

Margherita Zoebeli from Zurich to Rimini. A life devoted to childhood

Edited by

Dorena Caroli, Tiziana Pironi, Ilaria Bellucci,
Monica Maioli, Mara Sorrentino



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This volume has been financed by the contribution of the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli, Rimini - Italy.

This volume is the translation of *Margherita Zoebeli, una vita per l'infanzia*, a cura di Dorena Caroli, Tiziana Pironi, Ilaria Bellucci, Monica Maioli, Mara Sorrentino, Bologna, Clueb, 2024, pp. 343.

Some revisions have been introduced into the texts.

On the cover: Margherita Zoebeli with children from the Italian-Swiss Educational Centre – CEIS (1954), Photopress Zürich (AMZ, CEI-0253_025), previously published in the Swiss weekly Cooperation, n. 26 (1954).

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ISBN 978-88-491-5838-0

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFP	Archivio Fotografico dei Positivi della Raccolta storica della Biblioteca civica Gambalunga di Rimini (Photographic Archive of the Positive of the Historical Collection of the Gambalunga Public Library of Rimini)
AMG	Allied Military Government
AMZ	Archivio Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive)
BGR	Biblioteca civica Gambalunga, Rimini (Gambalunga Public Library)
CEIS	Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre)
CEMB	Centro Educazione Musicale di Base, Rimini (Basic Music Education Centre)
CEMEA	Centri di Esercitazione ai Metodi dell' Educazione Attiva (Active Education Methods Training Centres)
CEPAS	Centro di Educazione Professionale per Assistenti Sociali (Centre for Professional Education for Social Workers)
CIDEF	Centro di Innovazione, di Documentazione Educativa e di Formazione (Centre for Innovation, Educational Documentation and Training)
CIRSE	Centro Italiano per la Ricerca Storico-Educativa (Italian Centre for Historical Research in Education)
CLN	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (National Liberation Committee)
CTS	Cooperativa della Tipografia a Scuola (Typography at School Cooperative)
DSS	Dizionario Storico della Svizzera (Historical Dictionary of Switzerland)
ECA	Ente Comunale di Assistenza (Municipal Assistance Agency)
ENAOLI	Ente Nazionale Assistenza Orfani dei Lavoratori Italiani (National Board of Orphan Assistance for Italian Workers)
ETH	Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology)
FICE	Fédération Internationale des Communautés d' Enfants (International Federation of Children's Communities)
FIER	Fédération Internationale des Enseignants de Rythmique (International Federation of Eurhythmics Teachers)
ICEM	Institut Coopératif de l' École Moderne (Cooperative Institute of the Modern School)

IRPA	Istituto Regionale per l'Apprendimento (Regional Institute for Learning)
IRRSAE	Istituto Regionale di Ricerca e Sperimentazione e Aggiornamento Educativi (Regional Institute for Educational Research and Experimentation and Update)
ISF	Internationale Socialiste des Femmes (Socialist International Women)
ISME	International Society for Music Education
JLR	Jeunesse Laïque Républicaine (Republican Lay Youth)
MCE	Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (Movement of Cooperative Education)
MZ	Margherita Zoebeli
ONAIR	Opera Nazionale di Assistenza all'Italia Redenta (National Work of Assistance to Redeemed Italy)
ONMI	Opera Nazionale per la protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia (National Maternity and Child Protection Organisation)
OSEO	Oeuvre Suisse d'Entraide Ouvrière (Swiss Workers' Mutual Aid Society)
SAH/SOS	Schweizerisches Arbeiterhilfswerk / Soccorso Operaio Svizzero (Swiss Worker's Relief Organisation)
SCI	Servizio Civile Internazionale (International Civil Service)
SEPEG	Semaines Internationales d'Études pour l'enfance victime de la Guerre (International Weeks of Study for Children Victims of War)
SIA	Solidarité Internationale Antifasciste (International Anti-Fascist Solidarity)
SIEM	Società Italiana per l'Educazione Musicale (Italian Society for Music Education)
SIFF	Switzerland International Film Festival
SOS/SAH	Soccorso Operaio Svizzero / Schweizerisches Arbeiterhilfswerk (Swiss Worker's Relief Organisation)
SSK	Schweizer Spende an die Kriegsgeschädigten (Swiss Donation for the Victims of War)
UDI	Unione Donne in Italia (Italian Women's Union)
UIPE	Union Internationale de Protection de l'Enfance (International Union for Child Protection)
UISE	Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants (International Union for Child Relief)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)

We renew our greetings... a few months later

Maurizio Fabbri and Ira Vannini

With the Conference *Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996). One hundred and ten years after her birth. A life for active pedagogy at the service of childhood*, a new season of collaboration opened between the Department of Educational Sciences “Giovanni Maria Bertin” of the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, CEIS – Italian-Swiss Educational Centre and the Zoebeli Foundation of Rimini.

We are pleased to bring our greetings to the Conference, on the Rimini Campus, and we again thank the promoters Dorena Caroli and Tiziana Pironi, who masterfully organized the days of study dedicated to the figure of Margherita Zoebeli, a very significant Italian pedagogue in the history of post-World War II Italian pedagogy, who can also be considered one of the main female figures of twentieth-century pedagogy.

Already in the past, thanks to various professors of our Department of Educational Sciences – deeply committed and involved in the CEIS and Foundation project – and thanks to the intense activity of Andrea Canevaro, the collaboration with the Italian-Swiss Educational Centre had been significant and fruitful. We are convinced that such collaboration can still find energies for shared planning today, in the dual perspective of contributing to the educational quality of the territory and to the quality of the training of future educators and designers of Rimini curricula. In this direction, it is worth mentioning the start of a new phase, with the establishment of a working group, composed of faculty members from the Department of Educational Sciences “Giovanni Maria Bertin” and teachers and educators from CEIS, aimed at revitalizing the traditional relationships of dialogue, collaboration and planning: relationships formalized by the renewal of the agreement between CEIS and the Department.

The special institutional attention with which the conference was surrounded fills us with confidence for the development of our Department within the Rimini Campus. Again, we want to thank the Mayor of Rimini Jamil Sadegholvaad, the Magnificent Rector Giovanni Molari, and the Vice

Rector for Teaching and Education Roberto Vecchi for the words they dedicated during the Conference to a common project within the educational system and services of the Romagna territory. A heartfelt thank you to Alessia Mariotti, President of the Rimini Campus Board, for supporting this conference with particular organizational efficiency and care in relationships. We are still grateful to our colleagues Roberta Biolcati and Dario Tuorto, directors, respectively, of the Second Cycle Degree in *Planning and managing of educational intervention in social distress* and of the First Cycle Degree in *Expert in Social and Cultural Education*, for their commitment in this part of Romagna, distant only geographically from the Bologna Department. The active participation and interest of the students made all of us confident of the development and professional potential they themselves will benefit from within the vibrant and supportive territory of Romagna.

Margherita Zoebeli's ideas and pedagogical practices can, even more so today, be considered an important source of inspiration for all those who work in the field of education: educators and planners, trainers, teachers, territorial actors, policy makers and the civil community, who are facing the challenges of a complex and problematic present for children and young people, especially where there are conditions of inequality and social hardship. We have a very strong responsibility to guide educational policies and practices in our territories, in order to accompany all young people towards balanced paths of growth, development of critical awareness, and experiences oriented towards respect for others, democratic citizenship and active participation.

Just as Marguerite Zoebeli was able to deal with the problems of children affected by the traumas of war, educators today unfortunately also face dramatic problems that primarily affect the younger generation. Educational poverty, migration of minors, flight from wars, domestic and gender-based violence are huge issues that afflict us and urge us to deploy all our planning energies and pedagogical skills to identify some, small but invaluable, way out, even more so by looking to the example of the great women of our history, their strength, courage and political and social commitment.

