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The integrated system of early childhood education and care of the Emilia-Romagna Region. Case studies of innovative services.

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# WP4 Case studies

## D4.2 Evaluation report on each case study

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Case Study: The integrated system of early childhood education and care of the Emilia-Romagna Region. Case studies of innovative services

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## Executive Summary

The Report analyses the *Early Childhood Education and Care* (ECEC) services, which are certainly one of the core policy areas of the SIP – Social Investment Package (COM 2013/83). Moreover, according to the Europe 2020 Strategy, ECEC services are an essential requirement to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The Report presents the results of an eight-month research program undertaken under the INNOSI Project framework, pursuing three main *objectives*:

- Proving that ECEC services are beneficial to a wide array of actors: children, families and society at large;
- Collecting knowledge aimed at improve quality and effectiveness (equitable access) of ECEC system to reach a higher level of growth and to guarantee children’s academic results and employability in the future;
- Analysing, through a case study approach, the integrated ECEC services’ system in Emilia-Romagna Region as possible best-practice of Social Innovation with regard to the partnership between public, private for profit and nonprofit actors. Namely social economy initiatives pro-actively engaged with local actors, including children, their families and the communities in which they are living.

The reports monitoring the situation of ECEC in the national context highlight that accessibility and the educational quality provided by ECEC services are very unequally displayed across the national territory, although exceptions exists in those Regions where investment in ECEC has occurred over a long period of time (e.g. Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany).

The choice of the ECEC services system of Emilia-Romagna Region (focusing specifically on the services addressed to children aged 0 to 3 and their families) is due to the relevance of this policy area for the theme of *Social Investment* and because of the significant presence of partnership with social economy actors such as social cooperatives.

Concerning the *methodology* of INNOSI project, in order to verify the potentialities in term of Social Innovation of the ECEC services in the Emilia-Romagna region, we opted for the “Case Studies” research technique. We carried out an ECEC services analyses articulated at the micro (social demands), meso (societal challenges) and macro (systemic change) levels.

We selected three cases: “*Filonido*” in the city of Bologna; “*Il Girotondo intorno al Bosco*” in the village of Serramazzoni; “*La Gabianella*” and “*L’albero delle meraviglie*” in the

small town of Comacchio; one for each ECEC main typology operating in the system: Nurseries-kindergartens; Integrative-complementary services; Home services. We also took in consideration the following variables: Geographic distribution; Municipality dimension; Ownership structure. We analysed three main dimensions of the services' outcomes: a) reconciliation of family and working life responsibilities for parents; b) equal educational opportunities for children's development and growth; c) participation of groups which are at risk of social exclusion (low-income families, children from ethnic minority background).

The main results can be summarised as follows:

From the analysis of the data collected (through interviews with managers and local decision-makers) it emerged that no-one model fits all. Rather the key success factors for increasing the *availability* as well as the *affordability* of ECEC provision seems to reside in the *flexible combination of different funding sources* coming from the public sector – as well as from the private NFP sector and private enterprises – within a *comprehensive framework of public policies that responsively addresses the needs identified within each community while striving for universalism*. In this sense, the case studies analysed provide exemplary cases of how a diversified ECEC provision serving the diverse needs of children and families within local communities could be realised with a special focus on accessibility and economic sustainability.

Beside addressing the issues of sustainability and accessibility, the case studies shed light on how the *pedagogical quality* of ECEC provision and *its ongoing improvement could be nurtured through the co-creation and sharing of knowledge, expertise and experiences that is generated by innovative forms of public governance* (local and regional networks, partnerships with parents, coalitions for policy advocacy, inter-agency collaboration).

## 1. Introduction<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 The Policy / Programme

The *Early Childhood Education and Care* (ECEC) services are certainly one of the core policy areas of the SIP – Social Investment Package (COM 2013/83), as it is documented by the Recommendation C2013/778 on “*Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*”.

#### 1.1.1 European regulatory framework

The European Commission has emphasized, based on the analysis of the latest cross-national evidence and discussion with high level experts, that ECEC is beneficial to all: children, families and society at large (see the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education's study on *Quality Education and Care*, 2013). Not only ECEC services allow parents to better reconcile family and professional responsibilities, thus encouraging employability. They also help children to unlock their potential and contribute to engaging parents and other family members with related measures to improve parent education and job-related training, thus favouring particularly children from a disadvantaged background - including those from migrant and low income families. In this perspective, the role of ECEC in contributing to the achievement of the objectives set by the flagship 2020 – called “European platform against poverty and social exclusion”<sup>3</sup> – as well as to the achievement of the headline targets of the “EU2020 Strategy” – *addressing child poverty and preventing early school leaving* – is increasingly acknowledged.

According to the EU Commission Communication on *Early Childhood Education and Care* (COM 17/2/2011), improving the quality and effectiveness of education systems across the EU is a crucial prerequisite for all aspects of growth<sup>4</sup>. In this context, early

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<sup>2</sup> This Section has been written by Andrea Bassi.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation ‘Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of Disadvantage’ (European Commission, 2013):

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112&from=EN>

<sup>4</sup> Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care’ (Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission, 2014)



childhood education and care (ECEC) is a critical foundation for successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability. Assuming a complementary role to that of the family (which remains central), educational and care services in early childhood have a profound and lasting impact that measures taken in the later stages of life are not able to achieve. Based on the premises that high quality ECEC is beneficial for all children – but particularly for those with a socio-economically disadvantaged or migrant background – it has been recognised by the Council of the European Union that *providing high quality ECEC is just as important as ensuring its availability and affordability* (Council Conclusions on ECEC, 2011, p. 4-5). In this regard, particular attention needs to be devoted to issues such as environment and infrastructure, staffing, the curriculum, governance and quality assurance. It has furthermore been stressed, that a systemic and more integrated approach to ECEC services at local, regional and national level involving all the relevant stakeholders - including families - is required, together with close cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy sectors, such as education, culture, social affairs, employment, health and justice (Council Conclusions on ECEC, 2011; COM 17/2/2011).

At the Barcelona European Council in 2002, Member States had set the common objective to ensure, by 2010, access to educational facilities full-time childhood at least 90% of children aged between 3 years and 5 years, and at least 33% of children under 3 years. To date Italy has reached the first target of 90%, but not yet that of 33%<sup>5</sup>.

With respect to the service of municipal nursery (and private with municipal support), in the school year 2012/13, only **11.9%** of children between 0-2 years old have used the service (ranging from Emilia-Romagna with 24.8% to Campania with 2%)<sup>6</sup>. But a large difference across regions remains (especially between southern regions and the rest of the country) with regards to both the number of social and educational services for young children in public and private provision and the extent of fees paid by families.

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[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Key data on ECEC (Eurydice, 2014): [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/Eurydice/key\\_data\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/Eurydice/key_data_en.php)

<sup>6</sup> Dati ISTAT e monitoraggio nidi condotto dall'Istituto degli Innocenti di Firenze (2015):

<http://www.minori.it/minori/servizi-per-linfanzia-rapporto-di-monitoraggio-del-piano-nidi-0>

## 1.1.2 Legislative and regulatory framework in Italy

### National Level:

Law n. 1044 - 6 December 1971 –Piano quinquennale per l'istituzione di asili-nido comunali con il concorso dello Stato (Five-year plan for the institution of municipal nurseries (0-3 years) with the collaboration of the State).

Legge 285/1997: “Disposizioni per la promozione di diritti e di opportunità per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza” (Legge Turco)

Legge 328/2000: "Legge quadro per la realizzazione del sistema integrato di interventi e servizi sociali"

### Regional level (for Emilia-Romagna):

a) Emilia-Romagna Region – Regional Law n. 1 - 10 January 2000, “Norme in materia di servizi educativi per la prima infanzia e successive modifiche” [Legislation regarding early childhood educational services and further amendments] (L.R 14 aprile 2004 n. 8; L.R 29 dicembre 2006 n. 20; L.R 22 dicembre 2011 n. 21; L.R 22 giugno 2012 n. 6);

b) Deliberation of the Regional Assembly N. 85 - 25 July 2012 – “Direttiva in materia di requisiti strutturali ed organizzativi dei servizi educativi per la prima infanzia” (Directive regarding structural and organisational requirements for early childhood educational services).

c) Deliberation of the Regional Assembly N. 1089 - 30 July 2012 – “Linee guida sperimentali per la predisposizione del progetto pedagogico e della metodologia di valutazione nei servizi educativi per la prima infanzia” (Experimental guidelines for the elaboration of the pedagogical project and the evaluation methodology of early childhood educational services).

## 1.1.3 Financial framework

The Early Childhood Education and Care services are financed by Municipality with the contribution of the Regions. For the year 2015 the Regional Council of Emilia-

Romagna has approved the allocation of funds for nurseries and educational services for children, as well as pre-schools (municipal and private). It is 7,250,000 Euros for educational services for children from 0 to three years and 4.1 million Euros for children from three to five years in preschools.

Since the 0-3 service is a so called “individual demand service” (i.e the costs of public provision are partially covered by citizens), families are asked to contribute to the cost of the services. But fees vary greatly across different municipality areas (in the school year 2014/15, fees range from an average of 296 Euros per child – on a monthly base – in the Municipality of Ravenna to an average of 410 Euros on the Municipality of Forlì. The average at the regional level is **331** Euros).

The Emilia-Romagna ECEC services system is clearly focused on the benefit of the children. Whereas at the National level the regulation is more on the benefit of working mothers. With a slogan we can say that the Emilia-Romagna system is promoting the “education” part whereas the National regulation is driven by the “care” part of the Early Childhood Education and Care services system.

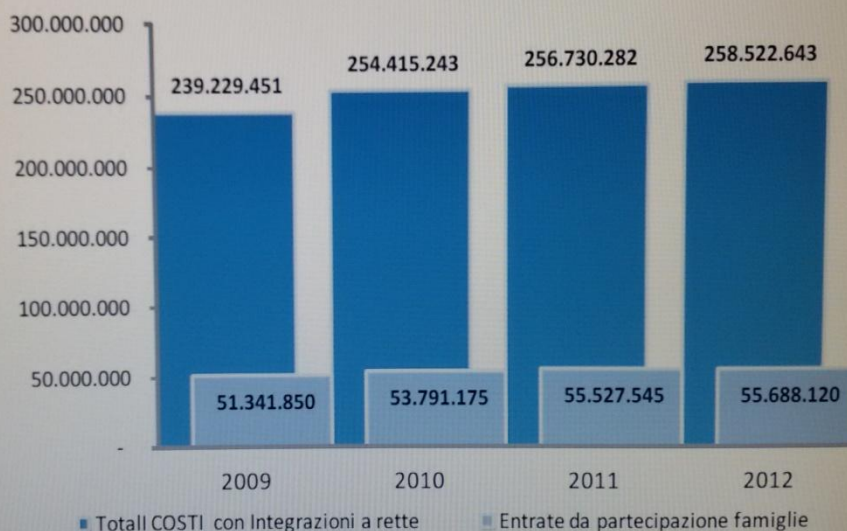
As far as the actual funding structure of the ECEC services system in Emilia-Romagna, it adopts a progressive fees-scale based on the income (revenue) of the families. The cost of the service is targeted on each families based on an Indicator called ISEE, which take into account both the income (salaries) and the assets (property) of the family.

The cost of one place in a Nursery (open from 7.30 am to 5 pm) vary in the different Municipalities of the Emilia-Romagna territory due to differences in the “cost of living”. It is higher in the big city (such as Bologna, Modena, Parma) and lower in the small municipalities. It is around 800/1.200 Euros a month (for 10 month per year). The contribution of the family vary in a corresponding way.

For example - in the school year 2016/2017 - in the Municipality of Ravenna (150.000 inhabitants) the monthly families’ contribution vary from 63 Euros (for very low income families) to **495 Euros** for the richest ones. In the Municipality of Bologna the highest quota is **575 Euros**.

**Figura 6.1**

Costi totali dei comuni negli ultimi 4 anni e quote di partecipazione delle famiglie



**Figure 6.1 – Total costs for Municipalities (2009-2012) and families contributions (Emilia-Romagna Region)**

	Municipalities	Families	Total
2009	187.887.601	51.341.850 (21,5%)	239.229.451
2010	200.624.068	53.791.175 (21,1%)	254.415.243
2011	201.202.737	55.527.545 (21,6%)	256.730.282
2012	202.834.523	55.688.120 (21,5%)	258.522.643

As mentioned above, there is a great variety of coverage of ECEC services in Italy. From this uneven distribution it comes also a huge difference in the pro capita cost. For instance in Emilia-Romagna the pro-capita cost is of **1.600** Euros, whereas the average at the national level is **761** Euros (School Year 2011/12, data from Istat).

#### 1.1.4 Main actors including mix of public, private and not-for-profit sectors

In the Emilia-Romagna Region there is a strong tradition of public provision of services in the Early Childhood Education and Care area. However, in the last decade the relevance of private provision (sometimes offering more flexible services) has grown significantly. The number of places in private nurseries/kindergartens has increased from 21,6% - in the school year 2008/09 - to the 26,4% - in the school year 2013/14 - of the total of places available. In this respect, it is important to stress the relevant presence of social economy actors such as social cooperatives.

The Emilia-Romagna Early Childhood Education and Care system includes four main typology of services:

- a) Centre-based early childhood services (*nidi*; *micro-nidi*; special sections in pre-school centres for children aged 24-36 month called “*Sezioni Primavera*”);
- b) integrative/complementary services (“*Spazio Bimbi*”, centres for children aged 12-36 month, operating for 5 hours a day) and “*Centri per bambini e genitori*” (centres for children and parents together addressed to children for children 0-6 and their families);
- c) family day-care services (*Piccoli gruppi educativi*: up to 7 children);
- d) experimental services.

Recently, there has been an increase of the so-called “corporate welfare” (*welfare aziendale*) with regards to ECEC service provision. There were 19 corporate kindergartens (*nidi aziendali*) in the school year 2010-11 and there were 33 in the school year 2013-14. This corresponds to an increase from 672 places (2010/11) to 1,441 places (2013/14), which represents the 3,3% of the total number of places available in the Region.

### 1.1.5 Significant social innovation elements

Recently, there has been a big policy debate at the national level and among professionals with regards to a new Law of reform of the Italian National Education System, the so-called Law on “Buona Scuola” (*Good School*), approved by the Italian Parliament the 13 July 2015: Law n. 107 - 13 July 2015 – “*Riforma del sistema nazionale di istruzione e formazione*”.

For our purpose it is important to note that at the Art. 1 – Comma 181 – Letter e) “*Istituzione del sistema integrato di educazione e di istruzione dalla nascita fino a sei anni, costituito dai servizi educativi per l’infanzia e dalle scuole dell’infanzia*” the Law establishes an Early Childhood Education and Care system of services at the National level. This is a huge innovation at the legislative level, and the expected result should be the introduction of the same standards of services all over the country. This specific provision has been strongly supported by Associations of professionals, researchers and local administrators (*Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia*). From the point of view of policy implementation, the issuing of Legislative Decrees by the Government is to be completed.

### 1.1.6 Significant regional variations

Data from the “Monitoring of Regions and Autonomous Provinces” (source ISTAT), show that on 31 December 2013 the number of kindergartens in public ownership amounts to **3,978** and of private ownership to **5,372**. The availability of seats is **162,913** in facilities in public ownership and to 110,666 in private ownership ones. Altogether, about **273,579** places are available (public provision represent 59% of total places and private provision 41%, respectively).

The region that stands out for the highest number of public nurseries is Emilia Romagna (619 facilities and 28,388 seats) followed by Lombardy (597 nurseries and 25,145 seats).

Altogether, 56% of communal nurseries are concentrated in the northern regions, 25% in the central regions and only the remaining 19% in the South.

According to ISTAT, in the school year 2012/13, **11.9%** of children (0-2 years) has used the service of municipal nursery (or private with municipal participation). The figure, however, varies between **24.8%** of coverage in Emilia-Romagna and **2%** in Campania.

We decided to focus our case study on the ECEC system of Emilia-Romagna Region (by focusing specifically on the services addressed to children aged 0 to 3 and their families) - which is one of excellence in the Italian welfare system - for the relevance of this policy area for the theme of *social investment*, which is closely connected to the issues of *quality* and *accessibility* recently put at the forefront of European Commission policy agenda.

Moreover, it represents an example of possible best-practice with regard to the relationship between public and private actors (with a relevant presence of Social Economy actors) and for this reason is an interesting area to study examples of social innovation.





Concerning the INNOSI project we should take in consideration SI that cover the dimensions mentioned above, articulated at the micro (social demands), meso (societal challenges) and macro (systemic change) level of analysis. The proposed conceptual model will be therefore articulated in the different phases of the case-study research as follow.

#### Phase one: need assessment

The units of analysis included in the case studies will be selected on the basis of the social needs that the ECEC services are seeking to address. At EU level, the main social problems which ECEC seeks to tackle are poverty and the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, social exclusion and educational underachievement (including early school leaving). As illustrated by the research evidence produced cross-nationally (European Commission's Thematic Working Group on ECEC, 2014), the public policies that are most successful in tackling these problems are those directed toward increasing the accessibility and quality of ECEC provision through a meaningful engagement of all stakeholders involved: children, families and local communities.

On the other side, the reports monitoring the situation of ECEC in the national context (*7° Rapporto di aggiornamento sul monitoraggio della Convenzione sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza in Italia*, 2015; *Rapporto di monitoraggio del piano di sviluppo dei servizi socio-educativi per la prima infanzia*, Istituto degli Innocenti, 2015) highlight that accessibility and the educational quality provided by ECEC services are very unequally displayed across the national territory, although exceptions exists in those Regions where investment in ECEC has occurred over a long period of time (eg. Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany).

The case study will analyse the integrated system of ECEC services in Emilia-Romagna as an example of how increasing the accessibility and quality of ECEC provision could be pursued through a partnership between public and private not-for-profit initiatives which pro-actively engage with local actors, including children, their families and the communities in which they are living.

The rationale for selecting the units of analysis - six early childhood services<sup>7</sup> distributed across the regional territory - is therefore linked to the social demands underlying services' implementation:

- reconciliation of family and working life responsibilities for parents;
- equal educational opportunities for children's development and growth;
- participation of groups which are at risk of social exclusion (low-income families, children from ethnic minority background,...).

### Phase two: theory of change

Starting from the analysis of empirical data (interviews to key-stakeholders such as local administrators or pedagogical coordinators, focus group with personnel employed in the services and parents – complemented by children's observation in the settings) the perceptions of the different actors involved will be examined. The analysis of empirical data will reveal which are the critical factors underlying the elaboration and implementation of a Theory of Change which responsively addressed the social needs identified in the previous phase.

### Third phase: process evaluation

In the third phase a second level analysis will be carried out by combining the empirical data collected at micro-level through interviews/focus groups/observation with the data collected at meso- and macro- level (policy initiatives undertaken at local and regional level, use of economic and human resources, partnership between community actors and distributed governance). Such analysis will allow to identify key-success factors (and barriers) to the implementation and scaling up of social innovation with specific reference to the ECEC sector.

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<sup>7</sup> During the empirical research we realised that it was not possible to carry on six in-depth case studies, due to the lack of time and resources, so we decided to analyse three ECEC services.

	RESOURCES			POWER/AUTHORITY GOVERNANCE			ROUTINES			BELIEFS		
	Material	Human capital	Economic/ financial	Networks	Coalitions	Partnerships	Ways to organize	Ways to work	Ways to produce / deliver goods / services	Ideas/ Concepts	Values	Frame / Narrative
MICRO (social demands)												
MESO (Societal challenges)												
MACRO (systemic change)												

Table 1.1 – Logic Scheme of the Theoretical Model for Social Innovation Research

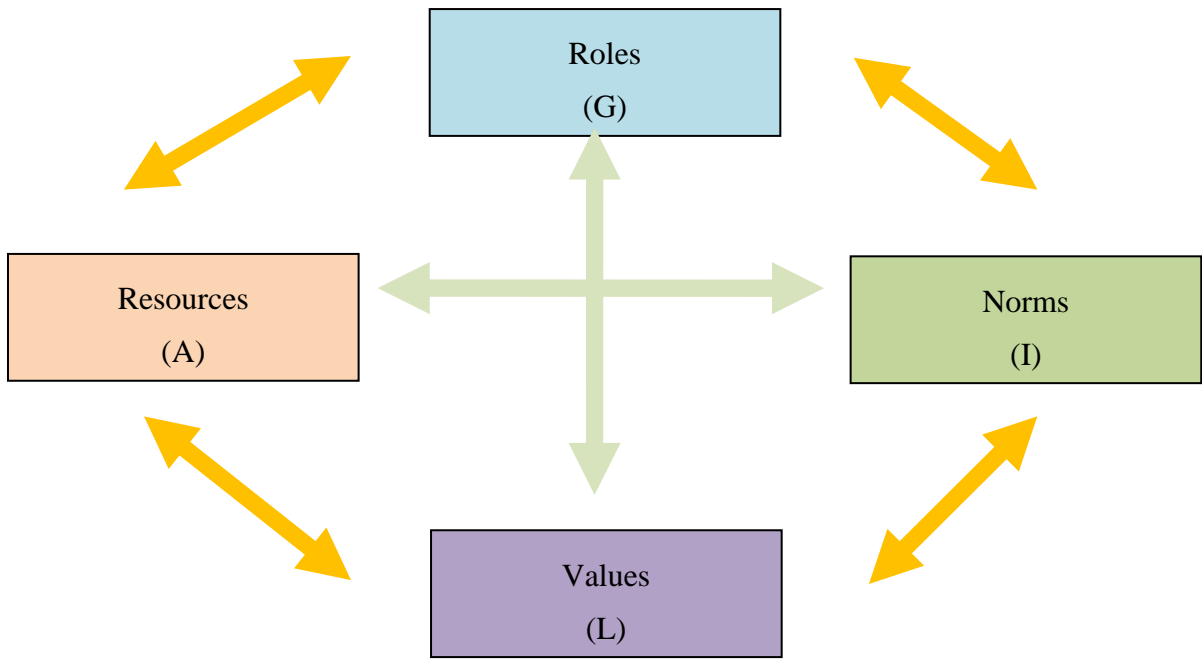


Fig. 1.2 – Dimensions of Social Innovation - (Source: Elaboration of Andrea Bassi from Hochgerner J., 2011).

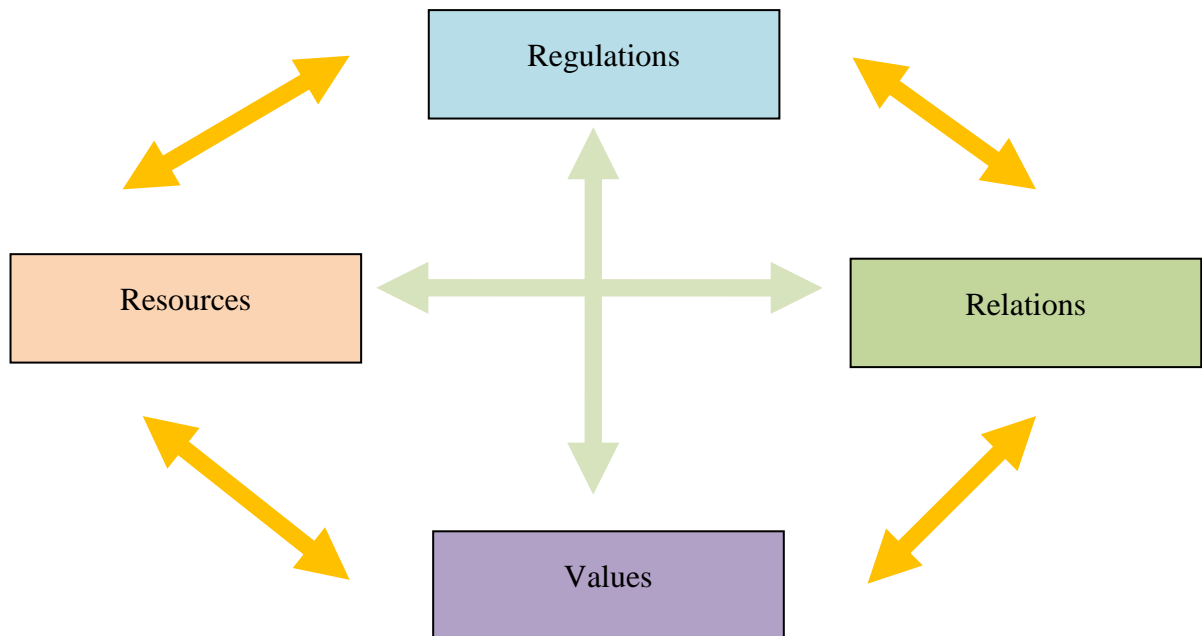


Fig. 1.3 – The complex process of Social Innovation

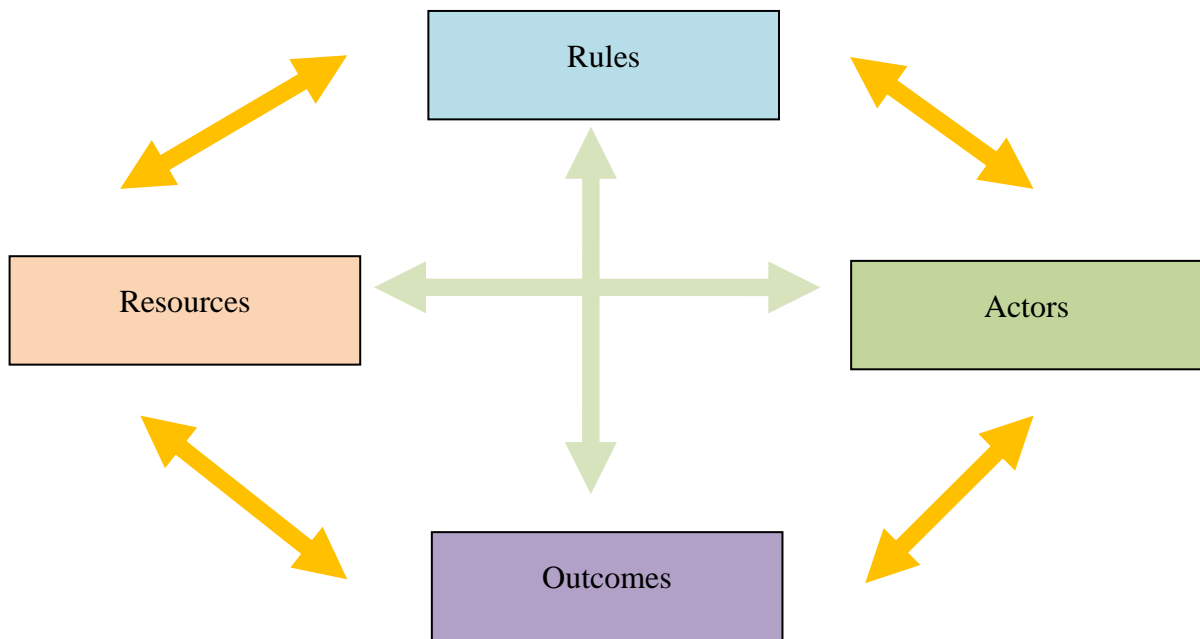


Fig. 1.4 – The ROAR Model of Social Innovation for Social Investment

### 1.3 - Selection of the units of analysis

In this research project we aim to realize **six case studies** of innovative services-projects-programs in the ECEC policy field<sup>8</sup>.

The cases to be include in the research will be selected following several criteria (variables):

- a) geographic distribution = West, Center, East areas of the Emilia-Romagna Region;
- b) municipality dimension = small (up to 15.000 inhabitants); medium (up to 100.000 inhabitants) and big cities (metropolitan area, from 250.000 to 500.000 inhabitants);
- c) ownership structure (principal delivering organization) = public, private for profit, private nonprofit;

<sup>8</sup> As mentioned in note n. 7 we actually realised three in-depth case studies.

d) services typology = following the classification defined by the Emilia-Romagna regional government [a) Nurseries/kindergartens; b) integrative/complementary services; c) home services; d) experimental services]

For each case study selected we will gather a variety of information and data coming from a multiplicity of sources (direct and indirect), such as:

- official documents (Laws enacted by the Regional government; Regulations enacted by municipalities);
- unofficial documents (bylaws of nonprofit organizations; minutes of Board of Directors of for profit enterprises involved in corporate welfare programs);
- grey material (research reports, evaluation reports, etc. by public bodies and research institutions);
- face to face interviews with representatives from public administration, nonprofit organizations, private corporations, parents associations, etc.
- focus group with representatives of the above mentioned organizations.

The information and the data collected during the inquire will be analyzed following a grid of analysis (template), illustrated in the box below.

## CASE STUDIES TEMPLATE

### A] HISTORY

When the service/project/program started/born? How did it (the occasion, event)?  
Who are the founders? Could you describe the main stages of development?

### B] GOVERNANCE

The legal form. The statute/contract/agreement.

The composition of the Board.

President. Stakeholders.

The forms of participation of the different actors.

### C] ACTIVITIES '

What do they do? (Who does what?) With whom they operate (networks, partnerships, collaborations, etc.)?

Who are the main users / beneficiaries (users, customers, etc.).

### D] DIMENSIONS - HUMAN RESOURCES

Number of shareholders (and composition); Number of employees (and composition);

Number of volunteers (and composition);

### E] DIMENSIONS - ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The economic volume of the service/program/project. The yearly balance.

The structure (composition) of revenue. The fundraising activities. Do you have a system of "accountability/Social reporting" (Social Report)?.

