



January 2021

The points of view of families, professionals, children:
*Summary of the analysis of the focus groups with staff and parents,
and of the drawings and interviews with the children in Belgium,
Lithuania, Italy*



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Introduction

The EDUCAS project planned to start the CPD paths in the three countries involved (Belgium, Lithuania, Italy) with specific focus groups involving families and staff in the ECEC centers partners of the project. The aim of the focus groups has been:

- 1) gaining insight about families' and staff's ideas/beliefs/feelings in relation with the ECEC spaces where their children are and their connection with education and care;
- 2) exploring ideas concerning the 'ideal' ECEC service for families and staff (which core elements)

Through the focus groups, the partner organizations aimed at getting a better insight concerning the needs, ideas and beliefs of staff and families concerning the theme of the project, with the purpose of elaborating a bottom-up participatory implementation path (case study – action research).

Each research center carried on 2 focus groups in each of the 2 ECEC center involved in each country (plus an extra one in Italy): one with parents, one with staff, for a total of 4 focus groups per country (5 in Italy).

In total 13 focus groups took place, involving 47 professionals and 36 parents.

The method and themes of the focus groups have been discussed and agreed in advance, in order to have 'similar readable data' at the end of the process (see Framework of IO2,3,4).



Summary of the analysis of the local focus groups in Belgium (FL)

1. Introduction: some data

In Belgium (FL) we carried on 4 focus groups: 2 with parents and 2 with professionals, in the 2 ECEC centers involved in the project. The ECEC centers are:

1. De Tandem (in Bruges), which is a Center that joins childcare, preschool, school, out of school care. More specifically the group of professionals working with 0 to 4 years old children is involved in Educas. The school and preschool follow the Freinet approach.
2. Hippo's Hof (in Ghent), which is a kindergarten and out of school care for children from 2,5 to 6 years old, following the Jenaplaan approach.

In total, we could involve in the focus groups 17 professionals and 7 parents.

The professionals were a mix between practitioners, professionals and teacher assistants. In both focus groups with the professionals, the directors asked to join the focus group and we decided to approve their participation after discussing it with the group. All professionals were Dutch native speakers; two of them speak also a second language at home. 15 professionals were woman, and 2 man.

The parents were all mothers, with children of different ages between 1 and 5 years old. Five of them had Belgian origins, two with migrant origins. During the focus group, we spoke Dutch, but when needed we translated something in English. For the mother from Poland there was a Russian translator present.

2. Summary of the points of view of parents and professionals:

2.2. Favorite place

When asking to professionals, which **place you like the most** in the school they often point at their **own class**, explaining that they feel 'at home', they made it the way they wanted, they feel

they belong to it. It is a calm place, 'homish', where each person can feel at ease and safe. **Safety and 'calmness'** are common repeated needed concepts. **Light** is another element that should be present inside. *'I feel good in my own class, because it's like a second house, it's calm, you can give your own touch to the room and make it cozy' (professional).*

Some also mention the professionals' room, where they can meet and exchange with colleagues. In one of the schools/services, where there is a **big hall with benches, sofas and coffee** available, professionals say they like to be there. Also the parents of this school say that they like this space very much, especially the benches, which are near to the children rooms.

'My children were in another school before. And what I like here is that you come in and there is immediately a place to sit and meet, to have a coffee. I like to sit in the hall on the benches and talk to the other parents' (mother).

In the same school, parents also say that they like to be in the class with the children in the morning. Not all schools/services in Belgium allow this, so it is especially appreciated, together with the fact that there is quite a flexible timing to enter the school and say goodbye in a personalized way (until 8:50).

In one of the schools/services many professionals say they don't like the **toilets** because they are old, smelly and not 'cozy', and the storage room, because too messy. In this school, a renovation of the whole building has been planned for the following years.

Considering the **children**, it is interesting to notice that both professionals and parents (and especially parents) mention that **they don't know** where children like or don't like to be in the school. *'I don't know where my child likes to be' (mother).*

However, both mention that they think **being outside** is very much liked by the children, in the sand, or biking etc. At the same time, in one of the schools/services, it is exactly the outside space that receives most of the 'critics' from professionals and parents, because not big enough, with not enough different offers and materials.

Some professionals also mention the **toilets** as places the children like to go in small groups, hiding in one of the toilets, or washing their hands.

