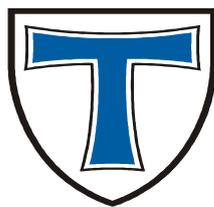


**Quality Care and Good Governance.
Goals and Recommendations for Child Care Policy at an
International European Level¹**

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¹ The text reflects findings and perspectives from the research papers and discussions in the TSFEPS project, with participating teams from France, Italy, Sweden, Germany, England, Belgium und Bulgaria; the illustrative examples in the boxes have been mostly contributed by the national teams; the full responsibility for the text is nevertheless with the authors.

Formulating goals with respect to child care policy is difficult due to two dilemmas:

- First of all, there is the general problem that the state of development and the historical background of the various countries that have taken part in the TSFEPS project are rather different, it is difficult then to sketch goals beyond the presentation of a list of banal points that mirror the smallest common denominator.
- Secondly, there is a problem due to the development of the TSFEPS project itself: while the international project gives a very good overview on national developments, illustrating and concretizing them by case studies, it does not really have a specialised topic, the research has been focussed on; therefore recommendations can touch issues, mentioned in its title, like social cohesion, but one will not be able to be too specific because the TSFEPS project has not really focussed on this. While there has been a bit more emphasis with respect to issues of governance, there is the same problematic.

Therefore, the following list of possible goals and recommendations is covering a wide field. After some introductory remarks concerning a future guiding image of day care services and their governance (section I) the two following parts will be on quality (section II) and governance (section III).

I. A future oriented image of day care services and their governance

The work of the project has strengthened the view that the further development of child care services in Europe should aim at services that guarantee continuous and reliable support to families over the whole childhood period. There is a need for services that besides wider coverage develop qualities in care, pedagogies and education; services should seek the dialogue and cooperation with the parents; they should meet the needs of children, family needs and the quests for a kind of labour market participation and work- life balance that represents a fair compromise between families, women and children on the one and the interest of employers on the other hand. This altogether can strengthen social cohesion. Child care services should not only be seen as an important matter of rights and well being of children and families, but as well as an investment into infrastructures, that can help in reducing inequalities by inheritance, while having simultaneously important positive outcomes for social and economic development – be it by their integrative effects for families or by their by-effects in job creation.

Consequently, reassessing the guiding image of child care first of all calls for a turn from an image of services linked exclusively with consumption and day care towards an image linked much more with issues of early support of chances and potentials by investments, public and private. This includes secondly a turn with respect to governance. Beyond traditions that point at patchy and residual facilities with an exclusively local responsibility on the one hand, and different from traditional concepts of hierarchical top down regulation on the other hand, the development of good governance in child care services should be associated with shared responsibilities and commitment among various actors, something that includes a good balance of local and central, public and private stakeholders. It should be centred on a good working axis between local public authorities and service providers on the one and the parents on the other hand.

II. Coverage and Quality - Recommendations for developing child care services

Coverage – making care continuously available

Within Europe and the wider European Union there is only a minority of countries that have achieved so far a continuity of public responsibility for childcare, addressing children from birth to 10 years. While childcare services for the preschoolers from 3 to 6 represent nowadays normality, there is still a sometimes dramatic gap when it comes to services for the 0 to 3 old children; in a number of countries as well systems of reliable full day school- care, including care during school holidays, is missing. It should be therefore a first priority goal to extend considerably, wherever needed, the number of places in crèches or other facilities for the 0 to 3, having in mind, that there is an EU – recommendation for reaching a coverage rate of 30%. Next to that, those countries, where school systems do not entail the task of providing services and care for younger pupils 6 – 10 beyond the morning core school-hours should rapidly develop such offers.

Beyond its wide coverage, one of the main characteristics of the Swedish childcare system is its institutional seamlessness. In Sweden, care is normally provided for 1-6 year olds at the same facility. Generally, children thus remain at the same place throughout their preschool years. At larger (i.e. most municipal or non-public for-profit) facilities, the only physical and social transition they have to experience is the internal move from younger to older age groups. At smaller facilities (generally co-operative ones), age groups tend to be integrated. This makes for more stable and long-term relationships both between the children themselves and between the families and facilities. Pedagogically as well as socially, the model is strongly oriented towards continuity and coherence. There are no radical points of rupture within childcare practice. Extending thereby the usual period in care may also increase the parental motivation to invest in involvement.

