



***REciprocal
maieutic Approach
pathways enhancing
Critical Thinking***

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Report on the **Analysis of the status quo and of the strategic perspectives** regarding the application of the **Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA)**, enriched with the ideas of **Maria Montessori's Method** in school context



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1. Introduction

The current document is the result of an analysis carried out at partnership level within the project REACT - Reciprocal Maieutic Approach pathways enhancing critical thinking. It has been a crucial step in order to kick off with the full-implementation actions of the project: it allowed to understand and analyse all the national school contexts in which the methodologies at the core of the project will be implemented - both the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach by Danilo Dolci and some features of Maria Montessori's method. The analysis will allow to identify the synergies, variables and specific features of each context, thus applying the methodologies in the best way, discovering the strategic perspectives already happening at local level for a better and more integrated development of the critical thinking skills in each of the country involved by the project. The Analysis starts with a theoretical and general introduction to both Maria Montessori experience and Danilo Dolci approach; then, it deepens more the perspectives of each country on three main concepts common to Dolci and Montessori's experiences: a) learning environments and learning spaces; b) contribution of education to change social context; c) education and its role in the development of social and soft skills. The Analysis continues by showing local good practices, initiatives in co-designing approach, how critical thinking skills are enhanced through local school actions as well as an overview on the main reaction by the school systems of each partner countries against the pandemic disruptive effect. The gathering of these results has been possible thanks to the involvement of more than 26 educational experts from the partner countries, as well as a desk research carried out at national level. The several perspectives each section provides are really interesting and provide a fruitful result which would be crucial for the next steps of the project. Furthermore, it is also a really useful document to understand the current policies of 5 different educational school systems, which can inspire potential new interventions that can "exploit" the existing policies and synergies for a stronger impact in the educational communities.



2. The project

REACT project intend to develop and implement an innovative methodology for the **enhancement of critical thinking** (CT) skills acquisition, aimed at fostering inclusive education and the common values of tolerance and acceptance of diversity.

The new methodology involves the key actors of the educating communities: teachers, students and parents. The approach starts from the application of a set of laboratories based on the **Reciprocal Maieutic Approach** (RMA) for discovering and discussing the process that leads to the creation of intolerance and spreading of stereotypes.

The RMA will be enriched with some peculiar aspects of the **Montessori's experience**, the application of the observation principle and the re-tought of the learning space.

Critical thinking is a **particular a mental habit** and to support the creation of the related skills requires students to think about their thinking and about improving the process, it requires students to use **higher-order thinking skills** – not memorize data or accept what they read or are told without critically thinking about it.

Therefore, critical thinking is a product of **education, training, and practice**. Innovative pedagogies should be used, even because the assessment of students in such analytical skills and critical thinking, in the adoption of certain common values and attitudes (such a sense of tolerance) and the active participation and engagement of students in school and community life is a complex task.

REACT project's activities are addressed to multiple target groups.

Directly, the project impacts **students aged 10-15 years old** that will benefit from the laboratorial activities in 6 EU countries. During this period of life, research of autonomy often manifest itself as a priori opposition and the prevailing emotions in youngsters, not yet able to adequately process their emotional states, are the poles of enthusiasm and suffering.

This polarization makes young people more attracted to extreme ideologies and positions. Moreover, the inclusion in the mainstream of education provision does not guarantee that the students individual needs will be met. Students should be “placed at the centre of the framework” (OECD, 2013) and this implies that students are given responsibility for their own learning. Applying the **RMA as a cooperative and dialogic**



learning tool, combined with a proper **attention to learning environment rebuild** and application of **observation principle** will engage students with their learning, contributing to the definition of their needs (not only the educative ones) and then to the planning and organisation of proper responses.

Teachers of lower and upper middle schools are impacted by the project's activities as well. The role of education in preventing extremisms has only recently gained global acceptance (UNESCO, 2016). Recent researches and EU projects' results demonstrate that teachers do not have an adequate training offer available on the issues of development of critical thinking in terms of preventing extremism. The majority of the studies reported critical thinking aims that were limited to the cognitive level, underrating the fact that **critical thinking** is only developed with considerable practice and effort. REACT will give teachers practical tool to better understand **inner needs of students in this peculiar growth phase through the development of critical thinking skills** to apply also outside the RM labs in all the other educative contexts such as lessons. In addition, while teachers can prepare and pre-plan lessons and discussions as part of the day lesson on sensitive topics, if trained to do so, there are other entry points for discussion that may occur on the spur of the moment. REACT RM laboratories will be considered as "teachable moments", opportunities that should be seized to explain concepts difficult to understand and where **teachers can learn** (practically, being participants, experiencing themselves) how prepared, both personally and professionally they should be in order to not miss these opportunities in other educative moments.

As demonstrated by previous researches, **parents** have training needs related to their educational role, but there is a **general lack of opportunities** to share them with professionals and/or other parents and become fully aware of them. The proposals addressed to them have a low participation, because quite often are organized without an active involvement methodology. This leads parents, when they need help in resolving conflicts with their children, to contact other subjects belonging to their "intimate" network. Moreover, it is precisely in the transition phase between childhood and adolescence that parents feel they need help most. Parents also **play a key part in whole school approaches and community schooling**, and these have been shown to



be effective tools in promoting social inclusion, through shaping students' attitudes towards other cultural groups. Parental involvement is linked not only to academic results but also to **children's social and emotional development**. REACT will involve parents in the core phase of the activities, making them responsible and key actors in the development of critical thinking skills. The competences acquired during the RM labs will be key in building a better conflict-resolution strategy in familiar and educative contexts.

The **Educating Communities**, embedding the key educative actors that play a role in the psycho-physical development of youngsters, often suffer a **lack of coordination** of the various actions undertaken at different levels. Activities organized officially by school; events promoted by sportive/cultural/third sector organizations addressed to students and/or parents; other activities promoted by third organisations somehow linked to the network of schools (e.g. the RM labs developed in the framework of EU/national/local projects) are often perceived as "spot" interventions, unrelated to each other. By not taking the form of an articulated path, these actions often lack long-term impacts. Implementing a **comprehensive community approach, REACT project aims at building a strong, coordinated and long-term path involving all the actors of the educating community**, thus contributing to the psychophysical development of youngster, the professional competences improving of teachers, sense of responsibility of parents and involvement of all the other actors of the educating community in a long-term perspective and with a solid impact.

Also, **policy makers** will benefit from a systematic formative and summative evaluation plan of REACT activities, focused on their needs in order to reproduce successful outcomes of the project in other EU educational contexts. They will be also involved in disseminative actions at local, national and European level.



3. How was this document developed?

The analysis has started from the results of the application of the two methods **Reciprocal Maieutic Approach** and **Montessori's experience** in several contexts and from their evidence of effectiveness.

In parallel to the development of this part of the research, the structural relation among critical thinking, degree of tolerance and stereotypes has been explored.

Starting from the results of studies that attempt to measure critical thinking disposition and the reflective degree of tolerance, the research hypothesis is that tolerant beliefs are part of the intellectual nature of people and a direct consequence of a critical thinking approach.

Two types of documents were created for the research:

- A template whose questions were aimed at gaining insight into research and innovative educational experiences promoted at national level and related to Danilo Dolci's and Montessori's methods, as well as to those conceptualised by other important scholars and educators who work or have worked in the partnership countries.
- All partners have identified a list of "experts" as educators, trainers, pedagogists, university professors that have experience in formal and non-formal education to provide the required information. Main topics were related innovative and new activities which are implemented in their national education system in order to promote critical thinking and soft skills among the educational community.
- A google form addressed to the teachers of the schools participating in the project

aimed to gathering data to their daily experiences on how important the learning environment/space is, which innovations could be used to improve the learning environment and the role of the soft skills.



4. First Part: theoretical framework of reference

In this first part, the two methods at the core of REACT project will be introduced. It is a necessary step to take in order to understand the theoretical framework in which the project has been conceived and towards it is going, a “theoretical compass” through which the next steps have been planned.

4.1. Montessori contribution to the critical thinking

Maria Montessori is known for her contribution to the development of children and for her innovative Method based on a continuous observation of the behaviors. Teachers play a guidance role, avoiding direct and overwhelming intervention as well as strict indications and obligations. The popular motto “help the children do it alone” is meaningfully explanatory of the idea she has about the educative relationship with the children in a specific and “prepared” learning environment. To understand what “prepared” can mean in a Montessori context is one of the scopes of this document and will serve as a concrete and operative basis for all the subsequent work.

“Montessori” name is meant to be related to the “Montessori Method” that is practiced and applied in the Montessori schools all over the world. The generally accepted and widespread perception about “Montessori World” indicates that once we have chosen a Montessori school for our children, we will be sure that the related learning environment will be full of Montessori indications and principles, in a well-defined and exclusive “Montessori-featured learning space” that is commonly perceived to be much different from the rest of the educative public system.

4.2. The four pillars of Montessori pedagogy

The Italian pedagogue Don Lorenzo Milani, who operated in a small and poor mountain village nearby Florence with sons of small-scale farmers, was very clear in declaring that the social and pedagogic contributions must be not just related to their authors. On the contrary, those contributions must be autonomous from their authors in order to



give a floor to further and future innovations. Milani was a revolutionary Christian-Catholic priest that fought for the freedom in teaching and for the eradication of any inequality in education. Following the indication of Lorenzo Milani, this section is based on the analysis of the work of Maria Montessori and on its visionary connection with the social approach of Danilo Dolci, going through their innovative contributions to the social pedagogy. The two pedagogues inspired a revolution in the field of education, and as Lorenzo Milani affirmed (*Esperienze pastorali*, 1958) were not happy about the inadequate use of the word "Method". Even though this is the way the Montessori pedagogy is popularly defined, the Italian Pedagogue was convinced that, the "Method" has to be used in its proper meaning, the focus having to be on seeing the soul of the child who, free from obstacles, acts according to his nature (Montessori, 1990, p. 187). This would hopefully help to overcome the common meaning that «Method» generally acquired over time, and allow us to replace it with another "conceptual" definition of the Method. According to Montessori herself, we can consider the Method as a help to the human personality to conquer its independence, from the oppression of ancient prejudices on education. (Montessori, 1946)

What emerges clearly from Montessori's statement is that at the center of the Method there is the human personality, and it is not composed by just a set of tools and principles to be applied and exploited. In the Montessori's perspective, the central point is "the defense of the child, the scientific recognition of his nature, the social proclamation of his rights that must replace the fragmented ways of conceiving education" (Montessori, 1993, p. 11, our translation).

The four basic ideas of the Montessori pedagogy are posed, flowing from the above-mentioned premises, starting from the idea of the human being in an educating process. Montessori considered the child as a subject of rights more than an object of law, that is - she said - a "spiritual embryo", an "absorbing mind" and a "forgotten citizen" - we could add other evocative definitions such as those of "living worker" and "new teacher". All these definitions tend to highlight the legitimate dimension of the protagonist, which is at the real and effective center of the educating process. This "educating process" includes not only the development of the child, but also extends to



the progress of society and mankind. Consequently, even the role of the educator has to be meant in a renewed way. Rather than assume the "positive" function of the educator who intervenes on the child, it is important to focus on the "negative" function of the educator: he/she observes the child and does not intervene on them, preferring to act on the learning environment. The objective of this approach is to remove eventual obstacles and promote the right conditions for the development of the child. As for the educative process, the same is said for this development: it is meant in an extensive way and concerns all people that are involved in an educating process. Seen in this perspective, the environment acquires an important function for which it must be "suitable" to foster the development of the child. The interactions with learning environment, once observed in a Montessori perspective, have to be the measure of the child development. Finally, in the Montessori Method the traditionally-called "didactic material" is configured as "development material" implemented following the "education and learning" approach instead of the "teaching" approach. Thus, the "patented" material used in Montessori schools has no function other than to be responsive to the needs of the child's growth. For this reason, it must comply with precise requirements, which are established on the basis of indications from the development sciences, as Montessori indicated and explained in her Californian conferences held in 1915).

4.3. The contribution of Maria Montessori to the development of critical thinking

The education of mind and body (of mind and heart, of intellect and hand) merges in the educational proposal of Montessori to strengthen the personality of individual, the greatness of humanity and the promotion of all human beings. It moves steps from a new consideration of the nature of the child that is considered the creator of their own development and author of a repeated and precise work in a learning environment that is ordered and arouser of interests. The aim of this section is to highlight the aspects



and dynamics that contribute to the formation and enhancement of human personality for Maria Montessori in the perspective of "education as an aid to life".

Montessori stated that independence is the first basis of the concept of "personality". Personality begins when the ego has dissolved from the bonds of the others' ego and begins to function alone. The personality, then, is driven by the perception of its own value and to confirm and improve this perception the individual is pushed to look for increasingly important tasks to be carried out. It implies that, although child-adult relationships are asymmetric (children-parents, pupils-teachers, etc.), such relationships must always be based on equality. Hence the awareness that the person, through a process of personalization, conquers his own personality (Maria Montessori, *Il metodo del bambino e la formazione dell'uomo, scritti e documenti inediti e rari*, a cura di Augusto Scocchera, edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, Roma 2002). In Montessori view, personality implies independence. Learning to do for oneself is indispensable to learn to be, to do and to do with others, contributing to the social organization of community life. For Montessori, without independence there is no integration of functions and processes, no self-control neither constructive openness to others and to the environment.

For a six-month-old child, for example, moving steps on the path of independence may mean freely leaving his low bed to go and look for the mother or the person who looks after them whenever is needed, without asking for external help. The construction of independence requires, therefore, to fully exercising the human potential in a prepared environment that respects the needs of growth and development of the human being: in this case, it is the conquest of successive levels of physical independence. The construction of personality then recalls some concepts such as "prepared environment", "sense-motor-mental work", "affectivity" and "sociality". It requires, therefore, a spontaneous work that should be adequate to the psycho-physical forces of the child but also passionate, tireless and personal. This work should adhere to interests and motivations as it is carried out with freedom and respecting child's times of concentration and rhythms and because it connects the child (and the adolescent) with themselves, with the others and with the natural and social environment.



Independency is linked to the ability to understand the world around us and to express our opinion with the aim to be understood. It is no possible to be independent without being able to express our critical sense. The Montessori approach promotes problem solving and critical thinking skills in many ways. The children are requested to develop hypothesis around problems and to find their own solutions. In the Montessori approach, the scientific contents are not merely transmitted. Students are not requested to follow the teachers' presentations and later to repeat the contents of the presentations. On the contrary, the Montessori approach implies a personal exploration of the topic, an individual consultation of all the materials to develop a unique and well documented presentation of the topic.

The role of the teacher in the Montessori view is to prepare the environment. As we will explain below, the Montessori learning environment is meant both physically and conceptually. In respect to this, a prepared environment relates to an accurate selection of the materials and to a well-prepared methodology of discussion. Generally speaking, methodologies such as those referred to/based on the Inquiry methods can be considered a good way to apply the Montessori not-transmissive approach. This new role of teacher and characters of the learning space have an immediate pedagogical impact and profound meaning which must be emphasized, without ignoring what is, perhaps, less evident but not less important. In this regard a quote can be extremely significant: it is necessary that society liberates children as "prisoners of civilization, preparing for them a world suited to their supreme needs, which are psychic needs". (Montessori, *La formazione dell'uomo*, Garzanti, Milano 1970, p.99, our translation) Studying the scientific and humanistic subjects with a critical approach is the way to make the students free and prepared to be active citizens.

4.4. Danilo Dolci and the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach

Southern Italy, specifically in Sicily is where a critical pedagogue, Danilo Dolci carried out much of his work of a critical pedagogical approach through his ideas and work. He was a social actor who engaged individually and collectively in the process of opening up greater democratic spaces and dismantling oppressive structures.



The pedagogical challenge is that of providing an education that stresses the connection between learning and power and the potential, for social solidarity, of a collective approach to learning based on a process of what Freire and other critical pedagogues would call “critical literacy”.¹

In order to involve and empower people, Dolci was using the reciprocal maieutic approach.

This method is based on emphatic and reciprocal communication, and its main emphasis is in the capacity to involve all the people participating in the meeting. In fact, the maieutic method was used by Dolci among groups of people and addressed to discuss their problems. In a maieutic meeting people can freely express themselves, always being an active part of the group, as everybody is always in communication with each other. The real communication became an instrument of involvement and change (Habermas, 1986).

Communication in RMA is clearly distinguished from transmission. Communication in RMA is based on active listening, real involvement, deep dialogue, values and ethics (Banks 1999) based on nonviolent reciprocal adaptation. Sincerity and compassion, empathy and honesty are fundamental to the process of real communication.