Some mention also the fact that children like the **polyvalente space** (Hippo's Hof) because here they are 'collected' all together to go from one space to the other. They like it, sometimes they have to wait a bit, but professionals and practitioners underline that they try to make it anyway a 'nice' moment.

'It is not really about waiting (wachten), but about expecting (verwachten)', because there are moments in which we create expectations with the children about what is going to happen' (professional).

In the other school/service, on the other hand, these '**waiting moments**' are perceived as not pleasant for the professionals and for the children (from the point of view of the professionals).

The open question that came out during our focus group is: is it the hall that is not nice or the organization?

2.3. Inside playing space and entrance

Considering the **entrance**, as we said, in one of the schools/ services parents think it's great to have a **big entrance where you can sit, chat, have a coffee**. The professionals of this school also say it's great to have this possibility. They also find parents '**naturally respectful**', in the sense that they stay but they are also aware of when they should go. In the other school there is not much space in the entrance for parents. Professionals say it's already very good that parents can enter the children room and say goodbye in a calm way. They don't think there should be more space for adults there, because the school is anyway mainly for the children. In the same service parents find the entrance moment (of the children that arrive early) calm and cozy, because children can **bring their breakfast** and eat it with the professionals that drink their coffee. Sharing food together makes the entrance moment for these children very familiar.

It is interesting to notice that in the school that has a '**goodbye window**', some professionals think it's very nice for the children, while parents think it makes the goodbye moment more difficult, especially for the young ones, who might cry when seeing the parents going away. *'I like very much the room with the goodbye window. Children can say goodbye to their parents' (professional). 'I think the 'goodbye window' is difficult for some children. They see the parents going away and they cry. Maybe it should be built higher' (mother).*

Probably more exchange between professionals and parents is needed about the meaning of this window and more in general about the meaning of familiarization.

All professionals say it's nice and **homish** to have **plants** at the entrance, but they need care. Maybe also a **digital framework** with pictures is seen as a homish element.

Considering the **continuity school/home**, some parents mention that they like the fact that children can **bring things from home to school**, because they can also contribute to the project themes the school is carrying on. On this matter, it is interesting to notice that many parents say that they know which projects the class/school is carrying on, but they don't know the details, or how, or what exactly they are doing. The same lack of information is mentioned several other times; for example parents know that the day starts with a 'circle moment' in which children talk and decide what to do, but **they don't know what happens** afterwards. Some parents mention they would like to know it, or to see pictures of short movies about what happens in the school/service. One of the schools uses **family pictures** with the children, to talk about their different/similar families and create a bridge home/school.



Some other parents mention that they don't want her child to bring things from home because the child doesn't want to share them and it becomes difficult. One of the schools/services has pictures of the families, which are used with the children to know each other and to create a bond school/home.

In one of the school there has been an interesting exchange about **learning and playing**: some parents say they like the fact that in the school children are let free to choose and play, that they see learning and playing as interconnected (children learn by playing), some others mention that they actually would like more stress on 'learning', also because in their country of origin children learn poetry and similar activities at this age.

'I think there should be more school preparation, learning poetry etc. In my home country, children learn poetry from a very young age' (mother).

'For me playing and learning are the same thing. I think that by playing, children learn about themselves, the world, the others. And also about motoric development, colors, etc. ' (mother).

Considering **materials** we notice that both, parents and professionals like wood and non structured materials, but not only. They also mention that sometimes some plastic toys are good, they are easily washable, and children like the colors.

Some professionals also mention the fact that it would be good to have a space that allows adults and children **not to 'clean up' too often**: f.e. if children are busy building something, then it would be good to have the possibility to leave their work the way it is for a while even when going to another activity (lunch etc.). This is mentioned also by some parents.

In one of the services, parents say that some materials/toys are **closed in closets** in the class, and they wonder how professionals use these closets with the children, because they noticed that their children don't always know what is inside the closets. Also in this case probably a more clear communication school-families-children is needed.

One parent specifically mentions that she likes that **books** are available for children.

In one of the services, which has **mixed-age groups**, **professionals** struggle with the organization: although the mixed age groups have many learning/caring potentials for all children, they have the feeling that more attention is given to the older children, and not enough to the young ones. A similar worry is present in the words of **parents**, who are happy their children can interact with different ages and learn from each other, but they also question the safety of the young ones.

'I have to admit that I am happy my child is not a baby anymore here [...]. But I like the fact that I can see that he is aware of another young child, that h knows he has to take care' (mother).