We hope that, thanks to this Conference, the work of Margherita Zoebeli, who arrived in Rimini on December 17, 1945, and founded a Children's Village that was and still is a model of educational commitment, will be increasingly analyzed, studied, and deepened with critical awareness and historical intelligence, so as to offer a reference model for the educational professions. Our best wishes go to the Students who have chosen this difficult and beautiful profession, both challenging and generous, which is constantly confronted with a reality that changes abruptly and tends to get ahead of the times with the commitment gathered in projects of transformation and growth.

Margherita Zoebeli, creating a community in a plural world

Giovanna Guerzoni

Reflecting on the life of Margherita Zoebeli, one hundred and ten years after her birth, is important not only as a contribution to the history of socio-educational services in Italy, but also as a “political act”. Margherita Zoebeli’s life and ideas create a space where academic reflection meets the ability of communities to take local action – in Rimini, in this case. As a politically engaged educator and pedagogue, her life was directly and indirectly linked to the history and educational policies of Rimini from the post-Second World War years onwards.

Perhaps it is only now, after enough time has passed, that we can piece together not only her biography and pedagogical thought, which influenced the reconstruction of post-war Rimini, but also consider the numerous possible changes, whether by analogy or difference, with the present day. This allows us to recognise the importance of Margherita not only for those involved in education, but also for anyone living, studying or playing an active role in present-day Rimini¹.

Through the overview of her life, thoughts and choices of Margherita Zoebeli – who, as the conference organised by Dorena Caroli and Tiziana Pironi has underlined, we might today, perhaps inappropriately, define as “activist”. Nevertheless, we can delve into a historical period whose everyday life we have perhaps partly forgotten. During the Second World War, buildings and infrastructure in Rimini were completely destroyed, and the entire area was in a state of extreme poverty. A young woman with a long-standing political commitment to childhood and an international network of contacts in the field of pedagogy, aimed to create an unprecedented educational experience. For Margherita Zoebeli, the future of a community lay with

¹ See C. De Maria, *Lavoro di comunità e ricostruzione civile in Italia*, Roma, Viella, 2015; Id., *Utopia e concretezza. Ricordiamo Margherita Zoebeli a 110 anni dalla nascita*, in «Clionet», n. 6 (2022); see also G. Fofi, *Margherita Zoebeli e il lavoro di comunità*, in «Quaderni Cisl. Scuola e formazione» (2016), pp. 54-55.

the boys and girls who had emerged from the trauma of war. However, she also believed that it was closely linked to the reconstruction of urban contexts as “pedagogically conceived spaces”. Experimenting with new values of community development, education, growth and attention to inequalities shapes a concrete yet utopian path of community development based on education for active citizenship and, therefore, inclusion for all.

It is the youngest and most marginalised who can rebuild a community torn apart by war. Through dialogue between the past and the current situation, with education driven by politically and socially engaged pedagogy and supported by exchange with innovative international figures such as Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, Ernesto Codignola, Francesco De Bartolomeis, Lamberto Borghi, Aldo Capitini and Célestin Freinet, we can rediscover Margherita Zoebeli’s contributions to pedagogy, educational practices and community life, as well as her forward-thinking approach². However, delving into her life and work can also lead to a sense of disorientation. On the one hand, we observe social interactions, family life and childhood experiences that differ greatly from those of today. On the other hand, Margherita Zoebeli’s actions seem to resonate with our present situation, in which we are once again confronted with the deafening and unjust reality of war in Europe and the Mediterranean. These aspects reveal the true face of violence: disruption to family life and education, and the violation of children’s rights. They urge us to reflect on issues that seem impossible to solve by supporting pacifism alone, and to ask ourselves what kind of solidarity can guarantee the future of communities torn apart by war.

Of the many aspects of Margherita Zoebeli’s life and work, I would like to focus on three issues that I feel are particularly relevant today. The concept of “community development” that emerges from the experience of the Italian-Swiss Educational Center (CEIS) is based on the decision to start again from childhood. This reveals Margherita Zoebeli’s awareness that the effects of war are not only destruction and death, but can also be passed down through the generations. This hinders cultural transmission and the idea of “creating/making a community” over time. This is epitomised by the “trivial” aspects of daily social life that constitute the glue of a community. These aspects nourish social relations, such as friendship, respect, mutual aid and love. Their absence can lead to uncertainty about the future. This is particularly damaging for those who find themselves at this juncture with “their whole life ahead of them”.

² T. Pironi, *Da Maria Montessori a Margherita Zoebeli: l’impegno educativo nei confronti dell’infanzia traumatizzata dalla guerra*, in «Annali online della Didattica e della Formazione Docente», 8/12 (2016), pp. 115-128.

For Margherita Zoebeli and CEIS, “developing a community” involved establishing an educational community that can experiment with innovative teaching methods and help to overcome the initial emergency phase. It also concerned raising awareness on the strategic importance of educational policies in a rapidly changing social and cultural landscape.

While it may seem far-fetched, the story of Margherita Zoebeli and CEIS in Rimini embodies the qualities of a community organiser³. This involves addressing issues related to education, training, and inclusion through committed activism that considers the impact of educational interventions on social contexts. The story of the small CEIS community and its relationship with the city highlights the importance of avoiding any form of educational instrumentalism in order to affirm that “other worlds” are possible: worlds without war, where marginalised people have a voice, and where education for inclusion begins with a “community of practice”⁴. Thus, the life of Margherita and the history of CEIS, spanning the 20th century, remind us that education is a political act in itself, it means promoting inclusion and fighting social inequalities, while recognising the value of differences.

On closer inspection, the international scope of Margherita Zoebeli’s life and work is highly relevant: her commitment to childhood – or rather, to children – reveals a strong criticism of border politics, which seem to deny humanity, both then and now, and which often affect childhood itself. It is no coincidence that the CEIS experience has, in recent years, led to the international cooperation project, Educaid. Educaid, of which CEIS is a founding member alongside local social cooperatives and the University of Bologna, has gained valuable experience working in various countries, from Palestine to South America. The organisation is driven by the belief that active and inclusive educational practices must be promoted both nationally and internationally in order to trigger processes of educational and social renewal, thereby overcoming the exclusion and marginalisation of children and adults (Educaid⁵ Statute, 10 May 2004). Therefore, we must take this opportunity to learn more about Margherita Zoebeli’s life, her pedagogical thinking, her ideas about community and her work on behalf of children. In a world that seems to be in a constant state of emergency, leaving us with

³ B. Hooks, *Insegnare a trasgredire. L’educazione come pratica della libertà*, Roma, Meltemi, 2020.

⁴ E. Wenger, *Comunità di pratica. Apprendimento, significato e identità*, Milano, Raffaale Cortina, 2006.

⁵ Educaid is an NGO based in Rimini (Italy) which has been operating in the field of international cooperation for over 20 years in the sectors of education, psycho-social support and promotion of rights of the most vulnerable groups in various countries of the Global South.

little time for the in-depth reflection necessary to consider our responsibilities, especially with regard to childhood, the story of Margherita Zoebeli and CEIS demonstrate how we can create a new future by supporting young people.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

Introductory remarks

Emma Petitti

The Asilo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss kindergarten), founded after the Second World War in a torn and destroyed city, has over time become a real point of reference not only for Rimini, but also for the region and the country. This innovative pedagogical model has been able *to put the child at the centre* of its activities and has also used the internal and external spaces as part of the project.

Reflecting on the early days of CEIS, our thoughts go to the current situation, to the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, after which the kindergarten, once again, immediately promoted recreational activities for young refugees and their families.