Without sufficient coverage for children younger and older than the usually covered age of 3 to 6 there is a clear deficit of possibilities for parents to plan for their respective balance of work and family tasks, thereby devaluating what might have been already achieved with respect to the age group 3-6. Furthermore it should be taken in mind, that facilities for the age groups mentioned before have a strong link with educational and equity linked purposes, given the fact, that especially early child care of good quality can be a reliable contribution to

the childrens' personal development; especially children from difficult family and community backgrounds can profit from early professional care and an enlarged and more diversified offer of care and services in school.

However, especially policies for early childhood care (0 to 6) have to respect the fact, that many parents do not want in this phase of family life make regular use of continuous institutional provision. A considerable part of them prefers to do the bulk of care work themselves. A more family-centred pattern of early childcare has been supported in many countries by various regulations such as legislation for parental leave and special child care allowances.

These recommendations do in general not discuss the issue of allowances for families versus developing service-networks at their disposal nor the wide issue of making working life and times more family friendly. Nevertheless it must be stated that - especially with respect to the 0 to 3year old children – there is a policy dilemma. Policies that want to guarantee full and guaranteed choice result in a considerable burden. Foreseeing financial and regulatory provision for both alternatives - parental care (including the respective labour market regulations and child care allowances), as well as more care by professional service - is a costly endeavour.

However, besides this it should be underlined that especially with respect to early childcare 0 - 3 parents may frequently need different types of support and service qualities: e.g. services that can be used only from time to time, without bureaucratic prerequisites and services that correspond as well to needs others than to look for the children, supporting parents, helping them to get together, give advice and consultancy on various concerns of young families.

Types of services: making a new generation of services take shape

The diversity of services has increased and wherever this is meeting the needs of users, such a trend should be strengthened. This holds especially true for the aim of overcoming a sharp division between collective professional services on the one and informal family care on the other hand. In between of these extreme points, the offers of child minders, parent-child initiatives, and support and counselling services can strengthen and multiply the bridges between the private and public dimensions of child care.

Tempo per le Famiglie is a program in various Italian municipalities that offers structured activities, where children under three years of age together with a reference adult (mother, father, grandparent, childminder) can spend time on a regular basis (e.g., a few hours twice a week) with other couples of adults and children, in the presence of childcare pedagogues who encourage participation and mediate the relationships which arise and develop. The places are equipped with toys similar to a crèche. The aim is the integration not only of children but also of adults, as well as parenthood support.

What has become visible is a new generation of services that deserves more support and attention. There is need for

- More services open for being used to varying intensity and according to different time patterns
- More services that can be used casually from time to time
- More services that are available even at quite unconventional hours

In France during the nineties, child minders (*assistantes maternelles*) have been the dominant form of formal childcare and represent a significant component of the local welfare mix in childcare services, notably for 0 to 3-year-olds. The development of individual childcare (childminders and home childcare) has partly been driven by the lack of places in public crèches, partly by the search for flexible time-patterns in childcare and a preference of parents for a personalized service, particularly for the under twos. The central basis for the expansion of a system of individual childminders is a *public childcare policy*; it comprises on the one hand benefits and fiscal incentives granted by the central government to parents who employ childminders or home care services; on the other hand it has developed a differentiated systems of rules and regulations that formalizes this (in other countries like Germany, Italy or Spain) quite informal type of child care with respect to issues like training, working conditions and rules for the interplay of child-minders and parents. Individual childcare is formally organized by means of childminder registers set up by the local authorities, information and professionalisation places for parents and professionals and a services development policy (*Relais Assistantes Maternelles*).

This strategy of upgrading the role of childminders in the overall system of childcare has as well allowed for creating considerable additional care in relatively short time. The counterpart is an unbalanced development and funding between individual and collective childcare (crèches, halte-garderie) during the 90s and the reinforcement of social polarisation of childcare services. Organized individual childcare remains a form of childcare that is often out of the reach of families with low incomes.