When working with farmers and fishers, women and bandits, he started a dialogue stemming from his ignorance and desire to understand that land. These discussions appeared immediately as maieutic dialogues, even though he did not call them so. The reciprocal maieutic approach is the result, as it is apparent at this point, of direct action and experience: the reflection upon such matters came afterwards. We can see in Danilo Dolci a circularity between action-experience and reflection; Danilo acted by creating maieutic dialogues upon which reflect and discover the characteristics of an approach that by overcoming the Socratic conception becomes reciprocal, even prophetic at times. Being aware of one’s ignorance inspires continuous research. His maieutic

¹ Learning and social difference, Challenges for Public Education and Critical Pedagogy, Carmel Borg – Peter Mayo



method goes beyond an elitist and Socratic vision and becomes reciprocal-planetary. Each person is involved in the dialogue; they can sense their dismay from doubt and then find themselves again when discussing with others to reach shared truths uniting all the individuals in a group. In the afterword to his essay *Il ponte screpolato (The Cracked Bridge)*, Gianni Rodari wrote: *“That’s Danilo Dolci, a person who is always looking for something with other people... He built his identity by helping farmers, unemployed and illiterate people, and bandits escape from darkness and step into history... Together, that has always been the rule.”* In 1979 Rodari kept on saying: *“Danilo stays at the centre of these multiple movements, not as a guide, a Socrates who can lead his Phraedri and Critos on a path he only knows about, secret strategist of common discourse, but as a democratic Socrates. He feels equal to the last and simplest man and can make a protagonist out of him, determining with him the character and the goal of the quest itself.”*

The reciprocal maieutic approach, which he also called “planetary”, to underline its global character and the opportunity to export it to other places and times, has some crucial differences from the classic one. Exploring the differences between the Socratic maieutic method and the one reinvented by Danilo Dolci is necessary. It aims to free the thoughts of a community and not to start a sly practice seeking to activate individual interest and be more successful in selling a lesson or a ready-made recipe. Empathy has now replaced irony; poetry is no longer considered a moment of craziness but an active component of growth. Nature is not silent anymore, as it communicates and gives inputs for reflection. Each person has a contribution to offer, including women and children. No one will constantly be the facilitator because it is a reciprocal process. Finally, writing is essential to disseminate the method. Three words are central to Danilo Dolci: experience, maieutic, and planetary. His maieutic practice is not connected to pure abstraction but is based on experience from which it starts and is nurtured. It is planetary because it targets the whole world, *“You cannot be happy if other human beings are suffering”*.

Starting from these substantial points, we can identify some differences.



Socratic approach	Reciprocal Maieutic approach
Irony, dissimulation	Encouragement, appreciation
Unique and unchangeable truth	Multiperspective truths
Abstraction: logos, concepts	Experience: project, action
Individual (max 2-3 people)	Group (no more than 25 people)
Men	Men, women, children
Selective ("Ce n'è poi altri che non mi sembrano gravidì")	Inclusive ("Everyone is creative")
Learning by remembering	Learning by searching
Only the interlocutor is solicited	Collective participation
Rigid rules	Reciprocal
"One" maieutic master	Educators of new facilitators
Dominating person	Coordinator
Targeted at human beings	Targeted at all creatures
Intellectual engagement	Empathic engagement
Focused on politics, science, technique	Focused on arts
Local	Planetary

In our greedy consciousness of ignorance, we know that starting from the self, we can embrace the world. What does it change in the way we ask questions? In maieutic communication, there is not a precise, unique answer to find. We are not engaging in a maieutic dialogue when we ask students, sitting in a circle, a series of questions and waiting for the "right" answer suffocating all the attempts to continue to explore and reflect, losing thousands of shades of thoughts because we are not paying attention! In maieutic communication, the facilitator does not presume they have an answer; they have one, but it is just one amongst many different possibilities. It is not only about asking questions but also accepting all the other and multiple answers, even those which appear unusual and unexpected, trying to find a link while searching for harmony. The facilitator must be ready to listen to people as they dig deep inside



themselves. It takes time, a long time, as every thought activates other reflections in which everyone can find unexpected discoveries. Only when the group think they are satisfied it is possible to look beyond. Otherwise, the dialogue can be updated but never interrupted: doubting and asking questions are essential to critical thinking. Without it, one suffocates thoughts, and creatures die.

The reciprocal maieutical approach is the basis for building a society where everyone is aware of their power because common knowledge allows for self-discovery and appreciation of all the people. Thanks to that, one can regenerate thoughts neglected in years of resigned transmission; in other cases, one can help shape reflection and find the best way to express it. Everyone is involved and experiences the sense of dismay generated by doubts, to find themselves in discussion and reach shared truths uniting different personalities and identities within a group.

In the maieutic dialogue, the concept of truth is inevitably modified as it becomes a constant quest. It is not an absolute idea governed by a group of individuals with the faculty to transmit it. If the truth were a definite notion, then we would need to find it and keep it in a safe, leading to that depositary education Paulo Freire talks about. Reformulating the very concept of truth is essential to start a maieutic dialogue. When there is not one immutable truth, we can cultivate a way of thinking connected to continuous research and tireless doubt, a restless desire to understand the world conducting to critical thinking. The maieutic approach is based on two central interchangeable aspects: truth as continuous discovery and the development of critical thinking.

Danilo Dolci lived in a different time, but his message is current and full of unexplored potential. In his 1993 essay *Comunicare, legge della vita*, (Communication: The Rule of Life):

“Inside the school’s walls, one can transmit data, techniques, and atmospheres, **but knowledge is a process each person needs to recreate and confront with respecting critical thinking**: if teachers inculcate, train and examine, they cannot become proficient in the dialogue of research, they do not even familiarise with other individuals. When the school expects to teach the values it neglects in practice, instead of favouring a coherent critical relationship with the reality we live in; if the school



promotes love while it teaches children to justify privilege and dominion; if the school is incapable of educating in non-violence, while it extinguishes the creativity the poor need to heal the world, then this kind of school corrupts people, teaching them hypocrisy.

The multitude of the marginalised, gradually becoming even more marginalised, unlearn to integrate; they learn to bite each other.

When the courageously structured initiative of authentic educators fails to set, those who dominate ask to scientifically tame children and youth in schools: they are afraid and destroy their growing creativity and organic unity little by little. They slowly learn to become objects. The little ones do not grow up joyously as they are kept captive by their guardians inside the walls built by masters-benefactors. However, fearfully, they cannot cultivate their profound interests and prepare themselves to ignite structural changes. **If we looked closely at the main sufferings in the schools in any part of the world, we would observe a constant difficulty in youth's growth: young people do not learn to communicate nor use their power there. They usually become mere executors".**

5. Second Part – Where Dolci & Montessori approach can contribute nowadays

5.1. Analysis of similarities among the national contexts on key topics common to both approaches

In this part of the document, an analysis of the similarities and differences among the countries involved on common features of Dolci's and Montessori's methods:

- a) Learning environments and learning spaces;
- b) Contribution of education to change social context;
- c) Education and its role in the development of social and soft skills.



Each section will have not only part of the research gathered through the involvement of educational experts, but also will report the “voices” of teachers who were involved at local level, thus providing the perspectives on the above topics from a general to a “more local” level, coming from the daily educational experiences of people directly involved in the learning process.

5.2. A. Learning environment and learning spaces

Among all the countries involved in the research, the information gathered on the first common field – *Learning environment and learning spaces* – provides interesting perspectives on how these 2 concepts are meant in each national context. Through the feedbacks collected by involving educational experts and teachers, it is possible to summarize the different identified perspectives about learning environment and learning spaces around the following ones:

- **A physical space** where the learning process happens and which contributes to the success and the learning achievements of the students; for this reason, where the research has been carried out the institutions have or are going to plan several interventions thus allowing to strengthen both the safety of the students and guarantee the successful of the learning achievement.
- **An expression of values, goals and methods** chosen by society for the education of the students;
- A field of relationships and gaining experiences that shape them in practice;
- A fundamental **element of the learning process, to be empowered** through several tools thus spreading its benefits to the learners “working” in/through it.
- An **ever-changing concept** which has been subject of different re-definition on behalf of the student’s wellbeing and growth.

Specifically, looking at the national contexts taken into consideration:



In **Italy**, according to the National Guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education in 2012, the characteristics of the learning environment are recognized as “functional” and fundamental condition for the development of the skills, since the primary school². This importance has been considered still crucial in the development of the learners also some years following the guidelines publication: in fact, one of the main issues raised in the National Operational Plan 2014 – 2020 “For Schools – skills and learning environment” (MIUR, 2014), is the required urgent intervention to restore educational facilities to guarantee the availability or adequate learning spaces. The importance of the space in the learning process of the students is deepened furthermore in the Recommendation 6b of the same guidelines, where it is stated that these spaces should support innovative educational approaches and be more stimulating and liveable to encourage students to spend more time in these educational environments³. This is a

² «The school should be built as a welcoming place, involving students in this task. It is vital to create good learning conditions to enhance children's participation in a joint educational project. (...) The spatial and temporal organisation impacts the pedagogical quality of the learning environment. Therefore, it should be subject to a detailed design and assessment process. (...) Knowledge acquisition calls for flexible spaces, starting from the classroom itself. The availability of well-equipped rooms to facilitate operational approaches to develop skills in Science, Technology, European Languages, Music, Theatre, Art, and PE is also fundamental. An excellent primary school should count on a context capable of promoting significant learning and guaranteeing the educational success of all the pupils.».

³ The restoration of the learning spaces it is not a new “issue” in the Italian educational landscape: in fact, the Italian school building patrimony is mainly composed of old buildings (about 75% of the Italian schools were built before 1980, and 4% of those even earlier before 1900, prior to the introduction of modern aseismic design criteria). That's the reason why from many part of Italian society is requested a urgent and quick



necessary step to promote a contemporary idea of school. Quality education implies a quality learning process, and the spaces where this happens contributes fully to the students wellbeing and academic wellbeing and success: a strengthened awareness on this key element seems to be achieved, since different documents – such as National Plans for School Building, the Italian Energy Strategy and the National Action Plan for Renewable Energy – took into consideration the crucial role a safe and up-to-date, sustainable and technological environment has in the learning process of the students, and this path has been reinforced also recently by new laws⁴. Together with the importance of the “physical structure” of the learning space and environment it has also an equally importance the network of relations, connections and group-related synergies which feeds and make concrete the impact and effectiveness of the learning space and environment. Within the Italian educational landscape, it is worthy to be mentioned the analysis developed by INDIRE (the Research Institute of the Ministry of Education) which led to the INDIRE Model of “1+4 educative spaces for the new millennium”. The proposal has been declined in the following categories: “1” is the group space, the multifunctional learning environment of the group-class, considered as

intervention to build safer schools, refurbish learning spaces, and improve the aesthetics, usability, and functionality of educational facilities.

⁴ Law No 107/2015 (the so-called "Good School" Reform) introduces a substantial novelty concerning this issue: a fund of 350 million euros devoted to constructing new sustainable buildings open to civil society to promote safer educational facilities in all the Italian regions.

This measure was considered an opportunity to inspire Italian and European architects and launch experimental models to set new technical standards. In March 2017, the Italian Ministry of Education named an Expert Committee (chaired by architect Benedetta Tagliabue di Barcellona) to assess 1,238 projects and build 51 new schools in the Northern and Southern regions of the country.



the evolution of the traditional classroom that opens the school to the world. This environment is composed by flexible spaces in continuity with other environments of the school. “4” are the spaces of the school, that now on are considered as complementary and no longer subordinated, to the one devoted to daily formal education (the classroom): the Agora, the informal space, the individual area and the area for exploration⁵.

In **Bulgaria** the Government has continued a process started in the previous years, empowering the learning spaces and environments with tools and equipment that allow

⁵ This model was then identified as “**Manifesto for a new generational educational space**” and presented at the international conference “Environments for education. Educational environments” organized by the University of Kassel in Germany (<http://www.uni-kassel.de/uni/>). It is based on multiple levels of analysis (Brofenbrenner, 1989) and proposes a vision that deviates from the idea of school as the sum of classrooms (Airoldi, 1978) and extends, beyond the didactic dimension, to the social context and to the capacity of an environment to influence the quality of social relations (Leemans and Von Ahlefeld, 2013, Lefebvre, 1991). The work of the research group has developed along different and synergistic lines: the analysis of excellence cases at European level, the analysis of educational policies aimed at promoting innovative educational spaces, the study of technical regulations for school buildings, the observation and enhancement of the paths of rethinking spaces promoted by cutting-edge schools at national level, cooperation and reflection within research contexts and international bodies. This research method included a survey of the literature and a comparative analysis of the most significant international legislation, observation visits with application of qualitative and quantitative analysis tools, semi-structured interviews and the elaboration of case studies. The proposal of the Manifesto was brought to the attention of the network of schools known as “Avanguardie Educative” (Educational Avant-gardes) and led to the birth of many experiments in various places in the country.



to enhance the learning process of the students during the last years. The current national program foresees various modules aimed at enriching and optimizing activities in the school education system. All these modules are mainly aimed at renewal of the specialized equipment of classrooms, laboratories and workshops in compliance with the developing modern new technologies, to conduct practical training in a real work environment, modernization of laboratory conditions and experimental work in the natural sciences⁶. Especially on STEM, the national program is currently focused on creating school centers with new equipped learning spaces with focus on the study and application of competencies in the field of natural sciences in the state and municipal schools in the country. The program is aimed at schools with innovative practices and those with potential for development of innovations in the field of natural sciences, digital technologies, engineering thinking and mathematics (STEM)⁷.

Similarly, to Italy, the **Greek** National Curriculum (GNC) acknowledges that the learning space expresses the values, goals and methods chosen by society for the education of the students, but it is also a field of relationships and gaining experiences that shape it in practice. For this reason, the GNC promotes the use of learning spaces outside the classroom, for feedback and to strengthen the work in the classroom: investigations, visits, excursions to places near or even more distant from the school are carried out in order to collect data and utilise it in the context of school work, thus taking into

⁶ An example is the module "Libraries as an educational environment" - developed in implementation of the Agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture for cooperation - for implementation of initiatives, programs and projects between public libraries in the country and the institutions in the school education system

⁷ Every school center will include a change in the following elements: physical environment (improvement of interior architecture and furnishing of existing spaces), technologies, learning content, teaching methods and management of the educational process.



consideration not only the traditional “indoor” environment but also the “outdoor” context, expanding ideally what it is the learning environment to the whole community to which each student belongs.

In **Spain** both the learning environment and spaces have also their importance and they are also at the center of a re-definition, with various attempts to change with new and experimental approach at several level. One of the most relevant attempt has been developed by a network of Jesuit schools in Barcelona in a project called [Horizonte 2020 \(2015\)](#). The project aimed to change the curriculum, learning spaces and the role of students. It moved away from the traditional separation of school subjects towards a more flexible project-based and problem-solving approach involving various subjects using Cooperative learning methodology; away from exams towards formative assessment; away from fixed lesson times towards a more flexible attitude to time. These changes required changes in learning spaces to permit different working dynamics in different time frames, moving away again from the traditional teacher fronted classroom with rows of desks facing a whiteboard towards more open, flexible spaces that could reflect the centrality of the pupils in the learning process. Spaces where pupils can interact autonomously with each other. Schools now have spaces for group work, technology corners and floors and walls painted in colours that create more attractive and motivating work spaces. Finally, in the **German**-speaking countries, it is recognized that the quality of learning spaces plays an important role in the development of the students. Schools are seen as central institutions for shaping educational biographies, thus they have a central role as learning spaces and environment as previously introduced as regards the previous countries.

Teachers from several schools who participated in the REACT project research had several and meaningful answers when they were asked what they meant by a **learning environment** and what they meant by **learning space**.

All teachers agreed on what is meant by an **environmental space**. It is the physical and social space in which students interact and acquire knowledge. This environment will establish the foundations for proper learning. Also the learning environment is a set of



logistical, social, cultural and human elements that intervene in the learning process. It may refer to an educational approach or cultural context or the educational philosophy of knowledge experienced by the student, the culture of the population it serves, how individuals interact etc.

Moreover, a learning environment includes a learning space appropriate for everyone who is going to participate in an educational process and at the same time it should combine the classic learning methods as long as the digital innovations of our century.

It can be designed as a classroom with large windows and bright colours. It should be spacious and equipped with computer and internet access.

It also includes the things you have (with you) to learn: books, tablets, smartphones, exercise books.

According to some teachers, the two terms are really close, with a slight difference, though. A **learning space** is an alternative term for the conventional rendition "classroom". It refers to the place in which teaching and learning occur, and it may also refer to an indoor or outdoor location. A learning space is a term that mainly encompasses the physical location where learning takes place, it could be a typical classroom or not.