Over the years, thanks to the initiative of *Margherita Zoebeli*, the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) has become a reference point for state-of-the-art education, bringing together doctors, psychologists and pedagogists from all over the world.

The basic idea has always been an *active pedagogical model*, with the child at the centre of all activities, *an innovative model also from a cultural point of view*, with the city of Rimini as a backdrop, and the Centre becoming a piece of the city's history.

The Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna Region, which I represent, has strongly supported the documentary film *Lo spazio che vive* (The space that lives), produced by Gruppo Icaro, CEIS and Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation): the story of an institution that has left an indelible and significant mark on the city of Rimini and on all those who have come into contact with it.

Talking about this work also allows me to remember two great people who recently passed away: the Rimini director Teo De Luigi, who directed the film, and Andrea Canevaro, the father of special education, who worked for years with Margherita Zoebeli and the CEIS teachers and who gave a valuable interview in the documentary.

CEIS has been the driving force behind the kindergarten experience throughout the region, and its experience has had a very important influence on Italian pedagogy and beyond.

The Emilia-Romagna Region has always been very supportive of schools that improve pedagogy, taking into account all the aspects of it, including the *importance of space* for children.

We also believe that *focusing on children is the most important investment* to lay the foundations for the present and future of our society.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

Address by the President of CEIS (Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero, Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) in Rimini¹

Romano Filanti

First of all, I would like to thank the President of the City Council, Giulia Corazzi, for her invitation, which I gladly accepted.

I first entered the CEIS building as a parent. In April 1995 I joined the Board of Statutory Auditors, in April 2014 I joined the Board of Directors as Director and Vice-President, and since October 2021 I have been President of CEIS, which I have the honour and pleasure to represent tonight.

The 28 years that I have spent at CEIS are, of course, nothing compared to the 77-year history of the institution, which was established first as a community centre, then as a kindergarten and is now the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre). And tonight, we are here to talk about our history.

My speech will be inspired by the book *Memoria come futuro* published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of CEIS² by Teo De Luigi, a filmmaker from Rimini who died in October 2022, about whom I will speak later, and by Stefano Pivato, Professor of Contemporary History, Councillor for Culture of the Municipality of Rimini from 1999 to 2009, and Professor at the University of Urbino, of which he was Rector from 2009 to 2014.

I am sorry to return to the past and to those terrible post-war years, but it is useful in order to put today's situation in context, because it was during those years that the foundations of today's CEIS were laid.

As Oreste Delucca wrote, «after the Second World War (1945-1946), the situation in Rimini was truly tragic: 396 bombings suffered in 11 months,

¹ This address was taken and adapted from a speech delivered at the Conference, and given in full during the Rimini City Council meeting on 21 February 2023: See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko2KPPJRR8U> (last accessed 06/05/2024).

² T. De Luigi & S. Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro. Cinquant'anni di vita del CEIS*, presentation by R.L. Montalcini, Rimini, Maggioli Editore, 1996.

607 civilian victims, 4,189 buildings razed to the ground, 3,155 severely damaged, 1997 damaged, with a destruction coefficient of more than 82%»³.

The devastated city of Rimini sent out a call for help, which was immediately answered by the Swiss Worker's Relief Organisation, as a sign of solidarity with those most hit by the war.

In August 1945, after an initial inspection in Rimini by the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation, it was decided to build a community centre and a kindergarten for the city's orphaned children.

The then Deputy Mayor, Gomberto Bordoni, together with Margherita Zoebeli (who later became the Director of the centre), personally oversaw the construction of the Community Centre and Kindergarten.

In December 1945, Margherita arrived in Rimini with a project drawn up by the architect Felice Schwarz and herself to coordinate the works that would lead to the construction of the centre and a kindergarten made up of 13 wooden huts that could accommodate up to 200 children.

The site chosen was the one next to the Roman amphitheatre – and therefore approval of the Archaeological Heritage Office was to be obtained – because it was owned by the municipality of Rimini but also because, although it had been hit by bombs, it was free of rubble, far from neighbouring houses and close to the city centre⁴.

The City Council adopted the following 4 resolutions, which gave life to the project of architect Schwarz:

Resolution of 04/01/1946 “*Programme for the construction of a kindergarten made of barracks*” appointing Councillor Bordoni to represent the town council in its relations with the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation;

Resolution of 01/02/1946 “*Approval of the estimate for the construction of the kindergarten made of barracks donated by the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation*” replacing the Asilo Baldini (Baldini kindergarten), which had been destroyed during the war and therefore had to be financed with public funds. Estimated cost £2,980,000.

Resolution of 12/04/1946 “*Approval of the Statute of the Giardino d'Infanzia italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss Kindergarten)*” with the name “Giardino d'Infanzia Italo-Svizzero” (Italian-Swiss Kindergarten) Remo Bordoni. The resolution and the statute approved by the City Council recognised that the project for the construction of the kindergarten had been approved by the Ministry of Public Education, as the area chosen was subject to archaeological constraints due to its proximity to a Roman amphitheatre.

³ O. Delucca, *Nasce il centro italo-svizzero*, in T. De Luigi & S. Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro*, cit., p. 11.

⁴ *Ivi*, p. 16.

Resolution of 23/04/1946 “*Appointment of a provisional commission*” for the management of the Asilo italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss kindergarten). Therefore, in accordance with article 30 of the statutes («in the first days, the kindergarten was managed by a provisional commission appointed by the City Council, under the supervision of the Council itself»), the administration appointed the “Provisional Administrative Commission”, chaired by deputy mayor Bordoni Gomberto and made up of ten members, mostly representatives of the municipality and public institutions. It would remain in office until March 1950⁵.

The land on which the centre and the kindergarten were built was divided into two plots because of their double function:

– The southern part of the site was for children to play and work, and included the five classrooms of the kindergarten, the orphanage, the washhouse and the refectory;

– The northern part of the site was designed for adults. Here were installed offices, workshops (shoes, clothes, furniture), showers and the cultural room.

The Asilo italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss kindergarten) was officially opened on 1 May 1946.

The people of Rimini welcomed the opening of the Centre and the barracks, built among the rubble of a destroyed city, which were both a boost to reconstruction and a strong sign of solidarity.

The centre immediately took in 150 children (aged 3 to 6) and 20 war orphans.

In 1947, it also opened a primary school for economically and psychophysically disadvantaged children⁶.

The school adopted a new way of teaching, one that focused on the children and their needs. This pedagogical method is still the mainstay of CEIS today.

From the beginning to the present day, thousands of Rimini’s inhabitants have attended CEIS, and several books have been written about Margherita Zoebeli and the CEIS barracks, the only ones left in Europe.

If the amphitheatre is an undeniable part of Rimini’s history, so is CEIS: a “unique” school that, under Margherita’s guidance, has become and continues to be a national and international reference point, a destination for scholars and the recipient of numerous awards. CEIS is not only at the service of its own community, but also participates, through EducAid, in several

⁵ Resolutions of the Rimini City Council, *Ivi*, p. 16. See also the municipal archive of Rimini, Town council resolution series.

⁶ O. Delucca, *Nasce il centro italo-svizzero*, in De Luigi & Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro*, cit., pp. 21-24.

international cooperation projects around the world (Armenia, El Salvador, Palestine, Kenya, Tunisia).

CEIS is a centre of excellence, not only in Rimini, but worldwide.

Today CEIS is a nursery, a kindergarten and a primary school attended by 320 boys and girls, of whom 9% have severe disabilities and are co-integrated in the classrooms.

The semi-residential community “La Betulla” is designed for minors (from secondary school and junior high school) in situations of social and family hardship, who are looked after by our educators.