- More services that do not only give relieve but offer as well active support for parents (in addition to what they offer for the children), be it by facilitating the socialising of issues

of parenthood, by offering advice, or by linking with a wider range of family support services designed to strengthen the social, cultural, or labour market integration of parents

The *Familienservice*, in Germany, is a very successful private agency that acts as a broker of childcare. Contracted in usually by large and medium-sized enterprises, it offers a wide range of family support services to the employees of the respective firm. Most often however, it helps women to find childcare solutions which are individually tailored to their specific needs and guarantee the flexibility and reliability that enables them to follow their career path. To this purpose,

- it helps to find out about existing childcare places
- closes gaps in provision by maintaining and qualifying an own pool of day mothers, au-pairs, nannies, and baby-sitters
- helps to organize and supervise complex care arrangements, and
- mediates the setting-up of parent initiatives and workplace services.

It has pioneered a number of innovative service offers, such as back-up services, which step in at short notice, e.g. when a carer falls ill, or so-called *Kinderhotels*, services which offer care overnight and on weekends. While childcare is the core issue of the *Familienservice*, it provides information, referral and brokerage also in many other matters related to reconciling family and working life. Founded in 1992, it is meanwhile represented in all big German cities and has expanded to other European countries.

- More services aimed at managing individually tailored care arrangements for best possible compromises between child- and parent-centred goals, issues of child care and development, issues of staying in touch with ones' networks, labour market participation and career issues.

In *Belgium* a policy is in place where, similar to France, the endeavour is to give parents a real choice between different types of childcare, namely between collective services and individual childcare provided by childminders, which arguably presents the most flexible form of care. To this aim, there exists a national system of subsidized childminders. Public funding regulations guarantee that the parental contributions are not higher for a subsidized childminder than for a collective service. Since these contributions are also dependent on income, parents with a low income have the same opportunity to afford a childminder than the more affluent ones. Between 1985 and 2001 the number of subsidized childminders has nearly doubled and they make up for a third of childcare places in the French community of Belgium, being the most important source of out-of-school care.

The quality of day care for children is however more than the sum of the qualities of individual facilities:

- Better quality calls for a networking of different types of facilities, with some of them being complementary.

- A good integration with the school system is needed, especially since in many aspects early child care systems must be seen increasingly as parts of the wider landscape of education.
- Finally, with the diversity of services increasing, parents need more transparency on local child care markets be it by information on the internet, central agencies offering advice, information or brokerage; the more parents are seen as well as customers that make choices, the more important it is to work on what economists call information asymmetries.

In France, a new type of combined service, *the "multi-accueil"*, tries to answer the problems often linked to a diversified and fragmented service offer, such as the lack of transparency. The multi-accueil combine different types of services and care approaches on one site, including e.g. regular day care in a crèche, halte-garderies (childcare - offers of a highly flexible nature that can be used occasionally at short notice), parent-child groups, or specialized services which prepare the transition of smaller children to the école maternelle. The combined facility offers the advantage that parents can make better choices. Children can easily move from one service to the other if the necessity arises, without changing place. The staff working in the multi-accueil also move between the services offered in the institution in order to widen their professional skills. In many places, networking the offers of institutional day care and of child minders (assistantes maternelles) is an additional goal. The multi-accueil provide a point of referral and of organisational and professional support for a certain number of childminders working in the vicinity. By this, the childminders have additional access to some training and advice.

A special challenge will be to achieve a fair balance between the interests of children, parents and governments; this is concerning especially

- The balance between facilities that save time for working parents without offering too much for children on the one hand and offers that concentrate on high quality care, pedagogies and education for the children themselves, on the other hand
- The balance between the interest of children and parents in good caring-, living- and working time - patterns and the widespread drain into a constant availability for labour market career and consumer purposes.

Against the utopia of total mobility (concerning the time patterns and the choice of professional caring facilities, supposing that there is a constant chance for easy connections) there is a need to develop shared concepts for a certain degree of stable and continuous partnerships between families and services, with both sides taking their responsibility.