The learning environment is very important as key for promoting learning. **A safe and comfortable place or environment** where all members feel secure and fine is key for any learning process to happen. Teachers try to have spaces very inspirational, clean, organized as it has a positive impact on the students.

Learning spaces help build better relationships and communication between classmates.

Teachers have proposed some **innovations and proposals** in order to improve the learning environmental. Based on the assumption that the classroom layout is very important, the use of non formal activities is also essential.

In addition, it is crucial to combine those activities with the right methodological approach and tools, a proactive intervention of the persons in charge of the learning processes, providing space for students in order to make full use of the tools that are provided.

Suggestions provided by the teachers:



- More flexible classroom arrangements and outdoor spaces better suit more exploratory activities and discussion and dialogue
- A hybrid system including both distance and local learning
- Using digital textbooks
- Extra-curricular activities
- Make the learning space “pleasant”
- Size and colour are the top priorities, but these have to be filled with audiovisual equipment, room and layout for group work (circularly arranged seats etc), special spaces for alternative occupation
- Encourage students to participate in the creation of the new layout of their learning environment. Use of technology (Audio and visual material) to supplement textbooks. Classes outside the classroom.
- Desks should be light in order to change the arrangement according to the activity e.g circle
- Participatory or more innovative activities.
- “Erasmus+” projects, environment programs and music/theatre acts.

The space influences the type of teaching. Some classrooms have tables - anchored to the floor and arranged horizontally: this influences also the way the activities are carried out, always teacher-centered. Instead, round tables or movable furniture allow to carry out collaborative, participatory or more innovative activities. Class setting should be more moveable, changeable and unpredictable. The same format every day leads to boredom and stagnation.

5.3. Contribution of the education for changing the social context

Education is a revolutionary act, through which it is possible to change the context in which citizens live. Both Dolci and Montessori approaches were addressed to the empowerment of specific skills and competences which would have made people active citizens, potential multiplier of change in their own context. All the countries considered in this research are contexts where education is seen as the main tool to change the society, and this can be seen both in the changes and new trends that are happening in some countries to make education more powerful than before and in some legislation or legal framework where education is at the core and premise of a change of the whole society and in a long term perspective.



Specifically:

Bulgarian experts interviewed identified at their national level several initiatives or trend that are allowing to make education a stronger tool for the change of the society or which should be adopted to make the process faster. The “re-thinking” of the present learning process is not considered enough. Several initiatives are taken into consideration: customize learning could be another key element to improve and make this process effective – through quick identification and adaptation to the individual needs, motivation, skills and interests of students. Another strategy that can really contribute to this objective is the application of flexible cooperative models learning (as a prerequisite for increasing intrinsic motivation and commitment). Not only educational approaches and methodologies are important, but also the ICT field is crucial since it is what our world is permeated with: effective use of technology, creation of the opportunity to learn anywhere and anytime are powerful tools that can only contribute to the power for change of education.

In **Greece**, the pillars of the mission of education in contributing to the change of society are already included in the National guidelines of the Greek Educational system: it aims at the promotion of critical and dialectical ability as well as a positive disposition for cooperation and autonomy of students to a responsible, democratic and free personality, with social and humanitarian principles, without religious and cultural prejudices. Of course, it follows the European Union's orientation and agenda towards education: democracy, freedom, solidarity, collectivity, justice and social cohesion in open pluralistic societies, frame the common future purpose of European education

Of equal importance is the maintenance of social cohesion through the provision of equal opportunities and the cultivation of common attitudes and values, the cultivation of the conscience as European citizens while preserving the national identity and cultural self-knowledge and the development of a spirit of cooperation and collectivity.

The objective of promoting social change and educate good citizens is already stated in the **Spain's** most recent educational reform, LOMLOE (2020)



https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2020-17264, whose main objectives are the following:

- To fully develop personality and capabilities of students.
- To educate in the respect for others' rights, fundamental freedoms, equal rights and absence of discrimination.
- To educate in tolerance and freedom within the democratic principles of coexistence and the prevention of conflict.
- To educate in individual responsibility, merit and personal effort.
- To educate in peace, respect for human rights, human beings and the environment.
- To develop the ability in students to regulate their own learning.
- To foment respect and recognition of the linguistic and cultural plurality of Spain and of interculturality as an enriching element in society.
- To help students acquire work habits in all knowledge areas.
- To prepare students for the undertaking of professional, caring and socially collaborative activities.
- To enable students to communicate in official, co-official and foreign languages.
- To prepare the exercise of citizenship and active participation in economic, social and cultural life.
- To guarantee the complete integration of students into digital society.

It is clear how these objectives are following both the EU principles but also those pillars at the basis of a democratic societies, which have been already highlighted in the Greek educational system: democracy, freedom, solidarity, collectivity, justice and social cohesion in open pluralistic societies

Referring also to the country legal framework, according to the **Italian** Constitution, each school plays a crucial educational role. However, to fulfil such a responsibility should be supported by public and private entities through the educational co-responsibility agreement upon which the alliance School-Family is based. The participation of public and private stakeholders is a tool recognised by the Ministry of Education to promote and strengthen the social, educational and civil alliance between schools and local educational communities. Thus, education at school has the chance to



be an effective and strong tool thanks to its opening to civil society, defined by the Italian educational experts as “a real revolution”. Many open school initiatives have been launched since 2017, especially in bigger cities. According to this scheme, the school can act as a community centre and be a reference point for the neighbourhood, especially when local citizens can access its library, workshops and gyms.

In the School Plan 2020-2021, the Italian Ministry of Education officially acknowledged the so-called Community Educational Agreement, another step towards a cooperative educational model, validating furthermore the crucial role of school as main tool to change the society and in empowering future citizens. According to such document, the Community Educational Agreements can become an operational tool enabling schools, local entities, public and private institutions, third sector actors, organisations, and citizens to cooperate. By signing these agreements, parties commit to creating an educational, civil and social alliance capable of applying constitutional principles and values to promote every person's education⁸. Finally, the strategic role of the school

⁸ The Community Educational Agreements are pacts stipulated among schools and other public and private entities to define the practical aspects of learning projects connected to local specificities and opportunities. It is an occasion for promoting diversity within schools to answer immediate needs and act vertically on other priorities such as educational poverty, early school leaving, and the lack of digital skills.

Its main aims are to fight new educational poverties, early school leaving and academic failure by setting up a participatory and cooperative approach.

Supported by educational actors, a group of stakeholders will value and systemise all the experience and resources available at a local level to co-design educational pathways connecting different schemes.

The Ministry of Education pointed out the following goals:

- Promoting the provision of facilities and spaces, such as parks, theatres, libraries, archives, cinemas, and museums to carry out complementary educational activities;
- Supporting school autonomy by considering each institute's issues and conditions when creating alliances with different local stakeholders. The latter



system in contributing to the change of society has been recently recognized publicly by the Government – on the basis of a deep needs’ analysis – allocating 19.44 billion euros for the enhancement of the supply of education services (M4C1) in the framework of the Italian National Plan of Recovery and Resilience (PNRR). For the Italian government, the school is strategic for policies’ definition both in the long and in the medium term, as well for the immediate. This is confirmed by the number of young people not studying and not working (NEET) and the substantial differences between North, South and internal areas. As it has been previously clarified regarding the Community Educational Agreement, **the school cannot act alone**: the strong involvement of the entire “educational community” is essential. This is why a cohesion policy is promoted, based on constructive dialogue and coordination between public institutions and civil society. Finally, in **Germany**, individualization and the increased diversity are challenges that education must address. In this context, the educational experts involved by this research stated that it is important to provide the basis for collaborative change processes by communicatively linking individual competencies. In the German-speaking countries, it is accepted that schools are places where this linkage can and must take place.

Teachers interviewed identified at national and local levels experiences and initiatives aimed at promoting social change in the learning environment. Specifically, the most interesting initiatives were found among Italy, Spain and Greece:

can contribute to enriching the learning offer by identifying specific roles and tasks according to the resources available. Thus, civil society can put at school disposals buildings or nearby public infrastructure owned by public or private entities (museums, ecclesiastical buildings, educational farms), allowing for setting up learning activities outside the classroom in experiential contexts.



Spain:

- Role plays and activities reflecting about fair trade etc. in order to develop empathy towards the multicultural “other”.
- Preparing learning beneficiaries both for effective governance protocols and for projects focusing on social inclusion, leadership training, civil engagement and cooperation among diverse profiles of beneficiaries.
- Encouraging active participation and experimentation with ideas among students
- Dialogic gatherings and communication methodologies.

Greece:

- Digital debates about different issues using technology.
- Social change can be helped by connecting learning with multilingualism, tolerance and vocational perspectives.
- Drama techniques that promote non cognitive skills of learners
- Promoting more responsibilities of the student community along with the proper cooperation of the school, the parents and the social community.
- Extracurricular activities concerning the environmental protection and the acceptance of diversity
- Collaboration of two or more teachers in the same classroom with different learning subjects.
- Active reading, contrasting different texts, problem solving, self-reflection questionnaires, discussions on modern problems affecting the whole world.
- Creating awareness and empathy towards the refugee children and their inclusion
- Encourage students to actively participate in the teaching process (eg teach their fellow students).

Italy:

- Guiding learning processes by always starting from the pupils' prior knowledge, formal and informal, which deserves to be enhanced. It is important to demonstrate the transformative power of new knowledge and skills, learned in the school environment, through their application to the life experiences of the pupils. The significance of learning for children is a prerequisite for them to put their knowledge and skills at the service of society. It is important to explain to children that their learning, and the effort associated with it, is not only important for themselves, but for the world.



- Provide a time for educators and young people to discuss the work of those who lead and coordinate the activities. Give the students the opportunity to express their opinion on what is proposed to them and on the relationship established with the educators. Insist on the educational role of error, considering it an indispensable and fruitful moment in the learning process. To flank the health and psychological staff already present in the school with a professional from the philosophical field in order to guarantee a multiplicity of outlooks and visions of the world, someone capable of welcoming the person not only as the bearer of a specific illness/pathology/problem but also and above all as the bearer of their own existential uniqueness.
- Giving more space for pupils' creativity through e.g. theatre, music, activities that, freed from the anxiety of performance, allow everyone to express themselves and make school a real opportunity for personal growth and confrontation with others.
- Training activities, in-depth cultural meetings for parents, teachers and students. Education on emotions, effective communication, mutual aid.

5.4. Education and the role of the development of the social (and soft) skills

As third topic explored in all the countries involved in the research, the education and its role in the development of social and soft skill has been at the center of the investigations and of the feedbacks to the educational experts.

Generally, from the analysis of the countries, it is clear that the contexts taken into consideration are all in evolution, where clearly education is seen as the propulsive core for the development of the social and soft skills, together with the demanding request of technical and digital skills of the labour market. If in some cases specific interventions on how the educational system is proceeding to update the system towards these urgent needs (such as in Bulgaria), at least in 2 countries the reference to the 4 pillars of education of UNESCO has been referred, confirming both the importance of the international frame and providing a pathway in the development of national policies. It is good to see that – together with the importance and the crucial role which is assigned to the requested skills by the labour market, social and soft skills are still considered



relevant, since they are the ones that make the technical and “hard” skills effective and useful both professionally and in the lives of the students.

Specifically:

Bulgarian experts have highlighted several initiatives whose focus is skills development, demonstrating the crucial role of the school system in this kind of actions. Interviewed experts highlighted especially 2 initiatives:

a. "Model schools" of "Teach for Bulgaria" is a two-year program for professional development of school teams. Its focus is on developing and implementing sustainable and effective school teaching and management practices that contribute to the success of each student, focusing the attention on the development of the useful set of skills which are necessary to the learning achievements of the students.

b. “Your Hour” under the Operational Program “Science and Education for Smart Growth”⁹, aimed at overcoming students’ learning difficulties. The main goal of the project is to create conditions for increasing the potential of students and their opportunities for successful education by supplementing, developing and upgrading their knowledge, skills and competencies.

On the topic of the development of social and soft skills, in the **Greek** National Curriculum the main objectives show a transversal approach adopted in the country: its objectives could be grouped on three axes, common to all levels of school education. These axes are:

- i) knowledge and Methodology,
- ii) cooperation and communication;
- iii) relation of science or art to everyday life.

⁹ The project is co-financed by the European Union through the European Structural and Investment Funds (2014 – 2020).

The first axis concerns knowledge, mental skills, handling skills as well as skills specific to the approach of different sciences or other fields, which the student must have acquired by completing his / her studies at each level.

The second axis concerns the social skills that the student must develop in the context of group tasks, as well as communication skills, presentation of thoughts, opinions, information, etc.

The third axis concerns the development of sensitivity, reflection and the ability to critically deal with the effects (positive and negative) of the applications of science and art in its various fields.

The student should not simply accumulate information and knowledge. These should be accompanied by the acquisition of mental skills that will ensure the ability to deal with problems and the formation of attitudes and behaviors positive towards issues that concern himself and his social environment.

According to the national guidelines, the student should learn at school mainly "how to learn", in order to approach actively and creatively the knowledge provided. The school should also enable students to apply this knowledge and skills in their daily life, in but also in their social activity and engagement.

Since 2021-2022, the Ministry of Education of Greece implements the "Soft Skills Workshop" as a pilot Programme and recently as a training programme for teachers (see section about soft skills below).

In **Spain**, although primary and secondary education in Spain has advanced from the evaluation of content to the evaluation of competences, there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of soft, non-technical competences. The case of higher education is very different: since the implementation of the Bologna Process or the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) technical competences have appeared in all the syllabi. However, the evaluation of these and soft competences is a very different matter. In secondary education the key competences are the following (LOMCE, 2013 & LOMLOE 2020):

- Linguistic communication competence
- Math competence and basic competences in Science and Technology
- Digital competence



- Learning to learn competence
- Entrepreneurship competence
- Consciousness and cultural expressions competence
- Social & civic competences

Delors (1997) and the OCDE as well as the EU began the dialogue about lifelong learning and learning to learn. However, Delors (1997) mentions four key competences that were to frame many European educational reforms¹⁰: Learning to learn; Learning to do; Learning to live together and learning to be.

In **Italy**, a reference to the role of school in the development of these type of skills is already in the introduction to National Guidelines published in 2012, where the focus is on skills (as reported in another document National Guidelines and New Scenarios, 2018). It offers different insights and suggestions, particularly in the paragraphs devoted to global, European, national, and local citizenship. According to these guidelines, the curriculum's focus is the promotion of basic cognitive, affective and social skills that inform the development of each child¹¹. Moreover, the learning

¹⁰ These competences are the 4 pillars of Education according to UNESCO.

¹¹ The Italian experts involved in this research thought that the observations featured in the “The Self and the Other” section in the guidelines on promoting active and responsible citizenship were inspiring, especially the following paragraphs: “Children often ask why something happens, and such an attitude represents their willingness to understand the meaning of life and the moral value of their actions. At school, they have many opportunities to become aware of their own identity, discover cultural, religious and ethnical differences, learn how to live in a society, and think about the sense and consequences of their actions [...]. This field is ideal for discussing and concretely dealing with topics, such as rights and duties, and understanding how society and institutions work [...]. The school is a space to meet and discuss, learn more about cultural issues and promote peer learning among parents and teachers to present these topics to children. Moreover, they can model active listening and respect so that



material should contribute to building the tools of active citizenship and nurturing social and civic skills. Discussion, communication, cooperation, empathy, responsibility and the ability to find a connection between knowledge and reality are the *conditio sine qua non* to set virtuous models of co-existence and prosocial behaviours in educational environments. Moreover, the publication of Ministry of Education guidelines in 2016 opened furthermore the door to favour practices and reflection in the Italian school, leveraging the potential development of methodological, professional and social competencies. In this view, the so-called “Service Learning” represents a point of intersection between theory and practice, research and experimentation. It supports learning as a means to develop individual skills and promoting solidarity and sharing so that everybody can contribute to the growth of the whole community (MIUR, 2016). Service-Learning favours hard and soft skills acquisition and prosocial behaviours (Tapia, 2006). In particular, it represents an opportunity to reach the goals set by UNESCO for 21st-century education: learning to learn, learning to do and learning to be (Delors, 1996), which are also at the core of the framework previously presented in the case of Spain¹². This pathway at Italian level is well explained by the interventions

children can answer the questions they have concerning the meaning of life according to their family's choices, to strengthen the principle of democratic cohesion."