The need to interconnect **learning and caring** here becomes crucial, and it is one of the points that should be explored with the team.

2.4. Routine moments

Hygiene and Toilet

Both parents and professionals think it's important to have **privacy** in the toilets (so doors or at least short walls are welcome), but they also think children like to go the toilet together **in small groups**. They like to go in **small groups** in one toilet, hide there and play. *'I think there should be both possibilities for children in toilets: to be together, but also to have privacy' (mother).*

Children, normally go to the toilet both? when they need it and in collective moments, and both parents and professionals think it's important that these moments are **individualized and flexible**. In some cases the toilets are **quite far** from the children room/classroom, though, which can make it difficult for some children (especially young ones) to reach the toilet on time (parents say). There are normally potty in the class, but the question is: do all children feel at ease in using them? This has been a point to reflect on during one of the focus groups.

In one of the schools/services professionals underline, they don't like the toilets, they are old and not cozy.

Some **parents express some worries** also about the fact that sometimes young children are accompanied to the toilet by **older ones** (of 4-5 years old). But the young ones don't want to go with them sometimes, or they are dirty at the end of the day because a child of 5 is not going to clean properly one of 2,5. They also think their children like to play with water, but some say they don't like that their children often go home with **wet sleeves**.

Some parents also mention that they actually **don't know much** about how the toilet moment is organized in the school.

Eating moment

Both, parents and professionals think it's important for an eating place to be **cozy, calm, 'homish'**. A tablecloth is also appreciated. The professionals underline that not too many children should be in one place while eating.

In one of the schools/services professionals reflected on the eating moment, and now they use a **cover for the table and 'real' plates**, forks, glasses. They let **children participate** in preparing the table, counting the children (one child is responsible for counting) etc. In this way, they want to stimulate autonomy, responsibility. *'The eating space should be familiar, cozy, calm. It's nice here. We worked on it, and now we use 'real' plates, a table cover... Children help in preparing, one child is responsible for counting how many children are present... [...]' (professional).*

The professionals of this school think that not all parents know how the eating moment is organized, and that they should maybe let them know, because it is not like this in all schools/services. In the other school/service children are not actively involved in the preparation of the table etc. There is a professional that prepares everything (not present in the focus group). They use 'real' plates, but they are afraid of using 'real' glasses (in glass) or small glass bottles so that the children can serve themselves on their own. In the same way, children are 'served' by the practitioners. By talking about other possibilities, professionals underline that it would be difficult to let children serve themselves, because of safety reasons (warm pots etc.). Parents often say they **don't know very well** how the eating moment is organized. They find it important that children eat in pleasant materials (plastic smells and it's not pleasant).

Sleeping moment

Parents and professionals agree that in general the sleeping moment should be **flexible** (individualized, in agreement with parents), the room should be **calm, cozy**, with the possibility of listening to soft music, dark enough. In both schools/services, not all children are obliged to sleep, which is not the case in all Belgian schools/services. Parents appreciate this. Some professionals and all parents say it's important for children to have a **personal bed**. Some parents underline that this is important not also in order to feel at ease, but also for hygienic reasons. In one of the schools/services, they have personal beds, in the other one not in a 'generalized way', but some children do go always spontaneously to the same bed. In general, parents **don't always know** how the sleeping moment is organized.

Not in all preschools/services in Belgium is possible for children to sleep, so these two schools/services are already investing in this moment. In one of the schools/services, children can **sleep as long as they want**, in the other one, there is a more structured 'timing', also because the sleeping room is upstairs, and all children need to get down together. That's also one of the reasons why children that get awake earlier in this school should anyway wait in their bed before getting up.

2.5. Spaces for adults

In the school that has a big hall, **parents** like the fact that they can sit in the hall, take a coffee and talk to other parents. They also like the fact that they can stay a bit in the class of the kids in the morning. In the other school/service parents wish they could have a 'meeting space'. *'I think it would be nice to have a **'meeting place'** here, also for adults, to have a coffee together, to talk...' (mother).*

In both schools/services there are no specific places thought for parents in the class (besides in one class), but all professionals say that parents are welcome to stay when they bring and pick up the child. The question 'do we need specific spaces for parents in the class too' has been (and will be) one of the points to reflect on with the teams. It is at the same time interesting that in one of the services, one parent has been responsible to **close the school** after our focus group (no professionals were present), which is a sign of collaboration and trust between professionals and families.