### F] ASSESSMENT TOOLS

There is a system of internal evaluation? If so, which one (of activities, services, processes, products, etc.)? There is a system of quality assurance? Is there some form of recognition of the social impact of the service/project/program? It has been drawn up a "code of ethics" or a "Charter of services"?

### G] STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

What are the main strengths (positive aspects) of the service/project/program?

What are the major critical elements, problematic issues, limitations, weaknesses?

### H] TRENDS - THE WAY FORWARD

What will happen in the coming years? What challenges await the service/project/program in the near future? What strategies have been put in place to address them?

There are development plans or multi-annual programs?

## 1.4 - Research team

The research program will be carried on by one senior researchers (PhD in Early Childhood Pedagogy) and two junior researchers (a psychologist and an economist) under the scientific supervision of Andrea Bassi (PhD in Sociology and Social Policy) Associate Professor in General Sociology.

## 1.5 - Timing and phases (timetable)

The research program will last 8 months.

First Phase – Case studies selections (Contact with Regional Government officials) and literature review

February	March	April	May	June	July
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Second Phase – Literature reading and research tools preparation

February	March	April	May	June	July
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Third Phase – Filed work (documents collection and interviews)

February	March	April	May	June	July
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Fourth Phase – Information elaboration and data analysis

February	March	April	May	June	July
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Fifth Phase – Interpretation of the data

February	March	April	May	June	July
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Sixth Phase – Report writing

April	May	June	July	August	September
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## 1.6 - Structure of the Report

The Report is organised in five Sections.

The First Section (*Introduction*) focuses on the importance of ECEC services inside the European Strategy 2020 as a Social Investment and Social Innovation policy. As an initial section, it also presents the regulatory institutional environment, the main actors involved, the financial framework of the ECEC services system in the Emilia-Romagna Region. It offers also a brief outline of the main phases of the research project.

The Second Section (*Literature Review*) is articulated in two parts, the first one concerns the analysis of the scientific literature and grey materials regarding the Early Childhood services at both the European and Italian level. The second one deals with the topic of assessment of ECEC services and present the model of evaluation development by the Emilia-Romagna regional ECEC Office.

The Third section (*Needs Assessment*) details quantitative and qualitative data presented in national and regional Reports analysing social transformations, families' needs and service provision in relation to the education and care of young children.

The Fourth Section (*Realist Evaluation*) constitutes the core part of the Report. It illustrates and comments the three case-studies conducted during the research project, analysing the successful integrate system of ECEC services in Emilia-Romagna Region, from the point of view of the Social Investment policy framework and the Social Innovation initiative. It includes the examination of the perceptions of the different actors involved in the project in order to address the social needs identified in the previous phase.

The Fifth Section (*Concluding remarks*) summarises the theoretical and methodological pathway developed along the Report. In particular we present in a “bullet-point” format the main results emerging from the in-depth analysis of the empirical research.

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## 2. Literature review<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1 Policy Analysis

#### 2.1.1 Development of the policy<sup>10</sup>

The Italian debate on early childhood education and care (ECEC) has intensified since the twentieth century that was the period in which society and political institutions have acquired the idea of childhood as a fertile phase of the lifecycle. At first, in the years before the Second World War, early childhood institutions were mostly run by charitable bodies (predominantly Church-affiliated bodies and mutual assistance organisations) and had a mere custodial function, taking care of children from working class and poor families. Later, since the years after World War II, the educational role of early childhood institutions have been identified and valorised, in particular thanks to the experiences of some virtuous Regions, such as Emilia Romagna, which preceded and somehow guided subsequent national strategies.

Women's employment was one of the main issues taken on by women's groups and associations, from the late nineteenth century (Cavazza, Pombeni, 2012, translated by the author). Since the turn of nineteenth and twentieth century, the European feminists associations, and of course the Italian ones, fought for the recognition of a series of measures which included the protection of maternity and childcare, the improvement of mothers' working conditions and single women with and without children. Moreover, the second industrial revolution caused an increase in female labor, which continued throughout the twentieth century. For these reasons, motherhood was to be considered a "social question" and not merely a personal event. The maternity condition is a common factor for every woman and it cannot fall exclusively within the sphere of private businesses.

In this context, the regime fascism's activities on childcare represented "an attempt to relegate women in the family sphere" and to offer a mere care service to families. As

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<sup>9</sup> This Section has been written by Maria Lamorgese and Francesco Della Rocca.

<sup>10</sup> This paragraph has been written by Francesco Della Rocca.

pointed out by Cavazza and Pombeni: "we must not confuse the claims of women's movements partially approved by some democratic states since the twenties, with those from the fascist and Nazi regimes, which reaffirmed the ties that relegated women in the family sphere according to the respect for the traditional division of roles" (Cavazza and Pombeni 2012, pag.169, translated by the author).

It was in the view of the "male-breadwinner" family that was instituted the ONMI (*National Opera for Motherhood and Childhood*) – an institution grown up during the fascism period and dissolved in 1975 - which provided assistance and protection to poor workers and working mothers. The ONMI's activities - that had no educational contents - were within the enlarged Fascist vision, which tended to reinforce the idea of family based solely on the figure of the father.

The World War II accelerated the social and economic changes. In this context, the mobilization of women and the mass consumerism were elements that ruined the liberal model based on the clear division between public and private, the family, the individual and the State. The youth protests of the 60s and the "quiet revolution" of women against certain political and cultural models were the main factors that positively influenced the improvement of woman's figure in Italian society.

This was the historical and social context in which the first public intervention on childcare have carried out by national government through the Law no. 1044/1971 "*Piano quinquennale per l'istituzione di asili-nido comunali con il concorso dello Stato*" which instituted services for children aged 0-3 under the Ministry of Welfare<sup>11</sup>. According to the law, childcare services (*asili nido*) – recognised as a "*social service of public interest*" - provided only a temporary care service to ensure assistance to families and to facilitate the access of women in the labour market. Even though the law did not identify the educational contents of childcare, it stressed the need for setting facilities' structural requirements which allow the promotion of children's development, for recruiting qualified professionals and for involving families' in their social management. The law allowed municipalities to build and manage childcare services: it transferred managing and controlling tasks to municipalities, while Regions were – and still are – in

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<sup>11</sup> Governance processes of 0-3 years old services, until today, (or at least until the implementation of the decrees of the Law 107/2015) is within a "split system", in which the Ministry of social Affairs is responsible for 0-3 years old services, while 3-6 years old services are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

charge of planning and regulation.<sup>12</sup> In the legislative framework described so far, education and care provision for children under three years was – and still is <sup>13</sup>– understood as an individual demand service. It means that services are activated at the request of the families, which have to participate in the expenses carried out by Regions and municipalities. It seems important to underline that Regions such as Emilia Romagna have developed childcare services, especially through the efforts of local communities, before the National Law n. 1044.<sup>14</sup> The experiences of local governments - which have been coordinated at local and regional level - were essential for the recognition of the educational role of early childhood institutions, which in fact happened many years before the formal recognition took place in 2003. The administrative decentralization process initiated in Italy as early as the 70s, allowed the most virtuous regions to build high-quality ECEC systems and the multi-stakeholder approach had produced many innovative experimentations, especially in northern Regions such as Emilia Romagna, Toscana and Lombardia. Early childhood education and care policies have been formulated as support to family responsibilities (for conciliating life times with working time), but above all in order to satisfy children’s relational and educational needs (Milione, 2011, translated by the author; Mantovani, 2007). At the same time, the different sensitivity of Italian Regions has led to a strong diversity of the quality and availability of ECEC services in the different geographic areas. On the one hand, regions in the northern-central part of Italy have developed high quality, responsive and innovative early childhood education and care (ECEC) system. On the other hand, several southern Regions have fragile ECEC systems. In this context, creating networks and sharing best practices is essential in order to increase quality and sustainability of ECEC system in the whole country.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In the period 1972/76, the National Government allocated special funds to the Regions for granting cash contributions to the municipalities.

<sup>13</sup> The recent proposal to reform the Italian childcare legislative framework is direct to exceed the “split system” through the institution of the 0-6 integrated system. The issue will be addressed later in a more specific way.

<sup>14</sup> The first municipal pre-school (*scuola dell’infanzia*) was opened near Reggio Emilia in 1963, while the first municipal *nido* (attended by children aged 0 to 3) was opened in Bologna in 1969 (*nido Patini*). In both cases, the initiative of municipal administrations preceded the enactment of National Laws instituting pre-schools (Law 444/1968) and *nido* services (Law 1044/1971), (Lazzari, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> According to the newspaper “L’Unità” (10<sup>th</sup> March 1972), in Sicily, in 1972, about 225 thousands children did not have adequate support and care.

The socio-political debate of the years 70s-90s, has been reinforced by both requests carried out by international organizations (United Nations, *Convention On the Rights of the Child 1989*, ratified in Italy by the Law 176/1991) and the increasing attention to issues concerning the new generations. They have been recognized inalienable rights - also enshrined in Italian Constitution – such as education, respect of individual identity, ethnic, linguistic and religious (Milione, 2011).

Despite the above, the political attention to childcare issues has been rekindled only twenty-five years later the Law 1044/1971. In the late '90s, the national government has developed policies built on “*organic action plans*” (*piani organici di azione*). As pointed out by Milione:

<< The law 23 December 1997 n. 451, *Istituzione della Commissione Parlamentare per L'infanzia e dell'Osservatorio Nazionale per L'infanzia* (Establishment of the Parliamentary Commission for Childhood and the National Observatory for Children), has identified new institutional tools for understanding the reality of childcare, to define an organic overall political strategy and to coordinate all actors responsible to the protect and educate children. Particularly dynamic role has had the law 28 August 1997 n.285 (known as *Legge Turco*, Turco Law), that - by setting up a national fund for the promotion of children's rights and opportunities - is the most significant financial effort ever made in Italy for younger generations >> (Milione, pag. 86, 2011, translated by the author).

The right to be protected has been combined with the right to equal opportunities for educational growth and personality development of each child. For this reason, services are no longer targeted only to "problematic" children (need of care), but to the entire audience of children who have the same rights to entry to early childhood services. In 1999, the Minister for Social Solidarity, Livia Turco, stressed that it was important to recognize the right of younger children to be cared for by their parents but also to grow up with other children in specific facilities. The minister declared that the Law 1044/1971 was designed only for working mothers, while the new experimental services are turning the entire children's audience (*La stampa*, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1999, pag 3). The promotion of children's rights has developed along with other factors such as the integration of actors involved in ECEC services, and the enhancement of private social

resources (non-profit sector) and civil community. The *Turco Law* was a precursor of Law No. 328/2000, *Legge Quadro per la Realizzazione del Sistema Integrato di Interventi e Servizi Sociali* (Framework Law for the Implementation of the Integrated System of Interventions and Social Services), whose purpose was outlining strategies, which stressed children's rights and quality life in order to place them at the centre of the educational processes. The legislative framework identified stakeholders' participation as one of the most important characteristic of ECEC system.

The formal recognition of the educational feature of early childhood provision has been sanctioned by the judgment of the Constitutional Court n. 370 of 2003. From that moment, on the wake of the judgment, political actors and society have identified the need of an integrated system, from-0-to-6 years old. For this reason, there is a big policy debate at national level and among professionals with regards to a new Law of reform of the Italian National System, the so-called Law on "*Buona Scuola*" (*Good School*), approved by the Italian Parliament the 13 July 2015: Law n. 107 : "*Riforma del Sistema nazionale di istruzione e formazione*".<sup>16</sup> It is important to note at the Art. 1 – Comma 181 – Letter e), "*Istituzione del Sistema integrato di educazione e di istruzione dalla nascita fino a sei anni, costituito dai servizi educativi per l'infanzia e dalle scuole dell'infanzia*", the Law establishes an integrated system of ECEC services at national level. The changes introduced by the reform imply continuity of educational approaches throughout 0-3 and 3-6 services. Within this Law, the administrative responsibility 0-3 services will no longer fall under the Ministry of Welfare but will lay with the Ministry of Education, which means they are no longer considered as individual demand service. This is a huge innovation at the legislative level, and the expected results should be the introduction of same standards of services all over the country. However, , the issuing of implementation decrees by the National Government is not yet be completed, but it is set for the end of December 2016 (18 months from the enactment of Law 107, in July 2015).

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<sup>16</sup> This specific provision has been strongly supported by both Associations of parents and professionals through the previous *Legge di iniziativa popolare (Community law)* number 1260/2012.



### 2.1.2 Legislative framework<sup>17</sup>

For understanding the modern ECEC system in Emilia Romagna is essential to consider the national and regional legislation from 1971 to the present: it was a historical period rich of important cultural, social and economic changes.

The provision of ECEC services for children aged under three was first regulated at national level with the Law n.1044 of 1971. This law was a great innovation, because for the first time, the Italian State defined important guidelines directed towards the creation of early childhood services on the national territory (*asili nido comunali*), by providing public funds to Regions and local authorities. The latter were – and still are – responsible for the identification of needs at local level and for building facilities. The law defined, from the beginning, its strong social connotation because it aimed to give an answer to women who wanted to access the labor market and therefore to respond to their needs to temporarily entrust their children, in the first years of life, to qualified personnel in equipped structures which are purposely arranged for taking care of children, ensuring their safety and reliability. Later, the devolution of administrative autonomy to the Regions over the application of the law have generated an uneven distribution of ECEC services throughout the country: some regions<sup>18</sup> have built prudent policies to grab the social changes, while others are still struggling to implement a sufficient supply of services. Despite the innovative features, there were less positive aspects because the Law n. 1044 emphasized the welfare nature of the services, thereby undervaluing the educational potential.

On the other hand, "the Emilia Romagna Region, since the 80s, has planned, designed and managed ECEC policies - through an important collaboration with different institutions at provincial and local level – in order to consolidate early childhood services as educational services. This effort is reflected also in the terminology used to define these services in Regional legislation – which are called *nidi d'infanzia* (lit. children's nest) – rather than *asili nido* – which recall a custodial function – as in the national legislation. Since those years, they have been implemented some services,

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<sup>17</sup> This paragraph has been written by Maria Lamorgese.

<sup>18</sup> Some local contexts have implemented a pedagogical approach for the development of children in their early years of life and, at the same time, they created a new culture of the family and services. In fact, the law no. 1044 /1971 placed its bases on three pillars: the professionalism of the staff, the participation of families and the organization of services.

which were innovative because of operating and management processes and for being places for families' meeting and socializing" (Fuzzi, 2010, pag. 29).

After twenty-five years since the law no. 1044/1971, the national law n. 285/1997 was promulgated<sup>19</sup>, rekindling the interest on ECEC field. The purpose of the law is to implement and support the promotion of the rights, the quality of life, the development and individual fulfillment and socialization of childhood and adolescence, reached through the establishment of the "National Fund for Children and Adolescents" aimed to realize national, regional and local policies, which are strictly connected. The law introduces an innovative working method that induces institutions, provinces, municipalities, local health services, associations and social cooperatives to a strong collaboration. Local authorities take an active role in designing and implementing of interventions and policies, particularly on the social, educational and health aspects.

In the same year, with the National Law no. 451, the *Parliamentary Commission for Childhood* is set up, with controlling and monitoring tasks on the concrete implementation of international legislation on children's rights. The same law also creates the *National Observatory for Children and Adolescents*,<sup>20</sup> whose main task is to draw the National Action Plan for the protection of children's rights and valorizing their development. The Plan identifies the forms of strengthening and coordination of actions carried out by regional and local governments. In this legislative framework, the Emilia Romagna Region has set up the *Regional Observatory on Children and Adolescents*, with the aim of collecting and disseminating statistical documents and data that allow making proposals and developing appropriate projects to improve the quality of ECEC system.

Moreover, it is important to underline the *Legge Quadro* (National Framework Law) no. 328 of 2000, which aims at the realization of the Integrated System of interventions and social services. The main purpose of the law is supporting individuals - within their family as well - in a perspective of quality life, prevention, reduction and elimination of personal hardships.

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<sup>19</sup> Law no. 285 of 1997 "*Disposizioni per la promozione di diritti e di opportunità per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza*" (Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities for childhood and adolescence).

<sup>20</sup> Art. 7, comma 1, Regional Law 28 July 2008, n. 14, *Norme in materia di politiche per le giovani generazioni* (Rules on policies for the younger generations).

In 2003, the Emilia-Romagna Region - in accordance with the provisions of the national legislation - issued the Regional Law no.2 aimed at promoting social, welfare, and health interventions that ensure tangible help to individuals and families in need. The law redefined regional welfare actions and provided the coordination of efforts carried out in the school area.<sup>21</sup>

Another significant moment in the history of ECEC services in Emilia-Romagna is the enactment of Regional Law No. 1 of 2000 and subsequent amendments (RL 14 April 2004 n. 8; RL 29 December 2006 n. 20; RL 22 December 2011 n. 21, RL 22 June 2012 n. 6), which defines and regulates the integrated system of socio-educational services for early childcare.

The Regional Law and the Directive on the Organizational and Structural Requirement (*Direttiva sui requisiti organizzativi e strutturali*) , (Legislative Assembly Resolution no. 646/2005) aim to:

1. Change the entire framework of services for early childcare, focusing attention on the rights of children; to build a system of services to converge the children's and parents' needs, in terms of quantity but also on a quality level;
2. Establish the different types of services of the ECEC system in Emilia-Romagna:
  - a) *Nidi d'infanzia* (Centre-based early childhood services). Educational and social services of public interest, to all children from three to the thirty-six months old, which work with families to children's growth and developing, respecting the individual identity, culture and religion. The purpose of these services is to foster children's development and socialization, with a view of psychological well-being and enhancement of their cognitive, emotional, relational and social potential; children's care and education is linked to the presence of qualified personnel, which support families in caring and in educational choices. Early childhood services can operate and can be organized in different ways according to the

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<sup>21</sup> In Italy, the word *scuola* (school) is commonly used to refer to the entire education system, therefore encompassing institutions attended by children aged 3 to 6 (*scuole dell'infanzia*) (Lazzari, 2012).

opening hours, their receptivity (*nidi* or *micronidi*) and location (company crèches)<sup>22</sup>.

- b) *Servizi domestici* (Family day-care facilities). They are organized in small educational groups, enhancing the intimacy of the context in which the service are provided (educator residence, other dedicated facility). They can receive up to seven children.
- c) *Servizi integrativi* (Integrative/complementary services). They provide different kinds of services for children, even accompanied by parents or other adults. They include the *Spazio bambini*, which offers day care for children between twelve and thirty-six months old, and the *Centri bambini e genitori*, that offers hospitality to children with their parents or accompanying adults. Moreover, the initiatives of families – with the presence of pedagogical coordinator - willing to accommodate up to seven children are part of the integrated system.
- d) *Servizi sperimentali* (Experimental services). The latest generation of services that include family day-care settings (*educatore domiciliare*), educators operating at children's home upon the agreement with a self-organised group of families (*educatore familiare*) and small educational groups (*piccolo gruppo educativo*); they are open to other types of services that the territory want to propose in order to identify needs of particular social and territorial situations.

3. Establish a set of clear rules for all those involved in managing ECEC services, both public and private actors.

4. Support quality of the system by strengthening the role played by the pedagogical coordinator<sup>23</sup>, creating a link between the educational practices and social and health practices.

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<sup>22</sup> In the company and intercompany crèches (*nidi aziendali e inter-aziendali*), which benefit from public funding, it is allowed access even to children whose parents are not employed in the company itself. The access procedures are governed by specific agreements. The child has the right to attend regardless of any termination of the parent's employment, until the transfer to *Scuola dell'infanzia* (paragraph 2a, Art. 5 RL 22 June 2012 n. 6).

<sup>23</sup> The pedagogical coordinator has been introduced by the R.L. n. 1/2000 and subsequent amendments. He/she responsible for the educational project of services, professional training of operators and conducting the *collettivo* in order to standardize the work planning of all the town kindergartens and at the same time respecting the specific features of each of them.

To conclude this excursus on the legislation, which has regulated ECEC field at national and regional level, allowing to prepare policies to implement actions for children and to move from care services to educational services, it is important to consider the reform of the "National System of Education and Training ", the so-called law *Buona Scuola* (Good School), approved by the Italian Parliament July 13, 2015.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to note that at the Art. 1 - Paragraph 181 - point e) *Istituzione del sistema integrato di educazione e d'istruzione dalla nascita fino a sei anni, costituito dai servizi educativi per l'infanzia e dalle scuole dell'infanzia* (Establishment of the integrated system of education and instruction from birth to six years, consisting of early childhood educational services and preschools), the law establishes the right of all girls and boys for equality education, instruction, treatment, relationships and play. It is crucial that in this new legislation clearly resounds the importance of family participation in the choice of educational objectives of their children. Early childhood and pre-school services offer children quality educational experiences. For this reason, the legislation not only indicates the university specialization and continuing educators' and teachers' training as essential factors, but it pinpoints precise organizational standards, structural and qualitative for all the various educational settings, specifically emphasizing the importance of practitioners' collegiality and the presence of pedagogical coordination at the regional level for orienting and coordinating the activities of different services. The national government should provide a steady financial support to provide the services in a view of integrated system 0-6, which implies a tremendous support for the expansion of early childhood provision (for children aged under three) and the generalization of preschool (*scuola dell'infanzia*), attended by children aged three to six). The role of Regions and municipalities is essential in reviewing their legislations and in designing new facilities to guarantee children's educational rights from their birth.

This is an innovation in legislation, and the expected result should be the introduction of the same standards of service throughout the country. The Law has been advocated

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<sup>24</sup> The Law no. 107, July 13, 2015.

and strongly supported by the *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia*<sup>25</sup>, which took an active role in the elaboration of the *Legge di iniziativa popolare 1260/2012*<sup>26</sup> (People's Initiative Act) which was discussed in the Parliament and encompassed in the reform 107/2015 (Art.1, par.181, lett. e). This legislation, establishing the integrated system, clarify that ECEC services are no longer included among the individual demand services<sup>27</sup> and ensures the respect for children's rights to equal educational opportunities. Unfortunately, from the point of view of policy implementation, the issuing of legislative decrees by the government must be completed yet.

In time of great changes both from the social and legislative point of view, the Emilia Romagna Region, which had already intervened on the education system in 2012<sup>28</sup>, it is considering ideas and proposals for the forthcoming revision of the Law on 0-6 integrated system.

Elisabetta Gualmini, Vice President and Head of welfare and policies for children Department, is meeting local administrators of different realities throughout the region to understand objectives to be achieved and assess how the region and different territories are oriented in managing the effects of the crisis and what is looming for the new generations (Fuzzi, 2016). In addition, regional actors want to find out problems of ECEC system, paying attention to the quality of services and to the care of children, focusing, at the same time, on the needs of families, which are in profound transformation, and their difficulties.

To sum up, it seems important to underline that there are social and cultural changes in recent years and the effects of these transformations strongly influence services and managing processes: the families have needs that cannot always be met by social and educational services of Emilia Romagna Region. In fact, the policy makers' purpose is to

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<sup>25</sup> Association that wants to offer opportunities for interaction and discussion between people who work in the field of early childcare, in different places and in different professional situations, around the themes of life and social status of younger children.

<sup>26</sup>*Disposizioni in materia di sistema integrato di educazione e istruzione dalla nascita fino ai sei anni e del diritto delle bambine e dei bambini alle pari opportunità di apprendimento:*  
[www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/301466.pdf](http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/301466.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> The Decree of 31.12.1983 of Interior Ministry identifies the categories of services classified as "individual demand services". For these services it does not exist the institutional obligation of provision; they are activated at the request of the families but national or regional law has not declared them free.

<sup>28</sup> R.L. of 22th June 2012 no. 6; Assembly Legislative Resolution of 25th July 2012 no. 58; Regional Council Resolution of 30th July 2012 no. 1089.

propose a reform which is addressing both the issue of conciliation between work and family responsibilities and the issue of children's right to equal educational opportunities. It is in fact believed that this will allow implementing more effectively services for different types of families: those with many children, those single parent, those of immigrants.

### 2.1.3 Academic analysis<sup>29</sup>

The Europe 2020 Strategy pinpoints ECEC as an essential requirement to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. There is a broad consensus in the academic field that improving the quality and effectiveness of the ECEC system throughout Europe has an important role to play in laying the foundations for the successful lifelong learning of UE citizens as well in fostering social cohesion. (European Commission, 2011). Two of the most important features of ECEC are “equitable access” to services and “quality of pedagogical practices”. It seems important to underline these factors that are strictly interrelated; the equitable access itself is not enough to guarantee services' effectiveness and this is why the quality of practices – which depends on continuing necessity of educators' professionalism - is an essential factor to guarantee children's academic results in the future and employability.

As the Council of European Union underlined, the “generalised equitable access to ECEC services” has a crucial role in order to reduce early school leaving and the number of people living at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Despite of consensus at policy level, it is well documented that children from ethnic minority and low incomes families are less often enrolled in non/maternal care and preschool, and that – when enrolled – these children are more often to be found in provision of poorer quality than their more affluent peers (Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, 2013).<sup>30</sup> For this reason, in recent years European policies focus on children's rights, equal educational opportunities and social inclusion.

Equitable access (entry) to ECEC services is essential to reduce differences – in social and cultural terms – between children from disadvantaged background and children

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<sup>29</sup> This paragraph has been written by Francesco Della Rocca.

<sup>30</sup> On average, in the EU-28, the difference in participation rates in ECEC between those 15-years-olds who have a combination of disadvantages and those who do not, is 12%.

from higher income families. As Vanderbroeck and Lazzari (2013) underlined, “if certain conditions are provided” –such as early start and high quality services – “the positive effects of ECEC attendance can potentially persist until the teen age”. Students who attended ECEC for more than one year have achieved better results, in mathematics and reading, and they are well-prepared to enter in primary school. The attendance, however, is not the only factor that affects the future academic performances of children, and on the contrary seems to have a marginal role. According to the report of Eurydice and Eurostat, ECEC attendance – that explains only about 2% of variation in student results - seems to have less influence on the educational results of 15-years-old students than many other variables, for example social-economic background, gender or students’ motivation (Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, 2014). Among factors that produce differences in terms of participation rate, gender has not a significant weight. On the other hand, economic disadvantages and families’ low education level have stronger effects. In many cases, children who come from disadvantaged families – economically and culturally – coincide with the first- or second-generation immigrants. Nevertheless, the great heterogeneity of European experiences show that “the only further consideration that could be made is that comprehensive and consistent system of high quality are essential conditions to yield the expected beneficial results on a population level” and that effects are stronger for children in poverty and for those who come from ethnic minority.

In addition, Van Lancker clarified <<childcare mitigate early inequalities through two dimensions. First, allowing mothers from disadvantaged families (often, if not always, having a weak labour market profile) to engage in paid employment does not only yield benefits in terms of human capital, but also raises family income which may push them above the poverty threshold. [...] Second, the disparity in terms of social readiness, between children growing up in low-income families and children growing up in higher income families, is large already by the time they start school. This is largely so because the former grow up in a less conducive learning environment with parents who are less able to facilitate their children’s school readiness than their higher-income and higher-skilled counterparts. Obviously, other factors which are interrelated with poverty [...] interfere with and add up the early disparity in school readiness. In other words,



because these children start off from a disadvantaged point, they have the most to gain from high quality childcare>> (Van Lancker, 2013, pag. 6-7)

PIRLS<sup>31</sup> 2011 data confirms that the beneficial impact of ECEC on reading achievement is stronger for children with a low level of education, than for those children who have at least one parent with tertiary level education (Eurydice, Eurostat, 2014). Investing on quality of ECEC services produce benefits “over the lifelong learning cycle” on cognitive and non-cognitive children’s development, especially in “context of socio-economic and ethnic diversity”. High quality pre-primary programmes can give all children, regardless of background, a good start in their lifelong learning (Eurydice, Eurostat, 2014).

In the following, we will analyse the data of European context. Later, we will concentrate on analysing Italy’s and Emilia Romagna’s situation.

**European context.** Every country in Europe has a formal centre-based early childhood education and care (ECEC) but the organization of services is different throughout Europe. Centre-based provision – which commonly encompasses nurseries, day-care centres, company crèches and kindergartens - is within the regulatory framework and is provided outside home.

There are two main types of ECEC system. Some countries – such as Finland, Norway, Island or Norway – have a unitary system. On the other hand, some others countries – such as Italy, France, Portugal or Poland - have a split system which is the most common. The former refers to a single system for all children in pre-school age; the Ministry of education is responsible for ECEC governance, regulation and funding and the educational guidelines cover the entire ECEC phase. Children have no transfers until they start primary school. The Latter refers to two different phases of pre-school age, which commonly is from 0 to 3 years old and from 3 to 6 years old (the age break is about 3 years old). In this kind of systems, the ministry of health, welfare or family affairs is responsible for the provision for younger children, and the Ministry of education is in charge of provision for older children (Eurydice, 2014). Only 5 countries with a split system have implemented official measures to facilitate the transfer

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<sup>31</sup> The study IEA PIRLS 2011 - *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* – is an international survey carried out by the *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement* (IEA). Its purpose is the assessment of fourth grade children’s reading skills. It is in fourth grade that children, in most of cases, have learned to read and start reading to learn.

between the two phases. It seems interesting that some countries, such as Germany, Spain or Austria, have both separate and unitary settings. In these systems, while the management staffs are the same, the provision differs in terms of staffs qualifications, curricula and funding arrangements. Moreover, most European countries also have a regulated home-based provision but, in general, it appears insignificant compared to the centre-based provision; only in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Finland, the United Kingdom and Iceland does regulated home-based provision represent a significant proportion of ECEC, in particular for younger children.