¹² As for the second challenge – learning to do – is strictly connected to vocational education, several studies (Tapia, 2006, pp. 146-147) demonstrated that well-structured Service-Learning practices are a valuable tool to develop the competencies required by the labour market. As underlined in a recent document produced by the World Economic Forum (2016), aim at training citizens, as well as students and workers. businesses increasingly demand adaptive and relational abilities. Problem-solving, critical thinking, negotiation, creativity, people management, emotional intelligence, decision-making skills, service orientation, and cognitive flexibility are necessary to access the labour market. Therefore, we are deemed to abandon a professionalising mindset to encourage the acquisition of life skills. For this reason,



aimed at filling the so-called **skill mismatch between education and the labour market**. Of course, these interventions take into consideration the 4.0 enabling skills, the digital skills and all those skill empowerments on the area of managerial, scientific and highly specialised technical skills¹³. In terms of **social skills**, the Minister Bianchi has repeatedly emphasized as the increase of the dimension of citizenship that also passes through the evaluation of the **soft skills**, introducing the theme of knowledge and learning at schools and at work, considered as a **process involving not only cognitive skills** (such as remembering, speaking, understanding, making connections, deducing, evaluating) **but also other transversal qualities**, real personality dispositions called “**character skills**” (such as open-mindedness, the ability to collaborate, security)¹⁴. Finally, in Germany the global complexity, which seems lead the schools to a renewed focus on local and regional contexts. In the German-speaking countries, school is therefore accentuated as a place that is part of this localization and identity formation, with a stronger stress on the development of social and soft skills, which are at the core of the identity development.

according to the European educational strategy, education should Knowledge is a crucial source for the economic growth of the European countries (European Commission, 2010), so we need to promote quality education as a fundamental tool for developing a participative and aware society.

¹³ To reach these objectives, the Minister of Education has developed recently the Pathways for Transversal Skills and Guidance (PCTO), including by strengthening agreements between schools and universities and allowing students to make the first experience in the labour market (even if this type of initiative has been highly criticized since sometimes it doesn't guarantee the safety conditions in which students should work).

¹⁴ This concept has been introduced also thanks to the newly edited book “Viaggio nelle character skills” (*A journey inside the character skills*) edited by Giorgio Chiosso, Anna Maria Poggi and Giorgio Vittadini.



All the teachers interviewed on this topic were addressed to critical thinking as a soft skill: according to all of them, it is a skill that should be encouraged during a learning experience and it can be used in daily teaching practice.

There are different ways of practising it daily in the classroom. Among the main ones identified by the teachers, here they are some of them:

- Showing always two different perspectives for the same topic. Even, asking questions, questioning some established ideas.
- Providing a response to a specific social, educational issue by achieving consensus among different perspectives. Promoting critical thinking within the individuals in a group and coming to a common agreed response.
- Through diverse projects, in which students have to look for information, encourage students to analyze it, organize it and reflect on it.
- Students participation in debates about actual issues (high unemployment rates, political corruption, social differences...)
- Encouraging students to ask questions, questions that require thought, play roles that don't necessarily reflect their own views or behaviour. Making students more aware of their biases and prejudices by exposing them to different points of view/cultures.
- Decision-making should be used in class, with students involved in problem-solving through evaluating solutions by weighing pros and cons of a variety of solutions and deciding which ideas work best. Finally, creativity (art projects, invention construction, poem/story writing, song singing) and group work (being involved in group projects and discussions) are another two excellent ways to trigger students' imagination in creating something new, and also to encourage critical thinking skills through cooperative learning, so that students expand their thinking and worldview by demonstrating and realising that there's no one right way to approach a problem.
- By promoting cooperative education, student team projects, flipped classroom procedure and inquiry-based learning



- Active reading, contrasting different texts, problem solving, self-reflection questionnaires, discussions on modern problems affecting the whole world.
- Several practices should be encouraged. Some of them would be brainstorming, paying attention to all points of view, working on creativity. In addition, learners should develop self-confidence and tolerance through certain activities that promote collaboration in decision making.
- Involving students in taking decisions concerning class projects; encourage discussion in class about the behaviour and reasoning of their classmates; use technology to recognize fake news; use open ended questions to encourage to stimulate discussions.
- Through debates with personal experiences and the expression of evaluations of phenomena/objects of study.
- Through the search for similarities and differences between what is taught and what pupils experience, directly or indirectly, in everyday life.
- By educating them to reflect on the consequences of the choices made by rulers, the scientific community and individual citizens on the environment and human health, and by promoting discussions on the ethical aspects of science.

Teachers in their daily work strengthen and promote soft skills which are considered important for the development of students' critical thinking.

Through the questionnaires, merged that the soft skills on which most work and activities are proposed within the class are:

Creativity

Communication skills

Respect for others

Tolerance

at the same time, most of the teachers interviewed reported some skills that they work less on, such as:

- Self-reflection



- Mutual support
- empathy

5.5. Innovation in the national system schools

In this section, they are presented the main innovation in school system at National level which were highlighted by the education experts involved in our research. The contributions will help the partnership to understand where the innovative approach of REACT can be implemented, understanding which synergy or favourable conditions can be “exploited” to make the project intervention effective or easily adapted to the national initiatives. Learning spaces, methods and social and soft skills are the areas taken into account, thus integrating the previous information provided and giving a complete comprehension of each national contexts around the project reference areas.

5.6. Bulgaria

Bulgarian experts referred to specific and concrete interventions on each field, providing the following studies:

Learning Spaces

- “ Analysis of the consequences for the learning process,distance learning students and teachers in electronic environment in the school year 2020/2021” - The online environment as a new space for studying. Research and analysis. Authors : Asenka Hristova; Dr. Svetla Petrova; Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Tosheva

Source: [http://ire-bg.org/wpsite/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Impact of distance learning in electronic environment on educational process teachers and students.pdf](http://ire-bg.org/wpsite/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Impact_of_distance_learning_in_electronic_environment_on_educational_process_teachers_and_students.pdf)

Methods

- Measures to improve the quality of education for the 2021/2022 school year in 112 Stoyan Zaimov primary school - Sofia.

Source: <https://112ou.org/index.php/homepage/14-sample-data-articles/140-den-na-otvorenite-vrati>



Social and soft skills

- Online behavior of children in Bulgaria - Main conclusions from National representative study (compared to the 2010 EU children online survey), 2016

National center for safe internet Marketlinks

Source:

https://www.ngobg.info/uf/documents/7154/2076bulgariannationaresearch2016_summary_bg_final.pdf

- Monitoring of education and training 2017 Education and training, Bulgaria

Source: https://www.ngobg.info/uf/documents/7154/2126monitor2017bg_bg.pdf

5.7. Greece

Learning spaces

The restrictive structure of school buildings in Greece allow mostly traditional classroom setting and arrangements or U form, but also clusters of desks for pair and group work.

Among the innovations regarding the learning spaces, the following ones have been highlighted by the Greek education experts:

- **Excursions-visits and contact with the environment** (natural and man-made), where necessary and possible, to ensure immediate information that can be utilized in a variety of ways. This contact contributes in the experiential approach to knowledge
- **Vocational laboratories** facilitate students to approach more successfully their future studies
- **Circle time to facilitate teacher dialogue with students or group discussion:** the discussion gives students the opportunity to think, evaluate, conclude and express their views through processes of dialectical debate. The involvement of the student in the discussion and his / her active participation is achieved with



appropriate reflection questions, which are designed before the teaching takes place. Students' interest is activated, their attention is focused on a specific goal and learning becomes easier and more natural.

- **Computer labs** with the appropriate resources which are very useful for the students to better understand and comprehend concepts and processes.

Methods

On the recent National Curriculum an **interdisciplinary and holistic approach to knowledge** is considered as essential for the development of the student's ability, **following an appropriate organization of curriculum of each subject**, that ensures processing issues from many perspectives (horizontal connections) but also the organization of the curriculum on the same concepts, skills throughout the classes (vertical interconnection).

The application of cross-thematic approaches reduces the knowledge-oriented approach of teaching and utilizes school time. In this context, the teacher is a mediator in autonomous learning, which students acquire through their active participation in relevant activities.

Active methodology is at the center of this new educational landscape. The interdisciplinary approach is supported by methods of active acquisition of knowledge such as student-centered teaching approaches where students co-configure and intervene in the learning process (e.g in the Flexible Zone programmes), exploration and discovery through audiovisual material, simulations, demonstrations using appropriate equipment (slides, videotapes, etc, modeling, creative activities, project work).

Exploration and discovery (active approach to knowledge) aims to help students to think, to manipulate complex concepts, to research and to reach knowledge themselves, that is, to learn "how to learn that requires activation of the students. To be effective, of course, teaching requires practices that are appropriate conditions to enable "discovery".



Collaborative forms of teaching: The dynamics developed by the student are used either as a framework for the collective processing of data or as a framework to support the path to individual learning. Collaborative forms of teaching are suitable for the elaboration of work plans (projects), which are offered for the organization of interdisciplinary activities.

Some other teaching strategies:

- **Differentiated teaching:** implement strategies and techniques in mixed-ability classes
- **ICT in teaching:** pedagogic use of ICT tools to create incentives, foster stimulation, actively involve students in producing digital material and develop digital and media literacies

Social and soft skills

One of the late innovations is the initiative “Skills Workshops”: a dynamic intervention in the character of education and the climate in the school and its redefinition from "closed" to "open" system. The programs introduced will be organized starting 2021-22 school year in four (4) key thematic pillars and will cover more specific topics: a. Wellbeing; b. Caring for the Environment; c. Caring and Acting - Social Consciousness & Responsibility Creating & Innovating; d. Creative Thought & Initiative. Teachers after being trained (36 hrs) will use the materials to design and implement corresponding Skills Development Programs in their curricula. The design must include implementation of the four (4) thematic pillars and may include from 20 to 28 Skills Development Programs in total, i.e 5 to 7 weeks per thematic pillar.



5.8. Spain

Learning spaces

Regarding the new Learning spaces, the educational foundation of Jesuitas state that “there are three topics that are rarely addressed in several educational experiences: prioritizing the contents of the curriculum, the transformation of the physical space and the school organization” (Cuaderno 04, p. 63). Jesuitas agrees that the transformation of the physical space is a priority and, hence, they have worked together with architects and a commission of educators in order to establish the new model for their schools. This new model aims to promote dynamism, flexibility, happiness, surprises, creativity...thanks to the use of new, modern and wide classrooms. The transformation will also be seen in other spaces, such as the corridors or the canteen, as those spaces will also have an educational approach.

In this sense, it is stated that there cannot be “lost” spaces in the school; as every space would need to invite to a reflection, to an experience or to a relationship with one self or with the others. They also recall the importance of changing colours of chairs and tables, for example, as everything has an impact in promoting certain attitudes or values. It is important to note that, in this project, brick walls have been substituted by glass walls, in order to promote the value of transparency and to enhance collaborative work. The main goal of this project is to achieve the

Following: each learning space can be transformed to suit the students’ needs and the implementation of new methodologies. For example, each learning space needs to meet the following requirements: be easily adapted to individual and group work, be easily transformed in a workshop, library, mini-lab...It also has to be a place in which we can debate, reflect and evaluate... and it must have space for other sub-spaces, which could be used for private tutoring or for exchanging feedback.

See below an example of one of the new classrooms:



There are very few publications on the subject of physical learning spaces.

The Jesuits in Barcelona have developed an innovative project redesigning the physical classroom and its structure.

- **Cavaller, M. (2016).** Rediseñamos los espacios de la escuela: 35 escenarios para trazar el cambio educativo in *Transformando la educación*. Barcelona, Jesuits Educació.
- **Fernández-Enguita, M. (2020).** La Organización escolar. Repensando la caja negra para poder salir de ella. In *Diálogo Educativo*. Andalucía, PODI Print.

The Covid pandemic has of course redefined the concept of learning space to a degree for all stakeholders in education. See point 7 below.

- **Ochoa De La Fuente, L. (2015).** Creer, poder y hacer. Horizonte 2020 en las escuelas jesuitas de Barcelona. *Propuesta Educativa* [en línea], 44, 38-53. Retrieved from <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=403044816005>



Methods

During our research, we have found that **cooperative and dialogic learning** are two of the most popular methods in Spain. As far as cooperative learning is concerned, we have an organization in Spain, Cinetica collective (<https://www.colectivocinetica.es/colectivo-cinetica/>), which offers training, assessment and resources related to cooperative learning and other methodologies at primary and secondary school level. The courses are certified by the University of Salamanca and have become very popular among the educational community. They have also developed an online diploma on Cooperative Learning, addressed to primary and secondary teachers, school directors, future teachers and other experts in education. The director of Cinetica, Francisco Zariquiey, has also published 2 books on the subject during the last 5 years:

Cooperative learning

- <https://www.colectivocinetica.es/colectivo-cinetica/>

The Cinetica collective offers training, assessment and resources related to cooperative learning and other methodologies at primary and secondary school level. The courses are certified by the University of Salamanca. The director of the collective, Francisco Zariquiey, has also published 2 books on the subject during the last 5 years.

- **Zariquiey, F. Y Manso,O, (2021)** *Cooperar para crecer: el aprendizaje Cooperativo en educación infantil* Biblioteca Innovación Educativa SM
- <https://comunidadesm.com.pe/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Cooperar-para-aprender.pdf> (Same author).

Dialogical learning

This paper by professors from the University of Seville, proposes a series of criteria that aim to optimize the quality of interactions and define the characteristics of dialogical learning style interactions.



Aguilera-Jiménez, A., & Prados – Gallardo, M. (2020). Dialogic Learning, Interactive Teaching and Cognitive Mobilizing Patterns. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*, 10(3), 271-294. doi: 10.4471/remie.2020.5088

<http://dx.doi.org/10.447/remie.2020.5088>

Social and soft skills

Currently, it is key to educate our students as global citizens. According to Almerich, Díaz García, Cebrián Cifuentes, & Suárez Rodríguez (2018) the Society of Knowledge requires new competences, called 21st century Competences. These competences must be learned within the educational context. This new globalized system needs to educate citizens who are able to face digital contexts characterized by solving uncommon problems and with a lot of data complexity (Claro, 2012). Then, the main problem is not the access to data and knowledge but how to analyse and manage such amount of information in a critical way.

In order to carry out the research mentioned above, empirical data were collected, conducting several interviews addressed to HHRR experts and CEOs of relevant companies in our country. The results of the interviews showed that the most valued skill for participants with personal experience in leading roles—and, therefore, who know the skills their companies look for—is “Communication”, followed by “Collaboration” and “Self-Direction”. Then we find “Creativity and innovation”, “Critical thinking”, and, in last place, “Technology”. Most respondents say that technical skills are the minimum for even having a job interview, and that the skills referred to as “21st century skills” by the OEDC are key for the professional success of future professionals.

Erasmus+ projects in which Spanish universities participate are currently developing a handbook for teaching 21st century skills in the context of higher education.



Nemejc, K. & Bakay, M., E. (2021). *Catch 21st Century Skills Teaching Materials*. Prague, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague Institute of Education and Communication

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dc28ad57b92e564895cd0b9/t/60e2bb35d5afd0ef9d2fc30/1625471811536/Teaching_materials_CATCH_2021_ELECTRONIC.pdf

5.9. Italy

Learning spaces

The pandemic has accelerated a process of innovation that in previous years has mainly affected primary school, although changes have taken place at different scales. There are three different dimensions of spaces whose uses have been at least partially rethought.

The first is related to the **space of the school building**: the way of using the classrooms that in many cases have welcomed (and welcome) all the activities, from the lessons to the meal time, has changed in a very permanent way. At the same time, however, some of the previously unused or even considered spaces were recognized as places where is possible to organize and display part of the activities.

A second dimension of space is related to **school pertinences**, the space that usually closes within the school enclosure. These are large spaces, especially if they refer to buildings built during the sixties and seventies of 900. In these spaces the students begin to carry out different activities, not only sporting but also educational.

Then, there is the **entrance to the school**. In particular, more than architecture, the relations between school and territory have undergone a kind of acceleration. Openpolis' work on data helps to understand the geography and measurement of some of these phenomena. On one hand, some schools have gone out of their usual spaces on a daily basis, as has happened with the different experiences of "widespread school". On the other hand, the importance of networks of educating communities, in such critical times, has made clear and consolidated a real spatial re-arrangement.



Methods

In some contexts, even before the pandemic, there were already experiences and skills in action. The pandemic has shown its value, has abruptly tested its hold. Reference is made to the **educational pacts**, also in relation to the fact that for a few months they have been recognized and supported with dedicated resources, issues by the Ministry of Education. It is true, however, that in several cases there was already a habit of cooperation between different subjects, with a strong focus on educational issues, taking school as a reference place and institution where act on different fronts, first of all those of abandonment and school dropout. The pandemic presented examples of intervention in the territories, also very innovative, e.g. **Digital Solidarity** (solidarity also for distance didactic activities) promoted by the Department of School and Education, in concert with the Departments of Youth and Social Policies. As far as example, in Naples, this program is framed as an activity to support disadvantaged families who are not able to ensure the complete and correct development of distance didactic activities (e.g. for logistic problems, for material conditions and/or for previous difficulties experienced by students) nor to ensure that all the rules to prevent contagion are respected in daily life.