Professionals: training levels and working conditions that meet the quality standards requested in child care

This is calling for concepts of professionalism that entail the ability to develop such partnerships and to answer the quest for new and additional qualities concerning e.g. pedagogical and educational issues; in some countries this may call for a higher level of education and training as well as a higher level of payments.

Furthermore, given that services will have to deal with scarce resources and a call for efficiency, especially professionals in leading positions should have managerial competences, be able to deal with items like resource-mobilisation and -management, the networking of ones' unit a. o.

The financial and material working conditions should work against a high turnover of staff, which often mirrors problems like being underpaid, overworked or excluded from participation.

Beyond qualified and motivated staff, better service quality needs a minimal degree of "surplus – resources" in order to allow professional staff not only to keep an achieved standard, but to innovate and test improvements that may be generalized later on.

Finally working conditions in child care should be such that they allow for real careers, i.e. the possibility of additional training and phases of qualification at later stages of ones' working life.

Services for cohesion

By tradition, issues of social cohesion in child care have been taken up in two ways. First of all cohesion has been taken up by tradition as an issue of specialised services for children with special needs (reaching from orphans over to children with various physical and psychical handicaps). Secondly, cohesion was taken up as an issue of inequality, to be tackled both by a widened coverage, the creation of reliable rights on childcare as well as by keeping fees and extra costs at a minimum. Both concerns are still present and valid, but it has become visible, that cohesion, while including them, can mean even more.

With respect to coverage many regions and member states in the European Union are far away from a good balance between demand and supply; states, laender but as well municipalities should set themselves targets concerning coverage.

Furthermore they should safeguard, that as long as facilities are scarce, the distribution-principles should not work against the weaker and more vulnerable groups of parents and children. Childcare services should be available for both, parents who are in paid work and those who are not, as childcare has an educational, a social and a reconciling function.

In Bulgaria, in order to enhance the quality and continuity of education, compulsory part-time preschool groups have been introduced. Each child has to attend a preschool group, which is offered in the kindergarten, the year before starting in school. There, children are to be supervised by qualified teachers, doctors and other childcare specialists. Due to their compulsory nature, preschool groups reach children, who are otherwise less likely to attend a kindergarten although they could benefit most – namely children from minority groups and from disadvantaged family backgrounds. At the same time preschool groups try to motivate parents to take a higher interest in their children's education and to actively support their development. Children from minority groups learn the Bulgarian language and thus get better chances for integration. It is as well expected that the preschool groups will help to reduce the level of dropouts in schools.

Beside these two classical dimensions of special needs and lacking coverage, other ones have won impact in many instances

- The link between lone parenthood and poverty is to a great deal determined by access both to paid work, work integration, social support and child care services; while child care support for lone parents who look for work is of high importance, it must be discussed to what degree it should be allowed to put pressure on lone parents with smaller children to hand more care over to professionals in order to be able to (re-) integrate into a working life, that is – especially at the lower ends of labour markets – often detrimental to the workers' possibilities to meet children's needs and the rights on a family life.
- Child care services are a central part but not the (total) solution for a reduction of the tensions between work and social and family life. Making working time patterns more

family friendly is of equal importance; to get there is however especially difficult in those segments of the labour market where parents with lower qualifications will have to seek work; it must be underlined that access to flexible care services is of special importance for many jobless or working mothers in need.

In England, the governments' Childcare Strategy with its goal to tackle social disadvantage among children and parents via childcare services has created new types of services: *Early Excellence Centres* have been set up in England since 1997. They are especially targeted to disadvantaged areas, aiming to cater for the multiple needs of young children and families on the site and to disseminate good practice in childcare. The Early Excellence Centre described in the case study from England is one of roughly 100 similar government initiatives across the country. It provides integrated multi-services, such as integrated education and day care for children, a teenage mother baby care unit, an after school club, a supplementary school for ethnic minority children, a stay and play facility, a family room, training programs for disadvantaged parents (parenting skills, nutrition etc., but also labour market oriented training programs), and health visitors. Professionals with training backgrounds in health, education, and social services are working together. For the work of the Centre community building goals and a holistic approach to children and their families are central. The latter involves working in close partnership with the parents. In the particular Centre, part of it also is to provide opportunities for them to work and train. The Centre is perceived as being a crucial means of integrating parents into the community.