*Legal entitlement and compulsory ECEC.* The most of European countries have established a legal entitlement to ensure the ECEC for all children. Legal entitlement to ECEC refers to a statutory duty on ECEC providers to secure publicly subsidies ECEC provision for all children living in a catchment area whose parents, regardless of their employment, socio-economic or family status, require a place for their child (Eurydice, 2014). Legal entitlement does not necessarily imply that ECEC services are free and it does not exist the mandatory attendance. Lithuania, Turkey, Poland, Latvia, Italy, Austria, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus, have not established a legal entitlement yet. Another way to ensure ECEC access is establishing compulsory ECEC for the last one or two years (Eurydice, 2014); which means that children are obliged to attend and authorities should ensure adequate supply of pre-primary services to families. It seems important that some countries, which have or do not have a legal entitlement, have a compulsory ECEC (Poland, Greece, Switzerland, Latvia, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria).

*Planning and monitoring capacity.* In most European countries, the responsibilities of monitoring capacity and planning are shared between central and local governments. On the contrary, regional institutions, on average, have a minor role. Furthermore, authorities engaged in monitoring capacity, sometimes are not the same authorities that carry out planning (Eurydice, 2014). For instance, in Germany and Poland, authorities which are involved in capacity monitoring are not the same involved in forward planning. In Belgium (*deBelgium*) and Malta the only authority responsible for monitoring and planning is the central one for both younger and older children provision. In contrast, in countries such as Denmark and Iceland the local government is

the only responsible for monitoring and planning for every types of service. In Italy all levels of authorities are involved in both provision monitoring and forward planning but central government is only involved in the provision of older children's services.

*Supply and demand balance.* Data on the relationship between demand and supply show that the demand for publicly subsidised ECEC places are higher than supply, especially for younger children (European Commission, 2014). Only Scandinavian countries do not observe any considerable imbalances. In other countries, such as Spain, France, Greece, United Kingdom and Estonia, there are no imbalances for older children's provision.

*Participation rates.* Psychological and pedagogical research shows that participation in high quality ECEC brings significant benefits for children. The European Commission underlined the importance of early entry to the educational system and established the European benchmark, which stipulates that by 2020 at least 95% of children between the age of 4 and the starting age of school should be participating in early childhood education (European Commission, 2011). On average, in the EU-28, 93% of children in this age group are in ECEC. In 2011, seventeen countries have a higher participation rate than the average. In particular, in France Spain and Malta, the 100% of children from 4 to 6 years old are attending ECEC.<sup>32</sup>

Despite of all mentioned above, ECEC participation among children under 3 is very low. Eleven out of twenty-eight countries are above the European benchmark, which is 33%. According to Eurostat data (2015), the best nations are Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Luxembourg, and The Netherland with respectively 62%, 55%, 47% and 46% (percentage of "formal care" over the population of under three years old). In Italy, the coverage ("formal care") rate is 21%, with a reduction, since 2005 of four percentage points; on the other hand, participation rate in "other types of childcare services" is 45% but sometimes the two types of services tend to overlap each other. Furthermore, in the EU-28, 50% of children are cared only by their parents. East European countries tend to have higher rates than continental countries. Bulgaria is the highest (81%), followed by Slovakia (71%) and Hungary (64%). Latvia, Lithuania and surprisingly Finland as well are higher than the European average.

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<sup>32</sup> In four only countries, Belgium Italy Czech Republic and United Kingdom, the participation rate has been decreased from 2001 to 2011.

**Emilia Romagna.** Developing high quality practices cannot be separated from recognizing and enhancing of experiences in local contexts. According to Lazzari “the increasing dominance of social investment paradigm” – carried out by government adopting a liberal welfare state and characterised by outcome-focused perspective – “is currently generating contradictory tensions, especially in those contexts where [...] the provision of services for young children stemmed out of social and educational emancipatory traditions” (Lazzari, 2014, pag. 427-428).

In this context, analysing educational processes from a participatory perspective, rather than from a perspective focused only to measure predetermined outcomes, played a key role in developing a real culture of childhood (*cultura dell’infanzia*) in Emilia-Romagna. It is important to underline that “exploring the case of Emilia Romagna is significant not only because the city councils in this area were the first to develop such experiences and the pedagogical culture that contribute greatly to their educational quality, but also because the regional government played a pivotal role in promoting and sustaining these local initiatives” (Lazzari, 2012, pag. 557). Results of many psychological studies, which showed that childhood is a fertile phase of lifecycle, contributed to develop the pedagogical approach and underline the relevance of the active role of children in learning processes. Redefining the contents of the learning processes, children became the protagonists of their growth and of those very processes. In this perspective, “learning process [...] cannot be narrowed down to the mere transmission and reproduction of pre-determined knowledge” (Lazzari, 2012, pag. 559).

An important characteristic of municipalities’ action, in Emilia Romagna, is the employment of *pedagogic coordinators* or *pedagogisti* in managing and consolidating links between main stakeholders, such as parents, children and political actors in the local context. The role of *pedagogista* can only be defined starting at the image of the child – consequently our teacher’s, school’s and family’s images – and in turn contributes to those very images (Filippini, 1998).

Redefinition of educational processes requires a constant improvement of educators’ professionalism, which is essential to innovate the ECEC system. In this context, the connection between academic researches, research centres (eg. *Istituto degli Innocenti di Firenze*) and the activity of practitioners’ groups / associations – such as *Gruppo*

*Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia* - contributed over the years to strengthen “the link between theory and practice” as well as to achieve an “Experimental educational approach” (Lazzari, 2012). Moreover, monitoring activities of children’s everyday experiences and data collecting have generated new knowledge and the consolidation of good practises.

Citizens’ engagement and their active participation in political life – factors that have contributed to develop the “culture of childhood” – have created a real concept of “*gestione sociale*” (social management) of childcare services. Indeed, the democratization of the educational practises as well as the intense public debate have consolidated the idea of ECEC as a common good. Many authors underlined that the dialogue between stakeholders such as parents, educators and local community, carried out through teachers’ collegiality and families’ involvement are essential factor in order to increase the effectiveness and quality of ECEC system.

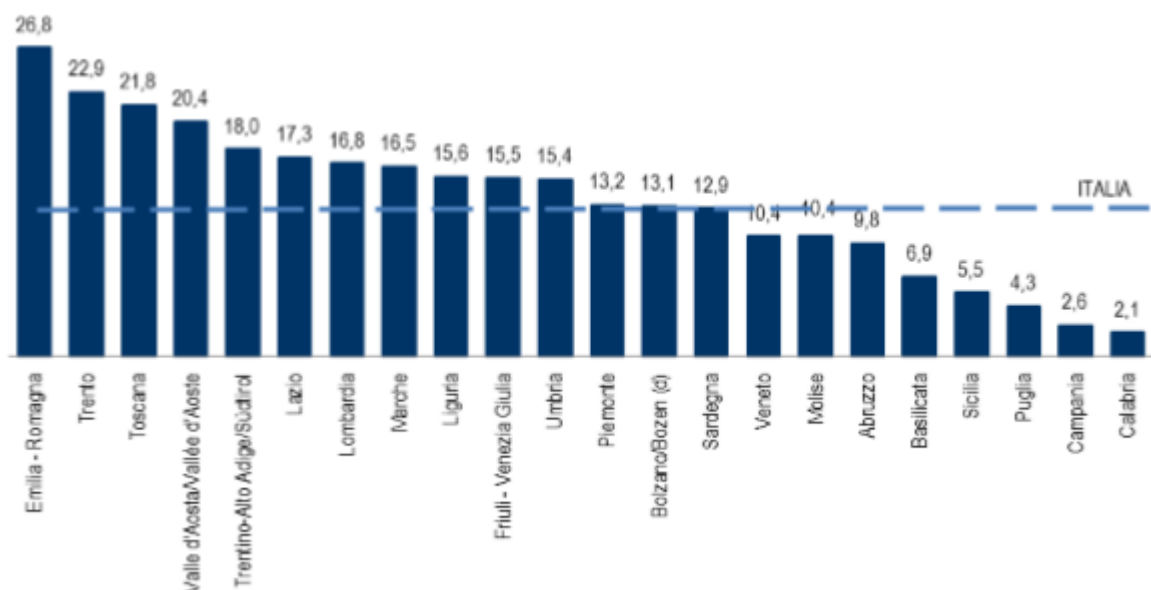
Another factor that has consolidated the ECEC system was the “long-term investment in research” (Lazzari, 2012). Coherent public policies were essential to create a coordinated network of infrastructures both at local and regional levels. Provincial and municipal structures, strictly connected to regional activities, have promoted sharing of knowledge and the consolidation of good practises. Over the years, these centres have become a well-established reality and networks have been progressively created at regional level to connect thoughts, ideas, projects and experiences for the qualification of ECEC institutions: documentations centres thus became laboratories for practitioners’ professional development and practise-based research (Mazzoli, 2005). *I “laboratori di innovazione”* (innovative laboratories) have made it possible to implement, since 80s and 90s, many innovative services, such as *Centri per bambini e genitori* (centres for children and parents) and *Servizi sperimentali (experimental services)*.

Moreover, in the Emilia Romagna Region there is a strong tradition of private not-for-profit provision. In the last decades. The relevance of NP sector (sometimes offering services that are more flexible) has grown significantly. The number of places in private not-for-profit nurseries/kindergartens has increased from 21.6% - in the school year 2008/2009 – to the 26.4 – in the school year 2013/14 – of the total places available. In this respect, it is important to stress the relevant presence of social economy actors

such as social cooperatives, while the private-for-profit sector is very limited and characterized by lack of official data in regard to attendance rate and costs of provision.

Nowadays, according to data, Emilia Romagna Region has a coverage rate over the population 0-2 years old of 35.7%, with a national average of 21.8% (Istat, 2014). On the other hand, some southern Regions such as Campania, Calabria or Abruzzo, have respectively 3.8%, 6.3% and 9.2 %. As we can see again, there is a huge different between northern and southern Regions. The decentralization of legislative powers to Regions and the managing tasks of kindergartens at municipalities have had a double effect. On the one hand, it has created a huge difference between northern and southern Regions in terms of services provision; on the other hand, it had allowed the development of good practices and innovative services in the more dynamic Regions. According to the Istat Report on “Provision of municipal kindergartens and other social and educational services for childhood”, differences between North and South Italy are increasing (Istat, 2014).

Figure n. 2.1



Source: Istat 2014

Referring to the participation rate<sup>33</sup>, the situation is the same. With a national average of 13%, the two extremes are Emilia Romagna, with 26.8%, and Calabria with 2.1 %. Thirteen Regions out of twenty-two are above the national average, while other are under this threshold (Figure n. 2.1).

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<sup>33</sup> Number of users per 100 resident children 0-2 years old.

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## 2.2 Previous evaluations<sup>34</sup>

### 2.2.1 Search strategy

Interest in the quality of ECEC services has gradually increased since the end of the twentieth century and, over the past decade, many European countries have introduced regulations and guidelines aimed at evaluating the quality of services. Moreover, the attention to the quality is caused, in part, by the increasing of services in the territory. In fact

"the implementation of a universalistic approach to pre-school education, as well as to recognize that ECEC services represent a strong factor of economic development – also supporting the employment of women - have contributed to reinforce the issue of supply extension of services on the political agenda of many European countries" (Di Giandomenico, Musatti, Picchio, 2011, pag.4, translated by the author).

These tendencies have highlighted the responsibility of public authorities to guarantee the quality of supply in the context of equal opportunities in education and in fighting social exclusion.

The theme of quality has been taken on by the Network for Children of the European Commission since the early 90's. The first Network for Children's document indicates how the quality has to be negotiated in a continuous process between the people involved: professionals, parents and children. ECEC services and practices should consider the changes affecting families and society to define purposes and goals of educational processes (*"Quality in services for young children, A discussion paper"* 1992). The subsequent document of 1996, collecting the debate launched by the former, identified forty quality targets that Member States would have to reach by 2006 (*"Quality Targets in services for young children, A Ten-year action programme."* 1996). The last target (37-40) are focused on the evaluation of services: they state the need of monitoring and periodically reviewing the achievement of goals, the engagement of community actors (parents and practitioners) in the evaluation processes and the need to adapt evaluation practices to the experience of young children. Later, in 2008, the

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<sup>34</sup> This paragraph has been written by Maria Lamorgese and Francesco Della Rocca with the supervision of Arianna Lazzari.

Network of European magazines Children in Europe<sup>35</sup>, which includes many of the experts involved in previous initiatives, has proposed a document, which consists of ten principles, to define the European approach in the field of ECEC services. The principle number seven presents general criteria for evaluating services for early childhood, which states "evaluation should be an ongoing process, participatory and democratic. The evaluation should be open to all citizens, children and adults, providing the opportunity to discuss of the real problems and take responsibility for making value judgments - rather than being hide behind the supposed scientific objectivity offered by expert and managerial evaluations. This requires methods such, as a specific educational information, that makes this practice visible, transparent and available to reflection, dialogue, interpretation and value judgments, which would guarantee space to achieve unexpected results" (Principle no.7, "*Bambini in Europa*", March 2012).

Considering that the issue of quality is a priority at European level, many Italian regions developed participatory evaluation experiences aimed at identifying the needs of children and their families and at improving the quality of early childhood services.<sup>36</sup> These experiences involved educators, administrators and parents, recognizing the need to consider the local culture of childhood (*cultura dell'infanzia*).

In Emilia Romagna Region, the drafting of Experimental Guidelines for the preparation of the pedagogical project and of evaluation methodology of educational services for young children, has allowed the sharing of an index that addressed:

"education staff of departments in implementing the Pedagogical Project, according to criteria that can safeguard the autonomy of theories and practices in which the different services are inspired, but unifying them in terms of consistency and adherence to the universal principles that underlie regional system" (Regional Government n. 1089, 2012, pag.4, translated by the author),

in order to identify some common evaluation tools. At the same time, the *Servizio Politiche Familiari Infanzia e Adolescenza* (Service for Family, Early Childhood and Adolescence Policies) of the Emilia Romagna Region has promoted the "regional

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<sup>35</sup> Magazine publishes simultaneously in all the countries that make up the network. It is an indispensable tool to be updated on the European policy, scientific research and good professional practice.

<sup>36</sup> A good example is the experience made in the Emilia-Romagna Regional initiative, in collaboration with the University of Pavia, aimed at defining a set of indicators collected in a report intitled "*La qualità negoziata* (2000).

educational documentation 0-6 Project". This project began as a support for the documentation of the most significant experiences in ECEC services of the region for increasing visibility, supporting *the culture of childhood* and the knowledge of educational practices. The development and consolidation of the project have been made possible by the establishment of the Regional Group of Educational Documentation 0/6 (*Gruppo regionale di Documentazione educativa 0/6*), composed by one representative of the Emilia Romagna Region, nine representatives identified by the Provincial Pedagogical Coordination (*Coordinamento Pedagogico Provinciale, CPP*)<sup>37</sup>, the operators of the Laboratory of Documentation and Training (*Laboratorio di Documentazione e Formazione*)<sup>38</sup> of Bologna, and an external consultant expert. The Laboratory of Documentation and Education of the City of Bologna plays a key role in facilitating communication between territories and the Region, gathering information, materials and projects in the different territorial realities, enhancing and supporting the exchange of experiences through the creation of a regional documentation service: sharing information and results has allowed creating an archive of wide and varied experiences.

The Regional Educational Documentation Group (*Gruppo Regionale Documentazione Educativa*) regularly produce and disseminate handbooks (lit. *quaderni*) aimed at enhancing the role of educational documentation and its potential, through the experience of pedagogical coordinators, educators and documentation centres' professionals<sup>39</sup>; to collect and develop experiences from the territories on significant issues; to inform about projects and actions carried out by the CPP of the Emilia Romagna Region. The study on the educational documentation developments were also

<sup>37</sup> From now on, CPP. With the R.L. no. 8 of 2004, the Provincial Pedagogical Coordination has been recognized and designated as a technical body whose responsibilities include:

- promoting in-service professional development of early childhood practitioners,
- fostering the discussion on educational experiences realised by ECEC services as well as the exchange of good practices, ,
- supporting local authorities in developing early childhood services at provincial level,
- promoting connections and networking with research institutes and Family Centers.

<sup>38</sup> The Laboratory of Documentation and Training is a structure for the promotion of the *culture of childhood* and pedagogical reflection on ECEC practices. The activities of the centre are primarily addressed to educators, teachers, students, institutions, associations and families interested in educational issues.

<sup>39</sup> They are places of documentation, training, information, advice, research and experimentation whose activities are directed to early childhood educators and teachers as well as schools of all levels, parents, students, professionals, associations, voluntary sector, in order to identify, develop and promote scientific support and tools for the qualification of services.

fostered by a series of regional and provincial initiatives, which allowed the comparison with other regions and the debate on the theoretical and methodological aspects, and thanks to the collaboration with "Childhood in Europe" ("*Infanzia in Europa*")<sup>40</sup>, which has increased the visibility of educational documentation produced by Emilia Romagna Region.

"It follows that the documentation helps not only to put in value what can also become a cultural exchange material, but also allows to continue to study, to promote the exchange of experiences towards different horizons: the enlarged size that glances over regional and national borders, to cultivate dialogue and discussions with Italian and European partners, facilitating the transmission in the reciprocity of common experiences, to use their own documentation to encourage continuous internal comparison to our territories [...]

the documentation also as knowledge production on which we can interrogate universities and documentation centers of our region who are engaged in basic training and ongoing development of practitioners operating in educational services for children aged 0-6 [...].

The documentation will also be the vehicle through which we will circulate the experiences carried out in the provincial pedagogical coordination units concerning external evaluation and self-evaluation of early childhood services. The development of a quality control system for the "0 to 3 years" services, aims to elaborate a participative monitoring process of the declared, perceived and practiced quality in the services. For that reason it is necessary to define upstream tools and guidelines to harmonize the evaluation process, in order to avoid pure "control" logic.

At the same time it is precisely the documentation of what we produced that makes it possible, in retrospect, the cross-reading between the expected results and the pursued objectives by making them compatible as much as possible with the new needs that new generations of children and families express nowadays" (Marzocchi T. 2013, pag. 51-52, translated by the author).

### 2.2.2 What do previous evaluations tell us

The *regional guidelines* on educational planning and evaluation of ECEC services are based on three pillars:

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<sup>40</sup> The "Children in Europe" project is a collaboration between the Emilia Romagna Region, the Province and the Municipality of Ferrara. The goal is to provide - through the creation of a documentation center and a website dedicated to the project - a constant update on policies, good practices and researches at national and European level, with regard to early childhood, and promoting a European common culture of 0-6 services. <http://www.infanziaineuropa.eu/index.phtml?id=299>

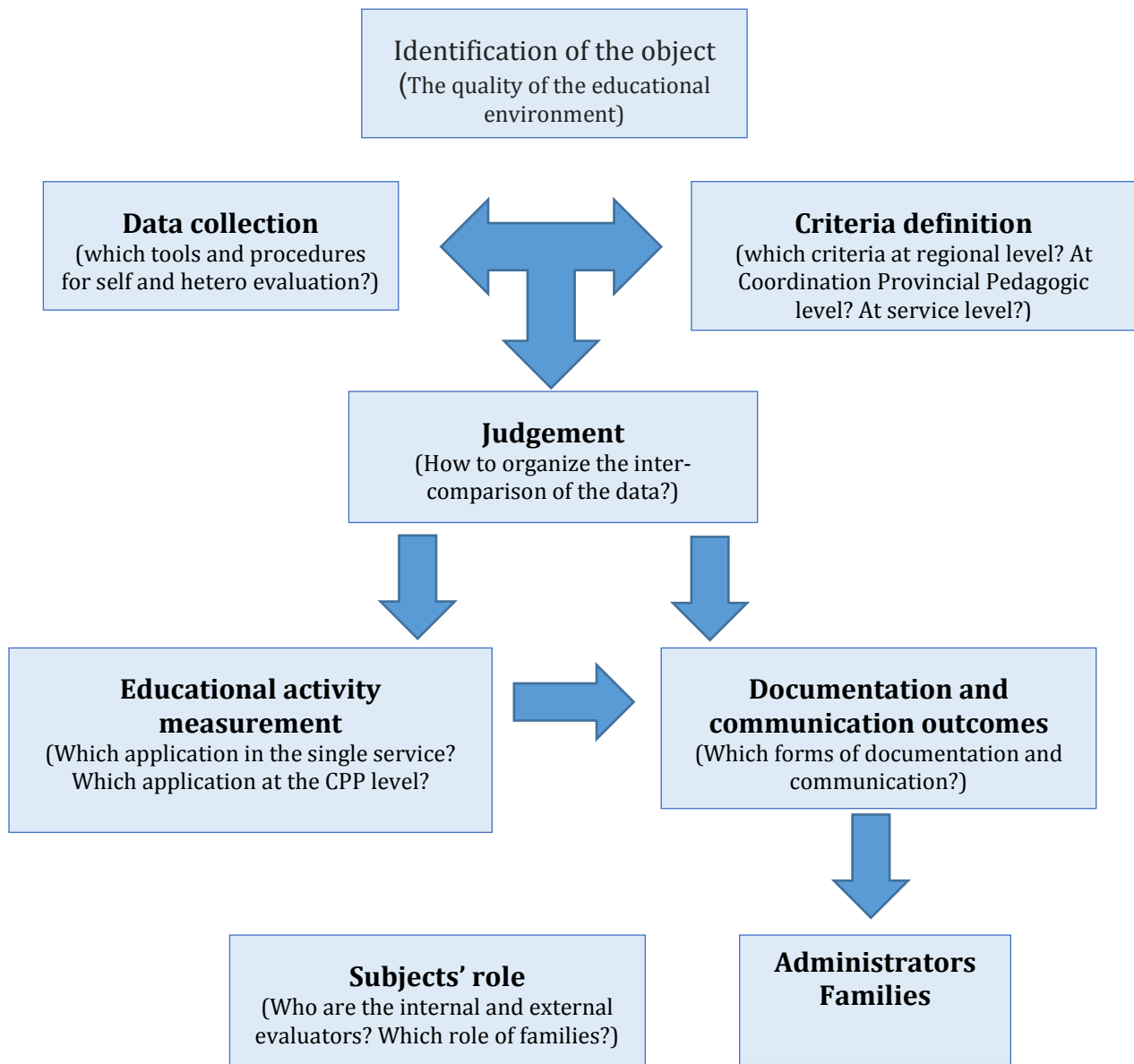
- 1) Development of a Regional Index of the Pedagogical Project (*Indice Regionale del Progetto Pedagogico*), in which are described the characteristics of the educational dimension of the service. This index is not an attempt to standardize the features of different services. It is important to recognize and to valorize the educational differentiation, and for this reason, the regional index is a basic reference for the activities of the different actors involved.
- 2) Development of criteria for assessing the quality of educational processes in the services, by promoting coherence between the assumptions declared and the daily actions. In this context, there are moments of self- and external- evaluation, with a wide autonomy of Provincial Pedagogical Centers (CPP).
- 3) Development of guidelines on planning and evaluation processes, based on two factors:
  - a) Identification of structural and organizational quality of service (numerical ratio child-educators, educators qualifications, the presence of the pedagogical coordinator, ...)
  - b) "Formative evaluation" (*valutazione a carattere formativo*) that stimulates dialogue between the professionals involved, based on surveys conducted by the practitioners themselves. Again, it is important to highlight the importance of combining self and hetero evaluation systems.

Starting from the statements contained in the documents of the European Network on Quality of Services, which point out that educational quality is a relative concept, not unique, based on the values and belief system, and that the quality definition process should be characterized by a participatory approach (Emilia Romagna Region, 2013, p. 16), we can identify the basic assumptions that guide the evaluation:

- The quality of services is characterized by a dynamic approach, for "pinpointing the key elements of quality that can be common working reference."
- The quality of services in a "transformative sense", as the ability to enable and promote an ongoing process of research and development, enhancing the analysis and reflection on practices (Emilia Romagna Region, 2013).

- The evaluation is based on a systematic approach and on the dialogue between the different actors involved, in participatory and social perspective.
- The ability of services' network to implement the self and hetero assessment, and identify tools and procedures in order to improve the evaluation and monitoring capacity, with positive effects on the quality of educational processes.

Figure 2.2 - Evaluation process



Source: Emilia Romagna Region, Department for Social Policies, redesigned by Castoldi (2010), translated by the author.

"The definition of the educational evaluation process involves the determination of a series of components that determine the characteristics and peculiarities of the evaluation itself" (Emilia Romagna Region, 2013), (Figure 2.2).

The system has three levels:

- Regional level, to "avoid the inconsistency and fragmentation of the system."
- Provincial level, to ensure autonomy to each territory and to the Provincial Pedagogical Coordination (CPP).
- The single service level, for the declination of the evaluation based on the specific service's features.

The description of the planning-evaluation system consists of 4 parts (Emilia Romagna, 2013):

- Regional Index of the pedagogical project of the early childhood service (*indice regionale del progetto pedagogico*) (Table 2.1);
- Evaluation criteria and examples of descriptors (Table 2.2);
- Indication on the predisposition of the instruments and evaluation procedures;
- Information regarding the documentation and usage of the evaluation results.

Table 2.1

<b>PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE</b>	
a)	Weighted index
b)	Premise
1)	Goals
2)	Organizational structure of the service
3)	Educational planning and organization of the service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3.1 Organizational criteria and methods of the educational context               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spaces and materials</li> <li>• Timing</li> <li>• Relationship</li> <li>• Educational proposals</li> </ul> </li> <li>- 3.2 Criteria and modalities of relation and participation of families and the relationship with the territory</li> <li>- 3.3 Working Group's operating criteria and modalities</li> <li>- 3.4 Evaluation</li> </ul>
4)	Duration
c)	Glossary



Table 2.2

3.1 <u>Organizational criteria and methods of the educational context</u>	Spaces and materials	Evaluation criteria	Examples of descriptors
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a) Accessibility</li> <li>• b) Readability and recognizability</li> <li>• c) Functional differentiation</li> <li>• d) Personalization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a) All children can access without difficulties to spaces</li> <li>• b) Attention paid to the aesthetics of space and materials</li> <li>• c) The quality and quantity of the materials is in relation to the project for using all the spaces</li> <li>• d) There are children's spaces and personal items</li> </ul>
	Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• e) Predictability and recognition of the daily Timing</li> <li>• f) Personalization</li> <li>• g) Continuity and changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• e) The educational day has a timetable</li> <li>• f) Care moments are planned, based on children's age and needs</li> <li>• g) It is expected the reorganization of the materials at the end of the game situation.</li> </ul>
	Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• h) Well-being</li> <li>• i) Personalization</li> <li>• l) Socializing and learning processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• h) Monitoring the situation carefully</li> <li>• i) The educator is focused on the child's initiative</li> <li>• l) The educator promotes positive social relationships among children</li> </ul>
	Educational proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• m) Intentionality</li> <li>• n) Significance and continuity</li> <li>• o) Variety and coherence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• m) The educator can motivate educational choices</li> <li>• n) Innovative proposals are continuous and regular</li> <li>• o) Educators proposes regularly outdoor activities</li> </ul>
3.2 <u>Criteria and modalities of relation and participation of families and the relationship with the territory</u>	Families' relationships and participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a) Participation</li> <li>• b) Parenting culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a) Parents are informed on the content of the teaching program</li> <li>• b) Periodically are provided opportunities to meet families</li> </ul>
	Relationship with the territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• c) Networking initiatives (<i>azioni di raccordo</i>)</li> <li>• d) Culture of the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• c) There is a close relationship with basic health services</li> <li>• d) There are educational initiatives for the entire</li> </ul>

		educating community	territory
<u>3.3 Working Group's operating criteria and modalities</u>	Working Group coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Collegiality</li> <li>b) Contextualized training</li> <li>c) Pedagogical coordination</li> <li>d) Reflectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Meetings of the practitioners' group held in a constructive and participative atmosphere</li> <li>b) yearly-planned opportunities for in-service training</li> <li>c) Periodic meetings with the pedagogical coordinator</li> <li>d) Sharing practices is an well-established routine</li> </ul>
	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) Intentionality, consistency and coherence</li> <li>f) Context and flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) The Pedagogical Project is known and shared by the working group</li> <li>f) The systematic monitoring tools are established within the working group</li> </ul>
	Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g) Orderliness and coherence</li> <li>h) Readability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g) Regular-timing documentation</li> <li>h) it does exist a relationship with the local and regional documentation centers</li> </ul>
<u>3.4 Evaluation</u>	Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Orderliness</li> <li>b) Training function</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) It is expected quality evaluation perceived by families</li> <li>b) Evaluation results stimulate quality improvement</li> </ul>

Source: Region Emilia Romagna, Department of Social Policy (2013).

It is important to stress that "the list of descriptors has an illustrative value, because only the evaluation criteria, which can be enhanced but not changed in substance, form a common reference for the evaluation tools elaborated in the provincial coordination "(Region Emilia Romagna, p. 23, 2013). Moreover, the list of descriptors included in the table is not complete. The complete one is in "The educational project and assessment services for early childhood. Regional Guidelines " (*Il progetto pedagogico e la valutazione nei servizi per la prima infanzia. Le Linee guida regionali*, 2013).