In any case, areas of collaboration have been created throughout the country between various actors (in particular NGOs) to combat educational fragility. Particularly, the Memorandum of Understanding for the management of the “**Fund Against Child Educational Poverty**” has been activated, intended as a supporting measure for experimental interventions aimed at removing economic, social and cultural barriers that prevent the full fruition of educational processes by minors¹⁵.

¹⁵ In the three-year period 2016-2018, the banking foundations have fed the Fund with about 360 million EUR. The 2019 Italian Budget Law confirmed the Fund for three-year period 2019-2021, providing 55 million EUR per year of tax credit to banking foundations, which can benefit from it for 65% of the amounts paid. Therefore, a contribution for the foundations of approximately 80 million EUR per year is expected. With the decree law 23rd, July, 2021 No 105 the Italian Government has previewed the



To better understand the phenomenon and extent of child education poverty in Italy, it has been established the **Observatory #conibambini** (#withthechildren). It is born from the collaboration with Openpolis to promote a debate on the condition of minors in Italy, starting from the educational, cultural and social opportunities offered. The main contribution of the Observatory wants to be the creation, as data journalism, of a database that allows social operators, media and Public Administration to analyse these phenomena no longer and not only in aggregate (usually regional or national) but **on a municipal and sub-municipal scale**. To do this, several municipal databases have been identified and aggregated in a single IT infrastructure, issued by a multiplicity of official sources with different times and formats. The analysis of the Observatory is developed along five main thematic dimensions: **school, culture, social services, sport and digital inequalities**. In particular, the Observatory monitors the presence and distribution on the territory of services focused on minors, from early childhood to adolescence.

Social and soft skills

Regarding the value given to social and soft skills in the Italian educational panorama, it is worth to be mentioned the recommendation of Education Minister Mr Bianchi that strongly ask to take into due consideration not only the responses by students to questionnaires and tests, but also other “**behavioural data**” that arise from the way students respond to such evaluation tools. This is to say to take stock of certain aspects of student behaviours as recorded by the computer during the responding process to disciplinary tests. In fact, the used of the so called “log files” made available by the OECD containing, among other things, information on response behaviour to the 2015 wave of

extension of the Fund for the years 2022 and 2023. Overall, the Fund is worth more than 600 million EUR. The Fund’s strategic choices are defined by a special Strategic Steering Committee in which the banking foundations, the Government, the organisations of the Third Sector and representatives of INAPP and EIEF – Einaudi Institute for Economics and Finance are represented on an equal footing



the PISA test. In this regard, there is a law proposal on how to prevent and combat educational poverty and early school leaving through the promotion of cognitive skills. The proposal foresees “in order to improve educational success and prevent educational poverty and early school leaving”, an experiment on the development of non-cognitive skills to be realized in children’s schools, during primary and middle school as well as in the provincial adult educational centres (CPIA). The experiment will aim to identify the most significant non-cognitive skills for the promotion of educational success, good practices related to teaching methodologies and processes that promote their development as well as the criteria and instruments for their recognition and measurement. It will include specific teacher training and will take place within the framework of school autonomy.

5.10. Germany

Learning spaces

The traditional school is the most important place where learning processes take place. However, the learning place itself has been changing for several decades (i.e., much before 2015). You find fewer and fewer schools where – at least in the elementary sector, but usually well beyond that – traditional frontal teaching takes place. Typically, classrooms are arranged so that students sit together in groups and work collaboratively. Concepts such as circle time are regularly used.

Other learning venues also have some traditions. For example, it is common for all schools to offer so-called project weeks at least once a semester, during which topics are developed across subjects and groups, sometimes in learning venues outside of school (for example: in biology classes in zoos, in social institutions, in blbliothèques, and many more).

Developments since 2015:



In the context of the Corona pandemic, digital learning has gained enormous importance as a virtual learning venue. However, it has been shown here that virtual learning often leads to further social division.

Methods

The most common used methods highlighted by the educational experts are:

- Learning by insight: the acquisition or restructuring of knowledge using cognitive skills (perceiving, imagining, reflecting, etc.).
- Multidimensional learning: a method of learning that links a number of different skills for the acquisition process and combines them in different learning forms.
- Project teaching (project learning): interdisciplinary self-determined learning.
- Project-oriented teaching: a form of teaching that opens up subject teaching in the direction of project teaching in terms of content and method.
- Discovering: a method of independent knowledge acquisition.
- Group work: to learn from / with others.

Social and soft skills

Soft skills are regarded as important in schools. The prevailing opinion is that soft skills should not be taught separately from the theoretical and classic subjects. The teaching of soft skills is therefore part of regular teaching, but usually plays a very important role in the learning process. However, there are no standards or rules relating to this topic. Each school tries out its own concepts: one school has grades, another has oral assessments. Some have adapted their building architecture to the different learning (as it has been specified above)



5.11. Initiatives aimed at promoting a transformative process of the educational system which actively involve actors of the educational community

In the following pages, it will be given space to those initiatives taken at national level in which schools have created educational alliances with other actors of the educational community, thus allowing to start a collective process of transformation with the purpose of a positive impact on the whole community.

The practices presented are several: from digital tools allowing teachers to add more contents and creative involvement of the students, making them perceive the value of participation and contribution also in the context of the lesson (such as GIS in School) to training programs addressed to teachers which are aimed at strengthening the democratic participation of the students (Democratic Paideia Programme); from government initiatives to involve young people potentially marginalized by the society to teachers training to introduce collaborative learning (“Scasiarchio”); from creative approaches enabling young people to unleash their creative potential to express and share uncomfortable situations (“The desk of loneliness”) to programme for teachers promoting educational transformation (EduCaixa); from the use of ICT to allowing the connection among educational communities (“Innovation School Mapping”) to projects aimed to strengthening the family participation in the school community (Hilvana project); from initiatives using creative approaches to increase students participation and soft skills (“Soft skills and playing chess” and “Map of emotions”) to EU funded project aimed at including all the members of the educational community in a participative process (ALICE project). The overview provided at national level reveals a fertile ground in which the educational system is clearly in motion, towards a change which is open to all the parts living the community, where learning environments and spaces are at the centre of this transformation.

Here below, it is possible to read in details the initiatives taken at national level:



Bulgaria

Title	GIS in School
Context of implementation	Free GIS software for your school.
Target	Designed for teachers who want to add interactive tools to improve the teaching and learning of the curriculum.
Needs addressed	New skills for perceiving geographical information.
Description of the practice	Geographic information systems can make it visible and easy to perceive information, which is otherwise structured in tables and complex databases, using its location and presenting it as a map.
Pedagogical approach used	GeoMentor is a volunteer program in which professionals in the field of geospatial systems and technologies help teachers in Bulgarian schools to use the full potential of GIS technology in the classroom.
Impact	Thanks to the established connection between components, GIS integrate the location of objects (phenomena) with their description, revealing new one's spatial relationships and models.
Useful links (good practice and any results)	https://teach-with-gis-bulgaria-esribulgaria.hub.arcgis.com/#lessons

Greece



Title	“Democratic paideia” programme
Context of implementation	Primary and Secondary education
Target	Teachers and students of Primary and secondary schools
Needs addressed	The intensity and the multiplication of xenophobic and racist perceptions in society and on the other hand the common interest in dealing with anti-democratic and violent phenomena in the field of education.
Description of the practice	<p>Democratic paideia is a teacher education and training programme implemented by the N.K U. of Athens (Postgraduate Programmes "Political Science and Sociology" and "Education and Humanities" Education in Preschool Age).</p> <p>The starting point of the project is that an effective response to actions that endanger the democratic foundations can only start from a very young age and exploring the needs of the educational community. The Democratic Education team has been in dialogue with primary school teachers and secondary education who have expressed the need to acquire more knowledge and skills to ensure a climate of democracy, solidarity and cooperation at school.</p> <p>The program supports one hundred practicing teachers in Athens, Thessaloniki and Patras by providing seventy hours of training. In addition, the program a) organizes an electronic platform that collects and has relevant teaching and learning materials and b) produces original educational material, activity manuals and action proposals, which teachers can include in their teaching practice.</p>
Pedagogical approach used	Processes and activities that enhance the active participation and self-organization of students in the educational process, oral history methodology



Impact	Development of projects in many schools and utilization of the educational material of the platform of the democratic paideia (see link below)
Useful links (good practice and any results)	https://www.demopaideia.gr/

Title	The collaboration of Refugee Education Coordinators and Principals / School Principals in attempt to include students / three refugees in education.
Context of implementation	Ministry of Education established three committees for the support of refugee children: Committee for the Support of Refugee Children, Scientific Committee (SC) consisting of 26 professors and scientific associates, Art Committee (AC) Primary Schools of the Municipality of Athens and the Coordinator of Refugee Education of the Open Accommodation Structure of Eleonas
Target	prepare a plan for the integration of refugee children into education in order to contribute to their wider social integration
Needs addressed	The integration of refugee's students in the Greek educational system
Description of the practice	preparatory and creative actions were proposed within the Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs), "pre-integration" year- planned to take place with differentiated scenarios to reflect the needs of different groups of students
Pedagogical approach used	Various activities i.e sport, art activities and activities using technology for all ages



Impact	assessment of the initiatives, reconsiderations about reception classes, new programs in Greek and their mother tongues
Useful links (good practice and any results)	Refugee Education project: https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2017/CENG_Epistimoniki_Epitropi_Prosfygon_YPPETH_Apotimisi_Protaseis_2016_2017_070_.pdf file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/66003768.pdf

Title	“Scasiarchio”: educational pilot project of Freinet Pedagogy by the K.U. of Athens, the University of Peloponnese, the French network Freinet (ICEM)
Context of implementation	Applied in schools of Regional Directorates of Primary and Secondary Education of Attica, Corinth, Argolida and Arcadia, by the “Scasiarchio” pedagogic group in collaboration of the Institute of Educational Policy.
Target	Teachers of primary and secondary education
Needs addressed	The need to create the necessary “space” for children’s initiative and independent action
Description of the practice	The programme is aimed at primary and secondary school teachers, who wish to implement in their classroom the cooperative learning with Freinet pedagogy. In the first phase, introductory training was provided to teachers who participated, while in the second phase implementation they follow Freinet pedagogy in pilot classes and schools with the support of those in charge of the program, as well as exchange of teachers' experience in workshops.



Pedagogical approach used	The Freinet pedagogic approach: project method, participatory planning, involvement of community, libraries, children's journalism
Impact	The teachers applied the pedagogical principles and educational tools of Freinet Pedagogy and collaborative learning in their classroom that had as a result the “reduction of competitive logic, respect for differences, the expression of solidarity, in the context of a democratic school open to society” (Alexiadi & all, p. 8). The collegiality in decision making contributed to the development both of the autonomy and collaborative culture among teachers. Two editions carried out by the Skasiarchio group, as well as translations and original material, subtitles of relevant films, publication of a newspaper and brochures, websites (of the Skasiarchio - the Network - of the Pilot Program) and useful material made available for information.
Useful links (good practice and any results)	<p>http://pilotikofreinet.weebly.com/2017-18-piotalambdaomicrontauiotakappaomicron.html</p> <p>file:///G:/european%20programme%20critical%20thinking/recent/2.%20Freinet%20%CE%A3%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C%CF%82%20%CE%A4%CF%8C%CE%BC%CE%BF%CF%82-%CE%A4%CE%B5%CF%8D%CF%87%CE%BF%CF%82%20%20-%20%CE%94%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%BF%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%20%CE%B5%CE%BA%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%AF%CE%B4%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%83%CE%B7%203.6.2020.pdf</p>



Title	“The desk of loneliness”. The contribution of ICT to the Pilot Program "Human Rights and Democracy in Action" and in the Comic competition of the Council of Europe and the European Commission (Το θρανίο της μοναξιάς: Η συμβολή των ΤΠΕ στη συμμετοχή στο Πιλοτικό Πρόγραμμα «Ανθρώπινα Δικαιώματα και Δημοκρατία σε Δράση» και στο διαγωνισμό Comic του Συμβουλίου της Ευρώπης και της Ευρωπαϊκής Επιτροπής)
Context of implementation	Secondary education students
Target	Prevention and reduction of aggressive behaviours that adolescents display in the school environment, cultivation of a culture of democracy and acceptance of diversity.
Needs addressed	The development of awareness of issues concerning exclusion and prejudice and of empathy.
Description of the practice	Utilizing the pilot project "Human Rights and Democracy in Action" of the Council of Europe and the European Commission enabled a high school class to create the comic "The Desk of Loneliness" and compete with peers from other European countries.
Pedagogical approach used	The methodology followed is: guided dialogue, brainstorming, exploratory and collaborative learning, web exploration.
Impact	The cultivation of skills for taking initiatives and collaborative learning, the awareness of issues of exclusion and prejudice and the empathy. Utilization of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) enriched the standard course and expanded the learning frontiers outside the traditional classroom
Useful links (good	https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michail-



practice and any results)	Kalogiannakis/publication/305000468 Proceedings of the 9th Pan-Hellenic Conference ICT in Education University of Crete Rethymno 03102014 - 05102014 in Greek/links/577ea86f08ae69ab8820e725/Proceedings-of-the-9th-Pan-Hellenic-Conference-ICT-in-Education-University-of-Crete-Rethymno-03-10-2014-05-10-2014-in-Greek.pdf
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Spain

Title	EduCaixa: promoting Educational Transformation
Context of implementation	The Caixa Foundation's educational programmes promote competences, provide support for teachers via a technical office, include didactic programmes with proposals for assessment
Target	Primary and secondary school Directors, teachers and pupils
Needs addressed	The development of soft skills (critical thinking, communication...) in students and the training of school teachers and directors in leadership and methodology.
Description of the practice	Among other programmes aimed at Primary and secondary level education on a National level, the Caixa (bank) Foundation provides training for school directors in a programme called Leadership for learning. At the moment it is training 50 school directors from all over Spain with a series of talks and workshops.
Pedagogical approach used	Their programmes encourage collaboration amongst teachers and use active, participative methodologies. Their belief is that



	teachers and school management teams lie at the heart of educational change.
Impact	
Useful links (good practice and any results)	https://fundacionlacaixa.org/en/educaixa-educational-programmes

Title	INNOVATION SCHOOL MAPPING
Context of implementation	Certain Regions of Spain
Target	Primary and secondary schools
Needs addressed	Fosters collaboration between schools by highlighting schools with successful learning communities and innovative best practices using tools such as Google Maps. Detects and promotes specific good practices at state and county level
Description of the practice	<p>The Department of Education in Catalonia accompanies schools in the region in the process of educational transformation responding to the needs of the 21st century and recognising the efforts being made in the field of pedagogic innovation.</p> <p>The pedagogic innovation map is an instrument that permits the visibility of initiatives relating to innovation and educational research carried out in education centres that have been recognised within the Catalanian school innovation framework.</p> <p>The aim of the innovaton map is to promote networking between centres sharing objectives and shows information that facilitates decision-making in the educational community, the</p>



	Administrartion and other entities. This decision-making encourages inclusion, cohesion and equality.
Pedagogical approach used	<p>Methodologies used in these innovaton projects are divers and can be found at any educational stage. They can be divided in 2 ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to curriculum area: artistic, technological-scientific, environmental, culture and values, digital, physical education, linguistic, mathematical, personal and social. • According to innovation type: 1) methodologies and resources to improve teaching and learning; 2) educational organisation and management 3) relation and cooperation with the educational community and society.
Impact	In 2020, seventy-six Catalonian centres had been awarded the certificate of 'Recognition of noteworthy innovative educational practices' : practices that are consolidated, and have transformed and improved the quality and equality of the education system in accordance with guidelines laid out in article 2 de la Orden ENS / 303/2015, from 21 of September, relating to the recognition of pedagogic innovation.
Useful links (good practice and any results)	https://innovacio.xtec.gencat.cat/

Title	RAMIRO SOLANS SCHOOL Proyecto Educativo de Centro "Live your school, dare to change". The "Hilvana" project.
Context of implementation	State school, Zaragoza, Spain. Educates a population at risk of social exclusion (40% second generation immigrants, 55%