- Simultaneously, policies should work on the apparent contradiction that often the most flexible childcare solutions (i.e. child minders) are – due to their higher costs - not available to those who may need this most.
- The vulnerability of families shows today many different faces, like isolation, forced mobility a.o. pressures that call for personal and individualized support services. Many families feel insecure or overburdened by the challenges of care and education; this creates a special need for childcare services that take on a wider role in supporting parents in the education of their children, in raising their skills, and in strengthening social networks around families.
- Ethnic pluralism is a special challenge and there is no general easy formula when it comes to debate whether or not ethnic minorities should run their own facilities in childcare or be integrated in facilities that are open for all local citizens. Yet the need to reach out for families with a different cultural or ethnic background at an early age of their children presents a challenge in all the countries.

- Already today thinly populated regions represent a special challenge; they call for smaller facilities that can be reached in a reasonable time or for special solutions (like child minders, ambulant services, etc.).

Summing up, one can say that policies for child care services in most countries have to undergo a double transition. First of all they must turn from rather patchy offers meant foremost to relieve working mothers over to a regular service that underlines its unique role for early childhood development by including pedagogical and educational tasks. Secondly, they must turn from a collective institution addressing children to a system that is in touch with the educational system and includes a variety of services that address families as well – both as a resource and as a system of persons that need and deserve support themselves. In such a perspective the various faces of inequality call not only for a wider coverage, but as well for special and personal arrangements and support services. This altogether is representing widening challenges and potentials for professionals, their training levels and perspectives of developing satisfying work and career patterns in child care.

III. Towards good governance in child care provision and development

The systems of governance in child care stem from very different traditions. On the one hand there was and still is in some countries a system that is patchy, and where exclusively local responsibility, sometimes combined with the responsibility taken by various associations from the civil society or local communities, does clearly prevail. On the other hand some countries have managed to build up universal systems, where strong levels of rights and standards go along with a strong saying of the public authorities and a firm hierarchical component. What is developing in between of these two poles is a great variety of governance systems, often marked by the fact that roles, functions and responsibilities are found to be scattered among various public and private institutions and sectors. Financing rules are unclear, there are parallel and uncoordinated responsibilities, new actors enter the field. Even in countries, where all tasks and responsibilities had been once concentrated in public hands there have been planned and unplanned forms of an increasing pluralism, where the setting up of facilities, provision, rule- setting, decision making, financing and control can be attached (simultaneously) to families and local communities, various organisations of the third sector, market actors and public authorities on different levels. While processes differ (planned decentralisation in some countries, setting up of rights and responsibilities of supra-local authorities not engaged before in others) the communality is a “mixed” economy of child care that represents sometimes more a “mixed up” state of governance rather than an agreed division of roles and responsibilities.

This general trend towards rather complicated mixed systems of governance, which bring together various actors, sectors and institutions, past and present regulations, local and central responsibilities, is often grown over a long time and can not be changed and put into more order easily. Nevertheless, even when respecting different regimes and traditions, one can say that “good governance” today should

- find an appropriate central-local balance
- give the users (the children and their parents) a strong and central role in shaping the care arrangements to be made over time

- look for types of networks and divisions of roles and responsibilities between various providers and stakeholder that are built on consent, a sense of fairness and a strive for synergies
- find a proper balance between market-type, public-hierarchical and finally civil society based contributions and steering mechanisms
- Financing should as well be seen as a joint responsibility – neither exclusively public nor private
- There is the special challenge of finding the right forms of cooperation for development – for proper dynamics of expansion and change of systems
- Monitoring and control should respect the fact that in such mixed forms of governance various sides will represent different priorities and perspectives.

One must however differentiate between governance issues that are concerning proper steering mechanisms and the tasks of giving child care as a major concern a new and better standing in public opinion and on the policy agenda. In many countries, child care services are part of a wider agenda – a search for renewing family policy and a better work life balance, a matter of innovation and just on the way to get a much stronger impact. Under such conditions, policies must look to get support not only from the parties directly concerned, but from the (local) civil society at large. “Pacts for the family” from this point of view should build partnerships that involve various public bodies, representatives of the business sector, associational life and the community.