As regards the preparation of the instruments and evaluation procedures, they are part of a process that includes

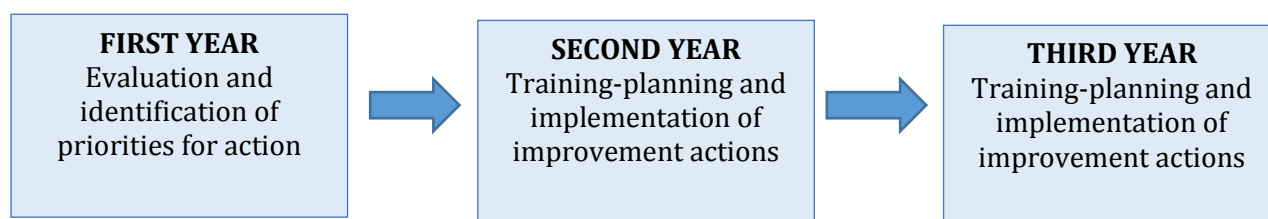
- Self-evaluation, that involves all educators working in the service.
- Hetero-evaluation, carried out by coordinators of other services that have a significant professional experience.
- Evaluation of the quality perceived by families, with instruments chosen by CPP (surveys, interviews, etc. ...).

The CPP play an essential role in defining the evaluation instruments, which are not conceived within a “classificatory logic”, but rather within a ‘formative and developmental perspective (Gariboldi, 2013). Such evaluation tools should have the following characteristics:

- Be consistent with the evaluation criteria defined at regional level.
- To be used for self and hetero evaluation processes.
- Imply a workload compatible with the resources available in each service.

Quality services’ evaluation is usually held every three years (Figure 2.3), but it may provide different timing in relation to the needs and to the number of services in the geographical area.

Figure 2.3 - Three-year planning-evaluation cycle



Source: Region Emilia Romagna, Department of Social Policy (2013).

Finally, as regards the features of the documentation, communication and usage of educational outcomes of the evaluation, it is important to emphasize the presence of reports in the different phases of the process (Table 2.3)

Table 2.3 - The documentation as a tool for giving back the process (*La documentazione come un strumento di restituzione del processo*).

Report	Curator	Recipients
Self-evaluation report	Service pedagogical coordinator	External assessor (valutatore)
Hetero-evaluation report	External assessor (valutatore)	Service pedagogical coordinator
Self and hetero-evaluation report	Service pedagogical coordinator	Practitioners operating within the Service
Final report	Service pedagogical coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service administrators</li> <li>- External assessor (valutatore)</li> <li>- Provincial pedagogical coordinator</li> </ul>

Source: Region Emilia Romagna, Department of Social Policy (2013).

In particular, the final report is characterized by a qualitative approach aims to identify not only the weaknesses or vulnerabilities, but also to emphasize the strengths of the service. For this reason, the final report has a strong educational value.

## References – Section 2.2

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### 3. Needs assessment<sup>41</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction

The needs assessment carried out in this section will rely and further elaborate the quantitative and qualitative data presented in national and regional reports analysing social transformations, families' needs and service provision in relation to the education and care of young children. As the case study focuses on the provision of ECEC services for children aged 0-3 in the context of Emilia-Romagna Region (ERR), the needs analysis will draw mainly on the following data sources:

1) *E-R Regional Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence web-site*, displaying quantitative data from the SPI-ER database on early childhood services<sup>42</sup> and qualitative research findings related to the analysis of social demands, educational innovation projects and policy trends in the ECEC field (retrieved from conference proceedings, studies commissioned by local authorities)<sup>43</sup>. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data is necessary as the information drawn from these sources complement each other, allowing to produce an overall picture where population's needs, their interpretation from institutions and the following policy responses are reciprocally intertwined.

The *Regional Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence* (ROCA) has been established in 2008 with the purpose of creating a solid and coordinated knowledge base informing policy decision-making processes through the collection, the elaboration and the dissemination of available data concerning the life conditions of children and young people in the Region as well as on the services dedicated to them. The activities carried out by the ROCA are: a) compiling statistical report by collecting data through periodic surveys, b) producing qualitative research reports analysing in-depth the social phenomena and trends emerging from these surveys, c) promoting the documentation and dissemination of innovative projects related to ECEC and youth services, d) fostering the dissemination regional conference proceedings focused on these issues.

<sup>41</sup> This Section has been written by Arianna Lazzari.

<sup>42</sup> <http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/infanzia-adolescenza/approfondimenti/osservatorio-infanzia-e-adolescenza/il-sistema-informativo-dei-servizi-prima-infanzia-della-regione-emilia-romagna-spi-er>

<sup>43</sup> <http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/infanzia-adolescenza/approfondimenti/osservatorio-infanzia-e-adolescenza/tutte-le-pubblicazioni/tutte-le-pubblicazioni-2002-2012>

2) *E-R Regional Institute for Applied Research and Development on Social Services* (IRESS) which produces and publish reports on the analysis and evaluation of policies initiatives undertaken in the field of ECEC in relation to local socio-cultural transformations affecting families and local communities<sup>44</sup>.

The IRESS institute is a nonprofit agency that was created in 1980 with the purpose of carrying out research, professional development and consultancy activities in the field of social policies. More specifically, the topics investigated are focusing on: welfare systems transformations in relation to the broader socio-economic context within which such transformations are embedded, the evolving relationship between institutions and civil society and issues of citizenship and participation.

### 3.2 The fragmented landscape of welfare policies and ECEC provision in Italy

From the most recent surveys carried out by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT)<sup>45</sup> it emerges that the number of children who are experiencing conditions of vulnerability since the early years is dramatically increasing:

- 1 out of 7 children is born in a family living in a condition of absolute poverty (ISTAT, 2013)<sup>46</sup>
- 0-3 socio-educational services (*nidi* and *servizi integrativi*) are not available for over 8 children out of 10 on national average.

As highlighted by the *VIII Report monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Italy* (Save the Children, 2015) this situation clearly outlines how an equal access to education and care opportunities is still denied to most Italian children and – in particular – to those who are living in the more economically disadvantaged regions of the country. As research show, the unequal distribution of ECEC services on the national territory is influencing greatly children’s educational trajectory in terms of learning achievements and school career (Del Boca, 2010; Del Boca & Pasqua, 2010). This situation is currently contributing to exacerbate – rather than mitigate – regional socio-economic disparities within the country resulting, on the

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.iress.it/publicazioni.html>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.istat.it/en/about-istat>

<sup>46</sup> ISTAT (2013) *La povertà in Italia* [Poverty in Italy]. Report retrieved from: [www.istat.it/it/archivio/128371](http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/128371)

long term, in higher rates of school drop-out and in increasing number of young people who are not engaged in vocational training nor employment. In these conditions, the rationing and lack of availability of ECEC services have a greater impact on those children and families who are already experiencing the consequences of living in disadvantage areas of the country, where public funding for investing in social and families support schemes tend to be less available than elsewhere, alimending the vicious circle of poverty.

The lack of public resources allocated to early years and families support measures at national level is particularly apparent within international comparisons: in fact, Italy occupies the second to last position among EU countries in relation to public expenditure devoted to family support initiatives (4.8% of total social expenditure, which includes funding for maternity leave and for 0-3 services). Against this background, it is clear that the investment – in terms of public funding specifically allocated to services for young children’s and their families at state level – is not sufficient to countering the adverse effects of poverty and socio-economic inequalities, nor to narrow the gap deriving from socio-cultural disadvantage. At the same time Local and Regional Authorities – especially Municipalities which play a key role in the Italian welfare system – reduced their investment in socio-educational services for young children and their families due both to the constraint of public expenditure imposed by the National Stability Pact and to the limitation of financial resources produced by the economic crisis. Statistical data from ISTAT (2011) highlighted that – on national average – the municipal expenditure devoted to family support measures decreased by 1,4% for the first time since the beginning of 2000 (while between 2003 and 2009 the same data revealed an average annual increase of 5.3%). Despite this common trend, the variance in the yearly municipal public expenditure dedicated to socio-educational services and family-related support measures still reflect great territorial disparities ranging from 8€/per-head in Vibo-Valentia province to 350€/per-head in Bologna province (ISTAT, 2011)<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> ISTAT (2011) *Spesa per interventi e servizi sociali* [Data on the expenditure of Municipalities for social services and interventions – aggregated by provinces]. Retrieved from: [http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS\\_SPESESERSOC](http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS_SPESESERSOC)



Based on a needs-analysis carried out at national level, the *VIII Report monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Italy* (Save the Children, 2015) drew the following policy recommendations, which were addressed to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies:

- Redefining the targets of the next bi-annual National Plan for Childhood (*Piano Nazionale Infanzia*) by focusing a particular attention toward early years initiatives aimed to:
- reducing poverty, especially for families with children;
- increasing the access to high-quality ECEC services since children's first year of life, by targeting additional resources toward disadvantaged areas and toward early years interventions for children with disabilities;
- supporting parenthood and parental competences, by designing and operating services within an integrated framework which sustain families in relation to their specific needs (through inter-institutional networking and outreaching activities).

### **3.3 The regional context of Emilia-Romagna: ECEC provision and current trends**

This section examines the main trends in relation to ECEC existing provision and demands at regional level by drawing on the data retrieved from the E-R Observatory on Early Childhood Services' database. The data published in previous statistical reports<sup>48</sup> have been integrated with newly collected quantitative data (SPI-ER database)<sup>49</sup> and further elaborated by our research team for the specific purpose of this needs assessment. In particular, the needs assessment carried out at regional level will focus on the analysis of the following indicators:

- 1) the coverage and typology of available ECEC places in 0-3 services and their uptake by families,

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<sup>48</sup> Assessorato al Welfare e alle Politiche Educative della Regione Emilia-Romagna (2015) *I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia in Emilia-Romagna - dati dell'anno educativo 2013-2014 e serie storiche*. Report available at: <http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/documentazione/pubblicazioni/prodotti-editoriali/servizi%20educativi>.

<sup>49</sup> The essential figures from SPI-ER database have been included in the main text of the report (Figures 1-12). For further reading: <http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/infanzia-adolescenza/approfondimenti/osservatorio-infanzia-e-adolescenza/i-dati-e-le-statistiche/i-bambini-e-i-servizi-educativi-per-la-prima-infanzia-fonte-spier>

- 2) the breakdown of existing ECEC provision examined in relation to its governance, which includes services' ownership (*titolarità*), management (*gestione*) and funding procedures (*finanziamento*);
- 3) the accessibility of available ECEC places in relation to families' socio-economic conditions.

### 3.3.1 Availability, typology, coverage and uptake of ECEC services

Over the last two years – for the first time since these data have been collected – it is possible to notice a trend in which the overall number of childcare places available within 0-3 services and the number of children enrolled are decreasing compared to the past. The decrease in the number of children attending is to be interpreted in conjunction with recent demographic trends, which show how the number of 0-2 years-old children – which are potential users of such services – has steadily dropped over the last period.

Typologies of educational services	Educational Year 2013 - 2014			Educational Year 2014 -- 2015			Trend over the years (%)		
	Numero servizi	Posti	Numero Iscritti - Bambini	Numero servizi	Posti	Numero Iscritti - Bambini	Numero servizi	Posti	Numero Iscritti - Bambini
<b>Nidi d'infanzia (day care services)</b>	<b>1.009</b>	<b>38.179</b>	<b>31.801</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>37.753</b>	<b>30.663</b>	<b>-1,2</b>	<b>-1,1</b>	<b>-3,6</b>
<i>of which Spring Classes (Sezioni Primavera) attended by 2-3 years old</i>	196	4.025	3.152	190	3.887	2.896	-3,1	-3,4	-8,1
<b>Servizi Integrativi (complementary services)</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>2.054</b>	<b>1.898</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>2.118</b>	<b>1.859</b>	<b>0,7</b>	<b>3,1</b>	<b>-2,1</b>
Children's centres	59	1.094	938	59	1.121	862	0,0	2,5	-8,1
Centres for children and parents (CCP)	77	960	960	78	997	997	1,3	3,9	3,9
<b>Small Educational Groups (SEG)</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>16,4</b>	<b>18,7</b>	<b>26,8</b>
<b>Servizi Sperimentali (experimental services)</b>				<b>9</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>202</b>			
<b>TOTAL NUMBER ECEC SERVICES (0-3)</b>	<b>1.206</b>	<b>40.628</b>	<b>34.027</b>	<b>1.214</b>	<b>40.597</b>	<b>33.140</b>	<b>0,7</b>	<b>-0,1</b>	<b>-2,6</b>

Figure 3.1 - Early childhood services (0-3), childcare places and children enrolled over the years 2013-15

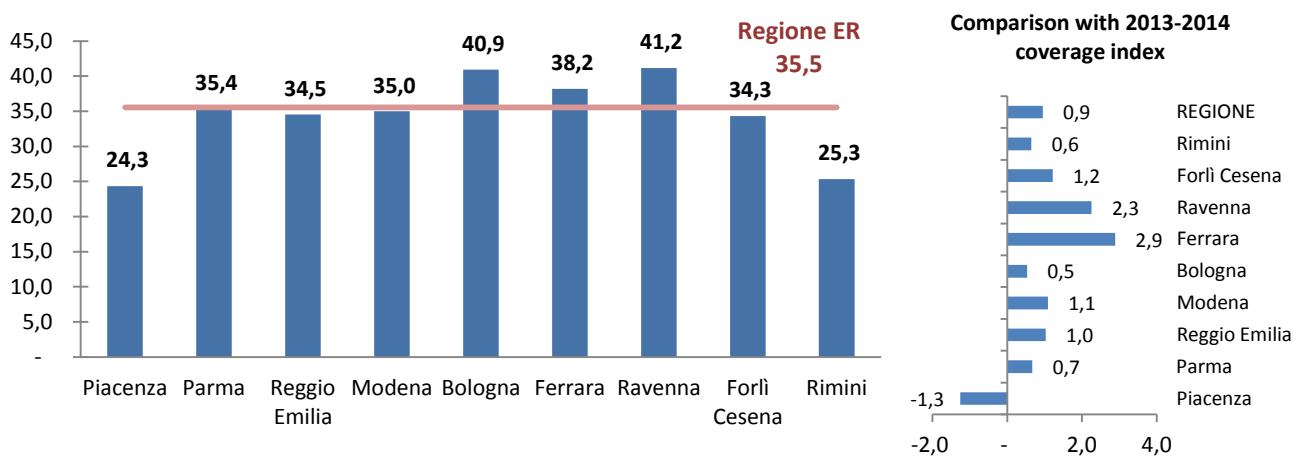
In comparison with previous years it can be observed that the number of 0-3 services run at the educators' home (*small educational groups, SEG*) has slightly increased. Despite the relatively small number of children attending them in comparison to the overall number of children enrolled in ECEC services (416 out of 33.140, 1% of the

overall population attending ECEC), SEG are becoming increasingly popular in rural areas and they now cover nearly the 6% of early years provision at regional level.

This countertrend of SEG could be interpreted either as an outcome of regional legislation amendments – which formalised the status of such services – or in the perspective of families’ preference for smaller-size services which are characterised by a more ‘informal’ atmosphere.

In 2014/15, the overall coverage of early years services at regional level is placed slightly above the European benchmark set by the Barcelona targets<sup>50</sup>, with available childcare places covering 35,5% of the potential demand (+0,9 compared to 2013/14).

**Figure 3.2 - Coverage index: childcare places per province and regional average (% places / 0-2 years-old population) and comparison with previous year’s index.**



However a certain variability can be noticed among provinces, ranging from 41,2% coverage in Ravenna (+92 childcare places compared to 2013/14) to 24,3% in Piacenza (-107 childcare places compared to 2013/14). The province showing the greatest increase in ECEC coverage over the last two years is Ferrara (+2,9%), with 47 new places being created mostly in day-care centres and centres for children and parents.

The situation of Parma is quite remarkable: despite the coverage index remain substantially stable (+0,7%), the number of places in day-care centres have decreased (-147) in favour of increased places in experimental services (+174), meaning that

<sup>50</sup> 'Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 % of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age' (European Council, 2002).

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/71025.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/71025.pdf)

traditional 'nidi' -attended by children aged below 3- were converted in experimental services attended by children aged 0 to 6. It is reasonable to think that such experimentation was undertaken in line with recent policy trends taking place at national level and advocating for an integrated system of ECEC starting from birth to the beginning of compulsory school.

**Figure 3.3 – Day-care centres (including Spring classes): number of services and places per province over the years 2013-15**

Provinces	Day care centres				Trend related to available childcare places	of which Spring Classes				Trend related to available childcare places
	2014-2015		2013-2014			2014-2015		2013-2014		
	No. services	No. places	No. services	No. places		No. services	No. places	No. services	No. places	
Piacenza	57	1.614	59	1.724	-110	9	165	9	162	3
Parma	85	3.509	89	3.656	-147	6	104	7	114	-10
Reggio E.	125	4.956	131	5.069	-113	40	827	42	876	-49
Modena	158	6.325	161	6.408	-83	25	519	27	566	-47
Bologna	241	9.837	239	9.844	-7	30	570	29	550	20
Ferrara	72	2.534	72	2.446	88	17	317	20	382	-65
Ravenna	107	3.660	104	3.577	83	33	735	33	733	2
Forlì Cesena	99	3.238	100	3.361	-123	26	561	25	553	8
Rimini	53	2.080	54	2.094	-14	4	89	4	89	0
<b>REGIONE</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>37.753</b>	<b>1.009</b>	<b>38.179</b>	<b>-426</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>3.887</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>4.025</b>	<b>-138</b>

**Figure 3.4 – Small educational groups (SEG) and experimental services: number of services and places per province over the years 2013-15**

Province	Small Educational Groups (SEG)				Trend related to available childcare places	Experimental Services				Trend related to available childcare places
	2014-2015		2013-2014			2014-2015		2013-2014		
	No. services	No. places	No. services	No. places		No. services	No. places	No. services	No. places	
Piacenza	2	12	2	12	0					0
Parma	10	59	10	57	2	7	174			174
Reggio E.	5	35	4	28	7	1	16			16
Modena	8	54	4	26	28					0
Bologna	23	157	21	141	16					0
Ferrara					0					0
Ravenna	10	65	9	61	4					0
Forlì Cesena	10	66	8	52	14	1	67			67
Rimini	3	21	3	18	3					0
<b>REGIONE</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>257</b>

To conclude, the data on company crèches (*nidi aziendali*) show that the number of childcare places available in Emilia-Romagna Region have more than doubled over the last five-year period: from 672 in 2010/11 to 1.494 in 2014/15. The creation of company crèches was supported by specific national and regional policy initiatives and therefore they fall under specific funding schemes. Initially (2010/11), 2% of available childcare places in E-RR were provided by company creches, while today (2014/15) they have reached the 4%.

**Figure 3.5 - Trend in day-care provision: focus on company creches (years 2010-2015)**

Educational years	Overall daycare provision		of which company creches			
	overall no. daycare centre	overall no. childcare places	no. company creches	% on overall daycare provision	no. childcare places in company creches	% on overall childcare places
2010-2011	986	36.890	19	1,9	672	1,8
2011-2012	1.016	37.974	22	2,2	880	2,3
2012-2013	1.018	38.278	26	2,6	1.108	2,9
2013-2014	1.009	38.179	33	3,3	1.441	3,8
2014-2015	997	37.753	33	3,3	1.494	4,0

### 3.3.2. Governance, management and funding of ECEC provision

In this section the breakdown of existing ECEC provision in E-R will be examined in relation to its governance, which includes the aspects of services' ownership (*titolarietà*), management (*gestione*) and funding (*finanziamento*). The first aspect – service ownership – is referred to the body which holds the responsibility for providing the service: the latter could be either a public (ie. Municipality) or a private (mostly Not-For-Profit) body. The second aspect – service's management – is referred to the entity which is actually responsible for running the provision. This means that ECEC services can be either publicly owned and managed (ie. in case of Municipal day-care centres which employ educators who are recruited directly by the municipality) or being publicly owned and privately managed (ie. in the case of Municipal day-care centres which are run by social cooperatives through contracting agreements). In some other cases, private NFP providers are approved and publicly subsidised by Municipal authorities through the stipulation of special agreements implying the concession of a certain number of privately-managed childcare places to the public body (Municipality). Over the last 5-year period it can be noticed a slight increase of privately-owned NFP services, with approximately 40% of provision being privately owned and

approximately 60% being publicly owned. However if we look at the number of childcare places being publicly owned the breakdown is significantly higher (approximately 73% vs 27% of places privately owned) as – on average – publicly owned services tend to be bigger. Overall, in E-R Region, 7 childcare places out of the 10 are publicly subsidised.

**Figure 3.6 – Number of childcare places categorised on the basis of the ownership and management bodies (all typologies of ECEC services have been considered).**

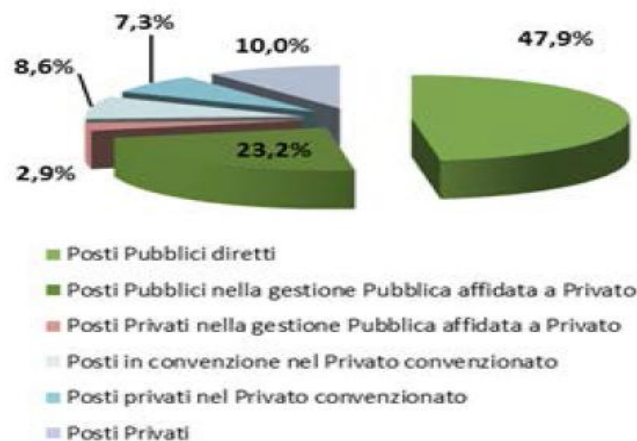
Bodies owning the childcare places	Bodies managing the childcare places								
	Municipalities	Municipalities' Consortia	Other public bodies	Social Cooperatives	Catholic bodies	Associations	Foundations	Private companies	Other private providers
Municipalities	16.253	111	209	6.596		130		312	2.348
Municipalities' Consortia		1.972		449					346
Other public bodies			611	332				18	129
Social Cooperatives				2.951					
Catholic bodies				107	3.059				
Associations				21		495			21
Foundations				78			560		17
Private companies				242		18		2.289	59
Other private providers				231					633
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.253</b>	<b>2.083</b>	<b>820</b>	<b>11.007</b>	<b>3.059</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>2.619</b>	<b>3.553</b>

Overall the most important managing bodies are social cooperatives, which run over 27% of provision through direct ownership of services (approx. 7,3%) and contracts with Municipalities (approx. 20%): in fact, Municipalities contract out to social cooperatives approximately 16% of public childcare places. Church-affiliate bodies directly run most of the childcare places they own (*sezioni primavera* would be the most common typology of provision), which account for approximately 8% of the total.

Finally, private companies are responsible for owning and operating – mostly through direct management of company crèches – approximately 6% of childcare places. Other private providers account for the management of 9% of places, most of which are offered in ‘small educational groups’ (SEG) provision and are publicly subsidised by Municipalities (approx. 6%).

To conclude, if we look at the breakdown of the most common typology of ECEC provision attended by children aged 0 to 3 (*nidi d’infanzia*) in E-R, we can notice that public childcare places account for approximately 71% of the total. More specifically 47,9% of places are directly managed by Municipalities, while 23,2% are contracted out by Municipalities to social cooperatives as shown in the graph below.

**Figure 3.7 – Day-care provision (*nidi d’infanzia*) in E-R: % childcare places by ownership and management**



Breaking down regional data on childcare places in 0-3 provision by province, Bologna displays the highest proportion of publicly subsidised childcare places (84.4% encompassing those directly managed by Municipalities, those contracted out to social cooperative and those entrusted to private-accredited bodies). On the opposite, Forlì-Cesena displays the highest proportion of private childcare places in 0-3 services run by social cooperatives or other private bodies (32,3%), with only 67,7% of publicly subsidised places.

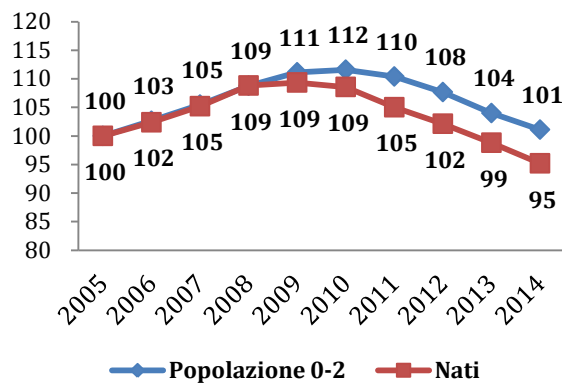
### 3.3.3. Accessibility of ECEC provision

Up to the 31 December 2014 the number of children enrolled in ECEC services managed either by public or by private (mostly NFP) providers is 33.140, which represents the 29% of the overall 0-2 population in the Region. Therefore it can be noticed that –

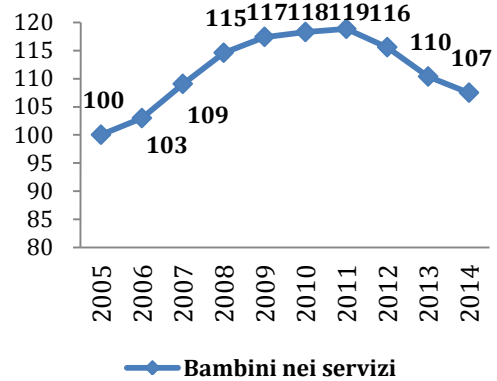
whereas the availability of ECEC places in the Region E-R cover up to 35,5% of the potential demand – the actual uptake of these places by families do not go beyond 29% of the overall population. In this sense, the ECEC uptake index (*indice di presa in carico*) differ slightly from the index of ECEC coverage (*indice di copertura*) presented in 3.3.1 section as the number of ECEC places available are never fully used by families. The number of children actually enrolled in ECEC services has dropped quite homogenously across the provinces of Emilia-Romagna over the last three-year period. While no significant differences could be noted between the educational years 2013-14 and 2014-2015, between the educational years 2012-13 and 2013-14 the number of 0-2 children attending ECEC service in E-R dropped by 4,5% (corresponding to approximately 1.600 children) as reported below in figure 8. Over the last 2 years, more than 40 ECEC services (catering for approximately 600 children) closed down due to the lack of enrolling demands.

**Figure 3.8: Demographic trends and enrolment of 0-2 years old children in ECEC services over the last 10 years**

**Figure 3.8a – Demographic Trend related to newborn (red line) 0-2 children population (blue line) over the last 10 years (Index numbers).**



**Figura 3.8b – Trend in children’s enrolment in ECEC services (index numbers baseline 2005)**



From the data collected in the SPI-ER database, the drop in the number of enrolment demands and attendance of ECEC services seems to be in line with the recent demographical trends, which show a constant decrease in the number of 0-2 population in the Region. However, no causal correlation can be established due to the multiple factors that are involved in determining the choice of families to avail of ECEC services –



and which are related not only to availability of provision but also to affordable costs and to the perceived usefulness and comprehensibility by families<sup>51</sup>. As these aspects were not taken into account in the process of regional data collection, it is not possible to establish whether the decreasing number of children attending ECEC services is the result of the demographic drop in 0-2 population or rather the combined effect of changed socio-economic scenario (financial crisis reducing public investment in ECEC as well as families' income and their precarious working conditions) and parental choices.

In these regards, the National Report on the Monitoring of ECEC Provision in Italy<sup>52</sup> (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2015) warns that data on the increasing gap between the availability of ECEC places (*potenzialità ricettiva dei servizi*) and their uptake by families (*presa in carico*) should not only be interpreted in the light of recent demographic trends but also in relation to services' accessibility. In particular, by combining the data collected by the Innocenti Institute for the Monitoring (IDI, 2008-2014) with the data from National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2008-2012), it emerges how the economic crisis has impacted on the accessibility of early childhood services on two sides (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2015, p. 43-44):

- on the side of ECEC provision → as the constraints of public expenditure makes it difficult for the Municipalities to subsidise ECEC services to their full operational potential (economic sustainability),
- on the side of families → as their spending power is progressively reduced making it difficult for parents to cover the expenses for attendance fees, with the result that children who are offered a place are either not enrolled (*rinunce*) or withdrawn from the services after few months of attendance (*ritiri*).

For this reason, starting from 2013-2014, two new items were included in the Questionnaire SPI-ER: one concerning the number of renunciations to an offered childcare place (*rinunce*) and another concerning the number of withdraws (*ritiri*). On a trial basis, an open-ended question investigating the reasons for renunciations and for

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<sup>51</sup> SOFECO (2012) *Early childhood education and care in promoting educational attainment including social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in fostering social inclusion. Literature Review*. Brussels: European Commission - DG Education and Culture. Retrieved from:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/eccec-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/eccec-report_en.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> *Monitoraggio del Piano di Sviluppo dei Servizi Socio-Educativi per la Prima Infanzia*: [www.minori.it/sites/default/files/rapporto\\_nidi.pdf](http://www.minori.it/sites/default/files/rapporto_nidi.pdf)

children's withdraws was also included in order to detect those socio-economic factors which might have determined the choices of families.

In first instance, the data show that over the educational year 2014-15, 2.278 children out of 39.600 who were offered a place were finally not enrolled (5,8%), and that 1.473 children out of 32.143 attending ECEC services were withdrawn in the course of the year (4,6%).