	Romany origins and 5% other sociocultural groups).
Target	<p>OBJECTIVES of the CENTRE</p> <p>The centre’s philosophy is to enable families to approach the educational environment and to become involved in infant education, with the aim of fostering a change of attitude and views on education, from unnecessary to essential, and eradicating inequality and poverty.</p> <p>OBJECTIVES OF HILVANA PROJECT</p> <p>Key general objectives of this project which aims to empower and foster social inclusion for women from this group. are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote intercultural coexistence based on equality and respect for differences. ● Foment female entrepreneurship through personal and collective empowerment. <p>To achieve this, pupils’ mothers, grandmothers and aunts attend sewing workshops at the school. The products they make are sold in economic solidarity networks. In this way, these women find empowerment and active inclusion in school life.</p>
Needs addressed	Families at risk of exclusion who do not consider schools or education to be essential. The project aims to support, accompany and encourage the women participating to access their rights. To do this, the generation of income is used as a means to achieve personal change that has repercussions in the family and community through the development of new competencies and skills.
Description of the practice	Women belonging to pupils’ families attend sewing workshops at the school.
Pedagogical approach used	Service-Learning Methodology



Impact	<p>Reduction in school absenteeism of children from participating families.</p> <p>Improved performance of children from participating families.</p> <p>Female empowerment and entrepreneurship. Previously invisible women have become positive models, overcoming prejudices and cultural barriers.</p> <p>Great impact also on participating institutions. (Ayuda en Acción, ESDA y CEIP Ramiro Soláns). The project has become visible on various platforms: web, blogs, social media, press. TV.</p>
Useful links (good practice and any results)	<p>https://spain.ashoka.org/portfolio-items/ceip-ramiro-solans-zaragoza-2020/</p> <p>https://aprendizajeservicio.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/DISEN%CC%83ANDO-PARA-HILVANA.pdf</p>

Italy

Title	Development of soft skills in primary school through playing chess
Context of implementation	Elementary and middle schools
Target	6-13 yo students
Needs addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Psychomotor abilities and spatial management ● Ability to analyse strategies ● Ability to critically choose between even contradictory or alternative hypotheses ● Problem-solving attitudes
Description of the practice	Chess is an alternative language in which each player can communicate to the opponent his/her game strategy and his/her logical-deductive abilities. It represents a useful training



	<p>for the mind, favouring the development of cognitive abilities, such as memory, concentration, attention, spatial ability, problem-solving and so on.</p> <p>The project began in the first class with the performance by the students of “chess psychomotricity”, a particular motor activity carried out in chess. The students, moving on the large space of a giant chessboard floor, individually and in group, play the role of chess pieces and simulate their movements. Building on this basis a network of multidisciplinary activities, the exercise of the game allows the transposition of skills in fields other than the mathematical logic.</p>
<p>Pedagogical approach used</p>	<p>The methodology used in the class has been directed towards a proactive system as playful and interactive as possible, so as to be able to keep high the level of attention and participation of students.</p> <p>A didactic design has been developed for interdisciplinary learning units, using as a common thread for the achievement of the goals set out in the book by L. Carroll “Alice in Wonderland” from which the proposed activities were born.</p> <p>The reading of the fable allowed the attribution to each piece of its specific move and the knowledge of the correct arrangement that each piece must have on the board at the beginning of the game.</p> <p>The presentation of the pieces and the rules with the related exercises-game and quizzes took place through the use of Interactive Multimedia Board with slides and contents.</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<p>This experience has proved from the outset a valuable tool for improving interpersonal relationships and collaborative climate. The chess project was highly appreciated by all the students. Some important results obtained by the class thanks</p>



	<p>to the particular features of this game are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The acquisition of some mathematical concepts has been facilitated ● Integration and socialization have been promoted ● The students with disabilities/experiencing learning difficulties, while experiencing some difficulties during the first phase (where game's rules should be understood), participated in the construction of the chess board and teaching activities by developing more manual, logical-mathematical, self-control skills and had more chance to interact with classmates ● Students with disabilities/experiencing learning difficulties and more demotivated felt valued like the other mates, thus increasing their self-confidence ● Students who are reluctant to follow the rules have developed more self-control.
Useful links (good practice and any results)	<p>https://www.iclucca2.edu.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SCACCHI-PRESENTAZ-SCUOLE.pdf</p>

Title	Map of emotions
Context of implementation	Secondary school
Target	14-18 yo students
Needs addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ability to reflect on one's own personal history for character development ● Ability to present arguments ● Ability to manage and recognize one's emotions
Description of the practice	<p>The emotions map project aimed to develop Emotional Intelligence as the ability to understand and monitor one's own feelings and those of others and use this information to act and adapt to social situations. In particular, the project is divided into three areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emotional evaluation and expression 2. Emotional regulation; and



	<p>3. Use of emotions.</p> <p>The pathway was articulated on the theme of autobiographical narration and students produced a series of “geolocalized” stories and transferred to a map. In particular, he/she was asked to identify a specific place in the city where a particularly emotionally relevant autobiographical story had been transmitted (e.g. “my parents told me that they met here for the first time”) or where an emotionally valuable story has been lived. The story has to be written and the students were invited to attend a seminar for autobiographical writing run by a writer. The theme was represented in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knowledge of one’s own emotions ● Control of emotions ● Motivation of oneself ● Recognition of the emotions of others ● Management of relationships ● Accurate perception of emotions ● Use of emotions to facilitate decision-making ● Management of emotions
<p>Pedagogical approach used</p>	<p>The pedagogy of the emotional intelligence of the project is based on the theme of Bruner’s narrative thought as a representative model able to constitute, through the construction of stories, an interpretative model of emotions even in a social context.</p> <p>Narrating generates a vision of the world and of oneself and invests the existential dimension and memory. In the project, the pedagogical dimension of narrative practice took strength from the formative value of reflection, which becomes memory and makes evident and readable the existential trajectory. Facing the emotional past to rebuild needs means to the students to employ appropriate tools through the discovery of the connections between memories, in a network of complex</p>



	<p>interrelations. Emotional memory becomes writing and then cognitive exercise to link events, discover causes, connections, explanations.</p> <p>The aim of the pedagogy of the project is therefore to make it possible to define for each of the student the plot of his/her existence through a projection towards the re-appropriation of his/her auto-poetic dimension. This cognitive activity also has a sharing and exchange function (Demetrio, 1997).</p> <p>In the project, the application of autobiographical methodologies has been distinguished in two different actions: self-reflective phase to tell the events and negotiating, to transmit emotions to others and make them transparent. The text of the stories, referring to a place and contextualized geographically as well as socially, have had a “medium” function that consisted also in a work of interaction negotiated on the collective meanings of experiences. The stories of the students were anchored through the map to their temporal and social context and we could say – communitarian context.</p> <p>In the autobiographical practice related to the description of emotions, the use of writing has allowed the physical form and redefining of thought, obliging to make synthesis and to reflect on the description of lived experiences.</p>
Impact	<p>The impact of the project was significant because it involved about 400 students in the preparatory activities, which consisted in the description of both the emotional practice both the features of biographical writing. More than half of the students involved produced a text and allowed their work to be published via a voluntary consensus according to privacy rules. Also 45 teachers took part in the preparation activities and participated in training on emotional intelligence and on the</p>



	autobiographic writing too.
Useful links (good practice and any results)	www.montesca.eu/mappaemozioni

Title	ALICE project: pro-social competences for secondary schools
Context of implementation	Secondary school
Target	14-18 yo students
Needs addressed	<p>The project carried out actions aimed at the development of critical thinking, starting from the creation of pro-social skills in students. The pro-social behaviour within a Community, that has in its objectives also education, is the premise for a harmonious individual and community development: in fact it is the basis of the relations' system and offers a stimulus for the creation of areas of competence. For the project, "competence" is the "ability to cope with a task, or a set of tasks, managing to set in motion and orchestrate their own internal resources, cognitive, affective, strong-willed and to use the available external ones in a coherent and fruitful way" (Pellerey, 2004).</p> <p>Having pro-social skills means having the ability to activate and coordinate the internal resources we have in key of citizenship, also oriented to the well-being, the mental health of the person and the improvement of social coexistence. In this perspective, the project has arranged various meetings and educational activities with the aim of identifying, developing and therefore observing pro-social skills.</p>
Description of the practice	The research-action carried out by ALICE project has developed thematic meetings with secondary school students based on reciprocity to discuss, deepen and raise awareness on the issue

of creation of pro-social skills. The project has allowed the realization of a curriculum of activities oriented to pro-social skills that will be used by the schools even after the end of the project's activities and that intends to:

- Promote pro-social intelligence, therefore meta-cognitive emotion, self-regulation mechanisms, sense of effectiveness and motivation for school success
- Working on a competence-based didactic, in line with the new Italian National Indications with emphasis on interpersonal and intersystemic skills
- Foster positive attitudes of citizenship, developing "inner legality".

Students were accompanied in a series of totally open meetings with the opposite theme of discussion represented by a pro-social competence put in a diachronic scheme (empathy/closure; pro-sociality/altruism; care/indifference). The approach was inspired by the Reciprocal Maieutic Approach by Danilo Dolci and the conditions to learn according to dynamic strategies in a perspective of self-efficacy through meta cognition and meta-cogni-emotion (Roche).

In these seminars, lasting about an hour and half, the value of the relationship become the integrating background and the class becomes a community in relation, aware of its dynamics in a systemic model from the "ego" to the "one to us".

In general terms, pro-social teaching has been articulated in interdisciplinary activities for the creation of disciplinary skills together with interpersonal and intersystemic skills as aggregating principles of values.

Phase I: workshop/seminars: are aimed at raise cognitive awareness. This phase is directed to the collection of information on the problem and/or the component of the related training. The goal is to raise awareness and knowledge.



	<p><u>Phase II: Acquisition of discussion and reflection techniques.</u></p> <p>The laboratory in this phase forecasted the acquisition of specific techniques and abilities through activities structured and adapted to the condition of the class and the single student.</p>
<p>Pedagogical approach used</p>	<p>The pedagogical approach is based on strategies for the creation of pro-social skills. The approach of the laboratories is based on the critical creation of safe relationships to let students understand that the class is a safe and interesting place and that the community/class is able to contribute in a positive way to their well-being.</p> <p>The project aimed to develop a first element of discussion and reflection towards the theme of the reconstruction of the “village”, understood as a system of relations to create a community of learners. As educational relationships create pro-social skills in students, so being part of a united learning community can foster their pro-social development.</p> <p>The laboratories focused a lot on the character of relationships related to empathy to create a real ability to understand the needs and intentions of others and to make their own interpretable, to overcome their exclusive point of view, to accept diversities (in particular those linked to physical and mental disabilities, including in order to stimulate the autonomous assumption of roles and tasks).</p> <p>Another theme was the multiculturalism of knowledge, recognition and enhancement of the diversity that can be found in the school itself and in social life in the broad sense.</p> <p>A central theme was undoubtedly that of self-esteem to make more transparent, within a positive interpersonal context, the action aimed at combining the first skills of choice and commitment of will and, at the same time, support the conquest</p>



	of self-esteem in view of a progressive pro-social relationship.
Impact	The project was addressed to a significant number of upper secondary schools. The workshops were attended by about 300 students who developed very free themes, following the methodological scheme presented.
Useful links (good practice and any results)	Pro-sociality Handbook for schools https://montesca.academia.edu/FabrizioBoldrini

Title	PATTO DI COMUNITÀ – NAPOLI (Community Educational Agreement)
Context of implementation	<p>Patto Educativo di Comunità (Community Educational Agreements) is an agreement stipulated among schools, local institutions and Third Sector organisations to strengthen the alliance between schools, families and the educational community.</p> <p>This agreement has already come into force in Naples in the following neighbourhood: Pianura, Chiaiano, Rione Luzzatti and San Lorenzo-Vicaria-Vasto. People living in these areas are working to implement specific measures by co-designing and giving value to the skills and the functions of the actors involved.</p> <p>The agreement strengthens and creates a network among different projects implemented locally. In particular, three national programmes Bella Presenza and Futuro Prossimo, financed by Con i Bambini in the frame of Fondo per il contrasto della povertà educativa minorile (Fund to fight child educational poverty), Fuoriclasse in Movimento, sponsored by private donors, and a network of intervention involving the aforementioned neighbourhoods (Punti Luce, Spazi Mamme, UnderRadio, Sottosopra).</p>



	<p>The agreement was entered into and signed by different organisations: Save the Children Italia, Dedalus, L’Orsa Maggiore, Coordinamento Genitori Democratici, EasLab, Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa, L’uomo e il Legno, Ellebi, E.D.I., A voce alta, Fondaca, Matematici per la città, Libera, Aste e Nodi, Le Nuvole, Casa del Contemporaneo, Oltre la tenda, Turmed, il Teatro nel baule, the Local Health Unity NA1 (district No. 26-28 e Open Point/Health Care and Social Services), and the Department of Education of the Municipality of Naples.</p> <p>Other local actors include the Theatre of Naples, Stellafilm, Guida Editori, Greenpeace, CSV Napoli, Massimiliano Virgilio, Studio Riccardo Dalisi.</p>
<p>Target</p>	<p>The schools which are part of the educational agreement are: IC Giovanni XXIII-Aliotta, IC Melissa Bassi, IC Nazareth-Musto, IS G. Siani in Chiaiano neighbourhood; IC R. Bonghi in Luzzatti neighbourhood; IC Bovio-Colletta in San Lorenzo Vicaria Vasto neighbourhood; CPIA Napoli 1; IC F.Russo, IC 72° Palasciano and IC Don G. Russolillo in Pianura neighbourhood.</p>
<p>Needs addressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - addressing early school leaving; - enhancing students' well-being and participation in curricular and extracurricular activities; - strengthening a positive relationship with the school environment; - consolidating a positive relationship with the school environment; - promoting more efficient career guidance processes; - sharing new didactic methods, materials, instruments and approaches; - improving the contamination between entities and schools, focusing on specific competencies.



Description of the practice	<p>The Educational Agreement works in a transversal way when it comes to designing and planning activities, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it makes use of an integrated co-design method based on an equal relationship among private and public entities, involved in a functional and organisational system aimed at acknowledging and giving value to the skills and the functions of all the participating actors; • it creates and bases activities and intervention on a solid intersection of contents, times, places, curricular and extracurricular programmes by foreseeing the co-design of activities to carry out with the whole class, involving headteachers, teachers, tutors and social workers; • it favours longitudinal modes of intervention, guaranteeing double and parallel attention to complex challenges and vulnerabilities and, at the same time, to weaker warning signs: e.g. irregular absences at school, often arriving late, finishing school earlier, being passive during lessons, having a shabby behaviour and not caring about school properties; • it fosters scaffolded interventions with individual programmes for children who face many challenges or whose success at school is at risk due to the economic situation of their family of origin or social and cultural distress; • it identifies opportunities to integrate activities targeted at pupils and initiatives for families, aimed at learning how to manage familiar responsibility and improve family-school relationships.
Pedagogical approach used	<p>This action involves students becoming protagonists of their learning path as they contribute to improving the lives of their school community by taking part in decision making efforts.</p>
Impact	<p>Invite teachers to get to know the aims of the agreement to understand how important it is for the whole school community,</p>



	beyond the classes involved, since from those classes can come helpful directions, methods and practices.
Useful links (good practice and any results)	https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/patto-educativo-di-comunita-napoli_0.pdf

Title	F.A.C.E Farsi Comunità Educanti (Becoming an educational community)
Context of implementation	The project is promoted by Fondazione Reggio Children and Centro Loris Malaguzzi and it is implemented in the following regions: Emilia Romagna, Campania, Abruzzo and Sicily. In particular, the activities are carried out in Reggio Emilia, Naples, Teramo and Palermo. The intervention aims to enhance and improve access to educational and childcare services for children between 0 and 6 years old in the regions above by encouraging the participation of families, especially disadvantaged ones. The project started by identifying the needs of the cities involved by inviting families and creating local participative pathways to integrate early childhood services. The results will be presented at a local level, and the good practices that emerged will be shared at a national level. In the end, co-designed pilot interventions will be developed on the territory to foster family and community participation.
Target	The intervention is addressed to 1500 parents and 900 children, 80 teachers and headteachers of the school partners.
Needs addressed	The main aim is to allow more children aged between 0 and 6 years to access educational and childcare services and childcare in the areas involved by enhancing family participation,



	<p>especially among disadvantaged ones. We aim to create the conditions to build educational communities capable of redefining school policies in the regions involved through these actions.</p>
<p>Description of the practice</p>	<p>The project is promoted by Fondazione Reggio Children and Centro Loris Malaguzzi and selected by Con i Bambini in the frame of the Fund to fight child educational poverty. It started by mapping the needs of the cities involved, inviting families and creating participatory pathways at a local level aimed at integrating early childhood services. In each area, organisations have implemented pilot interventions to support the participation of families and communities according to the desires and needs that emerged from discussions with those who took part in local events.</p> <p>The network</p> <p>National partners Amref Health, Enel Cuore Onlus, Fondazione Collegio Carlo Alberto, Fondazione E35, Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia, Reggio Children srl</p> <p>Local partners Naples: Municipality of Naples, I.C. 70 Marino Santa Rosa, Remida Campania</p> <p>Palermo: Municipality of Palermo, I.C. Sperone Pertini, Associazione Cuore Che Vede, Associazione Nuovamente</p> <p>Reggio Emilia: Municipality of Reggio Emilia, Cooperativa</p>



Comunità Educante

Teramo: Municipality of Teramo, I.C. Zippilli – Noè Lucidi, Associazione Deposito dei Segni, Teramo Children.

