Towards the Integrated System 0-6: Opportunities and Constraints

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ECEC services in Italy have historically developed in two institutionally separated segments, one for children aged 0-2 and one for children aged 3-5. In 2017, a national reform, aiming at increasing equity and quality in the field, introduced the "Integrated System 0-6", whose implementation requires complex actions of reorganization. One important action concerns the creation of the so-called "Poli per l'Infanzia", characterized by the sharing of places, resources and services. The integration is not meant only between the cycles (vertical) but also with services and actors inhabiting the same territory (horizontal), with a potential in terms of counteracting children's educational poverty. This contribution aims at exploring the potentialities and the criticalities of such a process, at two different scales of analysis. A first scale investigates the main discourses and expectations about the Integrated System 0-6 and, more specifically, about the "Poli per l'Infanzia", drawing on a set of interviews with experts, policy-makers, educators and territorial stakeholders. A second scale investigates the local conditions for the process of integration, drawing on an in-depth single-case qualitative research. The case-study was carried out in a neighbourhood in Milan, selected on the basis of a preliminary statistical and territorial analysis for its specific demographic composition, indicators of social vulnerability and for the high heterogeneity of ECEC services it displays. The research group developed a set of interviews with key-actors managing and working in the different ECEC services (day-care services and preschools, both private and public, state and municipal), and other services targeting families with preschool-aged children (health services, associations, libraries), as well as a set of observations of places green spaces, playgrounds, streets and pathways frequented by children and their families. The empirical material allows to identify the existing and potential networks and synergies, but also to disentangle criticalities and gaps that would need to be overcome in the perspective of an integrated system.