**Figure 3.9 – Renunciations to childcare places and withdrawn (2013-2015)**

Educational Years	No. renunciations at the time of enrollment	No. childcare places available*	% <i>Renunciations</i>	No. children withdrawn	No. children attending ECEC*	% <i>Withdrawn</i>
2013-2014	2.987	39.668	7,5	1.636	33.067	4,9
2014-2015	2.278	39.600	5,8	1.473	32.143	4,6

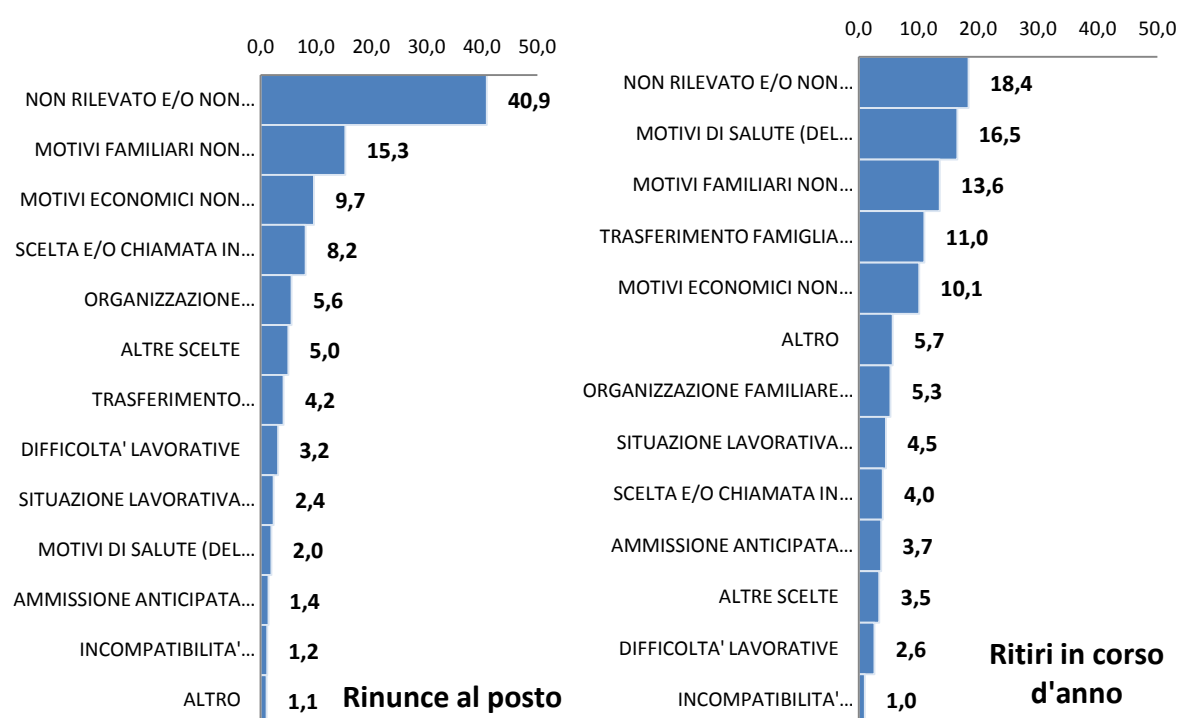
\* the childcare places available in Centres for Children and Parents (CCP) and the children attending those services have been excluded by the counting (no regular enrolment or attendance is required in these services)

The results of the open-ended survey are illustrated in the graphs below (figure 10): as these information were collected for the first time, in 40,9% of the cases concerning renunciations and in 18,3% of the cases concerning the withdraws data are not available. The most frequently reported answers in regard to the reasons given by families when renouncing to a place are: family reasons (not further specified - 15,3%), economical reasons (not further specified - 9,7%) and availability of another choice (eg. a childcare place was offered in a different service -8,2%). Instead, the most frequently reported answers concerning the reasons for withdrawing the service are: health issues (eg. children are getting sick too often or mother's pregnancy – 16,5%), family reasons (not further specified - 13,6%) and resettlement in another city (11%)

Despite the fact that renunciations and withdrawing are becoming increasingly growing phenomena both at national and at regional level, these issues are largely under-investigated in literature. At the time of this writing, there are no nation-wide or regionally-based studies investigating the issues of accessibility of ECEC services in relation to families' socio-economic conditions. In recent times, locally-based studies started to emerge, given the impact of these phenomena on the organisation and

management of ECEC services at municipal level: most of these studies have been commissioned and funded by those Local Authorities that are more sensitive toward the development of educational and social policies which are responsive of the needs of children and families within their community<sup>53</sup>.

**Figure 3.10 - Motivations for renouncing to an offered childcare place (left side) and withdrawing (right side)**

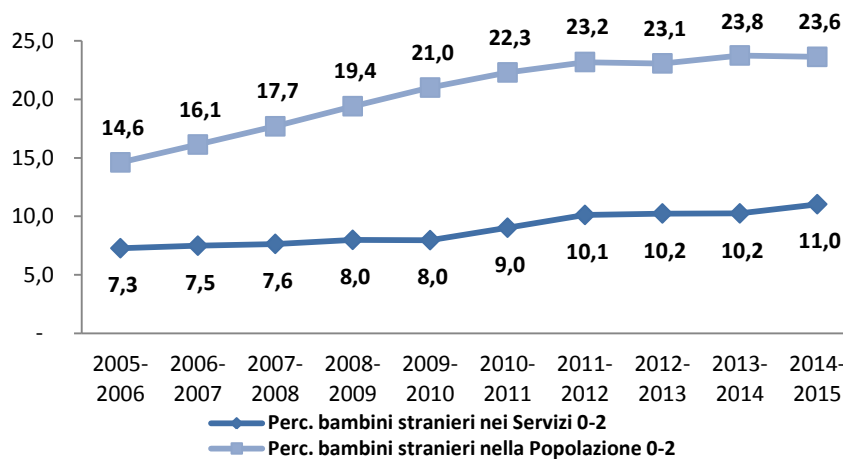


Concerning the participation of children from a migrant background to ECEC, regional data show that their presence account for approximately 11% of the children attending 0-3 services. As illustrated in the graph below, up until 2010-11 the 0-2 population with migrant background has grown much more rapidly (from 14,6% to 22,3%) compared to their presence in ECEC services (from 7,3% to 9%), implying that children from migrant background tended to be under-represented in 0-3 services. However, over the last five-year period this gap was gradually reduced, highlighting a trend toward a more equal access of migrant children to ECEC services.

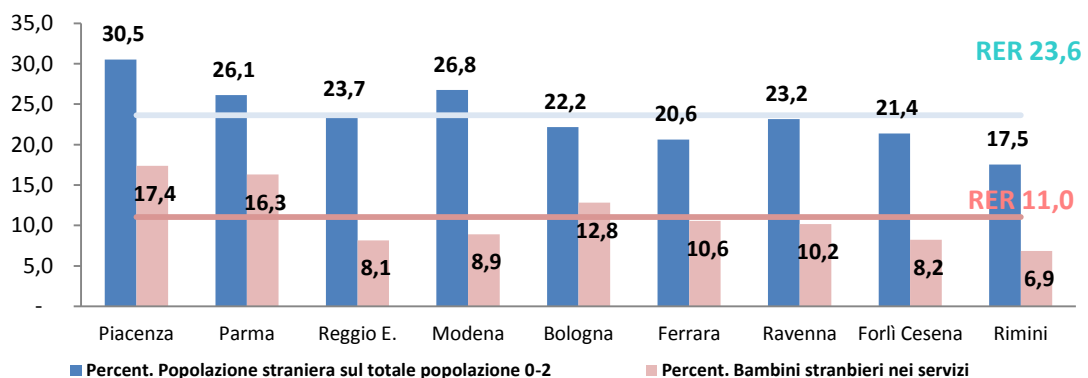
<sup>53</sup> IRESS (2010) *Scelte politiche e operative per i servizi educativi 0-3 anni*. Provincia di Bologna. [www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/sanitasociale/Engine/RAServePG.php/P/544511180300/T/Scelte-politiche-e-operative-per-i-servizi-educativi-0-3-anni](http://www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/sanitasociale/Engine/RAServePG.php/P/544511180300/T/Scelte-politiche-e-operative-per-i-servizi-educativi-0-3-anni)  
Amodio, G. (2015) *Infanzie e welfare: progettare il futuro. Buone pratiche tra politiche per le famiglie e servizi educativi per l'infanzia*. Carrocci.

It needs to be acknowledged, however, that such trend does not follow the same pace in all E-R provinces. For example, as attested in figure 12 below, the provinces of Modena and Bologna display two opposite situations. Whereas in Modena the proportion of 0-2 children with a migrant background is higher than the regional average (26,8% vs 23,6%), the proportion of migrant children in ECEC services is much lower than the regional average (8,9% vs 11%). On the opposite, in Bologna the proportion of 0-2 children with a migrant background is lower than the regional average (22,2% vs 23,6%) but the participation of migrant children to ECEC services is comparatively higher (12,8% vs 11%).

**Figure 3.11 – Demographic trend of 0-2 children population with migrant background on overall 0-2 population (%), (light blue line) and trend of 0-2 children with migrant background enrolled in ECEC services (%), (dark blue line).**



**Figure 3.12 - % 0-2 children with migrant background on the overall 0-2 population (in blue) and % children with migrant background enrolled in ECEC services (in pink) – data aggregated by province.**



These emblematic cases draw attention to the role played by local ECEC access policies – combined with public subsidies – in favouring, or rather hindering, social inclusion starting from the early years. In this sense, it might not be a coincidence that the ECEC policies enacted in Bologna province – which display the highest municipal public expenditure dedicated to socio-educational services and family-related support measures at national level (ISTAT, 2011) and the highest proportion of publicly subsidised childcare places at regional level (SPI-ER, 2016) – turn out to be more successful in promoting the participation of children and families from less advantaged backgrounds.

### **3.4 Children and families in changing societies: what services for whose needs?**

At European level a certain consensus exist, among researchers and policy-makers, on the fact that participation of young children and their families to ECEC is determined by multiple factors (Thematic Working Group on ECEC, 2014; p. 21-22):

- *availability* of provision,
- *affordability* of enrolment fees (services which are embedded in a comprehensive system of public policies which extensively support and subsidise an equal access to ECEC tend to be more successful than targeted provision),
- *accessibility* of services (the presence of complicated bureaucratic procedures for enrolment as well as monolingual information and communication might implicitly act as a barrier for disadvantaged groups),
- perceived *usefulness* of ECEC by the families who are potential users (services which are supportive of parent's needs, attuned to their demands and which systematically engage them in democratic decision-making processes turn out to be more successful in promoting their participation to ECEC),
- *comprehensibility* of the values and meanings which are underlying the educational practices enacted in early childhood settings (those services in which values, beliefs and educational practices are constantly negotiated with families and local communities seems to be more effective in promoting the

participation of children and families in context of diversity).

By combining these insights with the findings of the needs assessment presented in this chapter, three main issues seems to emerge:

- while quantitative data on availability of ECEC provision, its structural features and children's participation are systematically collected, **very few qualitative data exist in relation to the perceived needs of children and families attending these services** (*usefulness and comprehensibility*);
- while certain common issues – concerning in particular the economic sustainability and structural accessibility of ECEC provision – could be identified at regional level, **diverse needs and responses to these challenges seems to emerge in diversified contexts** (eg. local administrative governments, geographical areas in which services are based as well as the surrounding socio-cultural environment,...);
- virtually no data exists in relation to the **good practices generated in different local contexts in order to face the common challenges emerged in the needs analysis.**

By acknowledging the above mentioned research gaps, the Emilia-Romagna case study will focus on the 'thick description' of exemplary cases (Stake, 2003) which will allow us to analyse the good practices elaborated and enacted in different local contexts and to draw information about their potential transferability to other contexts facing similar challenges. In addition, given the lack of qualitative data available on the issue of *usefulness* and *comprehensibility* in the context studies, a special attention will be dedicated to give 'voice' to the children and parents attending the services through the use of participatory observation and interviews.

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## 4. Realist evaluation: a multiple site case-study design<sup>54</sup>

### 4.1 Introduction

This section outlines the main results of an in-depth analysis of ECEC services in Emilia Romagna Region, adopting a realist evaluation approach. In order to demonstrate how ECEC services could be a potential social innovation in Emilia Romagna, we will set out the methodology and the results of our empirical inquiry concerning three ECEC services case studies. In particular, we are going to analyse: “*Filonido*” in the city of Bologna (BO); “*Il Girotondo intorno al Bosco*” in the village of Serramazzoni (MO); “*La Gabianella*” and “*L'albero delle meraviglie*” in the small town of Comacchio.

### 4.2 Methodology (research design, procedures used for data collection and interpretation)

In order to verify the potentialities in term of Social Innovation of the ECEC services in the Emilia-Romagna region – in a Social Investment Policy Framework – we opted for the adoption of the “Case Studies” research technique.

As it is known the Case-study approach could be defined in the following way:

“Case study methods encompass a range of research techniques that are used to examine social phenomena. Researchers primarily focus their study on the micro level, concentrating on individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and/or events. The analysis is aimed at investigating contemporary issues or events within their real-life setting. A case study is considered a specific approach or strategy that can be used as a unit of analysis and also the means by which data have been gathered, organized, and presented.” (Wolff Kristina, 2016)<sup>55</sup> (underlined is mine)

further:

“A variety of disciplines utilize this mode of research, including medicine, law, political science, history, public administration, and policy studies as well as sociology. In sociology, case studies examine society to understand a variant of a specific social phenomenon such as the progression of an event,

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<sup>54</sup> This Section has been written by Andrea Bassi (4.1; 4.2) Maria Lamorgese (4.3) and Arianna Lazzari (4.4).

<sup>55</sup> Wolff Kristina, "Methods, Case Study." *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, in Ritzer, George (ed), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, Blackwell Reference Online, 03 February 2016.



changes that may occur due to something like the implementation of a policy, program, or specific event, and/or as a means to understand a specific segment or group in society. This method is often used as a pilot study or as foundational research to support a larger study. (...)

One of the primary goals of conducting a case study is to generate thick, rich, detailed explanations of the phenomenon that is being investigated. This research is largely descriptive and/or exploratory in nature. Many cases focus on the “how” or “why” something is occurring in society. Researchers seek to document the complexities of a situation.” (Wolff Kristina, 2016)<sup>56</sup> (underlined is mine)

finally:

“Case studies utilize an array of both qualitative and quantitative approaches including historical analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, policy analysis, surveys, and secondary data analysis. These techniques of investigation are used to reduce bias, increase validity and reliability, and to provide the “rich” data required of case studies and to allow for flexibility in conducting the research. Data are analyzed for common themes and patterns with the purpose of providing new insights into a specific social phenomenon.” (Wolff Kristina, 2016)<sup>57</sup> (underlined is mine)

This approach is particularly useful when examining changes in policies or practices. In that case investigators will conduct research that follows the progression of change from before the policy was adopted through to the implementation process and then to the outcomes of the policy.

The most difficult task in a research program based on “case study method” concerns the selection of the unit of analysis, in our project the typology of ECEC service to be included in the inquiry.

#### 4.2.1 - Identification of the Sample Process

As far as the identification of the services to be analysed is concerned, we proceeded as follow (see Table below).

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<sup>56</sup> Wolff Kristina, "Methods, Case Study." *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, in Ritzer, George (ed), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, Blackwell Reference Online, 03 February 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Wolff Kristina, "Methods, Case Study." *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, in Ritzer, George (ed), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, Blackwell Reference Online, 03 February 2016.

First of all we contacted the Head of the ECEC Services System at the Emilia-Romagna Region. We explain the research design and we asked him to offer the support of the ECEC Services Offices. Then we elaborate the criteria to select the services to be included in our inquiry and we had a confrontation with the public official working in the ECEC Services Office at Regional level. Once we agreed on the criteria we asked them to select - out of the 1.206 Services active in the School Year 2013/2014<sup>58</sup> - twelve (12) Services among which the Research Team should have chosen six case studies (2<sup>nd</sup> Mars 2016).

Once we selected the six case studies (4<sup>th</sup> Mars 2016), the ECEC Services Office send a letter (24<sup>th</sup> Mars 2016) to the Public Official in charge of the coordination of the ECEC Services in the Administrative Area concerned (usually a Municipality) for acceptance. Finally, when we received all the letters of acceptance (15<sup>th</sup> of April 2016) we started to contact the persons in charge of the ECEC Services coordination, in order to carry out the research on the field. The first on-site visit was delivered the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2016.

DATE	ACTIVITY/OPERATION	SUBJECT/ACTOR
8 February – 19 February	Scelta dei criteri per la sezione degli studi di caso	Research Team
22 February – 1 Mars	Interrogazione del data-base dei Servizi per la prima infanzia	RER Offices
2 Mars	Individuazione di 12 possibili servizi da includere nel campione	RER Offices
4 Mars	Selezione di 6 servizi tra cui svolgere gli studi di caso	Research Team
24 Mars 2016	Invio lettera ufficiale ai referenti Servizi selezionati	RER Offices
25 Mars - 15 April 2016	Accettazione da parte di tre Servizi presso cui svolgere gli studi di caso	Public Official in charge of the coordination of the ECEC Services in the Administrative Area/Division

Table 4.1 – Process of Sample identification

<sup>58</sup> The most up-to-date (recent) data-base available at the time of the selection (February 2016).

#### 4.2.2 Criteria of Selection

The cases to be included in the research has be selected following four main criteria (variables):

a) Geographic distribution = West, Center, East areas of the Emilia-Romagna Region (mountain/hills; plain; sea-side);

b) Municipality dimension = small (up to 15.000 inhabitants); medium (up to 100.000 inhabitants) and big cities (metropolitan area, from 250.000 to 500.000 inhabitants);

c) Ownership structure (principal delivering organization) = public, private for profit, private nonprofit;

d) Services typology = following the classification defined by the Emilia-Romagna regional government [a) Nurseries/kindergartens; b) Integrative/complementary services; c) Home services; d) Experimental services]

The final Sample has been the following one:

	Public	Private for profit	Private nonprofit
Mountain/hill		“Il girotondo Intorno al Bosco” (Serramazzone - MO)	
Plain	“Il Pifferaio Magico” (Parma)		“Nido Aziendale Policlinico” (Modena) “Tirithera” (Cesena) “FiloNido” (Bologna)
Sea-side			a) Spazio Bambini "La Gabbianella"; b) Centro Bambini-Genitori "L'Albero delle Meraviglie" (Comacchio - FE)

Table 4.2 – “Geographic distribution” and “Ownership structure”

	Nurseries	Complementary services	Home services
Small (up to 15.000 inhabitants)		a) Spazio Bambini "La Gabbianella"; b) Centro Bambini-Genitori "L'Albero delle Meraviglie" (Comacchio - FE)	“Il girotondo Intorno al Bosco” (Serramazzone - MO)
Medium (up to 100.000 inhabitants)	“Tirithera” (Cesena)		
Big (metropolitan area)	“Nido Aziendale Policlinico” (Modena) “FiloNido” (Bologna)	“Il Pifferaio Magico” (Parma)	

Table 4.3 – “Municipality dimension” and “Services typology”

As far as we carried out the first two on-site visits<sup>59</sup>, we realised that it would not have been possible to conduct all the six case studies we planned to do, given the duration of the research project.

So we decided - in agreement with the Public Official responsible of the ECEC Services of the Emilia-Romagna Region - to reduce our case studies to three. We selected one service for each ECEC main typology: a) Nurseries/kindergartens; b) Integrative-complementary services; c) Home services.

Namely: "*Filonido*" in the city of Bologna (387.500 inhabitants) for the first type; "*La Gabbianella*" and "*L'Albero delle Meraviglie*" in the small town of Comacchio (22.600 inhabitants), for the second type; "*Il girotondo Intorno al Bosco*" in the village of Serramazzoni (8.200 inhabitants), for the third type.

We also tried to take into consideration the other above mentioned variables, such as: Geographic distribution = Bologna: plain (Centre); Comacchio: sea-side (East); Serramazzoni: mountain/hills (West). Municipality dimension = Bologna: big; Comacchio: medium; Serramazzoni: small. Ownership structure = Bologna: big social enterprises consortium; Comacchio: medium nonprofit organization; Serramazzoni: small for profit business. It was not possible to include in the sample a Public ECEC service Centre.

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<sup>59</sup> Friday 22nd to Serramazzoni (Modena) and Friday 29th of April to Comacchio (Ferrara).

## Chronogram

DATE	TYOLOGY of ACTIVITY	PERSON	LOCATION
Tuesday, 26th January	Contatto telefonico e via email	Dr.ssa Angela Fuzzi (Responsabile “Servizi Educativi 0-3 anni” Regione Emilia-Romagna)	Bologna
Friday, 5th February	1^ Incontro Regione Emilia Romagna	Dr. Gino Passarini (Responsabile “Servizio Politiche familiari infanzia e adolescenza”)e con Dr.ssa Angela Fuzzi	Bologna
Friday, 19 February	Intervista	Angela Fuzzi	Bologna
Friday, 11 Mars	2 ^ Incontro operativo	Angela Fuzzi	Bologna
Friday, 22 April	Intervista e sopralluogo	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paola Guitoli - Ufficio Servizi Educativi.</li> <li>2. Carla Baranzoni - Responsabile Servizio Scolastico-Educativo e Formazione.</li> <li>3. Anna Pelloni- Coordinatrice pedagogica.</li> </ol>	Pavullo nel Frignano e Serramazzoni (Modena)

		4. Bianca Pozzebon – Gestore del servizio “Il Girotondo intorno al bosco”.	
Tuesday, 26 April	Intervista a educatrici	Il Girotondo intorno al bosco	Serramazzoni (Modena)
Friday, 29 April	Intervista e sopralluogo	Patrizia Buzzi – Responsabile servizi per la prima infanzia – Comune di Comacchio	Comacchio (Ferrara)
Wednesday, 4 May	Intervista Cooperativa “Dolce”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Elisa Guerzoni – Coordinatore Responsabile Servizi Infanzia.</li> <li>2. Cristina Gattai – Pedagogista Area Sede Infanzia.</li> <li>3. Cristina Segata – Responsabile Area Sede Infanzia.</li> <li>4. Giulia Sermasi – Promozione Servizi Area Sede Infanzia.</li> </ol>	Bologna
Wednesday, 11 May	Seminario di lavoro + intervista Sopralluogo Asilo Nido	Dr. Paolo Zanelli – Responsabile Unità Coordinamento Pedagogico 0-18, Comune di Forlì	Forlì
Friday, 13 May	Intervista	Cooperativa “Girogirotondo”	Comacchio (Ferrara)
Friday, 20 May	Osservazione partecipante Interviste operatrici Interviste ai genitori		Serramazzoni (Modena)
Monday, 23 May	Osservazione partecipante		Comacchio (Ferrara)

	Interviste operatrici Interviste ai genitori		
Tuesday, 31 May	Intervista Unipol Intervista Funzionari E-R	Dr.ssa Sabina Tarozzi Dr.ssa Carmela Lembo e Dr.ssa Annalisa Vanneschi	Bologna
Wednesday, 1 June	Intervista Hera	Dr.ssa Alessandra Galeotti	Bologna
Friday, 3 June	Osservazione Servizio Primavera		Serramazzoni (Modena)
Monday, 13 June	Osservazione partecipante Interviste ai Genitori	Filonido	Bologna
Friday, 17 June	Incontro Community Reporters		Bologna
Saturday, 18 June	Incontro Community Reporters		Bologna



### 4.2.3 - Sources of data and Research tools

Given the characteristics of the “case study method” we utilized a variety of sources of data and information during our research program, both qualitative and quantitative. Among them, we mention:

- a) - official documents (Laws enacted by the Regional government; Regulations enacted by municipalities);
- b) - unofficial documents (bylaws of nonprofit organizations; minutes of Board of Directors of for profit enterprises involved in corporate welfare programs);
- c) - grey material (research reports, evaluation reports, etc. by public bodies and research institutions);
- d) - face to face interviews with representatives from public administration, nonprofit organizations, private corporations, parents associations, etc.
- e) - focus group with representatives of the above mentioned organizations.
- f) – on-site observation of ECEC services Centers.

In order to collect the information of the letters d), e) and f) above mentioned, we elaborate several research tools, such as:

- A] Interview outline for face to face interviews with ECEC Public Official;
- B] Interview (or Focus Group) outline for face to face interviews with ECEC Services workers (Educators);
- C] Interview (or Focus Group) outline for face to face interviews with ECEC Services Parents;
- D] Interview outline for face to face interviews with Managers of Corporations and Public Authorities involved in “Corporate Welfare Activities”
- E] Template for “on the field” Observation of daily Activities in the ECEC Services

### 4.3 The case studies: description and analysis<sup>60</sup>

In this section we present the results of our empirical inquiry concerning three case studies of ECEC services in the Emilia-Romagna Region.

#### 4.3.1 The Home-Care ECEC service in Serramazzoni (MO)

##### The context

The City of Serramazzoni is situated in the first buttruss between the plains and the mountains of the Modena Province. It takes part of the “Frignano” Municipalities Union and counts 8,289 inhabitants<sup>61</sup>, of which 195 (2.4%) from 0 to 3 years. Of these, 17% are foreign citizens.

Serramazzoni has had over time a remarkable growth because of its proximity to the cities of the plain, the Altitude (m. 791 s.l.m.), the green and its panoramic position.

The period of maximum population growth is reached in 2001 with a population increase of the 26,81%. This data has been growing steadily until 2013, when there was a decrease of 2.16%.

The demographic trend between 2001 and 2012 signals a dynamic expansion in the number of families (24,18%). In the same period there was an increase of the resident population from 0 to 3 years: 2005 was the year with the highest number of children in this age group (n. 293).

Population growth of those years is due to the new possibilities of employment coming from the nearby ceramic district and migration flows of foreign citizens arriving mainly from North Africa and Eastern European countries.

In order to respond suitably to the new social needs that emerged as a result of the demographic development of the territory, the Serramazzoni City Council has seen fit to promote experimentation of services for families with children from 0-3 years engaged in the work.

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<sup>60</sup> This Paragraph has been written by Maria Lamorgese and has been revised and translated into English by Anna Clara Cucinelli.

<sup>61</sup> Updated to 31/12/2015

## **ECEC service**

The first service for early childhood enabled the territory of Serramazzoni was an experimental service of “Home Care Educator”, for children from 12 to 36 months of age, with a private management agreement with the City, heads for 5 children, opened in February 2002. In September of the same year the service continued with the same characteristics.

For the type of setting and for its particular location launching a unique and highly innovative experience in a situation like Serramazzoni. In this place families expresses an increasing awareness of the educational needs and educational needs of their children, for the earliest years of their lives. For this reason, there has been a steady increase in demand for services starting in the summer time but also extend to the whole year and are flexible timetable, responding to children and at the same time parental needs.

Over the course of two years the demand grew so much to bear, in school year. 2005-2006, the opening of 5 sections for a total of 25 places available. This service born in agreement with the municipality to meet the needs of families, which increasingly require the services for the Early Childhood. So, this is a privately owned service agreement for the totality of the available places with the municipality of Serramazzoni. Nell'a.s.2008-2009 was activated una “Sezione Primavera” (Spring Section), an experimental educational service of public interest aimed at all children and girls aged between two and three years, which competed with the families to their growth and training as part of a policy for early childhood and the guarantee of the right to education, with respect for their individual and cultural identity. “Spring Section” is a joint project of the National State owned “Comprehensive School and Education Centre” who has the ownership and city administration of Serramazzoni that deals with the organizational management through the service outsourcing.

From 2014-2015 the available seats are 37 (n. 5 in the Home Care Service Educator, n. 7 in the small Educational Group, and n. 20 in the “Spring Section”) and satisfy the total demand expressed by families.

## **Educational Household Early Childhood Services: "The Wandering around the woods"**

Educational service "The Wandering around the woods" was founded in 2005 thanks to an agreement between the municipality of Serramazzoni and a private entity, meeting the requirements of the Regional Law n. 1/2000. The obligations identified for the manager are the following ones:

- organizing and providing the necessary means for the execution of the service;
- providing educator staff and personnel of general services in the number and with the requirements of the legislation<sup>62</sup>;
- providing the necessary tools for the service;
- providing the purchase of equipment and furniture, and the ordinary and extraordinary maintenance of the location.

The municipality has the responsibility for:

- the organizational and administrative support service for everything related to the organization and its management, including passenger information and receipt of entries;
- the formation of the lists for admission to the service and
- the determination of the monthly rates charged to families.

The Educational service "The Wandering around the woods" is an educational site for children from 9 months to 3 years, suitable to accompany their growth and to complement and support the role of parents. It is located inside an historical building (of the 17th century) with typical characteristics of mountain areas, and consists of two services: a) a so called "Small Educational Group" in an apartment at the ground floor and b) a so called "Educator Homecare" placed in the home next door.

The service operates five days a week, from Monday to Friday, with hourly type of full-time operation, from 8.00 to 16.00. The "Small Group Educational" Service offers a course for seven children from the age of 9 up to 36 months led by two educators; the "Educator Homecare" Service offers a course for five children from the age of 12 up to 36 months led by two educators.

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<sup>62</sup> In the organization of the service the service manager will ensure an adequate ratio of staff and children in accordance with the provisions of L.R. 1/2000 and the relevant regional directives. It is ensured at all times of the day a number of appropriate staff to safeguard the safety of minors in relation to the spaces, the activities undertaken and the degree of autonomy of the children of the structure.