Central and local responsibilities: in search for a good balance in multi-level-governance

While in some countries dynamics work towards more decentralisation, giving local systems and providers more room for finding appropriate solutions, there is a need in other countries to establish some central responsibility and standards to be guaranteed and respected. This holds especially true with respect to the role of public authorities as goal setters and moderators; a strong role in governance does not necessarily mean that public authorities have as well a strong role as providers.

Systems of multilevel governance should allow for a new compromise between central and local initiative, standard-setting and diversity. They should entail a basic regulatory role on central levels while upholding chances for policy initiatives at the local level; municipalities

are challenged to maintain or build up an own strategic unit, that can safeguard that local authorities play throughout a central role in the more or less diversified systems of mixed and cooperative service systems.

Multilevel governance should make sure, that due to a focussed central responsibility global initiatives for change and progress can be taken, even under conditions where third sector organisations and representatives from the business sector as parts of the civil society have a strong impact. The same should be guaranteed on a local level, helping thereby to balance basic levels of universal rights in child care with variations that reflect local abilities to do different or better.

A strong services- parents - axis

Systems of governance and provision in the care of children should be built in a way that supports a combination of reliable services on the one and stable and supportive families on the other hand, working jointly for children. Services – even if they take a lot of the total care hours – can nevertheless be built for encouraging parents in their role; reversely they have a lot to gain from the involvement and active participation of parents in terms of “soft” quality dimensions, enrichment of the services, etc. Parents also will mostly look to safeguard services that allow for continuity with respect to persons and settings and for easy transitions over time (e.g. from the preschool to the school phase).

What is needed therefore is a strong representation of parents in the system of provision and its governance

- On the level of the single providing organisation and on the level of the system
- In terms of communication and social participation (local interaction and mutual support) as well as in terms of participation in political administration and decision-making
- Special support should be given to parent-led childcare initiatives.

Cooperation in a mixed system of governance and provision

Like in other areas of public services, child care systems need a well working mixed economy, that means first of all that the material contributions to childcare by *all* sides should be acknowledged – support for children should be a matter of cooperation that besides the public authorities, the organisations of the civil society and the family should as well address

the organisations of the private sector in various ways (as contributors to service financing, corporate citizens, employers that care for family-friendly arrangements with respect to working time a. o. items).

In order to safeguard, that matters of pre-school education are set on a broad basis and develop in dynamic ways, the city council of *Granada (Spain)* has set up a multi-stakeholder governing body for the respective local schools. In this policy making body, representatives of different political groups take part, as well as of workers, professionals, parents and neighbourhood associations, with each of them having the right to speak and vote.

While the balance of roles and responsibilities in such a mixed economy of care can vary, the practices of governance should be based on consented rules and aim at taking account of the whole of a diversified care system; tendencies to integrate a co-responsibility of third sector organisations half-heartedly, while going on to privilege public providers, are as insincere, as governance systems, that ignore e.g. wide lacunae of black and grey care work – e.g. by childminding on a purely informal base – while at the same time using the contributions of such sectors.

In principle, as well as practice, today's Swedish collective childcare legislation offers identical terms of provision for all providers – be they municipal, non-municipal for-profit (corporate or small-scale) and non-municipal co-operative or associational – a highly regulated pluralism setting universal standards. National public financing patterns are overriding, as are the main staff categories, the relevant structures of public supervision and monitoring, and the standards for health, safety, parent fees and curriculae. No strong patterns of discrimination from the side of the national system are discerned. The comprehensive approach seems to be able to support and cope with institutional variety on the service level without major difficulties. It should be noted that this policy of setting universal rules and standards followed a period of controversial discussion whether for-profit providers should be admitted in childcare anyway, and where there had even been a law to block services operated on a commercial basis. A special aspect of the general regulatory system is concerning the fees of parents. The *maxtaxa*, introduced in 2002 by the Social Democratic government does not allow for childcare services to charge parent fees above a (national) maximum limit. This limit is fixed in terms of absolute prices and as a proportion of parents' income. At present, the maximum tariff for the first child is set at 127 €/month or three per cent of the parents' combined income; 84 €/month for the second child or two per cent of the combined income; and 42 €/month for the third child or one per cent of the parents' combined income.