In both schools/services, the **room for practitioners/professionals** is on another floor. Some professionals experience this as a 'distance' that makes a bit difficult to use the room daily in a very efficient way. A calm room for adults to share, reflect and discuss is something that professionals/practitioners value as a positive element.

2.6. Outdoor spaces

All professionals think playing outside, with any kind of weather, **is important** for children. Both schools/services have boots for children to play when it rains. One of the schools/services has a very big and beautiful garden, with trees, plants, ponies and other animals. The other one is a city school with a rather small garden. In the latter, parents say that they like the fact that children go out also when is not good weather, but they think it's not always well organized considering the **right clothes** children need to wear.

'I like all kind of activities, but for me is important that my child is dry and warm while doing these activities' (mother).

In this school, there is also a tap for water outside. But some parents don't like that the children can just play with it and become all wet, also when it's cold.

Considering the '**freedom of choice**' of children about going or not going outside, in both schools/services there is partly freedom, and partly children need to be in groups for **safety** reason, because it is not possible for the professionals to see the whole outside space from inside. It is interesting to notice that the outside space is often mentioned as the **favorite** one for the children, but in one of the schools/services, it seems at the same time **less well organized** then others, and with not many offers, as especially some parents say.

2.7. Ideal space

Professionals' voices:

- More space

- Calm place
- Homish feeling
- Corners to build
- Places to hide
- Calm places to eat
- Calm places to sleep
- Places to move
- Places to be alone
- Places with not too many stimuli

Parents' voices:

- Places that stimulate the pleasure of learning
- A 'meeting place' also for adults, with sofas and coffee
- Light and glass
- Light colours (f.e. one colour on the walls) as a basis
- Possibility to do but also to be calm and rest (places with stimuli and places with less stimuli)
- A breastfeeding room/corner
- Cozy places with plants, pictures, paintings
- A roof on part of the garden, to be outside dry also when it rains
- Having a parent committee, to participate in what the school does, and to meet other parents

3. First 'conclusions': which possible ideas/questions for the next steps of the project?

The analysis of the data shows a focus of both professionals and parents on some recurrent concepts. Namely, a space for children should be **calm, cozy, homish, and safe**. Also taking care of **hygiene** seems quite important, especially for parents.

These concepts are directly linked with the '**educare**' approach, in the sense that in order to learn with pleasure, 'caring' spaces are needed, places where we feel at home, familiar, accepted, places in which our holistic wellbeing is taken into account.

It is also interesting to notice that **parents want their children to 'learn', but they express at the same time worries mainly connected to their 'care'**: for example they are worried that their children get wet in the toilets or outside; that they reach the toilet 'on time'; they like that they play outside, but they are worried that they have the right clothes (and professionals too); they want them to eat with pleasure; they want their emotional needs to be taken into account. This is

in line with what comes out from a recent research (Van Laere, 2017), in which it is underlined how caring aspects are always implicitly and explicitly present in the words of parents, when considering children wellbeing in school.

Through our focus groups we see the importance of **intertwining 'education' and 'care'**, giving them the same value, within a holistic approach.

Within this framework, questions arise about the place of children in their own growing path: how can we take their individual needs into account in a collective place? What does this mean concerning the 'routines' moments (hygiene, sleeping, eating)? F.e. do children that wake up earlier have to stay in the sleeping room anyway until everybody is awake? Why? To whom needs are we responding by doing what we do? Or, is it important for us that children participate in the preparation of the table when we eat? Why? If yes, how can we organize it? And how can we involve the whole staff (also the professional that serves the food in one of the services/schools) in co-reflecting about the organization of the eating moment? Or, since children like very much to be outside, how can we improve this moment? How can we improve the offer of activities, and at the same time make sure that they don't get cold or wet?

All these questions can be summarized by this sentence: **we need to explore our ideas as team (vision and priorities) concerning educare and spaces, what we think it's important considering children education and the relationship with families, in order to then look for organizational strategies that make our ideas possible in a coherent way.**

Concerning more specifically the space, once our ideas and priorities are clear, we need to clarify which issues are related to the way the space **is build**, and which ones are related to the **organization** we created. On the latter we can intervene more directly.