## The Working Group

The staff is composed of three educators who work with both groups and ensure the presence of two operators for the whole duration of the service and three operators for half day. Staff also take at least 80 hours per year (number of hours not provided in front of the employment contract) for training and programming and documentation activities<sup>63</sup>. In this regard, regular collective staff meetings are planned, held by the "Coordinator Pedagogical District"<sup>64</sup>, for setting and verification of educational work and the development of methodological and operational guidelines.

In the daily management of the two groups several common moments have been created: this represents a considerable advantage, in particular as regards the construction of relations between the children and the possibility of realizing more personalised actions with the simultaneous presence of the three educators. Based on the activities and the project to be achieved, the educators split the pupils in two or more groups.

## The spaces

Space as the "third educator" supports the autonomy and skills of children in their environment: it has to be functional to the needs of all children, large and cosy. In the rooms there are, in compliance with safety standards, furnishings reminiscent of the typical mountain home as a fireplace, a sofa, cupboards and decorative patterns that change depending on the season.

There are a space dedicated to reading, with a small library available to children; one with carpet to land-based activities and with table for graphic-pictorial activity or logical games; a large space destined to be modified depending on the activities proposed, properly equipped. This space includes a corner for symbolic play (with a

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<sup>63</sup> It is important to keep memory of experiences and to be able to retrace by following the traces, verify the changes and send to other children and parents information about their activities. For this purpose it is produced the following documents: works produced by children, photographic documentation of activities and routine moments on the walls, instructional design and educational programming.

<sup>64</sup> The Pedagogical Coordination consists of the municipalities of the Frignano District, a group of pedagogical coordination - organizational services for early childhood, which includes the Educator and the administrative employees of the participating municipalities. The Pedagogical Coordination is the instrument to secure the link between the services for early childhood within the territorial education system according to the principles of coherence and continuity of educational interventions and uniformity and efficiency in its organization - management and contributes technically the definition of guidelines and criteria for development and qualification of the system of services for children.

kitchen, banquet carpenter, corner of disguise) and a corner for the buildings (with trains, woods, trails).

Just like ordinary homes, there are two bathrooms for the use of children, specially equipped for the hygiene activities where children are educated to personal care; one sleeping space on the first floor, a kitchen for fractionation and portioning meals and various outdoor areas (large garden, a terrace and a walking trail in the woods and fields).

### **The activities**

The children with the educators supervision learn to use the tools related to daily life, to express themselves verbally and not through reading activities of books by the teachers and storytelling, autonomous vision of books by children, songs and rhymes mimicked and description by the adult of the actions that are taking place. For the development of cognitive skills the nursery proposes ball games, building towers with blocks and construction, games with recycled materials, manipulation games, racking games and symbolic games. Instead, for the development of motor skills they propose guided tours and activities free body.

The "Wandering around the woods" strengths are flexibility and acceptance. Flexible working hours, to promote and facilitate the needs of families in which there is a continuous and ongoing dialogue; and welcoming such as listening and respect of children's time.

The children remain in service throughout the day, so the pace is soft, dedicated to listening and to receive the messages that children forward.

Though with some security measures, the space is like a house space, like the one they already know, in which children personalized spaces and shared them with other inhabitants. They learn to have rules, to know the dangers of the house and learn to have appropriate behaviours. So they help families to live better.

In the nursery educators and children try to use as much as possible simple and recovery materials for activities and for the decor of the rooms; they propose field trips in different weather situations, equipped with boots, gloves, caps according to the season.

Thanks to the wooded area where the "Wandering around the woods" is located, it is possible to propose children outdoor activities, follow the changes of the seasons, to

know the land and its products. At the same time, the location of the service may create some difficulties for families: the access road, not being paved, it is full of potholes and often in the rainy and winter season, becomes almost impassable. Definitely better accessibility to the structure would improve the viability and would reach it in tighter times.

### **Educational Project**

The educational and didactic project "Wandering around the woods" bases its success on the key concepts of the cultural tradition of the nursery, which offers a healthy balance between theoretical knowledge, practical skills and strong reflexive professional educator. Also it takes account of the most significant elements of the experience nurseries, with its own identity as an integrated service into a larger system. This particular location makes the service extremely innovative and, in addition to being a place of learning and socialization of children, becomes for those concerned, a moment of observation and experimentation.

The inclusion of a baby to the nursery consist in his entrance into society, it is therefore a very delicate moment for both him and his parents: children are facilitated in connection with the new environment as they are received in a structure reminiscent of their house.

Social participation is a major asset for innovation and qualification of educational services and it is an incentive to pursue objectives of collaboration between operators and parents. Participation and social management have become integral parts of the educational program of the service, in which the active role of families is just as essential as the leadership of staff and children. The holidays are an important event, one of the few occasions in which parents can be present and know each other better. Among the initiatives proposed we can find workshops with parents, for the construction of play materials that the child knows in the nursery and finds himself at the kindergarten; the Chestnut Festival during Christmas, Carnival and end of school year; the "Nanny for a Day"<sup>65</sup> project where parents have the opportunity to spend a day within the service attended by their child actively participating in the conduct of activities.

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<sup>65</sup> Project proposed by the Service Management Committee for infants of Serramazzone and started in 2011/2012 school year.

The Serramazzone ECEC services have a proper Management Committee, in which the Centre participates, composed of an Administrative Instructor of educational services, operators holders of the services; one parent for each section established and an educator for each service. Among the tasks of the Management Committee there are:

- Participation into the implementation of the education program;
- Formulation of proposals relating to the service discipline;
- Promotion of meetings with parents in order to achieve a closer relationship between the families;
- Submission of proposals, meetings and / or initiatives for parents about topics of common interest.

The "Wandering around the woods" currently uses assessment tools for both the specific proposals and the entire service. Some tools are specific of the service, others are common to all the services of the district, others shared at the provincial level.

The service is valued by parents annually through the detection of the quality perceived by the families sponsored by the City and in the last year the service has attended the trial of self-assessment of the educational project promoted by the Region of Emilia Romagna.

## **Conclusion**

The "Wandering around the woods" hopes to give to the children and their families larger spaces in the future. In this way it can create more structured activities and accommodate a larger number of children, maintaining the characteristics that make their service a social innovation.



### 4.3.2 The “complementary ECEC service” in Comacchio (FE)

#### The Context

The town of Comacchio is in terms of scenic and historical aspects one of the major centres across “Po” river. Comacchio was born from the union of thirteen small islands formed by the intersection of the Po estuary with the sea, the reason why it had to base its urban and economic development on the element of water.

On the question of population, during the period between 2001-2014 it has been measured an increase of 11,46%, compared with a decline of the previous decade (-4.6%).

Comacchio is a town of 22,410 inhabitants<sup>66</sup> in the province of Ferrara. The distance from Bologna (about 50km) becomes significant especially in winter, when dense fog, persistent and frequent limit mobility making strenuous and risky movements. This isolated location and the particular characteristics of its territory have introduced an employment development regarding breeding fish in the valleys and fishing. Comacchio became a closed and slightly permeable island, from the anthropological and cultural view.

In the particular area abovementioned across the “Po” river, many organizations and institutions of different levels, local and international, they have created a plan of promotion and support of educational initiatives for early childhood.

The "Delta del Po" project, launched in 1988 and sustained until 1993, was co-funded by the “Van Leer Foundation”<sup>67</sup> and included five municipalities of Delta, each characterized by specific intervention models with organizational peculiarities, structural, functional various and all designed by the reading of needs, activated resources and availability in the local context involved (Frabboni and Dozza, 1994).

So in Comacchio, where a group of young mothers had mobilized to demand conditions facilitating the growth and education of their children in the context of community life,

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<sup>66</sup> Update to 30/06/2016

<sup>67</sup> The Van Leer Foundation supports initiatives aimed at improving children's living conditions in deprived areas of the world: the countries of the third and fourth world, but also are deprived of the developing countries.

has created the model "of meeting space and children's play and parents" has been created.

## History

The Municipal Childhood centre called *L'Albero delle Meraviglie* (The Center of "Wonder Tree") was founded in 1988 as a pilot experience: it is the first time that the City of Comacchio assumes a direct responsibility toward early childhood education: problems related to the accompaniment of the development of boys and girls in the early years, the support of parents role and facilitation of parent-child relationship (Andreoli and Change, 2001).

The young mothers who had worked to encourage the initiative, some of them in possession of a basic training in education, lend their voluntary work. The service is allocated in the building of an Elementary School, but the School Director withdraws the collaboration two years later and the initiative is interrupted for more than a year.

In 1992 voluntary moms found "Libellula", an association of volunteers (charity) registered in the regional register, to which the Municipality school and education Office entrust the management of the "*Albero delle Meraviglie*" for the next four years.

In 1997 the association, had to give up the management of the service, it continues its educational and outreach activities on the territory, addressing the parents with training sessions and courses pre-birth, and changes its institutional and statutory structure, transforming itself into a Cooperative called "Girogirotondo".

From the school years 1998-1999 Cooperative takes over the management of Childhood Centre "*L'albero delle meraviglie*" progressively expanding the range of offers and extending their activities also in the neighbouring territories with various initiatives aimed at different types of users (Andreoli and Change , 2001).

This service should be ascribed a double merit: to have provided an opportunity for the youngest in a territory - which was totally lacking - and have created an opportunity for professional training and job placement for young women.

## Services for young children inside the Centre

The Childhood Centre operates under the regulation of the Department of Education of the Municipality and it is managed by "Girogirotondo" Cooperative, is reserved for children from 0 to 11 years and their parents. It offers many services, such as: courses

to prepare the birth and breast feeding support; courses of infant massage; meetings with a pedagogist on issues relating to children; laboratories and workshops for adults; opportunities of playing and socializing children and parents; social entertainment; parenting support activities; and activities to improve the adult / child relationship.

The Centre for Children and Parents is open every afternoon from Monday to Saturday from 16:30 to 19:30 (every afternoon reserved for the different age group) and on Saturday, from 9:30 to 12:30.

The children's day care service "*La Gabbianella*" ("The little seagull") is an educational service run by the "Girogirotondo" cooperative. It was founded in 1999 in response to the needs of the families of a service of foster care for young children. Over the years this need grows stronger and in 2003 the City of Comacchio found the first nursery, which led to the closure of the Children foster care. After a year "*La Gabbianella*" has re-opened to meet the many demands of children on the waiting list for the nursery.

Today is an alternative/integrative service for those families who do not choose a service of ECEC full time, who still want a part-time foster care in which their children can still make significant experiences of socialization, playing, exploration, first separation from 'family environment and parents.

The service host up to 24 children aged from 12 to 36 months entrusted to educators for up to five hours daily period. During the year it follows the calendar of the public school holidays. But it is open the entire year (from September until August 31<sup>st</sup>), in order to give continuity to the service in place and to meet the demands that come from a tourism-oriented city. This yearly opening period is a major improvement, aimed at strengthening the "educational offer" of the territory and to help parents working in tourist accommodation services (beaches, restaurants, ..) during the summer.

### **The Center for Children and Parents "*L'albero delle meraviglie*"**

The Center for "Children and Parents" is a type of service characterized by the presence of children and parents (or other adult family members) that interact together. The Centre must therefore be understood as a "co-educational" site, a system in which each part (space, time, the role of adults, relationships) evolves and changes in relation to others in a reciprocal relationship. The Centre promotes opportunities for socializing and playing in a meeting space designed to encourage the processes of growth and

development of skills by creating an atmosphere of sociability and trust, both through experience in the peer group and in the relationship with adults (Musatti, 2004).

The service guarantees the child a time shared with adults (parents or relatives) and peers, at a time when the parent pays attention and interacts with the child and at the same time an opportunity for discussion and relationship between parents and parents-educators. The purpose of the service is not to convey specific pedagogical lines, but enable educational resources, facilitating and supporting communication and knowledge network among the families who attend the service, encouraging the sharing of experiences, doubts, difficulties and educational solutions (Hoshi -Watanabe, Musatti, Rayna and Vandenbroeck, 2012).

The core idea of the pedagogical project is the child as an active, competent and curious subject able to explore, to make, to use his/her imagination, reason and creativity.

The proposed activities may be subject to variation depending on the interest of the children, who may thus find a time and a place for both free and organized play, both in small group and large group. As far as the adults know each others, the activities for them can be modified (such as the time devoted to conversation).

Precisely for this reason, the educational choices are based on a particular attention to the relational atmosphere (climate) aimed at reinforcing the skills of the group, and soliciting curiosity and collaboration.

In the Centres for “Children and Parents” reflection and design of educational programs to be implemented must take account of a prerequisite. Hosting families with children of different ages determines the need to offer proposals, experiences and articulated and diversified meeting contexts in which children and adults can take opportunities - for themselves or as part of a group – appropriate and useful to the evolving needs and care of children, and to the necessity of attention and listening of the adults.

Proposals and experiences offered by the “Children and Parents” Centre are made under the organization of the working group of operators, whose job is to plan activities based on the theoretical assumptions and the purpose of the service, so that the choices and actions are deliberate and not impromptu and improvised. This design starts with the observation of the environment taking into account the different age groups of children, the different types of accompanying adults and the relational dynamics that are created within the service. Therefore it is necessary to grasp the demands, needs and the

implicit and explicit interests of both children and adults (Pedagogical Coordination Unit of Provincial Ferrara, 2014).

### **The children's day care service "*La Gabbianella*"**

The children's day care service provides an opportunity for individual growth for each child, through the daily care, play and relationships with peers and adult role models other than family ones. One of the main purpose of this service is to promote the growth and education of children respecting their identity and valuing their potential through exploration of the environment, socialization and body awareness in movement and space. The teachers commit themselves to promoting the autonomy and socialization of the child, to stimulating and supporting the evolutionary processes in an environment designed and arranged for them every day. In also, they provide a place to socialize, play and exploration for children, encourage the integration between children of different cultures and/or with special educational needs and foster integration with the territory and its educational needs (Musatti, 2002).

Another key aspect of the service is the routine activities that always repeating the same over the course of days, give a time scan the events, the succession of time and space. This helps to give your child safe by giving it the ability to predict future events, giving way to manage change, and appropriate timing. Then educators will take care in so always repeat the same reception, sound activities, the snack, the change, the laboratory and the greeting. Through the routines, they favour the friendship activities and social experiences recognizable and appropriate to the age of the children.

Another decisive aspect within the organization of the service activity is the organization of space. Spaces and materials are structured to let every child move freely in such a way as to promote the self-confidence, security, independence, the sense of responsibility.

Closely connected to the space there are the relationships, observing and promoting the development of communicative and language skills, as children have the opportunity to interact, both with adults other than parents with peers. Hence the idea of educators to propose to families and children a quarterly educational project to have more flexibility and ability to change depending on the needs of children. The first three months (September, October, and November) are dedicate to the consolidation of the group for the children, while the teachers are dedicated to observation. According to this they

meet and jointly researching and planning a proposal suitable to the group of children, but also to the individual trying to give them what everyone needs most (Pedagogical Coordination Unit of Provincial Ferrara, 2014).

The activities are organized by educators, and include: handling workshops, drama, reading and narration, graphic and pictorial and musical activities, motor skills workshops.

Communicating with families is a fundamental aspect of the children's day care service, because the family is the great expert of his/her child, and the educators are in closed contact with the family not only in critical moments but also in those pleasant, to share every experience on a daily basis within the service.

Educators are committed to accompany families throughout the year so “you never feel excluded”, even try to involve them in all the initiatives that the service promotes.

Every year specific initiatives are planned, such as: field trips, and/or meetings with families, and parties during the opening of the academic year, the Christmas party, Carnival in the square, the year-end party of “La gabbianella” centre together with the Centre for Children and Parents *L’Albero delle Meraviglie*.

### **The organization of spaces**

The childcare centre is a place that gathers different services (“L’albero delle Meraviglie”, “La Gabbianella” and the Birth training course) and where, every other day, attending children of different age groups (0 to 6 years). Precisely for this reason the educators of these services, which share a common area, have been structured spaces to make them functional for all needs.

The construction of these spaces has been intentionally designed to offer experiences and playing proposals for children and at the same time to facilitate the relationship with adults.

The hall is the space of the presentation, a sort of identikit of the service, it was set up in order to offer each person entering, a very brief overview of what is happening inside. It was realized a small angle reception, consists of a sofa and a tactile-sound panel. The hall is also room for moments of play, dances, songs, some of large group activities but also information space for parents through informative panels and boards. This space is connected to all areas of the centre and from it more doors are visible. Here is a large notice board informing the families of all of the service information.

The first room is composed of foam mattresses that cover  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the room, a square pool filled with different coloured balls, a small sofa and dark curtains on the windows that facilitate some of the activities. This space is designed to be used in various ways, from the motor, to the free play, to read, to relax.

The second room is divided into areas of interest that have been made and created in detail. The reading area is set up with mattresses and a library full of books of all kinds, soft, shiny, interactive, always available and at child height. The symbolic play space is separated from other areas through a plywood panel in the shape of the house, equipped with window and door from where the children come.

The kitchen area was built and developed by educators. It is composed of furniture and wall units similar to those found at home and tools and household materials are offered. The space of dramatization and disguise consists of a cabinet with hangers for clothes and accessories and a shoe, is aimed at the development of identification-projection processes that activate the participation of children. The room finally has a zone for the snack.

The third room, called atelier, is used for graphic-pictorial and plastic activities that allow children to express themselves naturally and to represent with painting and the use of different plastic materials, their own experiences of the inner life and the events of realities that have particularly affected. The room also has a corner of recycling consists of a shelving unit in which they are offered every type of recycled material.

The gear room is equipped with changing table and a large sink that allows you to wash your children with ease. In this small room there is also a mobile kit that contains the material of each child, each drawer stands out from the photo and the baby's name. From this room it possible to access to the bathroom for disabled people.

The children's bathroom is divided into two areas by a sliding door: the first area includes four child height taps, a bench, and the angle of the racking; in the second, there are three small water. Even the bathroom is an educational site, it has been decorated and personalized for the child to learn to follow the rules of hygiene. The materials, cans, glasses, bottles ... for racking games and water games are just a baby, then in view and within easy reach. The walls have been decorated inspired by the theme of the sea to make the most colourful and stimulating environment.

In addition to the interior space, the Childhood Centre is equipped with a large green area. In the external environment, because of the different ages are structured play

areas for the development of motor activities like slides, swings and facilities where you can climb. Finally, there is a large sandbox that allows children to have experiences, decanted and manipulations.

All spaces are subject to change during the year because they are organized in following observation of children and based on the design of the year.

### **The Working Group**

The Working Group (educators' team) is very important to ensure the quality of service and consists of all personnel working in the Childhood Centre. The main goal is the research and the sharing of a "style of education". The Working Group also has an educational task, through the offer, capture and share the training conducted by external experts in liaison with the educational coordinator. Also necessary to grant him a formative self-task, with the programming of moments of reflection and discussion with respect to educational issues.

The Pedagogical Coordinator supports the Working Group and is the guarantor of the quality of service, meeting him regularly, and monitoring the organization and orienting the design, participating with direct observation moments during the service activities and organizing staff training.

Within the services, the monthly working group is formed by the educators who work in the Centre both morning and afternoon, the educational coordinator of the cooperative, the municipal educational coordinator and facilitator of the communication centre.

The team meetings take place every month in the Centre and have an average duration of one hour and thirty. Instead, the meetings of teachers who work in the afternoon, takes place once a week, with a duration of one hour.

The contents addressed in the meeting time are manifold and vary according to the months of the year and the service necessities. The typical arguments are: the weekly trend, the activities to be carried out, the choices to be taken, documentation and evaluation of the activities completed through reflection and collegial comparison, the planning of the year and the use of space. In addition, the group regularly meets with a psychologist to discuss on particular situations in the service and on relationship dynamics.



## **Documentation and Evaluation**

The documentation is an opportunity for reflection and it becomes a communication and information instrument for families, an opportunity to socialize the choices and educational experiences.

The instruments used are photos, videos, drawings, thoughts, wall posters, stories and chronicles of specific routes, with visual texts, informational materials of events, parties, and materials on training and refresher courses.

The evaluation is an activity closely related to the documentation, as it supports the educational operations critical review, the explanation and the social sharing of meaning and reflective learning about practices. In this sense, the evaluation conducted by internal staff to the service (self-assessment) and external (hetero), is understood as an analysis of educational processes and characterized by its formative function and its systematic and continuous. It is designed to increase an ongoing research within the service by promoting the increase in educational awareness levels, the consistency of education actions and the improvement and progressive arrangement of the same. The use of an assessment tool designed for this purpose is important and phases, procedures and methods of observation, detection and documentation will be specify (Pedagogical Coordination Unit of Provincial Ferrara, 2014). Basing on these assumptions, the service has participated in the trial of self/hetero-evaluation of the teaching program promoted by the Emilia Romagna over the last year.

## **Conclusion**

The Childhood Centre is a place including both the Centre for Children and Parents “L’albero delle Meraviglie” and the day-care child centre “La Gabbianella”. They are different services and everyone requires a specific space, a style of relationship, dedicated materials and proposals to be put in place. It is important to evaluate the different needs and several potential interlocutors and basing on these observations defining precise objectives and practicable and appropriate tools.

When such initiatives are undertaken in territorial and cultural contexts that are already equipped, the one described above is the ideal-type process that a team of educator undertake:

First: problems identification;

Second: interpreting the needs;

Third: resources recognition;

Fourth: objectives definition;

Fifth: building skills;

Sixth: preparing setting and materials;

Seventh: seeking alliances and supports.

It is possible do this from already established knowledge and practices, armed with a wealth of skills, experiences and relationships.

In Comacchio the process started without being able to count on experience "close" that could be a basis of comparison and an example consolidated from which to draw. It started taking advantage of a great opportunity: the "Po Delta Project" and assuming the goal of responding to the needs of taking charge, care, educational intervention of childhood and adolescence until then disregarded. It started with limited resources and sometimes precarious (just think of the spaces before granted then denied by the elementary school direction) and volunteer staff.

Despite this, a group of women had the strength to get involved on various projects, although it was not physically possible, for each of these, to have the optimal conditions of start-up and growing.

All the actors involved - in particular the political decision makers, the head of the school Office, the Girogirotondo Cooperative, the educators working in the Centre - choose to give life to a project that, even before "educational values", has a "social value". In this case the "Social innovation" rests in the continuing evolution of the service: from two afternoons a week to five; from a first structure (Childhood Centre) to a second one (a Nursery). It then continued on the path chosen:

- to give as much as possible answers to social needs;
- to organize themselves in sustainable institutional forms (from association to cooperative) and, simultaneously,
- to reach and maintain the higher level of quality in the interventions.

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### 4.3.3 The Nursery “Filonido” (Bologna)

#### The context

Filonido is a “Corporate welfare” nursery Centre that was inaugurated in September 2011 as a tenth structure designed, built and managed in the province of Bologna by a Cooperatives Consortium called “Karabak”<sup>68</sup>.

The fair challenge started from the customer's requests analysis, represented by the Municipality of Bologna together with the Emilia Romagna Region and the companies of the trade fair, and one of the local context study about the needs, desires and medium - long term perspectives. Thus, the Filonido project was preceded by an analysis aimed at describe the specific characteristics in terms of city planning and socio-economic background of the Bologna's San Donato district as well as identify the demand for educational services for early childhood

Data published by the City indicate that in 2008 in Bologna the newly borns were more than three thousand, in line with the slow and steady growth which characterized the last ten years. The number of foreign children from 0 to 2 years old, it is growing at higher rates in the “San Donato” District<sup>69</sup>; in 2008 it was 28% with a majority of Moroccan, Bangladeshis and Romanian children. It is also significant the proportion of children, with the same age of above, living with single mother (16%) or only son (50%).

Demographic forecasts for the next decade confirm these trends and, in particular, they observe a decline of fecundity rate among the population with Italian citizenship and a further growth of the foreign component. Therefore, this scenario provides a stable number of births because of a further growth of children born to one foreign parent.

San Donato, the neighbourhood in which Filonido stands, it is characterized by a slightly decline of resident population aged 0 and 2 years over the last five years (-1.6%) and an increase of the resident population aged 3 and 5 years (+ 12.1%). The school-age population keep growing although lower than previous years.

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<sup>68</sup> The Consortia Cooperative Karabakh are special purpose companies for the design, construction and management of educational services for children. Karabakh is an entrepreneurial tool to translate into operation, through the financing of the project, the proposed construction of public services in cooperation with local governments.

<sup>69</sup> Districts are local administrative governments units inside the City of Bologna. The Municipality of Bologna is organized in ten Districts.

Based on this data, it has been proposed a crèche capable of changing over time according to the requests recognised annually through a continuous dialogue with the territory: Filonido is not only a nursey, but also a place for families, a children's center, a summer holiday resort and even a nursery school if required.

## History

In 2009 the Emilia-Romagna Region and the Municipality of Bologna signed an agreement for the construction of a public and “corporate welfare” crèche, located in the District San Donato in Bologna, open to the community.

For the construction of the crèche, the Region invested 2 million Euros and the Municipality of Bologna has made available the land where it is built. Moreover, it has identified Karabak Consortium as project manager and supervisor for a period of thirty year by using a public tendering procedure. Karabak Consortium is made up of five cooperatives: two “Social Cooperatives”: Dolce and Cadiai; one catering (food service) cooperative Camst; one construction cooperative Manutencoop; and a maintenance cooperative: CIPEA. The agreement includes three companies: Unipol Finance Group, Legacoop and Hera Group; based on that the Nursery Filonido host a certain number of children of the workers (mainly mothers) of these companies/organisations.

The agreement approved by Emilia-Romagna Region, the Municipality of Bologna and three participating services companies lays down the commitment of the partners to pay directly to the dealer, for the children of its employees, the fee required to cover costs related to as integration of the fees paid by the employees themselves<sup>70</sup>. At the end of the concession, the building will be owned by the city of Bolonia.

The Filonido project was therefore possible thanks to a partnership between public and private institutions, based on sharing a common goal: giving families some concrete answers to the families’ work-life balance needs.

Filonido represents an exemplary implementation of *community welfare* based on providing services through a net of different organizations.

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<sup>70</sup> The average cost of a child place in a Nursery is around 800 Euro a month. The fee paid by the families depend on an “income-scale” base. The remaining amount up to the cost covering is in charge of the Municipality. In our case study the difference of cost related to the places reserved to the employees of the corporations are paid by the corporation themselves.

## **The nursery Filonido**

The nursery is an educational social service of public interest that works with families and it is aimed at educating the children according to the Municipal Educational Guidelines.

Filonido accommodates 81 children aged 3 to 36 months, including 20 places agreed upon with the Municipality of Bologna, 12 with private or voucher and 49 with Emilia Romagna region and some companies belonging to Bologna Exhibition Centre (Unipol Finance Group, Legacoop Bologna and Hera Group).

The synergy between the council and the Region has laid the groundwork for a great design and management of the nursery. The management was entrusted in 2009 to the “Karabakh 9th Consortium” and, from 2011, to “Dolce” Cooperative.

“Dolce” cooperative, a social cooperative born in Bologna in 1988, works in childhood, elderly, minors, disability and discomfort in collaboration with governments, local institutions and private companies, through a network services located mainly in Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Lazio. It stands out in the local and national scene as a subject capable of proposing innovative and excellence solutions regarding the integrated design of structures, environments and services for children.

Dolce Cooperative provides advanced educational responses to the needs of those families having small children by a path of dialogue, research and continuous improvement of its models management. This is made possible thanks to the experience gained from communal nursery in Emilia- Romagna and a collaboration with professionals of this sector.

Each nursery is a custom-built project to ensure that every child with his family are able to tell a unique history that should hared together.

The cooperative manages: 58 Nursery, 2 children spaces, 7 child-family centre, 3 recreation centres and 8 kindergarten, to date.

## **The organization and services**

The educational purpose as well as the internal organization of Filonido are based on the traditional model of quality recognized in the Emilia-Romagna nurseries defined and provided by the regional regulations in force.

The nursery is designed as an open system, which is modified by the exchanges that take place between the service and the territory. The pedagogical model is based on listening to both children and families.

The educational programs and services can be arranged (in agreement with the City and Region) to ensure the highest level of reception and response to the needs of the context. Increasingly, children and families need concrete answers to complex needs.

The flexibility of the service access times is a change from the traditional model: the possibility for one or more children to arrive mid-morning or after the meal requires an organizational effort to hold together the flexibility and the quality aspects.

Sharing the daily activities, workshops and parties with families represents the moment of doing together more challenging and rewarding. The choice to "get" the families in the service start from the "construction" of the spaces and their use in the welcome and greeting times, which represent the most frequent and important moments of contact in everyday life, and it ends in their direct involvement in the service every day.

Parents are invited to eat with the children, upon waking and throughout the day. They join their educators in nursing task or in the conduct of some proposal. Every year educators and families organise the days that go beyond the routine (outings, parties and workshops).

The work of communication and co-designing with families starts from the first interview after the enrolment and it is sustained during the year thanks to a system of individual and group meeting. Over the time a set of meetings "support" to the needs of families with small children has been made available, they mostly concern question about growing children up and the being parents, as well as people, wives and husbands, professionals and workers.

The increasing demands expressed to educators and educational coordinator of the nursery could be considered as a result, on the one hand, of the willingness to listen; on the other the lack or the multiply of stabled points for those families facing the parental task. A survey conducted recently by Dolce Cooperative, which provides six hundred and fifty interviews to parents of children from birth to three years, has exposed the

families' requests to find in the nursery not only a context to look after children, but also a place to find answers more extensive and complex<sup>71</sup>.