In Palermo, the project started in April 2018 with co-design actions involving the Municipality, Sperone Pertini School, two organisations, i.e. Cuore che Vede and Nuovamente and families living in the Sperone-Brancaccio neighbourhood.

Action no.1 – Benessere di comunità (Community well-being)

During the first year, local partners analysed the needs of families with children aged 0-6 and organised co-design meetings with them. These panels help us identify needs and desires, which inform two educational actions: “Benessere di Comunità” (Community well-being) and “Orientamenti” (Orientations).

The action started in September 2019. The activities promoted in the frame of this action were aimed at both parents and children, and their goal was to strengthen parental skills by supporting and helping these people take care of their children. The workshop focused on different topics according to children’s age.

0-11 months: Danza in fascia (a special kind of mother-baby dance), massage therapy for children, parenting support;

1-3 years old - 3-6 years old: the social role of food; clay



workshops; digital workshops; getting in touch with the natural and the animal world.

The activities took place on Saturday mornings for three Saturdays a month, involving each family in nine sessions in three different locations: Sperone-Pertini School, Cuore che Vede offices and the farm Equiturismo e Cultura.

Starting in April 2020, during the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, partners opened the “Benessere di Comunità” Facebook group to keep implementing activities remotely and allow families to continue on their learning path. On May 4th, partner organisations opened a Social Community where psychosocial, educational and health practitioners could offer support to the families living in the neighbourhood. In particular, they gave them directions and suggestions to counteract the challenging social, economic and educational crisis they were facing, access to educational and solidary interventions promoted by local and national governments, support for parenthood (good educational practices, information and support to pregnant women). The chat was open six days a week, and people could directly contact relevant professionals. The profile on social network obtained good feedback: 40 new families followed the social community and participated in the distance activities along with the 46 registered families who had already registered. The initiatives should have been resumed in the face to face format on October 10th 2020.

Action No.2 – Orientamenti (Orientations)



	<p>On October 10th 2020, the second piloting action of Fa.C.E. called “Orientamenti” started. Orientamenti is an innovative counselling, training and information service where parents can meet, share opinions and learn from people who have lived the same parental experiences.</p> <p>The sessions organised at school and on the premises of partner organisations were training moments for groups of parents and caregivers moderated by a group of experts to deal with the issues at hand and facilitate parenting support groups.</p> <p>Among the issues discussed, there were doubts and curiosities shared by families and problems that emerged during the previous sessions. The main aim was to offer parenting support by creating environments where parents can meet and build meaningful relationships that can be helpful on a daily basis.</p> <p>At the same time, partners launched a series of workshops concerning different forms of expressions targeting children aged 0-6.</p> <p>Among those who have already taken part in the first action and newly arrived families, 40 families had the opportunity to participate in these initiatives.</p>
Impact	<p>The workshops will be delivered by expert educators using different methodologies to help children experience and get to know the world from different perspectives, allowing them to develop and perfect manual, expression, sensory, social and communication skills.</p>
Useful links (good practice and any	<p>https://percorsiconibambini.it/face/scheda-progetto/ "Povertà educativa e disuguaglianze in salute" (Educational</p>



results)	<p>poverty and Health inequity link on YouTube to watch it again) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQCMRkmLqyo</p> <p>The documentary “Farsi comunità educanti”(Becoming an Educational Community – overall length 40 minutes) is available at: https://youtu.be/gQfc9IiZ4yc</p>
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Title	N.O.E Nuovi Orizzonti Educativi- Una città che educa (New Educational Frontiers – Educating city)
Context of implementation	<p>This three-year project (2021-2023) allowed numerous local stakeholders (e.g. organisations, schools, social enterprises, entities, institutions, communities, and local services) to come together to build a cohesive and interrelated educational community. Each of these entities has the same importance and leads to the stipulation of a Community Educational Agreement among Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, the Municipality of Turin, the Departments of Educational, Social and Youth Policies – District No. VI and the Regional School Office of Piedmont Region. NOE integrates, coordinates and systemises more than 33 local stakeholders engaged in developing a long-term local educational path targeted at the whole community.</p>
Target	<p>The project activities are mainly targeted at children aged 0-18 living in the Barriera di Milano neighbourhood and their families.</p> <p>As a system of subjects who act responsibly to take care of children, the educational community is an indirect beneficiary of the project since they support the educational professionals and promote participatory and sharing processes.</p>



Needs addressed	<p>The project was implemented in a specific neighbourhood in Turin characterised by inequalities and with a significant number of people aged between 0 and 18 years old.</p> <p>In some neighbourhoods of Turin, there is a greater concentration of low-income families supported by different actors, large families needing consistent interventions, and a higher number of NEETs aged 15-29. However, in the <i>Barriera di Milano</i> neighbourhood, one can find multiple challenges calling for a swift intervention since it is in this area that many children aged 0-6 live (counting for 6.3% of the population vs 5.3% in the whole city) 44% out of them has not obtained the Italian citizenship.</p> <p>According to the scope of the project and the aforementioned contextual elements, the “NOE- <i>Una comunità che educa</i>” project aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• promote a holistic approach valuing differences and supporting the growth of children in different developmental phases, taking into account the leadership role that adolescents and youth can play within the educational community;• support the active participation of families and a positive attitude towards parenting, answering the needs and respecting the modes of life of each family;• foster mutual understanding and respect between people and their community, an inclusive approach aimed at overcoming the risk of cultural clusterization and conveying a sense of belonging to the community;• facilitate access to formal and informal, multidimensional and integrated learning opportunities; support the creation of an educational system capable of making and building educational alliances; adopt an integrated and data-driven approach;
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● contribute to collecting information to monitor and plan services addressed to people aged 0-18 promoted by local stakeholders.
<p>Description of the practice</p>	<p>Structure and governance of the project</p> <p>Starting from an analysis of contextual data, “Una comunità che educa” aims to promote a participative design and implementation project of extracurricular activities created by the people who are part of the educational community operating in a limited territory of the Municipality of Turin. The project will be carried out for three years (June 2020- June 2023). Following a preliminary phase curated by project partners, people who are part of the community will participate in a co-design action to create an operational plan which the Managing Committee of the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo will then approve. Once approved, the plan will be implemented starting in early 2021. At the end of each year, partners will report and assess the activity programme.</p> <p>Three instruments have been defined to guarantee participation, coordinate the initiative and implement the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the coordinating Technical Group (composed of technical professionals from Turin Municipal Departments, the Regional School Office, Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, and the president of the District involved) shall define the guidelines, analyse and approve the results of participative co-design activities so that the Managing Committee of the Compagnia can supervise them; oversee the main steps of the project to contribute to building an integrated data system, the assessment and visibility plan; regularly discuss with the



Participatory Co-design Panels to support the implementation of the educational community agreement stipulated among relevant stakeholders;

- the Participatory Codesign Panels are composed of people eager to participate in the co-design project and have worked at the local level for a long time. They have specific skills in the fields of caregiving, education, training, and youth work. They shall:

co-design the intervention, along with the technical group, they should define the assessment and communication plans;

participate in the monitoring of the project and contribute to evaluating its actions; collaborate to create an integrated data system; contribute and implement the educational agreement signed by relevant stakeholders. The size and number of co-design panels will depend on the expertise and the number of individuals interested in participating in this action. Moreover, during the co-design and implementation phase, it will be possible to accept and involve other individuals with valuable sets of skills used to capitalise on the interventions.

- The coordinating group will regularly meet with the representatives of each co-design panel to harmonise the actions proposed and guarantee the development of an educational community capable of acting in a coherent, integrated and coordinated way.

The project manager, appointed by Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo and the Municipality of Turin, will guide the Participatory Codesign Panels and the coordinating group. They shall harmonise the direction given by the technical group and the work done by panels, support and promote co-design



	<p>activities when identifying goals, expected results, actions featured in the action plan and annual programmes, and their implementation. Moreover, they will finalise the interventions according to the procedures. They will promote the creation of a monitoring and assessment plan with members of the panels, apart from encouraging participation in the monitoring and assessment activities.</p>
<p>Pedagogical approach used</p>	<p>Below we list the main actions and pedagogic methodologies used according to children's age:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 0-5 years old: supporting responsible and positive parenting, especially in terms of active participation in the community; educational projects aimed at answering the needs of the said developmental age; ● 6-13 years old: designing activities aimed at giving educational support by appointing adult role models; offering study support and actions aimed at preventing early school leaving; educational alliances with families to facilitate developmental pathways of children and access to extracurricular activities whose goal is to let emerge and appreciate children's potentials; ● 14-18 years old: acknowledging children's need to put themselves to the test and promoting their participation through activities which allow them to express themselves, be heard from adults and institutions, and encourage them to have an impact at a local level in a responsible way, promote responsible and positive parenting through deconstructed interventions.

<p>Title</p>	<p>AVANGUARDIE EDUCATIVE (EDUCATIONAL AVANT-GUARD)</p>
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Context of implementation	Italy (curated by INDIRE)
Target	All Italian Schools
Needs addressed	Pedagogical innovation
Description of the practice	Identify, support, disseminate and systemise practices and educational models aimed at re-designing learning activities at school and their temporal and spatial features to answer the needs of the everchanging knowledge society
Pedagogical approach used	Action-research
Impact	A blended coaching service supports the schools which participate in the project. They have adopted and tested different learning models and practices, which led to increased participation of students in curricular activities.
Useful links (good practice and any results)	https://www.indire.it/progetto/avanguardie-educative/



6. Third part - How the schools promote soft skills acquisition to support the development of critical thinking and active listening.

Critical thinking is in particular a mental habit and to support the creation of the related skills requires students to think about their thinking and about improving the process, it requires students to use higher-order thinking skills – not memorize data or accept what they read or are told without critically thinking about it (Scriven & Paul, 2008; Schafersman, 1991; Templeaar, 2006). Therefore, critical thinking is a product of education, training, and practice. In addition to the more traditional model of teacher-direct teaching, innovative pedagogies should be used, even because the assessment of students in such analytical skills and critical thinking, in the adoption of certain common values and attitudes (such a sense of tolerance) and the active participation and engagement of students in school and community life is a complex task. It is in this area that RMA and Montessori approach will intervene and it has been considered fundamental to understand – as it has been done previously in the current research – how schools in each country deal with it. Moreover, the role and the promotion of soft skills through which developing critical thinking and active listening has been researched, thus allowing to have – as all the previous results – a pretty diverse European context.

Experts from **Bulgaria** highlighted the innovations which have been implemented in some school, such as “Elisaveta Bagryan”, where in order to stimulate the development of critical thinking a problem-based learning approach has been chosen as main tool¹⁶. In **Greece**, since 2021-2022, teaching values and skills regarding soft skills will be part of a special teaching hour per week from kindergarten until the end of Junior High School (11 years in total). Each grade will work on certain issues given already by the

¹⁶ <https://51sou.info/> - 51 Sofia University "Elisaveta Bagryan" is an innovative school from the school year 2019/2020. The innovation is related to problem-based learning. You can find more information from the menu "PBO - essence, examples, forms".



Institute of Education Policy and each class will deal with several different issues so as to give the possibility to our students to learn the most out of it¹⁷. In other cases, teachers believe that there are differences between the age levels of school students in order to properly support the development of critical thinking and active listening in their soft skills program, thus different approaches are used according to the age of the students¹⁸. The teaching practices of developing critical thinking and active listening are

¹⁷ This is something new for Greece, so the first results are expected no sooner than the end of Summer 2022. Nevertheless, the schools participating in the program have extensive experience in European programs during which emphasis was placed on the cultivation and development of such skills. Staying with the families that host the children helps in adaptability, daily contact with classmates from all over the world helps to develop communication skills; travel preparation enhances teamwork and critical thinking and discipline within deadlines in organization and time management.

¹⁸ In primary schools the ages of our students are from 6 to 12 years and according to Piaget, they correspond to the developmental stage of rational mental energies, but there are big differences between them: while the younger ones (6-8 years old) gradually move away from the pre-intellectual stage, the older ones (10-12 years old) are constantly approaching the stage of formal logical and abstract processes. In grades A and B (6-8 years) teaching is based on the use of simple language, visual representation, dramatization, animation, with emphasis on a specific logical action to limit the pre-conceptual stage of students and to offer practice in the distinction of appearance / reality. In grades C and D (8-10 years old) teaching is based on the possibilities of decentralized and non-egocentric thinking of the students and on their perception: causal relations, biological bases of life, properties of animate / inanimate, properties of matter. In the 5th and 6th grade (10-12 years old) teaching is adapted according to the possibility of hypothetical-productive and inductive reasoning of the children. In primary schools the ages of our students are from 6 to 12 years and according to Piaget, they correspond to the developmental stage of rational mental



not only adapted to the students' cognitive abilities but also to the "context" in which teaching takes place as well as to the communication code used by the teacher. Moreover, the teaching objectives for younger students (6-9 years old) are the cultivation of basic mental skills for the development of critical thinking, such as: focus, observation and data collection, while for older students, the objectives are: identification of causes and relationships, argumentation, documentation, evaluation and summary.

In **Spain**, there are already some cases where critical thinking, active listening and other soft skills are the focus of the initiatives of some schools: in the network of Aragonese state schools there are projects that focus on these skills ¹⁹. The main characteristics of these projects is that they arise from inside the school community and involve all school stakeholders in the process, including all the educational community. All school levels participate and, although they are adapted to a particular learning need or level of the target, there are no significant differences in the objectives and competences included

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¹⁹ These projects can be viewed on the 'Redevolución' from the Aragonese Govt. (<https://redevolucion.catedu.es/los-25-planes/>)



²⁰. In **Italy**, interventions are foreseen from the government level: the Commission of Italian Parliament is discussing the proposal for the prevention of early school leaving. This proposal - No 2372 - promotes a three-year trial in secondary school, on a voluntary basis, of “a new teaching method able to develop in students’ non-cognitive skills” with the aim of reducing educational poverty. One of the main initiatives in which students can have the chance to develop non-cognitive skills is the pathway for school-work alternation: they are included in the 20% of school time (autonomy time) forecasted by the three-year plan for the training offer (Ptof) to create paths for development of critical thinking and a sense of autonomy of students ²¹. Generally,

²⁰ For example, in the school IES Lucas Mallada (Huesca), “AGORA for DEBATE”, teachers have found that debates influence self esteem, academic performance, active listening, critical thinking and participation positively in the students. In the school IES Pablo Serrano (Zaragoza) there is a project called “TU BARRIO ME EDUCA” (your neighbourhood educates me). Through the participation of the school and the community a reduction in conflicts in the neighbourhood is being brought about through the promotion of values such as respecting others, active listening, teamwork. The school IES Reyes Católicos (Zuera, Zaragoza) has a project called “THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL. INNOVATING FOR THE COMMON GOOD”, where autonomy, creativity, critical thinking, personal initiative and sensitivity of the student body are worked on. The CEIP Monsalud (Zaragoza) centre has a project called “CONVIVO, CONVIVES Y MEJORAMOS LA CONVIVENCIA” (I coexist, you coexist, let’s improve coexistence). In this project commitment and dedication of the educational community is required with the aim of improving the atmosphere at schools.

²¹ Pathways for school-work alternation for the creation of advanced digital skills and for the use of digital transversal skills in a professional and cultural perspective are considered one of the experiences more innovative generally. In Italy, the school-work alternation is an innovative teaching method, which through practical experience helps to consolidate the knowledge acquired at school and test on the field the attitudes of



according to the experts interviewed, in secondary schools, teachers pay greater attention to soft skills, especially in preparing students to access the labour market, while they are often neglected in primary and middle schools. In many contexts where the Italian education experts involved work, practitioners focus on teamwork using learning methodologies such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based education and peer to peer strategies. Moreover, problem-solving skills are among the most valued competencies as they emphasise logical procedures and methods over final results. Still, teachers rarely focus on self-efficacy since their interventions in this sense aim to support people with relational and self-esteem problems. Finally, German education experts have highlighted the importance given to soft skills: some school defines criteria, which determines the soft skills crucial to be developed within the curriculum: Communication and collaboration skills, learning skills, reasoning skills, resilience (psychological resistance to overcome difficulties), judgment, and independence. All students should have acquired these soft skills during their school career. At the same time, every teacher should contribute to this: teachers should be aware that these soft skills are not an abstract goal, but overall help to develop students' life skills. It is accepted that without them, there is no success in working with the school community. According to the interviewed teachers, critical thinking is a key in education nowadays. The fast spread of fake news is damaging the peaceful cohabitation in current diverse communities. This is in part due to lack of critical thinking and a lack of a global perspective or making global connections and local connections.