The Press Centre is located in the CEIS Village and accomodates adults with mental health problems and developmental disabilities.

The Dyslexia Laboratory was established in 1976 to help children with reading and writing difficulties.

Today CEIS has 260 employees and about 60 members, including the Municipality of Rimini.

It is a charitable and non-profit organisation.

The famous filmmaker from Rimini, Teo de Luigi, portrayed and narrated it excellently in his film *Lo spazio che vive* (The space that lives). A documentary film on the 75 years of CEIS history, whose national premiere was held in Rimini, at the Fulgor and Tiberio cinemas, with 4 screenings, on 9 May 2022. About 650 people attended the 4 screenings.

Further screenings followed in 2022 and the film was seen by a total of about 1400 people.

This sometimes very moving documentary has touched people’s hearts. I myself was moved when I saw it for the first time, as soon as it was cut.

Today we are showing the documentary film free of charge to the Town Council and all our citizens.

Unfortunately, our beloved Teo died in October 2022, but he left us his love for this *temple of Italian and international pedagogy*. He left us *Lo spazio che vive* and when you enter the gates of CEIS, you feel that you are breathing a different kind of air. A place to spend time in, filled with a sense of belonging and pride.

Yes, we are proud of our CEIS.

I would like to remember another great friend of CEIS, Andrea Canevaro, who also died in May 2022, Professor Emeritus of the University of Bologna, a great pedagogue and the father of special needs education.

I would like to end this speech by quoting a passage from Rita Levi Montalcini’s preface to the volume *Memoria come futuro*: «This is what is important when we talk to children and young people: the future [...]. Today, however, I think it is much more important to talk to children between the ages of 3 and 9. This is the age when young people absorb poisons and prejudices, this is the age we have to deal with. The age of childhood is a ‘kin-

dergarten' of primary importance, because it when the young person is formed by what we tell them and show them [...]. All this stems from the fact that children, even at a very young age, can be branded with hatred for life. That is why I believe that CEIS should be seen as a value to be developed, not only to remain as it has been for 50 years, but to become a symbol of human relations, of what I would call solidarity rather than friendship, to give young people correct information and never, NEVER to talk about racial hatred. This is what I admire and what I hope CEIS will continue to do in the years to come... and I would like to see, not only local and regional authorities, but everyone contribute to achieve this aim. Such a valuable experience should have a real future here in Rimini»⁷.

I would like to thank the Mayor, the President of the City Council, the Councillors and the Executive Councillors for giving me the opportunity to speak and for listening to me.

I will leave you with a quote from Margherita Zoebeli: «I am convinced that only education can change the world».

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

⁷ R.L. Montalcini, *Presentazione*, in De Luigi & Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro*, cit., p. 7.

Address by the Director of the CEIS (Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero, Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) in Rimini

Ilaria Bellucci

To have the opportunity to speak about the educational experience of CEIS, Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre), in front of an audience of students who are training to become future educators is a great opportunity for which I would like to thank, personally and on behalf of CEIS, Professors Tiziana Pironi and Dorena Caroli for their strong desire and practical support in organising this conference, all those who made these two days of study possible, the entire Department of Education Studies “Giovanni Maria Bertin” of the University of Bologna and the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation).

In addition to being an opportunity for discussion and professional growth, the specific nature of the audience to which the conference is addressed represents a great responsibility for those who, like us, strive to be a welcoming place, from a human and working point of view, and, above all, an educational environment where what has been learned during the university years can become daily practice, to be built together, integrating the history – or rather the identity – of CEIS with the fresh perspectives and ideas of new teachers and educators.

In my opinion, these are the main characteristics – the core values and the innovation (even, and perhaps especially, in the seventy-seven years since its foundation) – that CEIS has been able to preserve and constantly promote. It has always emphasised the importance of never remaining the same, of not succumbing to the strong and understandable temptation to fall back on pre-established schemes and models, but of spending time – a lot of time! – to get to know the children, as a group and as individuals, and what each of them has to give. This is what makes this experience unique in the Italian educational scene. And the credit for this goes to Margherita Zoebeli (Zurich, 7 June 1912 - Rimini, 25 February 1996) who, as Tiziana Pironi wrote in the Treccani *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, «was always somewhat reluctant to turn the operational pedagogy of CEIS into a specific

method... She did not write a didactic manual, but rather preferred to focus on the constantly evolving nature of her work, which was based on finding concrete responses to different situations, without ever crystallising into a single methodology»¹.

Margherita's choice, like all her choices, was a conscious one. Her extensive work with children, especially the most vulnerable, led her to believe that what is needed in education is a sincere interest in the other, expressed through listening, acceptance, lack of judgement, responsibility and essential and appropriate training. At the operational level, this approach, which is rooted in active pedagogy, translates into very precise structural, organisational and didactic choices: the educational project must be known and shared by all the actors involved. While respecting their different roles and competences, they develop, modify and question it in order to always find the most appropriate strategies, means and tools for *that* child or *those* children, in that particular situation. Not a method, not a manual, but a daily and constant willingness to rethink one's role and interventions, and to take the necessary action from time to time. A living educational context that takes the form of an educational and training community in which everyone – teachers, educators, clerks, maintenance workers, cooks, caretakers, children, parents – is asked to do their best, not in competition or for the satisfaction of others, but because they are aware that for things to work, everyone must play their part, according to their possibilities.

To work in the village is to accept this challenge, it is to believe that one's contribution is of value and to be ready to prove it. Not having a precise method to refer to may at first seem destabilising for those working in the inherently difficult and delicate world of education, but it is actually a condition of freedom and autonomy, a guarantee of democracy and quality.

I wish that students who are training to become educators may directly experience the enormous power of self-determination, so that it becomes a drive and a goal to be achieved in working with children, and a tool for professional growth.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

¹ T. Pironi, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 100, 2020, see Zoebeli, Margherita, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/margherita-zoebeli_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/, (last accessed 28 August 2023).

Address by the Director of the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in Rimini

Nadia Bizzocchi

Good morning,

I am very pleased to bring you the greetings of the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) and its librarians. I would like to thank the organisers of the conference for allowing me to present the Library's role as custodian and guardian of the Archivio Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive).

The Biblioteca civica Gambalunga is the public library of Rimini. Its mission is to promote reading, knowledge of contemporary culture and access to information resources for the entire community. Thanks to its centuries-old history, the library is also the guardian of the city's historical memory, of its collective history, recorded in the documents of the archives of institutions and organisations, and in the archives of ordinary and distinguished citizens who have contributed to the development and success of the community.

This is the case of Margherita Zoebeli and her archives, which are kept in our library. The archive is made up of personal, professional and study documents and photographs relating to the activities of the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) (1946-1992), which she collected herself. After her death, these documents became part of the archives of the Foundation that bears her name. The archives were transferred to the library in 2015, following an agreement between the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation), the CEIS Association and the Municipality of Rimini. An agreement that came about under special circumstances.

2014 marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Rimini from Nazi fascist occupation, and to celebrate the occasion the Library organised a photographic and documentary exhibition. Oriana Maroni, then in charge of the Library's modern collections and curator of the exhibition, while searching for photographs of Rimini in the early post-war period, had the opportunity

to access the materials held by the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation) at CEIS and immediately recognised their important historical and documentary value.

In order to make them known and accessible to everyone, she suggested to the then President of the Foundation that they be deposited in the library, catalogued, digitised and promoted. The opportunity offered by the digital catalogue to communicate and share information has made it possible to activate interesting international collaborations. We have received several requests for digital copies, particularly from Swiss research centres¹. This has led to collaborations and exchanges of knowledge that have made it possible, for example, to gather more information on photographers and their archives or on important people in the life of Margherita Zoebeli².