The nursery begin to be considered not only as a traditional ECEC service, but also as a place open to all the families of territory.

The need to open up the facilities beyond the school calendar and their traditional service has been required by both families and public and private entities.

Not only nursery but also summer center (from 1 July to the second week of September), winter centre during the closures for the holidays for children from one to five years, and childhood pole (nursery sections and school' children together) or experimental 0-6 (integrated educational service) when the needs of the families have requested it. Filonido is also a centre for families provided games, workshops, thematic meetings, parties birthday, listening counters, self-management space.

The nursery as open system can be considered as a response to the needs of families, without forgetting that services for early childhood, in all their various forms, are for families a choice that goes every time even compared with the economic possibilities and with working conditions.

The employment crisis has changed the choices and prospects of families even in relation to entries of their children in the nursery. Now a day fewer and fewer families cannot afford the nursery fees, whether it be a contribution to the cost of the service (places in public or accredited nursery) or the payment of a private right.

The cost of the nursery is one of the aspects that affects more families faced with the choice of including or not their baby to the nursery.

## **The spaces**

Filonido is located in the historic part of the San Donato district near the Exhibition centre.

The architecture is spread only on the ground floor and provides a structure the archetypal forms, with a flat roof. Some of the rooms, built with mobile tents, host the workshop for small groups. Large sliding walls allow flexible use, including in relation to the project and the pedagogical activities.

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<sup>71</sup> Full text of the research "L'esperienza genitoriale nella prima infanzia e percezione dei servizi" can be downloaded from: <https://www.societadolce.it/pubblicazioni/?ref=HOME&id=7466>



One element that characterizes Filonido is the glass gallery, linked with the garden directly, in which are concentrated the classrooms and spaces for activities.

The garden is an important element of the project, a kind laboratory of experience. Inside they are inserted specimen trees that they will pass the memory of the place. Children can find the elements of the landscape that are easily recognizable (the mountainous dunes, the plains, the grove) and that can guide them in the exploration of open spaces.

The building is characterized as "passive building", that offers the highest degree of energy savings and is potentially self-sufficient. Built entirely of wood, with natural and certified materials, including in their production cycle, giving enrollment highly sustainable ecological footprint. It features solar and photovoltaic system for the self-sufficiency of electricity and hot water needs, a geothermal system for air pre-cooling.

### **The working group**

The working group is composed of the educational staff, the support staff, from management coordinator and the pedagogical coordinator. All the people in the group have diplomas and professional qualifications laid down by the regional regulations. They are also required to attend training courses every year to ensure continued professional development.

The nursery pursues its institutional purposes using the active participation of parents, through the Assembly of the nursery, the Committee and the Coordination of participation organisms.

The Assembly is made up by the parents of all children admitted, by the operators and the Pedagogical Coordinator. It meets at least twice a year, usually at the beginning and end of each school year. The nursery Assembly elects its own representatives to the Committee, to review and discuss the general outline of the educational programming presented by educators and proposes meetings and contributions directed to the deepening of issues related to the problems of the first childhood and family.

The Committee is composed of parents representatives of children admitted and the representatives of the service providers. They have invited the Pedagogical Coordinator, social workers of the ASL (Local Health Unit), the neighbourhood representatives, in relation to the topics discussed. The Committee examines the nursery activity programs

and propose a timetable for parents' participation in their realization; involved in the organization of connection with early education initiatives in order to promote the continuity of educational interventions; handles relations with the District in order to promote awareness of children's needs; It proposes and organizes initiatives to promote the participation of parents in the life of the nest and awareness of families to emerging educational problems in the service.

The Coordination of the Presidents of the district' nurseries Committees shall meet at least once a year, convened by the President of the District (local administrative government unit), in order to make a comparison of their respective experiences, agree on joint activities and initiatives to advance joint proposals to improve the quality of services .

## **Conclusion**

The setting of educational and managerial project has its roots in the excellence experiences and the recognized quality of the Emilia Romagna Region nurseries, bringing innovative elements, specific, built on the principle of sustainability and flexibility not only structural and architectural but also educational.

Sustainability and flexibility are the specific characteristics of an educational service able to ensure over time the most qualified and most appropriate responses to the demands of the families.

Filonido is a highly flexible service that can modulate and transform itself according to the needs and proposals of children and families who live there, a continuous "movement". Tradition and innovation are conjugate generating a new educational model that offers more open activities where children choose personally between the different natural materials and the different areas of the nest.

Innovation in the structuring and modulation of the spaces that, thanks to the choice of furniture on wheels, can be rearranged according to the needs, the goals and desires of children.

Innovation in offering families a flexible service than the times and opening calendar; in involving families, not only through the shareholders' meetings, but also through "open nursery initiatives" that allow parents to live moments of the day to the nursery with her children.

Washable diapers, meals certified organic and “zero kilometre”, eco-friendly materials and furnishings, as well as targeted activities on responsible consumption, recycling and alternative energy complement the offer of Filonido in line with the decisions already taken by the Karabakh Consortium also in the other managed facilities.

## 4.4 Evaluation findings (results)<sup>72</sup>

### 4.4.1. Innovation in the use of financial and social capital resources<sup>73</sup>

From the analysis of the data collected through interviews with managers and local decision-makers emerged that no-one model fits all. Rather the key success factors for increasing the availability as well as the affordability of ECEC provision seems to reside in the flexible combination of different funding sources coming from the public sector (Municipal, Regional and State authorities) – as well as from the private NFP sector (social cooperatives and small-scale providers) and private enterprises (responsabilità sociale di impresa) – within a comprehensive framework of public policies that responsively addresses the needs identified within each community while striving for universalism. In this sense, the case studies analysed provide exemplary cases of how a diversified ECEC provision serving the diverse needs of children and families within local communities could be realised with a special focus on accessibility and economic sustainability.

In the case of Filonido – which is at the same time a company and municipal daycare centre – the economic sustainability of expanding the number of childcare places available for children whose families live or work in the Trade District of Bologna city, was ensured by a project financing agreement signed between the Municipality, a consortium of cooperatives (called Karaback) and private as well as public enterprises. The Karaback consortium is composed by a social cooperative (Società Dolce), two cooperatives providing cleaning and meal services (respectively Manutencop and CAMST) as well as a construction works cooperative (CIPEA). In response to Municipality's tender for building a publicly subsidised daycare centre in Bologna, the

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<sup>72</sup> This section has been written by Arianna Lazzari.

The content of paragraphs 4.4.1, 4.4.2 and 4.4.3 draws specifically on the analysis of the data collected through: a) interviews with key policy decision-makers and pedagogical coordinators; b) focus groups involving practitioners; c) individual as well as group interviews with children parents. The data collected through documentary sources (local and regional regulations, pedagogical project of the services,...) and ethnographic observations carried out in ECEC settings were also used for contextualising and complementing the information drawn from the analysis of interviews' and focus groups' data.

<sup>73</sup> The reference here is to the definition of *social capital* elaborated by Robert Putnam (1993) which draw on the commitment to public good, civic engagement, mutual aid and cooperation characterising the social and political life of municipality and regions in Northern Central Italy. For further references: Putnam, R. (1993) 'Social capital and institutional success.' In: Putnam, R., Leonardi, R., Nanetti, R. (1993) *Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

consortium elaborated a project encompassing the construction plan (CIPEA), the pedagogical project of the centre (Dolce social cooperative) and the service plan for cleaning and meals provision (Manutencop and CAMST), which therefore addressed comprehensively all the tender requirements. Once the tender was awarded, the Karaback consortium signed an agreement with the Municipality granting the management of the daycare centre for the next 20 years to the social cooperative – which is held responsible for the employment of educators and for their professionalization (pedagogical guidance and CPD<sup>74</sup>) – as well as to the service cooperatives in charge for cleaning and meals provision. Within such agreement, a certain quota of publicly subsidised municipal ECEC places are allocated to the daycare centre, allowing the consortium to recuperate the initial financial investment over the years. At the same time, a parallel agreement was signed with large-scale private companies (HERA, UNIPOL, Legacoop) and public enterprises (Emilia-Romagna Region) operating in the Fiera District in order to have allocated a certain number of ECEC places for the children of their employees. In this way, the affordability of ECEC provision is guaranteed – on one side – by the formal agreement with local large-scale enterprises which are partly subsidising the attendance fees for the children whose parents are their employee and – on the other – by the 20-years agreement with Bologna Municipality (convenzione) which allow families from the neighbourhood to access the service by paying the same fee as in municipal services. Therefore, the agreement with the municipality also sustains an equal access to ECEC in context of social mix, making the service accessible to children and families coming from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic status: in fact the Filonido serve a neighbourhood where middle-to-low income families traditionally lived before the recent expansion of the Trade District.

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<sup>74</sup> The provision of staff continuing professional development opportunities (CPD) and pedagogical guidance activities - encompassing supervision and mentoring - is considered to be an essential quality requirement for ECEC services. Therefore the availability of CPD free of charge for all staff as well as the presence of a pedagogical coordinator are integral parts of any agreement entitling private-NFP services to receive public subsidies from municipalities.

In addition, it needs to be said that the most important source of funding for supporting qualification initiatives through pedagogical coordination and ongoing professional development comes from the Emilia-Romagna Region that distribute financial contributions toward these initiatives at provincial level. The Region Emilia-Romagna is also responsible for orienting and coordinating the initiatives carried out at local level by the provincial pedagogical coordination group.

In the case of Serramazzone – rural municipality on the Modenese Appennine – the sustainability and accessibility of ECEC services is ensured through an integrated management of private forprofit and nonprofit provision that relies on a coherent framework of public policies and subsidies, sustaining pedagogical experimentation over times in order to address the constantly changing needs of children and families in the local community. At the present time, the integrated system of ECEC services that are publicly subsidised by Serramazzone municipality encompass:

- a small educational group ('Wondering around the wood') attended by 12 children aged 9-36 months and privately run by 3 educators in a home-like setting located outside the town,
- a pre-kindergarten class (sezione primavera) attended by 25 children aged 24 to 36 months and run by a social cooperative (Domus Assistenza) within a state-maintained preschool setting in the town centre,
- a centre for children (1 to 5 years old) and parents run by a local cultural association (polisportiva) within a community hall.

This flexible combination of ECEC services allow the municipality to cater for the educational needs of young children living in a small-size and quite isolated community, where the access to traditional centre-based provision would be either not possible (the closer centre-based facility is 10 Km away from town) or un-sustainable, due to the extreme variability in rates of newborn children over time. In addition, the building of a centre-based facility would have implied a considerable initial investment for a small-size municipality – especially in the present time of financial crisis and constraint of public expenditure (eg. National Stability Pact) – whereas subsidising already existing provision on the basis of municipal regulations and regional quality requirements appeared to be a more sustainable funding strategy over the long period. In this sense, the affordability of ECEC provision for families is ensured by the fact that the enrolment fees for attending these services are regulated under a formal agreement with municipality (convenzione), meaning that childcare places are publicly subsidised through supply-side funding dispensed directly to the services. Moreover, the municipality supports the coordination and the ongoing qualification of ECEC services at local level by providing pedagogical guidance, mentoring and networking activities (monthly meetings with the pedagogical coordinator) as well as opportunities for continuing professional development which are available free of charge for all the staff employed in the services.

In the case of the integrated ECEC centre of Comacchio, the sustainability and accessibility of services dedicated to young children and their families was ensured over time by the scaling up of a locally-based initiative originated within the voluntary sector. Such initiative took origin from the activism of a group of mothers<sup>75</sup> advocating for children's rights to educational spaces within an economically deprived community and, at the beginning, it was financially supported by the investments of an international NGOs (Bernard Van Leer Foundation). The funding initially provided by Bernard Van Leer Foundation allowed the professional qualification of the mothers setting up the advocacy group, who displayed a strong commitment to children's rights and social justice but had no professional background in regard to the education and care of young children. Therefore, a substantial investment was made at the beginning on the professional development of the low-qualified staff who operated within such services – who mostly consisted of previously un-employed mothers – and in the ongoing improvement of educational practices through pedagogical guidance and mentoring provided by highly-experienced professionals<sup>76</sup>. After the Bernard Van Leer funding expired, the municipal administration took over the responsibility for subsidizing the ECEC centre within a formal agreement between the Comacchio Municipality and the advocacy group directly running the services through their Association (called 'La libellula')<sup>77</sup>. In the latest period, the advocacy group 'Association La Libellula' became a social cooperative (Giro-Girotondo) employing qualified staff and managing the ECEC centre as well as other educational services for children and young people in the neighbourhood within a formal, long-term agreement with Municipality. Therefore, the sustainability and accessibility of ECEC services in the case of Comacchio was ensured over time through a responsive municipal administration that sustained the cultural growth of locally-based initiatives by providing both financial and pedagogical support

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<sup>75</sup> The self-organised initiative of the group of mothers who gave origin to ECEC services in Comacchio found a fertile ground in the feminist and mutual aid movements, which characterised the history of the community in the post-war period. In fact, many mothers who took part to the advocacy group reclaiming educational spaces for young children were active members of the National Feminist Movement (*Unione Donne Italiane*) – that played a crucial role in advocating for the National Childcare Act enacted in 1971 (law 1044/1971) – or of its catholic counterpart, the Italian Female Group (*Centro Italiano Femminile*).

<sup>76</sup> These pedagogical experts were either researchers from the Educational Department of Bologna University (Frabboni & Dozza, 1994) or experienced pedagogical coordinators from the Emilia-Romagna Regional Institute for Professional Development (IRPA).

<sup>77</sup> The salary of the educators employed through the Libellula Association was paid in full by the Municipality, which offered a permanent support to the qualification of the ECEC integrated centre also in terms of pedagogical coordination and guidance as well as in terms of continuing professional development.

through public funding and ongoing qualification initiatives<sup>78</sup>. At the present time, the Comacchio integrated ECEC centre encompasses the following services run by the social cooperative Giro-girotondo and funded by the Municipality:

- a half-day educational service (spazio bambini) attended by children aged 1 to 3 and run over 5 mornings a week,
- a centre for children and parents running for 4 afternoons a week proposing several activities depending on the age of the children (eg. infant massage for 0-12 moth babies and their mothers, small group sessions for children aged 1-2 and their parents/carers, open group sessions run for children aged 2-5 and their parents/carers over 2 afternoons a week),
- a leisure time centre for children aged 6-10 run twice a week in the afternoon (including Saturday)
- a family support service, which avails of a professional nurse running maternal and infant care programmes (pre- and post- natal) and of a family counsellor operating within the centre for children and parents, informally supporting those parents who might need additional advice (upon their request).

By providing diversified services under one roof, the integrated centre of Comacchio proved not only to be efficient in terms of public administration – in fact the cross-sectoral cooperation between health, education and social services prevents the dissipation of funding in different streams – but also effective in terms of outreaching – as the adoption of a multi-dimensional approach to family support allow to anticipate and meet comprehensively the needs of children and parents living the neighbourhood. In addition, the flexible combination of part-time day-care and sessional services for children and parents increases ECEC accessibility especially for low-income families and for those families in which only one parent is in employment.

The lessons learnt from the case studies analysis point out that CERTAIN CONDITIONS ARE NEEDED for the successful development of social innovation in the ECEC field. Such conditions encompass:

- the presence of a coherent system of policies providing a regulatory framework according to which funding to public and private-NFP provision could be systematically provided on the basis of *accessibility and quality requirement satisfaction* (eg. inclusion of children with special needs, income-related fees favouring the participation of low-income families, reasonable adult:child ratio, pedagogical coordination, amount of paid working hours without children allowing staff to participate in collegial meetings and ongoing professional development activities);
- a shared commitment to ECEC as a public good at all level of governance – from the regional level, to the local level to the level of ECEC service providers – which encourage

<sup>78</sup> In addition, it needs to be said that the most important source of funding for supporting qualification initiatives through pedagogical coordination and ongoing professional development comes from the Emilia-Romagna Region that distribute financial contributions toward these initiatives at provincial level.



bottom-up policy advocacy and sustains innovation through responsive policy-making processes.

The analysis of the data collected through interviews to key-stakeholders at the different locations in which the case studies were based also highlight that social innovation in ECEC is more likely to happen in contexts where:

- traditions of civic engagement and educational activism are present or emerging in the local community;
- the initiatives aimed to the development of ECEC services are driven by a commitment to children's rights and social justice (starting from parents and communities groups) rather than from a 'return of investment' rationale (eg. ECEC as profitable assets).

#### 4.4.2. Innovation in governance processes: networks, coalitions and partnership

Beside addressing the issues of sustainability and accessibility, the case studies shed light on how the pedagogical quality of ECEC provision and its ongoing improvement could be nurtured through the co-creation and sharing of knowledge, expertise and experiences that is generated by innovative forms of public governance (local and regional networks, partnerships with parents, coalitions for policy advocacy, inter-agency collaboration) . As stated in the Communication 'ECEC: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow' it is in fact not sufficient that early childhood services are available and accessible, but they must also be of high quality in order to make the difference in the life of children and their families (European Commission, 2011, p. 2). As recalled in the European Quality Framework (Thematic Working Group on ECEC, 2014) quantity without quality is a little merit. Evidence shows that ECEC services can enhance children's subsequent school success – hence contributing to reducing early school leaving and promoting social inclusion – only if they are of a high quality; on the contrary poor quality ECEC may do more harm than good and increase inequalities (Thematic Working Group on ECEC, 2014, p. 16). In this regard, the case studies analysed may offer inspiring examples showing on how pedagogical quality could be achieved and promoted through local and regional initiatives, thus offering useful insights for policy-makers operating at these administrative levels.

In the case of Filonido – the “corporate welfare” and municipal daycare centre in Bologna – the educational quality of the service is promoted through the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and pedagogical guidance for all the educational staff operating within the service. The daycare centre not only shares

the pedagogical vision and educational mission of the social cooperative which is directly involved in its management, but it is also part of a the broader municipal ECEC system. This means that the Filonido personnel is entitled to take part to the professionalising initiatives proposed by Bologna Municipality (eg. professional exchanges and networking with colleagues from municipal services) as well as to the qualifying initiatives promoted by the Emilia-Romagna Region (eg. experimentation of the regional guidelines for the internal and external evaluation of the pedagogical project). In addition, the pedagogical coordinator of the daycare centre (employed by the social cooperative) is entitled to take part to the provincial network of pedagogical coordinators (CPP) which tasks are to document and exchange the good practices realised within ECEC services at local level, to analyse and discuss the needs for improvement and to take part to policy consultation processes<sup>79</sup> .

The pedagogical quality of the integrated ECEC system in Serramazzoni was not only achieved through the provision of CPD opportunities and pedagogical guidance for ECEC staff operating in the municipality, but it is also sustained through inter-agency collaboration among educational services, cultural/leisure-time centres in the district (eg. library, sport activity centre,..) and community groups (eg. parent associations, voluntary organisations). In this case, the municipal pedagogical coordinator plays a key-role in sustaining networking and cooperation among the different stakeholders involved as well as in orienting educational practices across services within a shared pedagogical vision. The strength of the integrated system of ECEC in Serramazzoni is a close inter-connection between the level of local policy-making and educational practices – which promote the active engagement of families and other community actors – providing a common framework for joint action while at the same time valuing the diversity and specific identity of each partner involved. The solid partnership developed between key decision-makers and community stakeholders in the case of Serramazzoni allowed to develop local childhood policies that are more responsive of the needs of children and families and – at the same time – promoted the ongoing

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<sup>79</sup> The participation to bottom-up policy consultation processes is realised through:

- the direct participation of pedagogical coordinators to the annual regional seminars organised by the Department of Social, Educational and Family Policies of Emilia-Romagna
- the participation in the Provincial Coordination Network's meetings, whose reference person – called CPP tutor – is directly involved in policy roundtables organised by Department of Social, Educational and Family Policies.

improvement of educational practices enacted in ECEC services through a systematic pedagogical coordination linking these two levels.

In the case of the integrated ECEC centre in Comacchio, the pedagogical quality of the service was achieved over a long period of time through ongoing professional development and pedagogical guidance, involvement in action-research projects and inter-professional cooperation across the healthcare, social and educational sector. Since its very beginning, the educational project of Comacchio integrated centre was strongly marked by the collaboration with the University of Bologna (Frabboni & Dozza, 1994) and with the Emilia-Romagna Regional Institute for Professional Development (IRPA) which sustained its pedagogical growth (Andreoli & Cambi, 2001) through the professionalization of the staff working in the service. The ongoing qualification of educational practices over the years was furthermore supported by the involvement of local pedagogical coordinators and practitioners in action-research projects aimed at rethinking the educational environment arrangements in the perspective of a multi-purpose use of the facility, where common spaces had to be shared by different users at different times (Gariboldi et al., 2007)<sup>80</sup>. In this sense, one of the main strength of centre – that contributed significantly to the ongoing improvement of pedagogical practices – is the close inter-professional collaboration among early childhood educators, nurses, social workers and family counsellors which promotes a more holistic and integrated support to families with young children starting from their birth. At the same time, the ongoing confrontation and exchange among practitioners coming from different background, allow them to mature a deeper understanding of the development of young children across the different domains, therefore increasing their professional competence both at individual and team level. In this case – as well as in the case of Serramazzone – a crucial role is played by pedagogical coordinators<sup>81</sup>. Pedagogical coordinators are in fact responsible for facilitating cross-sectoral cooperation among

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<sup>80</sup> Gariboldi, A., Fabbri C. & Mauro, D. (2007) *Questa è un'altalena : spazi e contesti al nido d'infanzia: l'esperienza ferrarese*. Bergamo: Junior.

<sup>81</sup> In the case of Comacchio there is a constant interplay between the coordinator from the social cooperative that directly run the centre (Giro-girotondo) and the municipal coordinator who is in charge of supervising and orienting cross-sectoral cooperation among the centres' services and the healthcare / social services in the district. The practitioners operating in each service meet once a month for planning, documenting and reflecting on their practices with the supervision of the social cooperative coordinator. In addition, three meetings a year are held among the different professionals operating across these services in order to share common goals and integrated strategies to achieve them: these meetings are jointly facilitated by the municipal pedagogical coordinator and by the social cooperative's coordinator.

services at local level and for leading innovation by constantly improving the quality of educational and care services by connecting the social demands emerging in the community with proactive interventions that are shaped within a shared vision of change (community regeneration).

In line with the findings of the European study CoRe (Urban et al., 2011), the evidence gathered from the case study analysis underline that the QUALITY of educational and care practices enacted in early childhood settings is more likely to be the RESULT OF JOINT ACTIONS INSCRIBED WITHIN A COMPETENT SYSTEM rather than the direct consequence of practitioners' individual competences. In the cases of social innovation that were examined, the key-factors contributing to the successful development of high quality ECEC practices are connected to:

- the elaboration of a regulatory framework ensuring an even level of structural quality across ECEC services in the Region (R.L.1/2000 and amendments) in relation to: coordination, mentoring and guidance of professionals at team level, practitioners' joint work opportunities and non-contact time for participating in collective meetings, in-house professional development, action-research projects (approx. 80-120 hours/year) and meeting with parents;
- a shared pedagogical vision that actively encourages the participation of families and community stakeholders to the management of ECEC institutions: in this sense, the fact that early childhood institutions are conceived as a public good (see box 1 under par. 4.4.1) implies that parents are perceived as partners rather than as end-users ('service approach') or costumers ('private business approach');
- the presence of a coordination infrastructure and of participatory networks at municipal, provincial (CPP) and regional level which sustain bottom-up innovation and the scaling up of successful initiatives through the documentation and exchange of good practices...
- ... in this sense continuing professional development activities are organised in the form of 'laboratories for social change' (Manini, 2006) – empowering ECEC professionals – rather than as 'expert led training' aimed to the acquisition of predefined skills;
- inter-agency cooperation among professionals and institutions operating across different sectors (eg. healthcare, social welfare, education) for the welfare of young children and their families at all levels of the system (from the local community level to the inter-departmental collaboration at regional level);
- policy decision-making processes that are carried out in close consultation with ECEC professionals – such as the pedagogical coordination networks (CPP) – with community advocacy groups and with other relevant stakeholders.

In particular, the analysis of the data collected through interviews and documentary sources emphasise the CRUCIAL ROLE played by pedagogical coordinators as SYSTEM FIGURES. By constantly connecting – in their everyday work – the educational and social needs emerging at local level (regular meeting with ECEC staff and families, services' supervision) with pedagogical practice innovation through guidance and

professional development initiatives, the coordinators become catalysers of change both at the level of ECEC services and at the level of local policy advocacy processes. In this regard, the findings from the cases studies highlight that it is precisely the mutual interaction of bottom-up and top-down innovation processes – characterising the connection between experimental pedagogical practices and responsive ECEC policies in E-R – to be key-factors of success of local social innovation initiatives.

#### 4.4.3 Pedagogical innovation: reconceptualising educational practices and re-framing the value of participation

In this section, the thematic analysis of the transcripts from focus groups with practitioners and interviews with parents will be presented as complementary. In fact, the decision to discuss the findings emerging from the analysis of practitioners' and parents' perceptions in the same paragraph was taken because the thematic categories emerging from both data pools revealed a symmetry between the two perspectives, hence it appeared more meaningful for interpretation to juxtapose them within the same section. In the following sub-paragraphs, each thematic category emerging from the analysis of focus group and interviews will be narratively discussed by making specific reference to the statements made by practitioners and parents. In this perspective, the aim of the thematic analysis presented below is to highlight those common features that are associated to successful ECEC practices according to practitioners' and parents' perceptions.

The presence of a strong pedagogical identity and ethos shared by all staff working in the setting is identified by practitioners as a key-element of good practice as it contributes to orient educational decision-making processes in everyday interactions with children and parents on the basis of shared goals and values.

'Parents like it here, not only because of the place where the setting is located, but mostly because of the relaxed rhythm in which children can make experience...without hurrying to do things. In the early childhood children need to have a 'slow time' that respects their needs...[early childhood] is a precious time and this service is the home of children, where they can take their own time... The small educational group (piccolo gruppo educativo) is not a formal institution as such: it is half-way between a home and childcare centre. This allows young children to learn to become independent by participating to everyday life activities: they learn to stay away from the fireplace as it is hot, they learn how to help to prepare the food and they learn to manage waiting times by self-organising their own activities...' [SEG.ED1.12 – Serramazzone]

‘And also the older children learn to take care of the younger...they hold their hands when we go walking in the wood, they help them eating at the table...and at the same time the younger children try to imitate the older ones...this is the strength of working with mixed-age groups!’ [SEG.ED3.112 – Serramazzone]

‘The strength of our service (nido) resides in the shared pedagogical vision of the cooperative which is implemented through an intentional planning of educational initiatives, a special attention to the way the [learning] environment is organized and a constant reflection on practices that takes place within the team of educators with the support of the pedagogical coordinator. Team meetings and coordination meetings help us to look critically at our everyday work, by exchanging views with colleagues...and this lead us to improve our practices...’ [DCC.ED2.3 – Filonido]

‘What makes our service special compared to other services is the reciprocal influence between the children’s centre (spazio bambini) and the centre for children and parents (centro bambini e genitori)... The educators share the same coordination meetings – which is quite unusual – and this allow them to exchange and mutually enrich their competences...among educators who work with children in the morning and educators who work with children and parents together in the afternoon... Although they are working in different contexts, they share a common approach towards working with families... [CP.25 – Comacchio]

‘Sometimes successful practices are also transferred from one context to another: for example the idea of the morning coffee was taken from the centre for children and parents because our colleagues in the afternoon always welcome parents with a coffee to make them feel more at ease... It is an informal moment, a homey moment...and it has been introduced in the children’s centre in order to facilitate transitions from the home to the setting...in this way parents and children can take a bit of time to spend together before the daily activities start...’ [CC.ED5.25 – Comacchio]

The statements reported above, clearly highlight that the development of a shared pedagogical approach orienting the educational practices enacted in each setting is nurtured by a constant exchange among practitioners (teamwork) and by an ongoing reflection on their everyday work, which is taking place with the facilitation of pedagogical coordinators. In this sense, collegiality, collective reflection and pedagogical guidance could be seen as the most effective strategies for improving pedagogical practices and for sustaining practitioners’ professional growth. Collective reflexivity in

the context of collegiality not only deepens educators' pedagogical understanding by setting the conditions for the generation of shared knowledge, but also nurtures the ethical dimension of their educational work. In fact, the decision-making processes carried out in the context of collegial meetings drive all actors involved to decide not only what to do (Am I doing things right?) but also to question the reasons why (Am I doing the right thing?) .

From this point of view, what all the services included in the case study have in common, is a strong commitment toward working with families in a participatory and inclusive way, that values the contribution each parent can bring to the Centres. The adoption of a “welcoming approach” towards parent – sustaining their informal involvement in the everyday life of the setting – seems to be a key-success factor for developing mutual relationship of trust between educators and families, especially in contexts where a certain diffidence toward formal childcare exists.