Students need to think, analyze and reflect on different situations. The old way of teaching in which teacher gives a lecture and the students just learn by heart what the

students, to enrich the training and to guide the path of study and, in the future work, thanks to projects in line with their study plan. School-work alternation, mandatory for all students of the last three year of upper secondary school (including high schools) is one of the most significant innovations of Law 107 of 2015 (the so called “Good School”) in line with the of open school



teacher has told them is completely old fashioned. We need to help students to develop their skills and their potential.

In a world where fake news is proliferating, critical thinking helps both students and the professionals who will one day be - to discern between what is true and what is false, what is important and what is superficial. It is a critical ability to distinguish between fact and opinion. While it is true that all people have the ability to think, this is a skill that can and should be learned.

Since children learn in different ways and can come from vastly different backgrounds, it's essential that school teachers apply pedagogical methods that help them effectively reach various types of students, so they can learn to think critically and meet the challenges of living in a diverse, complex world.

Critical thinking can lead to developing the judgement, evaluation and problem solving. Students with critical thinking skills become more independent and self-directed learners.

Critical thinking is one of the most important academic skills that teach students to ask or reflect on their own understanding and knowledge about the information that has been presented to them.

One of the teachers stressed that "The theory of multiple intelligences or even Andreas Demetriou's theory on intelligence" seems relevant, suitable and better founded from a scientific point of view and, as teachers, we need to apply scientific theories.

Critical thinking is an important part of education as it is a function that affects the mental and emotional world of person helping him to understand information based on his logic unaffected by beliefs and stereotypes. It should be included in education since it helps a person create his personality.

Along with creativity, communication and collaboration must be the pillars of education so the student in the future can become active citizens and change the world

But, unfortunately in many schools it is still not a priority in education and should soon be given its appropriate value in every day teaching and students' lives.

Investing in the exercise of critical thinking, that is, in philosophical-dialogical doing, is what sustains and distinguishes a civil and democratic community, in constant and perennial learning. The phenomenological and maieutic (in both Socratic and

Confectionian guises) approach to reality allows one to train, consolidate and transform critical thinking into a habitus of mind and heart. Thinking critically, observing carefully, allows one to decentralise and de-centralise, leaving space and time for the other. Include among the necessary skills the historical one, another fundamental aspect to cultivate one's self-awareness and a thinking capable of comparing, connecting, selecting, verifying sources of knowledge.

Encourage pupils always to ask themselves questions and seek answers that convince them and not to accept what they are told just because it is often easier and especially one does not have to work too hard.

6.1. Establishing and structuring co-creation initiatives in class

Another successful feature of both approaches is the participation of all the members involved in the process. On this topic, the partnership has asked to the educational experts how the schools with which the project partner organizations work promote actions aimed at establishing and structuring co-creation initiatives in class or potential local education agreements.

Among the most successful initiatives, our educational experts highlighted some of them, going from co-design approach within the classroom among students and teachers (as seen in Bulgaria) to others involving third parties in the educational community. Specifically:

In **Bulgaria** there are many initiatives in which the digital tool has a role in making all the member potentially contributor and co-creator of initiatives happening in class, such as what happened in the school 51 SU "Elisaveta Bagryana" is with the project "CLOUD!": in 2018 the school implemented an initiative where digital tools help to more effectively organize the learning process with students and teachers, each one with their own profile, supporting internal communication and communication with students. In **Greece** there have been cases of collaborative educational initiatives between schools in the local community. The aim was to activate the group members of different schools for the development of students' social and personal skills. Their participation in



collaborative processes gave students the opportunity to practise communication, cooperation, acceptance of the different and mutual help, but also contributed to their normal psycho-emotional development. Through group effort, each student was encouraged to contribute to the common goal and maximize his interest in learning, while his/her critical thinking was mobilized [1]. In **Spain**, the educational experts highlighted 2 important initiatives, implemented by a public high school, “Rodanas”: one is called “Mira y Actua” (Watch and Behave) where there was an important exchange of teachers among different high schools watching teaching methodologies, and co-teaching. In this case, the co-creative approach was more focused at teaching level. Another level of co-creation has happened in Ashoka schools working with rural communities and with other public organizations, involving in this way new actors in the learning process. Regarding **Italy**, there are several experiences regarding the development of educational agreements related to co-creation (both the Italian partner – Villa Montesca and CSC Danilo Dolci – have decades of experience in it): moreover, they both follow programming forecasts by the Ministry of Education aimed at promoting processes of co-design between the school and the third sector in a logic of continuous exchange. In particular, in the region of Umbria the schools in the Villa Montesca area signed a memorandum of understanding for the development of the educational community which provides for a permanent co-location mechanism with the collaboration of local associations whether religious sports or third sector. Regarding CSC network, many schools participate in projects and actions aimed at creating or strengthening integrated learning environments and promoting educational alliances with local stakeholders (e.g., Third Sector organisations, museums, sports centres, libraries, universities, etc.). These initiatives attempt to identify co-design strategies, shared goals, and moments of reflection to consolidate and support the idea of open schools. These schools without borders can actively embody, along with other local entities, innovative and inclusive educational processes to sustain learning opportunities and enhance collective well-being. These projects are connected to four main axes: schools, Third Sector, families, and neighbourhoods. By promoting the designed activities, each of these axes shares the same vision: a community-centred one. Finally, in **Germany** social work is extremely important. Therefore, school social work



is not only active for the students themselves (who can of course turn to it in confidence in any situation), but also for teachers, in those cases of students who can be difficult to work with (and also with parents). Sometimes, parents are also institutionally integrated into the school community. There are association for this purpose, which usually are a non-profit basis, and it is a very vital body of parents, teachers and students, allowing to increase the learning benefits of the educational community.

[1] One such action was: the "Inter-School Olympic Education" which concerned the cultivation of noble rivalry through the conduct of experiential activities and competitions in Olympic sports.

A meeting of the respective classes took place between two schools. The topic was presented and children's acquaintance games followed. After a relevant audiovisual presentation, an attempt was made to raise awareness about the sports spirit and the timeless message of the Olympic Games. Then there were relay races between pairs of the classes. At the end of the games, discussions were held to address critically the individual and collective effort and contribution.

The children expressed and described their feelings by developing a dialogue. Then they expressed themselves through the arts, first with artistic creations and then with traditional dances. Later they formed smaller groups and wrote texts with their impressions as well as messages. In the end they composed a joint work (collage) with their texts and paintings. They also created a poster with the slogans they invented around the spirit of Olympism.



7. The school after the pandemic: new learning methods, spaces and paths using both analogic and digital features - new governance models and establishing local education agreements.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a disruptive effect worldwide: more than 1.5 billion of students were affected by the consequences of the pandemic and national lockdowns, with still countries recovering from the period 2020 – 2021, 2 years which set back many of the progress of the Agenda 2030 according to the UNESCO. What were the lesson learnt or better the initiatives that the school contexts involved by the project managed to develop? Here below it is possible to read some of the most interesting initiatives on this area, which can give an idea of the ever-changing context and reaction of the schools to the pandemic.

The educational experts from **Bulgaria** highlighted an initiative called "Equal access to school education in times of crisis": the main goal of the project was to prevent interruption of the educational process and inclusive education in the conditions of crises, providing conditions for the effectiveness of education, counteracting the risk of dropping out in a situation of distance learning. It is clear that it shows coherence with similar initiatives happening all over the world, with the main priority of reducing the early school leaving process and guarantee equal access to all.

In **Greece** the use of technology has been adopted with great caution by teachers but also by many parents. From the teachers' point of view, there was a lack of the required training and technological familiarity for the implementation of online teaching. There was no adequate information / training to convert traditional teaching to digital, resulting in several failures in the result produced but also a waste of valuable personal time. Gradually, however, there was self-improvement, adoption of asynchronous technology (such as moodle) for the benefit of students and gradually an overall improvement of the situation. Even if this process had a positive outcome, the education



experts from Greece agreed on the fact that the use of technology should no longer be considered as something that should be introduced in the daily life of education. It must be considered as part of the educational process and its correct adoption in the daily life of the school will bring clearly better results in the learning process. What needs to be improved is the way in which it can be introduced in each course for the best result. The transition now from the teacher-centered system to the student-centered and especially to the collaborative and team-building system is strongly supported by technology, which allows collaboration, self-action, research, challenge and knowledge production through the investigation and critique of what they themselves discover. The experience of the last 2 years with mixed learning, helped to demystify technology and distance learning, but also acknowledging the great disadvantages it provides as an exclusive method of teaching. In this new reality, teachers realized the urgent need to change their mentality and teaching practices. It has become clear that digital practice not only alternates with face-to-face but also persists in school reality as it dominates as a tool for transmitting information and as a means of communication and teaching.

However, in the new educational environment, many difficulties arise, such as the lack of infrastructure, the frequent inability to manage time, the lack of demarcation for the use of technology, the reduction of interpersonal emotional transactions and the consequent risk of creating impersonal intra-school relationships.

Spanish experts referred to an investigation from Martínez-León and Romea (2020a & 2020b) which describes the efforts made by teachers to adapt to online teaching and reveals that in order to maintain certain teaching/learning dynamics such as Cooperative Learning, specific skills, strategies and resources are required. The Web and its ecosystem favour interpersonal interaction, access to information and the collective construction of knowledge. However, these possibilities have not been explored and exploited to the full and pre-existing levels of development in Cooperative and Project based learning have not been maintained during the confinement.

In the case of infant and primary school, there has been a clear increase in the expository (teacher fronted) dynamic, particularly during the second period of confinement. In the case of secondary schools, similar patterns were observed but to a lesser degree.



The amount of student autonomous study has experienced a clear increase at both primary and secondary school level.

Regarding methodological strategies, there has been no appreciable advance in the development of new dynamics apart from the use of Flipped classroom and gamification which has increased considerably. Some teaching/learning strategies such as the use of learning corners, workshops and project work underwent noticeable setbacks during the confinement period.

There is evidence that there are pupils whose attitude and academic performance improved during the confinement period. Three causes for this improvement have been identified: the collaboration and implication of the family as active educational agent; the lessening of group and peer pressure as a result of online study for some students, and the development of more autonomous study dynamics that have allowed students to adapt their learning rhythm to their own specific needs and characteristics. All teachers interviewed referred to constant concern about and efforts made to maintain contact with their students to contribute to their emotional support and prevent them from abandoning the school dynamic.

In **Italy** the pandemic situation has a very huge impact in the whole school system. In general terms, the distancing measures and in particular the lockdown(s) have led to closures of schools, training institutes and higher education facilities several times from March 2020 till now.

All the schools face the need to assure a better than possible transitioning from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning, but the result was very different from school to school.

Digital tools have played a crucial role helping schools to make possible the prosecution of the educative activities. The main problems to face were:

- The educative and familiar conditions of poverty: The educational community plays a paramount role in assuring the best response of the school system to the need of families that have not the minimal conditions for participating to distance learning: in particular, the Civil protection activated a service for delivering the computers to the families that were in need (the donors were various);



- For the specific problems related to the educative poverty a local service of individual support was activated giving the possibility to specialized teachers to contact the families in difficult situation and to help the students to take part to the distance learning activities. Note that the distance learning involved also the primary school students and for those that have not parents able to support them in staying on-line the consequences were the total lack of participation to the activities²².
- All these activities were possible thanks to the educational agreement that was signed by different organizations of the civil society with the schools (NGOs, Sport associations, religious associations, Civil protection volunteers' associations, etc...)

During the second wave of COVID-19, the schools were partially opened and the situation to tackle was more related to how to adapt the teaching to the new changes and how to use the lessons learnt. The Ministry of education launched a program for reinforcing the digital teaching skills of the teachers. The idea was to verify if the learner's mindset were potentially adapted to a new learning environment. The program stressed on the need to make interactive the digital learning encouraging the

²² During the national lockdown, the school organizations tried to verify the data of those that were not detected (not connected) during the on-line activities. We discovered that the percentage in primary was quite high (35%), in secondary quite relevant (25%). The school support service contacted the families with students not attending the distance learning activities and tried to analyze the reasons. In most of the cases the reasons were the lack of a computer (or connection); the difficulty of the parents to help to stay on-line when the students were not able to do that in autonomy. In case of older students in secondary schools, the main problem was the impossibility of the parents for cultural and personal situations to control the effective participation, in particular when the parents were authorized to go to work (health operators or essential services operators).



so called digital integrated learning that takes the idea that the digital learning is not something different from the regular in presence learning, is not an emergency learning, but can be integrated.

The local system tries to support this process with some specific training programs addressed to all the categories of teachers.

The other situation the school system was facing is the evaluation of students. Student assessments were carried out online, with a negative perception by the students, uncertainty and confusion among the teachers. The approach adopted to conduct online examination considered the traditional systems (only in their adapted-on line versions). In all the local systems the schools discussed appropriate measures were possible not just to check plagiarism but also to create a good feeling in the students. The lockdown affected in general the internal assessments and examinations but a part the postponement or cancellation of the examination assessment, the main problem was that the students perceived the system as punitive, especially in secondary schools.

“The pandemic led us to change our practices, but above all, it imposed a change of perspective due to the capacity to accommodate new learning needs. Many challenges came to the surface: social distancing, the emergence of feeling such as fear and distress, and the need to offer emotional support to children and their families in this challenging moment which stole from us relational and learning spaces and moments. At the same time, these difficulties allowed us to understand that we need to overcome certain schemes and embrace uncertainty to move forward together”.

(Italian educational expert).

Finally, in **Germany** COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the measures taken to contain the virus, had several implications for all members of the school community. These can be both negative and positive.

The lack of direct personal management of class communities by teachers may even lead to more (cyber)bullying. On the other hand, in many cases schools show how in a crisis there is better care for each other and mutual help and support.



On the adult side, there are problems with overload due to multiple tasks at work and in the family, for teachers the challenge of digitalizing traditional lessons *ad hoc*, or difficulties among students in organizing themselves for learning. There are clear differences in the ability of parents to support students in their learning at home. On the other hand, benefits from digitalization are already visible now and creative joint solutions for learning, especially for upcoming exams, have been used everywhere. Nowadays, the challenge is that students come back to school more differently than before in terms of their mental state and level of performance, and for teachers is a big issue to deal with.



8. Conclusion

The overview of the Analysis of the status quo gave the partnership a really rich and interesting “landscape” of the school system in which the REACT project is going to be implemented: each of the countries have shown synergies and national/local initiatives where Dolci’s and Montessori’s methods can successfully take action.

Even if the disruptive effects of the pandemic are still strong and have created a more complex context compared to the period in which the project has been conceived, it’s sure that the benefits that the methodologies will bring are useful for all the context of implementation.

The introduction of RMA with the features of Montessori’s methods can provide benefits at 3 levels:

1. **Institutional level** - the last reforms and/or the current law regarding the school system in all the countries involved by the research show openness on the concepts which are key for the next project implementation: an always crucial role of the learning environment and space and its fundamental contribution to the learning process; the school as a multiplier of social change and the central role of soft skills and critical thinking development. The structural legal arrangement of the school system clearly encourages initiatives such as the one of REACT project. Each national coordinator should be facilitated in the introduction of this type of project in the educational community, especially the ones where the educational alliance with other members of the community is seen as crucial in the learning process of the students and the school as a whole.
2. **Local level** - the number of local/national projects focusing not only on the three key concepts of Montessori and Dolci methods but also in the other key topics - such as co-design, participation, critical thinking, social change, soft skills, citizenship and ownership of the learning process - clearly show an almost-designed path that will allow the REACT approach to synthesize and put together all these elements, with a new “learning offer” for the targets.
3. **Target level** - in all the countries analysed, it is seen as crucial the involvement of teachers, students and parents, following the fundamental concept of



educational community that can have a positive impact only if all these three targets work parallelly for the same educational objective.

The focus on critical thinking and soft skills it will be another “selling point” of the implementation of the next project phase: especially nowadays, contributing to the strengthening of these skills could be strategically important, especially at community level and especially now after the disruptive effects of the pandemic, which have created damages in the sense of community - reducing it for a long period more to a digital one (which has been a safe place during the first months of the pandemic for some, but also a new “discrimination factor” for other without the necessary equipment) than a “real one”. Dolci and Montessori approach - implemented after the last 2 difficult years - can be a chance to “conquer” again own learning space, and use the critical thinking lens in order to widen own perspective, empowering those soft skills that make us active citizens, responsible for the destiny of our community: not only students, but also teachers and parents, for a long-term impact with benefits for all the members of the educational community.

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