The Archivio Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive) can therefore be considered a good example of the importance of collaboration between conservation institutions and research centres such as universities (today's conference is a case in point). The Library considers this collaboration to be vital and strategic in order to make its documents and materials available for discovery and study. And precisely because I am speaking to an audience of students and future (and current) researchers in the field of educational studies, I would like to draw your attention to some collections of archival documents held by the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library), which you could study in the future. I am thinking of the collection of Vincenzo Mascia, primary and secondary school teacher, Councillor for Public Education of the Municipality of Rimini from 1965 to 1970, and University Professor in Urbino in the 1970s³.

¹ Among them was the “Kulturhaus Helferei”, the Italian Cultural Institute in Zurich, which organised the conference *Una scuola svizzera per una città distrutta: Margrit Zöbeli e il Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (CEIS) (A Swiss School for a Destroyed City: Margrit Zöbeli and the Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS)* on 21 April 2022, with lectures by the contemporary historian Carlo De Maria and Verena Flubacher, Margherita's collaborator.

² Among the archives that hold photographs useful for the research into CEIS and its origins are the Swiss National Library, which holds the archives of the Swiss Donation Organisation (<https://www.helveticaarchives.ch>, last accessed 06/05/2024), and the Swiss Social Archive in Zurich (<https://www.sozialarchiv.ch>, last accessed 06/05/2024), which holds the archives of the SAH and the OSEO, as well as the archives of SOS, the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation, which in 1945, through Margherita Zoebeli, came to the aid of the people of Rimini, who had been severely affected by the war.

³ The Vincenzo Mascia Fund contains more than 8.000 bibliographical references, including monographs, journals, brochures, and dissertations, which can be searched in the *Scoprirete* online catalogue (<https://scoprirete.bibliotecheromagna.it>, last accessed 06/05/2024).

Vincenzo Mascia's pedagogical and research activity coincides with a decade in which a network of kindergartens was established in Rimini and, more generally, with a period of investment in the development of educational services and school buildings. In the public documentation (local newspapers, municipal brochures, photographs from the press office) we can find traces of this activity and of that of Enea Bernardi, head of the public education sector of the Municipality of Rimini, who, in close contact with Margherita Zoebeli, was behind that innovative period of public education policy mentioned above⁴.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) is ready and willing to work closely with you, the University, its students and researchers, by offering its services, its premises and its collections, in the firm belief that this exchange can be beneficial for both institutions and for research. I would like to thank you for your attention and wish you all the best for today's meeting.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

⁴ The working papers of Enea Bernardi (1922-1998) were acquired by the Biblioteca Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in 2022 as a donation from his heirs.

Introduction

Dorena Caroli, Tiziana Pironi, Ilaria Bellucci,
Monica Maioli, Mara Sorrentino

This volume collects the proceedings of the conference dedicated to Margherita Zoebeli entitled *Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996). A centodieci anni dalla nascita. Una vita per la pedagogia attiva al servizio dell'infanzia (Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996). One hundred and ten years after her birth. A life for active pedagogy at the service of childhood)*. The conference was held on 18 and 19 November 2022 at the University Campus of Rimini, Italy. It was organised by the Department of Education Studies “Giovanni Maria Bertin” of the University of Bologna, in collaboration with the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation, the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS) and the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in Rimini¹.

The main objective of this two-day conference was to reflect, on the basis of archival documents, on the valuable work carried out by the Swiss educator and pedagogist who moved to Rimini at the end of the Second World War. Thanks to Margherita Zoebeli and her national and international contacts, the Villaggio italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss Village), which she founded and which later became the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss

¹ The conference was organised by Dorena Caroli and Tiziana Pironi, Full Professors of History of Education at the Department of Education Studies “Giovanni Maria Bertin”, in collaboration with Monica Maioli, President of the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation), Ilaria Bellucci from the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS), Mara Sorrentino (archivist-librarian of the Biblioteca Civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in Rimini) and with the help of ICARO group, showcasing the documentary film *Lo spazio che vive (The space that lives)* (2022), a work by Rimini director Teo De Luigi, who died a few weeks before the conference. The event was sponsored by the Department of Education Studies “Giovanni Maria Bertin” and the University Campus of Rimini under the auspices of the Centro Italiano per la Ricerca Storico-Educativa (Italian Centre for Educational Research - CIRSE), the “Gina Fasoli” Active Teaching Research Centre and by the Festa internazionale della Storia (International History Festival) of the University of Bologna.

Educational Centre - CEIS), became a true workshop of active pedagogy in the post-war years. The aim of the conference was thus to focus on the pedagogical and educational value of the choices made, certainly influenced by the situation of the time, while underlining their relevance for today's training of educators and teachers, a training that is becoming increasingly important in view of the new challenges and emergencies that education is facing today².

The conference strived to investigate the pedagogical and documentary heritage of CEIS for the students of the following Degree programmes: Primary Teacher Education, Expert in Social and Cultural Education, Educator in Childhood Social Services, and Planning and Managing Educational Interventions in Social Distress.

Professional development has always been a flagship of CEIS, which has always been a point of reference for the training of teachers and educational professionals and a research ground for renowned pedagogues from various Italian universities. Moreover, the different activity enabled CEIS to launch courses for social and educational workers in the 1980s in cooperation with the Department of Education Studies of the University of Bologna – the Centro di Innovazione, di Documentazione Educativa e di Formazione (Centre for Innovation, Educational Documentation and Training - CIDEF).

It is also worth mentioning that on 23 January 1989, Margherita Zoebeli, Paulo Freire and Mario Lodi were awarded honorary Degrees by the University of Bologna, on the proposal of the Department of Education Studies and the Degree Course in Pedagogy. On that occasion, Andrea Canevaro, the then director of the Department, stated that the decision to award this distinction was motivated by the need to «search in the present for that part of history to which we can give value»³. He considered that what they all had in common was their commitment to the field of education, which had led them to work «in reality, with institutions, risking every day to be trapped and trying every day to ‘reinvent the world’»⁴.

² It is precisely because of the importance of CEIS' activities over the years that an interdisciplinary research group was set up at the Department of Education Studies "Giovanni Maria Bertin" on 19 July 2023. The group was established thanks to the collaboration between CEIS and the Department and brings together scholars and researchers from different fields.

³ A. Canevaro, *Fra l'imprudenza e il coraggio*, in «L'Educatore», 24 (July 1989), p. 6. In this issue, the magazine devoted special attention to the event entitled "Le Lauree *Honoris Causa* alla scuola e agli educatori di tutti" (Honorary Degrees for everyone's school and educators), and published in full the lectures delivered by Zoebli, Freire and Lodi during the award ceremony in the Aula Absidale di Santa Lucia.

⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 5-6.

In her speech to a packed conference hall, whose title “*Il progetto-sogno educativo*” (*The educational dream-project*) said it all, Margherita Zoebeli reflected on her more than 50 years of experience, guided by the idea that «a different kind of education can change the world», a conviction that led her to conclude her speech with these words: «Faith in humanity has never failed me, despite the exaggerated individualism of our society, the many wars across the planet, the social injustices in every part of the world»⁵.

Over the years, an intense scientific activity has sought to promote the educational legacy of CEIS, recognising its innovative nature⁶. Margherita Zoebeli and her activities have been the subject of historical studies and research projects, starting with the collection published after her death, edited by Teo De Luigi and Stefano Pivato, *Memoria come futuro. Cinquant'anni di vita del CEIS*, which presents a series of essays, accounts and photographs⁷, with a preface by Rita Levi Montalcini. Having visited CEIS and met Margherita Zoebeli, Rita Levi Montalcini recognised the extraordinary value of her work. She stated: «I think that CEIS should be seen as a value to be developed, not only to remain as it has been for 50 years, but to become a symbol of human relations, of what I would call solidarity rather than friendship, to give young people correct information and never, NEVER to talk about racial hatred»⁸.