A new mixed economy in child care calls for an integration of the potentials of the private sector without letting public systems slip under private governance. An encouragement of initiatives from the civil society should not exclude private co-funding of schemes and private initiative on a commercial basis.

New forms of governance in child care with a plurality of organisations and concerned partners should however encourage forms of participation, that are not just based on the special partial or economic interests of some providers or financing institutions; representatives of parents, of childcare professionals, trade unions and chambers of industry should take part as well.

In the German city of *Frankfurt* a partnership culture has taken shape over the years, including the public authorities, public providers, providers from the third sector, the parent initiative sector, interested enterprises and other organisations concerned. This cooperation has as central elements

- The local commitment to foster a pluralism of providers, whereby also new providers and bottom-up initiatives are strongly endorsed
- A systematic development and focus on the city's role as moderator and goal setter rather than provider of childcare
- A strategy of guaranteeing fair and equal market conditions to the different providers, e.g. through a uniform regulation of parent fees (and complementary public funding), which abolishes the possibly discriminating effects of higher fees in non-municipal services
- A participatory style of decision-making, through working groups, round tables, etc. on various levels
- Enabling policies which show e.g. in unbureaucratic funding programs and a responsive administration.

Furthermore such systems can profit from networks – i.e. semiformal networks of exchange and opinion building e.g. of providers and/or professionals, that look for better service quality, innovations or an enrichment of their jobs.

Good balances and synergies between different ways and logics of steering the system

In the present debate about governing systems of personal social services various solutions are proposed and tried out, putting the accent on one of three potentially dominating principles

- First of all there are the supporters of more market oriented steering mechanisms: by vouchers, choice of parents as consumers, competition among providers, marketing techniques and management rules imported from the private sector
- Secondly there are those, that underline the central importance of clear and universal rules; equal and strong rights call for a strong role of public administrations and a public service steered by agreed standards and inputs
- Finally there are those that argue for giving more room to inputs from communities and the civil society, be it by mechanisms of user involvement and participation, the support of third sector organisations, parents associations and other forms that work for an increasing role of the social capital that results from “fund- and friend-raising” in the running and financing of services that can offer more than the usual standard.

Whatever element will be given the leading role – it should be safeguarded that one-dimensional solutions are avoided, marginalizing either the market dimension of choice and competition, the dimension of hierarchical standard setting and control, or the dimension of civil society and community based participation. Users of child support services should be given chances to participate as customers with a degree of choice, likewise as active participants that can cooperate in service provision and development, and finally as citizens that enjoy rights on services and that are welcomed to voice their concerns through forms of active citizenship.

Financing: a fair contribution of the various sides concerned with child care

The above mentioned principles for a new mixed economy of provision and a joint governance of child care systems entail as well some hints with respect to co-responsibilities in financing.

First of all there is a need for central funds in order to safeguard that local funding and provision, mirroring uneven economic potentials and different degrees of local commitment, does not translate into child care provision without universal guarantees and standards.

Secondly, the fees of parents should be structured in ways, that they do not give disincentives for using the system; fees that eat up the bulk of the (additional) income of a working mother are contradictory to a policy that wants to upgrade the role of child care services for all; a

similar problem can be caused by income-differentiated fees; in case they are not fixed properly, there can be an unwanted incentive for the better off to look for exclusive individual and private solutions.

Thirdly, one should be aware of the various traditions of mixed funding in a mixed economy that differ from simple purchaser-provider splits. While in the latter concept one only finds (state-)public and individual (user) responsibility for funding, the traditions of subsidiarity represent forms of a mixed economy that stimulate as well collective social and solidaristic contributions: associations and other organisations from the third sector receive public funding on the basis that they add something on their own (co-funding, contributions of volunteers etc.) Such a rule can restrict to some degree types of mixed systems that invite to work for public money with purely private commercial interest. On the EU level, concepts and traditions of subsidiarity should therefore be considered when constructing a new mixed economy and governance system in child care.