‘We usually ask parents to come and visit us with their children before the school year starts. In this way, the parents can have an understanding of what we do here and his/her child can start familiarizing with the other children and with the new environment... We have some ‘open days’ in July during which the parents who will enrol their child in September can join us for a couple of hours, spend time with us during the daily activities and free play... This helps parents a lot, as they can see their child is comfortable and enjoys playing with other children...and if the parent is trust the setting, it will be easier for the child to settle-in in September...’ [PGE.ED1.18 - Serramazzone]

‘We attach great importance to listening to parents as they can teach us a lot about their child...and this help us to develop a better understanding of their children... Furthermore, if they parents feel valued, they come back, because here they do not feel judged, they feel at home...This does not mean that there are no rules – but rather than the parents feel as they belong... And it is so rewarding to see parents who live in vulnerable conditions, facing a lot of difficulties in their private life, when they come here they feel confident, they want to ask questions, they are willing to talk and to exchange views with other parents!’ [CBG.ED8.28 - Comacchio]

The opportunity to get engaged in the life of the Centres and to see what children do and learn when they are together is very much appreciated by parents, and their way of looking at their own children change after such experiences. They realise the educational value of childcare services – which are not just seen as places where

children are cared for when parents are at work – but are spaces of socialisation and learning, where children’s potentialities and capabilities are nurtured through meaningful interactions with adults and peers.

‘Before my first child started to attend the small educational group, my wife and I were strongly against childcare but we were both working parents and we had no choice really... By thinking back, I am now convinced that it was the most important experience my child could have ever had from an educational point of view! And I realised that as a parent while being there with my child. When I accompanied him in the morning, I used to spend even half an hour on the armchair in the playroom, I played not only with my child but also with the other children, while the educators were offering me a coffee...Then I became the first father to be involved in the project “educator for a day”!’ [Italian father]<sup>82</sup>

‘The sense of independence that very young children develop while attending the centre is amazing... As an example, I used to take the skin off the banana before giving it to my child to eat...instead I have noticed that the educators let the children find out themselves how to peel it...They leave them the space to try out things, to experiment, to solve the problems themselves’[Italian mother]

‘When I entered the service as ‘educator for a day’ I saw with my eyes the things that children are able to do when they are together, older and younger...they help each other and they learn to care for each other!’ [Peruvian father]

‘At the beginning it was not easy for my child to socialise with other children as she used to stay at home with me all the time...in the 2 years she attended the service she developed authentic friendships, who are still important to her now, although she is in kindergarten...’ [Italian mother]

Establishing a relationship of mutual trust and reciprocal learning between educators and parents is particularly important in order to enhance the participation of families living in vulnerable conditions, which are at risk of social exclusion and might fear stigmatization when approaching a formal setting. In this sense, adopting a “non-

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<sup>82</sup> The ‘educator for a day’ is a project that is implemented – in slightly different ways – across all the services included in the case study. Within this project, each parents who wish to spend a day in the ECEC centre, is given this opportunity. In some cases, it might be that parents are also invited to run a small activity with children based on their expertise, in other it might be that parents are invited to the services during special occasions to spend times with their children (eg. lunch, tea break and snack, festivals, field trips...).



judgmental” and empowering attitude in working with families is crucial. This might encompass creating opportunities for “listening” to parents rather than “talking” to parents, as well as developing informal parent support initiatives sustaining their capability rather than providing them with ‘parental education training’ or ‘expert advice’ which might be perceived as patronising and therefore might turn out to be counterproductive.

‘I got to know the centre for children and parents through another mum attending the pre-natal course ...she told me they do infant massage here and gave me the contact... I started attending the baby massage course and at the end of it the nurse told me that in the same centre they also organise parents and toddler groups...As I was not employed and I was at home all day with her, I started to go and we are still here after 3 years! My child and I learned a lot of things together here...She learnt to socialise with other children although she did not attend childcare. And I felt supported in my role as mother – not only at practical level – but also at psychological level... I learned to listen to her, to be responsive of her needs and...let’s say that I learnt how to better interact with her...especially in those situations in which I was facing difficulties and I used to panic...now I’ve learned how to deal with them...’ [Romanian mother]

Only if parents are involved as active agents of change in ECEC, their participation can be *scaled up* and become a powerful resource for bottom-up social innovation. This, in turn, could contribute to the regeneration of local communities starting from advocacy for children’s rights – as in the case of Comacchio – or to the improvement of the wider compulsory school system, like in the case of Serramazzoni:

‘Having had the experience of participation in the committee for the management of ECEC services set up by the municipality, we decided to set up a parent committee also in the state-run pre- and primary school attended by our children. As there is no coordination between the 7 state-school institutions spread across the municipality, we decided to set up a parent committee to promote a more unified approach throughout the different school levels, starting from kindergarten to lower secondary school... We also help schools with fundraising initiatives in the communities because, you know, here the schools do not have many resources... We decided to set up the parents committee a summer of many years ago... We started to plan together what to do...we created an association and we are still here, after 8 years...and we all started when our children attended the childcare centre...>> [Italian father president of parents committee]

## 4.5 Theory of change

The debate on early childhood education and care (ECEC) actually moves beyond the dichotomy between ECEC as preventative measure to support children's development versus ECEC as a labour market intervention to support women in the workplace. As documented in the NESSE report (2009; p. 26 - 53)<sup>83</sup>, there are many competing, intersecting and overlapping arguments in defining and providing a rationale for ECEC provision, which contribute – in turn – to shape policy focuses and to orient policy decision-making processes (*see table in the next page for a concise overview*).

From the case studies analysed, it clearly emerges that the rationales driving Emilia-Romagna Region's public investment in ECEC services since the 1970 – as well as their ongoing quality improvement – was a right-based rationale combined with a social justice rationale.

Children, including young children, were viewed since the very beginning of ECEC in Emilia-Romagna as competent human being and citizens bearers of rights, such as:

- the right to participation in decision-making processes on matters that them (UNCRC, 1989)<sup>84</sup>,
- the right to actively engage in the social and cultural life of their local community (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993)<sup>85</sup>,
- the right to receive responsive care and education which address their needs and nurture their potentialities (Mantovani, 2010)<sup>86</sup>.

Therefore, the ongoing improvement of early education and care services was driven by the commitment of ECEC professionals (educators and pedagogical coordinators) to observe children and to constantly revise their practices by reflecting on children's experiences and progresses, as well as to promote the participation of families and local community members to the life of the services. At the same time, this commitment was accompanied by the awareness that pedagogy, civic engagement and political engagement are strictly linked: this awareness, in turn, had profound implications for the way ECEC policy-making processes were shaped at local and regional level.

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<sup>83</sup> NESSE (2009) ECEC: key lessons from research for policy makers. Brussels: European Commission. [https://olc.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/Early\\_Childhood\\_Education\\_and\\_Care\\_Key\\_lessons\\_for\\_Policy\\_makers\\_2009\\_0.pdf](https://olc.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care_Key_lessons_for_Policy_makers_2009_0.pdf).

<sup>84</sup> UNCRC. 1989. United Nation Convention on the Right of the Child. [www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx)

<sup>85</sup> Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman, G. (eds) (1993) *The hundred languages of children*. Norwood: Ablex.

<sup>86</sup> Mantovani, S. (2010) 'Vygotsky and the Early Years of ECEC in Italy.' In Tuna, A. & Hayden, J. (2010) *Early Childhood Programs as the Doorway to Social Cohesion*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

**Table 1: Rationales for ECEC provision**

Rationale	Research Perspective	Policy focus
Early education is a good investment in that it mitigates the expense of remedial action in primary and secondary schooling and results in subsequent adult productivity, and in the relative absence of anti-social behaviour.	Economics, human capital theory, long-term societal benefits: Draws on large-scale longitudinal aggregated data sets and cost-benefit studies of early childhood interventions.	Provide targeted early education for most vulnerable children
Early education (and care) is only a good investment if it is of high quality. Poor care may do more harm than good for the most vulnerable children.	Child development research that suggests good child-staff ratios, staff training and good programmes are essential aspects of quality	Provide targeted early education services with emphasis on defining and monitoring quality
Early education benefits all young children, enhances dispositions for learning and socializes them for starting school, especially children from poor or migrant families	Child development research about children's learning processes and teachers pedagogic practices	Provide universal early education as part of an education system, ensure access/support for the most vulnerable
Education and lifelong learning essential to competitive knowledge economy. Education promotes social mobility	Education research and comparative education data from OECD and other trans-national sources	Provide universal early education as part of education system
Women are essential contributors to a dynamic economy.	Economics, cost benefit studies of labour market participation, gender studies	Remove disincentives to women's participation by the provision of full-time childcare (Barcelona targets)
Working mothers contribute to tax revenues and lessen the need for social security payments; they make an important contribution to family	Welfare economics, emphasis on workplace participation of single parents and other parents who would otherwise be dependent on state benefits	Maternity, paternity and parental leave and provision of full-time childcare, work support schemes
Mothers need to be involved with their children; parents are a child's first educators.	Child development research which stresses critical early period and importance of family environment and mother-child attachments.	Home visiting schemes, parenting classes, mothers as volunteers
Child poverty impacts severely on children's educational performance, their sense of self-worth and their subsequent societal contributions.	Social welfare research on the impact of poverty on families	Redistribution of taxes and benefits and other social policies to mitigate child poverty; labour market legislation such as minimum wage
Children, including young children, are rights bearers and <i>all</i> children have a right to protection, provision and participation	Legal requirements of Human Rights/Child Rights legislation Legal/sociological studies investigating children's experiences and well-being in the here and now, and children's agency	Broad approach, including reduction of child poverty, health and welfare support; defining provision from children's perspective.
Low birth rates below level of replacement a societal problem	Demography, social welfare studies of population growth	Pro-natalist policies, child benefit, maternity and paternity leave, childcare

It meant, in fact, that the development of local and regional policies were driven from *bottom-up* rather than *top-down* and that local administrators and pedagogical coordinators worked closely together in order to improve the quality of educational services for the children and their families.

In this sense *policy consultation* on one hand – and *policy advocacy* on the other – could be considered the two side of social innovation in the ECEC field. This led, over the years, to the development of a competent system that – on one side – sustained educational experimentation, research and dissemination of good practices – and on the other – created a solid infrastructure for the public management and ongoing qualification of ECEC provision (Gandini & Edwards, 2001)<sup>87</sup>. Such infrastructure encompasses: a coherent framework of public policies for the regulation and ongoing qualification of early childhood services – including long-term financial investments – a widespread network of pedagogical coordinators sustaining practitioners’ professional growth and collective reflection for the constant improvement of their practice and finally the social management of ECEC services (*gestione sociale*). *In particular, a participatory approach to the management of ECEC services is a key-concept around which the ‘theory of change’ revolves in the case studied, as professionals (educators and pedagogical coordinators), parents and, more in general, all the stakeholders involved are viewed as advocates for children’s rights in the community.*

The fact that ECEC services found their origin in a context of citizens’ active engagement in their management shaped the concepts of *gestione sociale* (social management) and *partecipazione* (participation) that are still features of ECEC provision today. According to Mantovani (2010, p. 67), *partecipazione* is ‘a key-concept in which pedagogy and civic and political engagement are strictly linked’, finding expression in ‘organised forms of participation and control’ (2007; p. 1106) such as teachers’ collegiality and parents’ involvement in decision-making committees. Collegiality refers to how the meanings and purposes of educational practices are discussed and enacted collectively through practitioners’ joint work and collective reflection (Picchio et al., 2012)<sup>88</sup>. Parents participate in the everyday life of ECEC institutions through their involvement in decision-making committees, which is part of a wider effort to *democratise* educational practices and sustain a public debate about education in the framework of local communities. In this sense, it could be said that both democratic decision-making structures within ECEC services and widespread political consultation at local level have contributed to reinforce the idea that ECEC is a common good, a responsibility of all citizens.

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<sup>87</sup> Gandini, L. & Edwards C. (2001) *Bambini: The Italian Approach to Infant/toddler Care*. New York: Teachers College – Columbia University Press.

<sup>88</sup> Picchio, M., D. Giovannini, S. Mayer, and T. Musatti. 2012. Documentation and analysis of children’s experience. an ongoing collegial activity for early childhood professionals. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 32 (2): 159–170.

To conclude, it is to be acknowledged that – whereas nowadays there is a growing international consensus among researchers and policy-makers that ECEC should be viewed as a *public good*, the arguments for increasing *public investment* in the provision of early childhood services vary greatly. Recent research on policy-making emphasises economic, social and educational advantages within a “human capital paradigm” that is becoming increasingly dominant in shaping political orientations towards public investment in the ECEC sector (NESSE, 2009). The risk associated with these studies is constructing children in instrumentalist terms as “profitable assets” rather than considering them as “competent human beings” and “citizens with rights”, thus undermining possibilities to increase their participation in democratic decision-making processes (Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012; Lister, 2007)<sup>89</sup>. Against this background, the case study of ECEC provision in Emilia-Romagna we analysed lead us to reflect on the nature of the political commitment that is at the core of a vision of ECEC understood as a democratic and emancipatory practice.

The case study analysis in this sense contributed to the advancement of the perspective that views ECEC as a public good on the basis of civil-rights and social justice rationales. This section examined the contribution offered by the case studied — in terms of implications for practices and policies — in the light of the issues at stake in international debates.

*Nurturing an understanding of ECEC as a public good through the enactment of democratic practices in early childhood services.*

Understanding ECEC as a public good means first and foremost to consider educational institutions as “public spaces” for all citizens, where democracy is enacted as a way of thinking, being and acting, of relating and living together (Urban & Moss, 2011)<sup>90</sup>. The respect for children as “competent human beings”, experts of their own lives and active co-constructors of knowledge should be reflected in everyday educational practices in ECEC institutions. This implies adopting dialogic pedagogical approaches that engage with children in meaning-making and that sustain reciprocal relationships within educational processes. In this perspective, educational practices are elaborated from children’s learning strategies in

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<sup>89</sup> Kjørholt, A. T. & Qvortrup, J. (Ed) 2012. *The Modern Child and the Flexible Labour Market: early childhood education and care*. London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Lister, R. 2007. Why citizenship: where, when and how children? *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, 8(2), pp. 693–718.

<sup>90</sup>Moss, P. & Urban, M. 2011. *Democracy and experimentation: two fundamental values for education*. Bertelsmann Foundation: [www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/de/media/xcms\\_bst\\_dms\\_32994\\_2.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/de/media/xcms_bst_dms_32994_2.pdf)

everyday interactions (with peers and the environment) and nurtured by practitioners' ongoing reflection on children's experiences (through documentation and collegial work). Enacting democratic practices in ECEC institutions also means engaging with parents, by encouraging them to participate in educational decision-making and by building participatory alliances that contribute to create networks of social solidarity within local communities (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2009)<sup>91</sup>. Given these premises, ECEC institutions become *public fora* in which change can be generated by involving all those who have an interest in education – parents, practitioners, citizens and local administrators – and in policy-advocacy.

*Promoting a vision of ECEC as a public good through consultative policy-making.*

Understanding ECEC as a public good means to adopt – at each level of governance – democratic decision-making processes as a way to reclaim collective choices for the common good. In this sense, a well defined national policy providing a broad pedagogical framework and a unitary approach to the regulation and financing of early childhood services creates the conditions for democratising ECEC governance through devolution of powers and responsibilities to local authorities. The elaboration of broad policy frameworks that leave space for local experimentation not only increases the sense of agency of local actors in promoting social change (Urban, Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2011)<sup>92</sup> but also promotes citizen's civic engagement and shared responsibility in the management of ECEC services. In this perspective, the setting up of a flexible infrastructure that makes local experimentalism sustainable over time and the development of a coherent policy framework that guarantees continuity of pedagogical approaches within a long-term vision, become essential elements for sustaining the qualification of ECEC experiences between tradition and innovation, within a dialogue that constantly re-define the meanings and purposes of early childhood education and care.

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<sup>91</sup> Vandenbroeck, M., Boonaert, T., Van der Mespel, S. & De Brabandere, K. 2009. Dialogical spaces to reconceptualize parent support in the social investment state. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10, pp. 66–77.

<sup>92</sup> URBAN, M., VANDENBROECK, M., PEETERS, J., LAZZARI, A., & Van LAERE, K. 2011. *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care. CoRe Final Report*. Brussels: European Commission.



## 5. Concluding Remarks<sup>93</sup>

In this section we would like to summarise the main findings emerging from the three in-depth case studies realised during the research project.

In order to reach this objective we will utilise the rhetoric form of “questions and answers”.

1] First question: are the three case studies analysed examples of “Social Investment” Policies?

The answer is “yes” but in peculiar different ways.

The Bologna ECEC service Centre is a clear example of a “social investment policy” given the fact that it offers a very high quality nursery service, at the price established by the Local Authority, to a very broad number of working women (the Centre has the capacity to host up to 81 children 0-3 years old), in the proximity of their working place. The Centre, indeed, is located in a very high density offices district (the so-called “Fiera district”) that is characterised by the concentration of many private enterprises (consultancy, financial and commercial intermediaries), cooperative enterprises (Insurance, Bank Services, Umbrella organisations giving services to their membership) and Public Agencies (the Regional Government), with an high level of women workforce. The possibility to entrust their children in a very modern and functional nursery service – with a flexible time schedule – near their work, allows them to conciliate their working life with their family life, and to ameliorate their life-working balance. It is about very high skilled, well educated, middle class women who occupy middle-high level job positions in the tertiary sector of the economy.

The two Comacchio ECEC service Centres, on the other side, are an example of “social investment policy” in the sense that they offer a “space”, a place, where people of different generations, ethnicity, religions and cultures can meet in a safe and controlled environment, in order to pursue the education of their children. It is a particularly

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<sup>93</sup> This Section has been written by Andrea Bassi.



important facility especially in a traditionally deprived and isolated geographical area, and a key actor of the community in the effort to build an inclusive and cohesive society.

The Serramazzoni ECEC service Centre, on its part, is an example of “social investment policy” given the fact that it offers a nursery service – in a small, informal, friendly and familiar setting – to families that otherwise would not have the possibility to care in a high qualified way for their children. Taking into consideration that the municipality of Serramazzoni is a small village on the hills outside the big city of Modena, in a very industrialized and developed area of production, with many young families without relatives in the neighborhood, the Home Centre represents the only possibility for the parents to conciliate their job careers (especially for women/mothers) with the desire to have children. As it appears in many interviews: “if the Home Centre was not there, I would not have been able to work. I should have been forced to stay at home, caring for my children”, said a lady who has three children of different ages, and all of them have been enrolled in the Home Centre.

2] Second question: are the three case studies analysed examples of “Social Innovation”?

Even in that case the answer is “yes” but in peculiar different ways.

The idea below the theoretical framework is that Social Innovation happens when it is activated – by some actor (individual or collective) in the system of interaction (relational network) – a change, in one of the four dimensions of the relational field of action, that is able to “activate” additional changes in the other three dimensions (positive feedback).

Only “when” and “if” the changes interact with each other reaching a certain level of intensity (scale) the entire system of interaction changes (saturation effect) in a substantial, stable, and somehow permanent way.

So in order to start a Social Innovation process we need a socially innovative entrepreneur, but in order to allow the Social Innovation to diffuse and reach a scale sufficient (critical mass) to become adopted by the majority of the actors in the system of interaction, it is necessary that a certain number of pre-condition should be complied.

It is a long-standing process with several forward and backward steps, the final success of a Social Innovation process is related to the level of “path-dependency” or “path-breaking” orientation presents in the system of interaction.

### The Bologna ECEC service Centre

The Bologna case studies could be understood as an outstanding example of Social Innovation from the point of view of an original and unusual combination of economic and financial resources (see the “left quadrant” in the Social Innovation Compass – Fig. 1.1 on pag. 11 of this Report). In this chart we represented the Social Innovation process as an “emerging phenomenon” that arise from the interaction (virtuous circles) of four main dimension of social action: Resources – Authority Flows – Routines – Beliefs.

As it has been clearly illustrated in paragraph 4.3.3 the peculiarity of the Nursery “Filonido” is the very innovative arrangement of public, private for profit and private nonprofit actors, that made it possible to (literally) build a new nursery Centre in the “Fiera District area” in the city of Bologna.

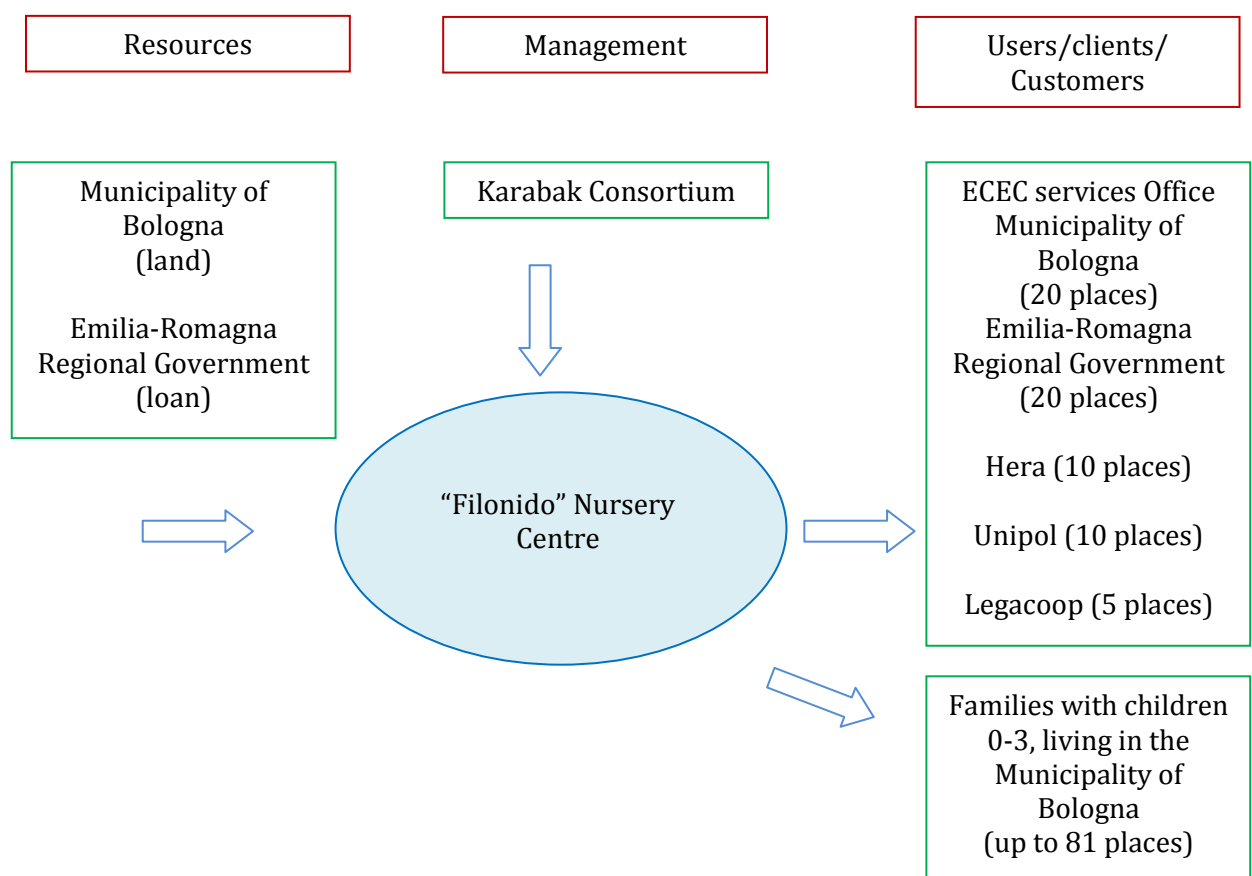


Figure 5.1 – Networks of actors involved in the “Filonido” Nursery Centre.

- The Bologna Municipality = gave the land (for a thirty years period);
- The Emilia-Romagna Regional Government = gave a loan of 2 million Euros<sup>94</sup>;
- The cooperative movement = set up a consortium (of five members);
- The Consortium Karabak = built the new Centre;
- The cooperative “Dolce” = run the Centre;
- The cooperative “Camst” = supply the food service;
- The Emilia-Romagna Region; the Hera corporation; the Unipol Corporation; the Legacoop umbrella association = pay for a certain number of places in the nursery for the children of their employees.

### The Comacchio ECEC service Centres

The social innovation element of the Comacchio case study consist of an attempt to modify the “cultural orientations” and the “beliefs and values” of the local community towards childhood and adolescence (see the “bottom quadrant” in the Social Innovation Compass – Fig. 1.1 on pag. 11 of this Report) in an isolated e deprived area of the country.

Until the end of the ‘80ies of the last century, the territory suffers of a lack of attention toward early childhood education; there were literally no services dealing with problems related to the accompaniment of the development of boys and girls in the early years, the support of parents’ role and facilitation of parent-child relationship.

Only the successful interaction of international, national, regional and local actors could create the fertile environment for the development and the growth of a germ of experimentations around which take roots a bunch of activities and projects that are still going on and were able to multiply themselves in a plurality of services and facilities.

### The Serramazzone ECEC service Centre

The social innovation element of the Serramazzone case study consist of an attempt to modify the Authority Flows of the local community in regards to the system of services towards childhood (see the “upper quadrant” in the Social Innovation Compass – Fig.

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<sup>94</sup> On a 2,5 million total budget for the construction of the Nursery Centre.

1.1 on pag. 11 of this Report) in a dynamic and lively small town situated in one of the most developed economic and productive territory of the Region.

The growing demographic trends of the beginning of 2000's with the increasing number of young families with infant children, both parents working outside the home, without relatives living nearby, it springs a pressure towards the local administration to implement ECEC services. The impossibility to build a Nursery Centre – due to the high investment cost – pushed the municipality to promote the research of new settlement and innovative solutions, possibility that was allowed by the new regulation framework enacted by the Regional Government in 2000. The new Law (n.1 of January 2000) at the Art. 3, differentiates the plurality of ECEC services available and it introduces the typology of “Home Educator Service”.

So the Serramazzone case study constitutes a clear example of combination of different elements that changes the flow of authority in the local community, giving voice to the requests of families with infant children, and creating a “new market” for ECEC services in which new private providers can find an opportunity to develop their businesses.

### 3] What are the main commonalities that the three case studies share?

Usually the process of activation of an innovative ECEC service follows a common pathway, that can be summarized in the following phases:

1. In the first place an “activist” or a civil society association (women, parents, workers’ union, neighborhood committees, social movement, etc.) (Forno and Graziano 2014) put in place an advocacy campaign, pushing the local administration (municipality) towards the adoption of deliberation in order to activate a ECEC service;
2. After a long period of negotiation (bargaining) the public administration enacts a resolution that establishes the institution of the ECEC service, sometimes as an experimentation (for a limited period of time, usually from one up to three years);
3. There are also counter-powers, usually the institutional regulation framework is not very open to experimentations, pilot projects and innovative services. Especially inside the public administration bodies (at the different government levels: regional,

- provincial and municipality) the employees try to impede any kind of deviation from the routine (“business as usual” way of working);
4. After a certain period of activity, the ECEC service result as a very successful policy, coalitions of supporters are formed in order to sustain the initiative, and the Municipality is pushed to extend the period of experimentation or, often, to adopt the initiative as a permanent policy;
  5. At this point, also the workers, that in a first phase opposite the establishment of the service, should recognize the success of the idea and, unable to obstruct (block, impede) it, they start a strategy of “acceptance”, in the first place passive and then more and more active;
  6. Once the ECEC service became a permanent activity, usually, the citizens as customers and the workers as care deliverers, individual or associated (Guidi and Andretta 2015), are able to obtain an extension of both the period and the times of opening, or the activation of additional complementary services.

This very long time consuming process shows several features that can be summarised as follows:

- it is clearly a bottom-up process (starting in the civil society and moving towards the public administration);
- it requires the presence of a “social” entrepreneur (usually a woman or a group of women);
- it puts in place a multi-level interaction system with a plurality of actors (global, national, regional and local);
- it activates a complex network of networks (economic, political, social and cultural);
- it consists of an “emerging” phenomena, springing off from the system of interaction in an unintended and unexpected way;
- it requires the combination of several pre-conditions, among which a very key role is played by the bundle of resources present in the territory;
- it represents an institutionalisation process through which new practices and way of thinking enter in the mainstream policy.

#### 4] Lessons to be learned from the three case studies

1 – Social Innovation initiatives are highly “context dependent”, not only in the sense that what can be understood as an “innovation” in one territory it is not in another one, but because social innovations are strictly interweaved and interlocked with a network of actors (that we defined the “relational system of interaction”) that are embedded in a specific economic-political-social-cultural environment;

2 – The Public Sector is not always an obstacle to the development and the diffusion of Social Innovations, on the contrary in order to be effective, stable (scaling-up), durable and sustainable social innovations require a crucial role to be played by the different agencies of the Public administration;

3 – The private for profit sector can play an important role in social innovation initiatives, but usually – in the field of social, health and education services – is not the actor who starts the experimentation process that give way to the social innovation initiative;

4 – Civil society organisations at different level of social action– micro, meso and macro – play a crucial and central role in the beginning of small, locally based, experimental, pilot activities, projects and actions, that constitute the favourable environment in which social innovations can start, grew and develop;

5 – Social innovations are more effective (and sustainable) when they are able to trigger a virtuous circle that activate processes of change in all the four dimension of the “social innovation diamond” (or compass): a) Resources distribution; b) Authority flows, regulation, actors’ roles; c) Routines, social norms and relationships; d) Values and Beliefs.

6 – Social innovations often emerge as an “unintended consequences” of social action put in place by social actors who want to solve an immediate, concrete and urgent need of their individual members (or families);

7 – Usually at the beginning of a social innovation process there is the action of a person or of a group of people that play the role of “entrepreneur”, not only nor primarily in an economic sense of the term, but more widely form a social, political and cultural perspective.