In 2011, on the initiative of Carlo De Maria, a conference was organised by the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation) and CEIS, which was the starting point for a series of historiographically significant studies, reconstructing in particular the network of relationships that Zoebeli had woven while creating her educational experiment⁹. These in-

⁵ M. Zoebeli, *Il progetto-sogno educativo*, in «L'Educatore», (24 July 1989), p. 15.

⁶ See for example the history of CEIS as seen by children: L. Biondelli, R. Calieri, A. Fabbri, N. Gallazzi, G. Sapucci & G. Zannucoli (eds.), *A scuola nel Villaggio. Parole chiave ed esperienze del CEIS di Rimini. Rilettura e aggiornamento delle parole chiave del Centro Educativo italo svizzero di Rimini, a sessant'anni dalla sua nascita. Un contributo all'impegno educativo della città e al rinnovamento della scuola italiana*, Gardolo (TN), Erickson, 2008.

⁷ T. De Luigi & S. Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro. Cinquant'anni di vita del CEIS*, presentation by R.L. Montalcini, Rimini, Maggioli Editore, 1996.

⁸ R.L. Montalcini, *Introduzione*, *Ivi*, p. 7.

⁹ C. De Maria (eds.), *Intervento sociale e azione educativa. Margherita Zoebeli nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra*. Proceedings of the conference held at the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) (Rimini, 7 May 2011), Bologna, Clueb, 2012; Id., *Lavoro di comunità e ricostruzione civile in Italia. Margherita Zoebeli e il Centro educativo italo-svizzero di Rimini*, Roma, Viella, 2015. See also the recent collection *Utopia e concretezza: ricordiamo Margherita Zoebeli a 110 anni dalla nascita/Utopia and pragmatism: remembering Margherita Zoebeli 110 years after her*

clude Tiziana Pironi's research, focused on the pedagogical role that the so-called (at the beginning) Villaggio italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss Village) has played over the years as a centre promoting active and cooperative education throughout Italy¹⁰.

Equally important has been the research that has examined CEIS from an architectural point of view. In the introduction to the collection *Lo spazio che educa. Il Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero di Rimini*, the editors point out that even in the original design of the Village, planned by Schwarz together with Margherita, particular importance was attached to community life with a specific arrangement of pavilions, articulation of the outdoor spaces, a communal square and smaller squares, and to greenery. Even today, the outdoor and indoor spaces invite children, parents and adults who visit the centre to linger, they encourage encounters and dialogue with nature and with others, promote discovery, invention, experimentation and self-government. The urban design of the village thus becomes the main mediator of an education in sociality, in the individual's sense of belonging to the community, where well-being is also guaranteed by the quality and care of the natural and built elements, by creative and responsible participation in the care of such places and things, as an integral part of the community itself.

In the same vein, in 2017, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of CEIS, Andrea Ugolini published a volume collecting the contributions of the conference organised by the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation) and the Centro Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre). On this occasion, the concept of space behind the layout of the Village was examined in depth and from its inception, also considering it in a European dimension¹¹.

Finally, a few days after the conference, Christian Raimo published a book in which he devoted a chapter to the experience of Margherita Zoebeli. He saw her as a woman deeply imbued with anti-fascist sentiments, whose «educational ideal was one and the same with her militancy in the Spanish Civil War or her commitment to the Resistance»¹². While describing a school

birth, in «Clionet. Per un senso del tempo e dei luoghi. Rivista di Public History: storie, percorsi, saperi, arti e mestieri», <https://rivista.clionet.it/autore/carlo-de-maria/>, last accessed: 11/08/2023.

¹⁰ See in particular the chapter *La comunità educativa di Margherita Zoebeli: il CEIS di Rimini*, in T. Pironi, *Percorsi di pedagogia al femminile. Dall'unità d'Italia al secondo dopoguerra*, Roma, Carocci, 2014, pp. 151-179.

¹¹ A. Ugolini (ed.), *Ruderi e baracche. Bambini. CEIS: Riflessioni a più voci su un'architettura speciale*. Texts by K. Fabbri, A. Lambertini, M. Maioli, T. Matteini, S. Morri, M.L. Stoppioni, A. Ugolini, Firenze, Altralinea Edizioni, 2017, pp. 17-18.

¹² C. Raimo, *L'ultima ora. Scuola, democrazia, utopia*, Milano, Adriano Salani Editore, 2022, pp. 219-243 (in particular p. 243).

that, on the basis of what CEIS has achieved, must become a guarantee of social advancement, Gianluca Argentin recently underlined how, unfortunately, this guiding principle is today dramatically compromised¹³.

Given the lively educational dynamics of today's society, the conference organised on 18-19 November 2022 focused on the activities that Margherita Zoebeli carried out over the decades: the didactic innovation in kindergartens and primary schools, the approach to juvenile deviance and disability, the training of teachers and educators and the network of professionals of the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre).

Research in the Fondo d'Archivio di Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive Fund) has brought to light new and largely unpublished aspects of the work of the Swiss educator and pedagogist, as can be seen from the contributions collected in this volume, which are the papers presented at the conference arranged thematically. In the first part, the various essays examine in depth the following aspects: the network of international relations that underpinned Margherita Zoebeli's work at the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation (Pironi); the centrality of expressive activities in the initiatives she promoted for children during the Spanish Civil War (Meda); the relationship between pedagogy and architecture in the construction of the Villaggio italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss Village) (Maioli); the relations that Margherita Zoebeli established with other avant-garde initiatives, such as the Scuola-Città Pestalozzi in Florence (Betti); and the importance of CEIS in the promotion of cooperative pedagogy in Italy (D'Auria).

The second part gathers those contributions that reconstruct the history of the educational institutions created by Zoebeli in the Villaggio italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss Village), and, in particular: the evolution of the kindergarten considered in relation to the national and international context (Caroli); the contribution of the Villaggio italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss Village) to the development of open-air schools in Italy (D'Ascenzo); the activities of the summer camps in the second post-war period on the initiative of Margherita Zoebeli (Salustri).

The third part analyses in detail those experiences and didactic activities within the CEIS that were innovative and, in some way, pioneering for local and national schools such as: the inclusion of children with disabilities (Caldin-Sapucci); the use and creation of children's books in pedagogical activities within the Village (Grandi); the new musical approach by children (Addessi). Finally, given the importance of photography in Margherita Zoebeli's teaching activities, a section dedicated to the photographic archive

¹³ G. Argentin, *Nostra scuola quotidiana. Il cambiamento necessario*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2021.

could not be omitted, as it also documents CEIS activities through the lenses of famous photographers of the time (Sorrentino).

At the end of the third part, Cristina Gambini (Gruppo Icaro) presents the interesting documentary dedicated to CEIS, made in 2022 by director Teo De Luigi, who died a few days before the conference. Finally, the Appendix, edited by Maurizio Boarini, brings together six testimonies from current and former educators at CEIS, whose experience spans more than twenty years. These are voices that, in a trip down memory lane, maintain an immediate style, unfiltered by editorial work, and preserve the spontaneity of the educational relationship developed with the children.

The editors would like to thank everyone at the University Campus of Rimini who contributed to the organisation of the event, including its President, Alessia Mariotti, and all the staff for their professionalism. They would also like to thank the staff of the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in Rimini, who constantly facilitated the research of the sources and allowed the publication of the photographs held in the Archivio Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive). They are also grateful to Gruppo Icaro for the screening of Teo De Luigi's documentary, *Lo spazio che vive* during the conference.