Finally, given the fact that financing child care is seen as a part of family policies, and considering that fresh money for service development under conditions of scarce public finances must often be taken from other funds, it is recommended to see state-public family support as a combination of direct income support (by transfers and tax exemptions) and support by services; in many European countries the latter component has been undervalued for a long time.

Approaches that make it easier to start up service-systems and to get the dynamics needed for development

Since in many countries the issue of child care services is concerning the aim of boosting the number of places available, proper developmental approaches should be set up. They should not only comprise (local) government, providers and parents, who usually manage such a system altogether, but, with a view on the public opinion build as well on a wider spectre of partners and organisations that are willing to act as corporate citizens, interested to engage in a debate on the future status and character of child care services as part of politics for the family and sustainable growth. Giving child care a better status does not only call for proper steering mechanisms of the system of provision, but as well for creating spaces for awareness

raising and increasing support – appropriate forms like round tables or mixed commissions, partly internal, partly open to the public.

In *Italy* a national fund has been set up in 1997 (national law n. 285) for financing local projects (municipal and intermunicipal) selected by the regions and aiming at enhancing children's rights and welfare. Financing is strictly dependent from a collective project involving different local actors (social services, schools, third sector organisations ...). This law gave an impulse for strengthening the emphasis of the general public on childhood issues in Italy and allowed much experimentation. In the local case study sites Monza and Pesaro funds were e.g. primarily used for parenthood support services for households with very young children and for multi-cultural activities for children in primary and intermediary school. In Cosenza,, funds were used for setting up recreational and formative structures for young adolescents (for those at an age when a bulk of social problems explodes). Concepts like these try to arrive at integrated child-centred interventions and synergies rather than the mere creation of new services.

Besides building “outside” – support, there is a need to find as well the best ways for dynamizing development as well from “inside”. E.g. parent initiatives will usually be quicker than public administrations when it comes to find facilities and staff for crèches with public support; building up a system of childminders, that get some training and whose work is a matter of licenses and contracts, may be at least as important as an approach which focuses on building up new facilities; finally, dynamizing service-system development can as well entail to formalize and legalize contributions from private sides so far uncontrolled and part of a black market of child care.

In the English case study site, the local authority employs *development workers* to facilitate and support the local process of creating new childcare places. The central task of development workers is that of liaising and working with providers. They basically help existing providers, and sometimes seek out new providers, to develop initiatives in particular neighbourhoods. E.g. they help them to find suitable premises, guide them through the bureaucratic procedures (getting the necessary planning permissions etc.), assist providers in drawing up business plans, and promote bids for funding. By doing this, development workers can speed up the process of setting up new facilities while also ensuring that the new services are situated within particular locations and are hence accessible to particular people. Finally, in the case study site, development workers also encouraged providers from different sectors to set up networks which they thought could contribute to better quality services.

While start-up grants and various other forms of initial funding are valuable tools to boost new developments, it is equally important to open up ways of reliable long-term funding in order to guarantee the sustainability of newly created services.

On the local level, the respective central and/or strategic units should build up capacities for acting as developers of systems and networks rather than as mere owners of funds to which access is restricted and regulated in traditional ways.

Monitoring and control – more than a mere specialists' matter

Like other personal social service systems child care needs monitoring and control that comes from both inside and outside.

The criteria of quality should be set out in a way that prevents an overall dominance of technical and managerial aspects, that can be easily checked and measured against qualitative and professional (e.g. pedagogical) criteria where evaluation will not be so simple and univocal.

Quality control can be part of monitoring and assessment procedures that foresee the participation of various sides, groups and organisations, employing different criteria and different priorities with respect to what really counts for quality in child care (e.g. parents, staff, the children themselves a. o.); “social audits”, representing such a mixed bag of participating groups and organisations, can perhaps be the natural complement to a mixed economy of care.

Especially where commercial subcontractors are providing services, it is important that the respective public authorities are enabled (e.g. by enough personal) to safeguard a continuous check of those basic qualities that have been agreed and laid down in the initial contract whereby a private commercial organisation has been licensed as a provider in a public service system.