Through this close collaboration between the University and the local authorities of Rimini, the editors hope that CEIS will continue to support and accompany the children in their growth, as interpreters of the values of freedom, solidarity and democracy.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

PART ONE

Margherita Zoebeli
from internationalism to activism

Margherita Zoebeli, the Rimini CEIS and special pedagogy for an inclusive school

Roberta Caldin e Giovanni Sapucci

I am Giovanni Sapucci, former director of the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre, hereafter CEIS). In this speech, I am also speaking on behalf of Prof. Roberta Caldin. I've agreed upon the contents with her. I would like to begin with the words of Raffaele Laporta, a pedagogue and great friend of Margherita and the CEIS.

In his introduction to the book *Paesaggio con figura. Margherita Zoebeli e il CEIS* (Landscape with people. Margherita Zoebeli and the CEIS), Laporta wrote that Margherita Zoebeli's «educational experience was born not in the classroom but from the ruins of cities and countries at war, gathering refugees and groups of young people together to welcome them and provide them with a place to live together»¹.

This meant accommodating their traumas and helping them learn the normalcy of life, of culture. All this was possible by providing them, first of all, with food, hygiene, clothes and shoes, and shelter for sleeping living. Providing safety. Then from safety comes singing together, the ability to laugh and to draw, to recount their dreams for that day: in school as in life... a pedagogy that evolves with life, through the constant updating of the educational work at the CEIS and school.

«This was the effect of not enclosing her work in a method»². According to Raffaele Laporta, this was Margherita Zoebeli's pedagogy.

A pedagogy that, in anticipating far in advance the most modern concepts of special pedagogy and inclusive education, is based on sound scientific knowledge and a willingness to act concretely on social realities.

¹ Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (ed.), *Paesaggio con figura. Margherita Zoebeli e il Ceis. Documenti di una utopia*, Villa Verucchio (RN), La Pieve Poligrafica, 2007, 2nd ed., p. 11.

² *Ibidem*.

A pedagogy that views school as a place for an education that can change the world, where every child feels safe, thrives, and is actively involved in situations of intense social life in the classroom and school.

A school, that is, capable of:

- encouraging interpersonal exchange;
- arousing the pleasure of communicating and listening;
- facilitating and enhancing verbal and non-verbal modes of expression;
- welcoming and valuing the interests of every child;
- encouraging many real-life experiences inside and outside the school.

All this with the knowledge that a rich social life promotes well-being, with especially positive social, emotional, and cognitive spillovers and hence, spillovers on the quality of education interpreted as culture, knowledge, and know-how.

Margherita taught us that all this is possible if schools and communities know how to recognize the different inclinations and needs of children, uniting them with the needs they all share: to be together with others, to communicate, socialize, get excited, and learn.

This is the framework for how Margherita and all the CEIS's work focuses attention on children with disabilities. A reinforced (not special) attention to their social needs. A constant and continuous attention, so that those needs are always incorporated into the project of the entire class and entire school, as well as into the individualized educational project.

This means organizing the school environment by knowing how to carry out many different activities – in terms of content, type, and social and operational context – through a complex organization of schoolwork that may take on different forms: individual, large, and small groups; workshops; manual and expressive activities; and numerous free and organized games.

Situations that, in focusing attention on children with difficulties, allow “everyone” to experience many well-organized social, emotional, relational, and learning experiences.

Attention that extends to the inclinations and needs of every child in the class, creating an education that recognizes and promotes each one's differences.

This is how a climate of reciprocal exchange and recognition is created at the ECIS.

Enea Bernardi, another great friend of Margherita and one of the main architects of the City of Rimini's system of municipal pre-schools, stated that the CEIS created a climate and environment «that called every child, whatever their intellectual and learning potential, to participate in their own

process of mental, social and civil formation»³, a formulation that already defined some key elements of what we now term one's "life plan".

In her first lecture at the University of Bologna – on the occasion of receiving an Honorary Degree – Margherita said:

«A community of children and adults, in which each member is urged to make a concrete contribution to making coexistence work, abiding by the rules created together.

A community in which opportunities for work and play are so rich and diversified as to guarantee frequent experiences of success and social esteem even for the weakest, who in this way build self-esteem they often didn't have before and reinforce it»⁴.

The CEIS demonstrates a "collaborative" organizational model that can meet the individual and social needs of pupils... this applies to all pupils and, therefore, to those with "severe" disabilities as well. For many years, CEIS pupils with complex and severe disabilities have been completely integrated into ordinary classes, where all the assistance they require is implemented in a well-structured way based on the Individualized Educational Plans agreed upon with teams of local specialists. These efforts are carried out with classmates, producing a mutual recognition effect that is of great value for everyone.

Great efforts have been made and are being made to continuously train teachers and educators so that they are always able to perform at their best with pupils with severe disabilities and to organize and reorganize school environments and the structure of activities to ensure specialized responses to the condition and needs of these students.

For children with severe disabilities, inclusion in the class and its everyday routine ensures a rich network of meaningful relationships with classmates, teachers, and the school community. The specialized work implemented for them is thus much more valuable than if it were carried out in a separate environment, no matter how specialized.

An experience that has significantly encouraged the involvement of classmates and the construction of a realistic vision of the differences and, above all, the potential of each child, no matter their disability.

³ M. Castiglioni et al. (eds.), *Una scuola una città. Il Centro educativo italo-svizzero di Rimini*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1991, p. 74.

⁴ *Intervento di Margherita Zoebeli in occasione del conferimento della Laurea honoris causa in pedagogia all'Università di Bologna*, in Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (ed.), *Paesaggio con figura*, cit., p. 57.

An experience that has brought out the desire of many children in the class to get to know their classmates who are apparently unable to actively communicate and act, ask teachers many questions, attempt a real reading of behaviours and try out many different forms of communication. An extremely valuable experience for everyone's growth.

In many cases, classmates are a great help to teachers, discovering signals and skills that the latter cannot always grasp and "see" effectively. Classmates are often particularly effective "interpreters" of the communication methods of their classmates who have serious communication difficulties.

Thus, an environment in which all children can experience practical experiences of "collaboration" and "contact" in spontaneous and organized situations such as – for example – different daily routines, workshops for manual and expressive activities (cooking, handling different materials, psychomotor activity, etc.), and in many other moments of life in the classroom and school. In Margaret's view, situations when the hint of a smile or body language signal a sense of belonging to the group.

The concrete experience of the CEIS, vouched for by many generations of Rimini children, tells us that the Village and its school are a place where everyone gladly enters each day, a place where everyone feels good and comfortable and is in the best conditions to offer their best self.

All parents, of both disabled and non-disabled children, highly rate the quality of the CEIS school, in terms of both social relations and academic achievement.

I am quite convinced that this is possible precisely because the CEIS was devised as an educational environment where pupils with the greatest difficulties are the centre of everyone's attention. Attention that has favoured an approach of recognizing individual differences that concern not only children with disabilities but all children.

The generalized differentiation of teaching is needed for all the children, substituting lectures with group work and many support activities for individuals and small groups.

Well-being is an important condition in and of itself.

In schools – as demonstrated by the experience of the CEIS and many other educational and school experiences (often little-known or forgotten) – well-being is a condition that decisively fosters quality learning in the school for all pupils/students and not just those with disabilities.

A condition that enables the best development of the cognitive, social, and emotional potentials of each one.

Children who enjoy well-being are certainly far more willing to do their best to meet the demands of academics and life in the school community, which sometimes appears to be very difficult and demanding stumbling blocks.

The relationship between well-being and learning leads me to express some thoughts on the issue of “merit”, as many (Luca Ricolfi, Paola Mastrocchia, Ernesto Galli della Loggia, Angelo Panebianco, among others) have taken it upon themselves to defend the new government’s decision to insert the term “merit” in the name of the ministry.

In his most recent book Christian Raimo⁵ states that many have spoken out in defence of “merit”, focusing in particular on the defence of individual merit. The scholar argues – rightly so, in my opinion – that this rationale corresponds to a classist perspective that serves to widen inequalities and leave the most vulnerable behind.

I found this reference in a 5 November 2022 article by Marco Balzano in *Corriere della Sera*, entitled *Ridateci un po’ di pedagogia. Da Gianni Rodari alla svizzera Zoebeli: l’identità che la scuola deve ritrovare* (From Gianni Rodari to the Swiss Zoebeli: the identity that schools must rediscover). In this article, Balzano presents Raimo’s book and highlights the need to recover the history of our schools to capture the extraordinary contribution of such individuals as Margherita Zoebeli, Mirella Casale, Mario Lodi, Gianni Rodari, Tullio De Mauro, and many others.

The CEIS is an educational community that welcomes all children while considering all their dimensions: cognitive, social, emotional, and relational. A community whose main objective is to draw out and nurture the merits of every pupil.

To do this, the school carries out continuous, tactful and at times difficult work to get to know each child and identify their different characteristics: character, interests, skills, difficulties, inclinations, and every other aspect that characterizes them.

A path pursued through constant daily action, creating educational and relational situations in which every child can:

- *freely express their thoughts* through multiple languages, verbal and non-verbal;
- *have the opportunity to experiment* in many situations and experiences;
- *engage with learning paths based on practical experience*;
- *discover and manifest their interests* as elements that teachers account for when designing an educational pathway for the students.
- *develop their learning based on what they already know*. Margherita always focused on this aspect, highlighting an educational principle that emerged from her experience working with children with the greatest difficulties, yet which holds for all children: to develop new knowledge

⁵ C. Raimo, *L’ultima ora. Scuola, democrazia, utopia*, Milano, Adriano Salani Editore, 2022.

and skills, one must begin with the strengths of each child, from what they are already able to do, in an environment that does not focus on competition to draw out the “best”. On the contrary, she sought every day to ensure that children could work together, an indispensable condition for revealing the POTENTIAL AND SPECIAL MERITS OF EACH ONE; thus interpreting in a particularly meaningful way Article 34 of our constitution;

- *live in an academic environment that is looked after and consciously employed* by teachers as a tool for indirect education and training. Since the first design of the Village, Margherita dedicated careful attention to the quality of all school premises, considering them tools for an indirect education that provides important stimuli for the education and development of children;
- *be engaged in a general educational project* based on a foundation of deep-rooted democratic values, reinterpreted in light of continuous social, cultural, and economic changes, and especially focused on the condition of childhood;
- *live in an academic environment that can help and support them* in difficult situations.

In a community like this, teachers and educators obviously hold a very important position.

At the CEIS, teachers and educators are required to cooperate with the group and for the group. This does not mean that their professional and personal individuality is overshadowed in any way; on the contrary, their individuality is valued precisely by being able and having to work and cooperate with a group.

In this regard, Margaret stated that «if a teacher cannot collaborate with their colleagues, how can they teach children to cooperate in the classroom and at school?»

Margherita was convinced of the need for teachers to overcome the “individualist” vision of traditional schooling – with reference to Célestin Freinet and the Movement of Cooperative Education (MCE) – from the Village’s earliest days. She continuously fostered a cooperative culture of teaching, continuing education and the work of teachers’ groups as decisive conditions for individual and collective professional growth.

The “freedom to teach” of each teacher is fully expressed within a group that cooperates to forge a shared and co-constructed general education project.

Working in a group with continuous discussions and teamwork enables teachers to act as a unified entity. As with each child, each teacher is recog-

nized and valued for their skills and inclinations, allowing them to provide an original contribution to the group's cohesive action and richness.

This approach to organizing educational work has been progressively refined over time.

A process that – with the decisive and expert contribution of then-rector Gianfranco Iacobucci – has accelerated sharply since the 1970s to expand and reinforce the teaching group, unifying parallel classes and considering special needs teachers and educators assigned to children with disabilities in the two parallel classes as an integral part of the group, in addition to the subject matter instructors.

Margaret argued that implementation of the educational project of pupils with disabilities must not be delegated to the special needs teacher alone, as this only apparently removes the obstacles to integration.

The educational project of individual pupils must be incorporated into that of the whole class, as children with “handicaps” – as they were known in Margherita Zoebeli's time – are members of the school community.

From an organizational point of view, for some time every class at the CEIS has been assigned to a large group of teachers and educators from the two parallel classes. This group operates as a team to govern, through meticulous and flexible management, all aspects of class life.

The continuous adjustments and revisions necessary to welcome and nurture children's emerging interests might evoke a confusing situation, but it's not. Teachers and educators devote great care, through many team meetings, to ensure that organizational changes and adjustments always aid the effectiveness of their work. The children, as well as (naturally) every teacher and educator, are aware of these coordinated efforts so that everyone has the necessary reference points for their own contribution.

The CEIS's educational environment requires teachers and educators who are motivated and do their best to acquire and enact high-level pedagogical, methodological and instructional skills, obtainable from specialized basic education and equally specialized continuing education.

Qualifications that can best be expressed when they are applied to a project like the CEIS, in which everyone – child and adult – is valued for their skills, merit, and potential.

A project based on values, principles and methodologies that come from afar and which, since the birth of the CEIS, have been the safest and most authoritative basis for courageously addressing the challenges of the future.

Challenges that, up to now, have been faced with the necessary clarity, without fear and with awareness of the risks to be undertaken that each challenge entails.

I am certain that the CEIS will be able to continue to do so with the active commitment of all its professionals and administrators, who will have to be

very careful to avoid every deviation into uncritical and nostalgic perpetuation of an important, yet distant, past.

A past strongly characterized by Margherita's work, which the CEIS has been able to propagate through the work of all those who have succeeded her in the last 40 years, utilizing and reinterpreting – with the aid of new studies, research, and experiences – the original values and many intuitions of the first 30-35 years to face ever-new educational challenges posed by the continuous evolution of society: thus keeping intact the modernity and innovation of the CEIS's experience.

Indeed, the CEIS is a truly modern project even today, to which the scholars, institutions, and schools of our city and our country should dedicate the attention it deserves.

The CEIS continues to be a concrete example of an effective and truly “inclusive for all” educational organization. An example not easily transferable in its totality, but it could certainly provide precious inspiration for the indispensable reform and modernization of Italian schools.

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Finito di stampare per Clueb
da Editografica – Rastignano (BO)
nel mese di gennaio 2026

This volume gathers the proceedings of the conference dedicated to Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996) and organised at the University Campus of Rimini by the Department of Education Studies 'Giovanni Maria Bertin' of the University of Bologna, in collaboration with the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation) and the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero di Rimini (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS).

The main objective of the conference (18-19 November 2022) was to study, through archival documents, the valuable work carried out by the Swiss educator and teacher, who moved to Rimini after the Second World War. Thanks to Margherita Zoebeli and her national and international contacts, the Villaggio Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Village) she founded, later the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero di Rimini (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS), became a true workshop of active pedagogy in the immediate post-World War II period.

The contributions focus on the pedagogical and educational value of her choices, considered in the context of the time, while also trying to highlight their relevance for today's training of educators and teachers, a training that is becoming increasingly important in view of the new challenges and emergencies that education has to face.

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