In this path, a strong partnership with families is needed. From our focus groups, it comes out that there is sometimes a **lack of information** from the school to the parents: parents often don't know what happens in the school, and most of them would like to know more. In line with this need, families also mention their interest in having a parents committee. They say that they appreciate very much the possibility of entering the class, of having a place in the hall (sofas, benches, coffee) where they can stay with their children, but also with parents, underlying how important it is today to offer families **meeting places** where they can also share their parenthood with other families, and feel less lonely.

On this matter, all professionals/practitioners say that the collaboration with parents is crucial, and that they are always very welcome in the school. But at the same time, not always there is a physical place for families in the school or in the class, and parents are not always informed about many aspects of the daily routines in the school/services. Since informing parents is the first step to create participation, this is an important aspect to be further explored with the teams. After informing, a deeper collaboration can be created, in which professionals and families exchange their ideas and co-construct meanings and practice: a concrete example is the one referring to the



goodbye window: parents and professionals have different opinions about it, but they never had the chance to talk about it, make them explicit and listen to each other.

A transversal element to reflect on is the **participation of parents to this project**: how are we going to make sure we can involve them? How can we involve diverse families? How can we give them feedback about what we are doing? How can we make this project visible for them? This is something we need to take into account for the next steps of the project.

Concluding, from our focus groups, we can summarize the following concepts as some of the possible **aspects to be taken into account when building a CPD path in Belgium (FL)**:

- ***Informing, making visible and sharing with parents***
- ***Creating a cozy, safe, homish (and clean) place***
- ***Creating possibilities to 'do', but also to be 'calm'***
- ***How to join learning and caring***
- ***Clarifying what the teams think and want (vision), in order to organize the space in a coherent way***



Summary of the analysis of the local focus groups in Lithuania

1. Short introduction: some data (context, how many focus groups, how many participants, characteristics of the groups etc.)

We had four focus groups – two in each ECEC center. It was the same amount of participants in each focus group – 6 participants. In both ECEC centers we had only female teachers and in both ECEC centers we had one father and five mothers. All teachers had university education, except one of them. Teachers work experience in the center from 1 to 14 years, average – 4,6 years. Average age of teachers in one center – 27 years; in another – 36 years. All parents had university education, except one of them. Average age of parents – 35 years. Age of their children in ECEC center from 2 to 5 years.

2. Summary of the points of view of parents and teachers concerning the following points¹:

2.1. Favorite place

Majority of parents said that they like the most the playing rooms. "I like to see children working at the tables, when they are doing something purposefully." "I like that classroom looks like home. There is no spirit of such an institution – everything like at home." The half of the parents openly said that they never asked their children about the place they like in their preschool.

Majority of teachers said that they like the most their classroom "My classroom, because I arranged my classroom myself. I tried to develop activity centers thinking about children's needs. They know where to find materials, feel safe and it helps to unfold their creativity. Children like places where they find more toys, games."

2.2. Inside playing space and entrance

The presence of cozy spaces as well as spaces in the classrooms in which children can play/be alone are important to meet children's need for privacy, withdrawal and intimacy.

Continuity home – preschool is very important as it helps children faster develop their knowledge

¹ Please write a summary of the main findings. To better explain your analysis, insert also some of the direct quotes of teachers and parents from the focus groups

and skills; toys from home give them feeling of safety and comfort.

It is important to incorporate varied, plentiful, natural materials that stimulate children to explore, play and learn. Parents would like to see bigger difference in materials, less activities with very strict templates, more cognitive games and possibilities to stimulate creativity and possibility for children to express themselves.

2.3. Routine moments (hygiene, eating, sleeping)

Teachers didn't say that there are some problems for children using WC, but some parents said: "My son doesn't like to go to the toilet in the preschool. It looks that he doesn't feel comfortable." There are some contradictions in opinions of parents and teachers speaking about autonomy and interactions during routine moments.

Parent: "My first impression was that everything was brought, everything was carried away by teachers. I think children can do a lot by themselves. Everyone can take the dishes, no matter how old they are. Bring spoons, forks – everyone can." Teacher: "Each day children have different responsibilities: to distribute food, put plates, clean tables, etc."

Parent: "One of the stages of the job interview is the business lunch, when You need to talk and eat at the same time. Should this come from childhood some kind of skill? I never thought about it. But may be." Teacher: "We try to eat in silence."

2.4. Spaces for adults

Parents as well as teachers would like to have a space for meetings. Teacher: "It would be good to have a space for parents to meet, or to wait until their child is finishing something."

Parent: "I talked to the director and he said that we can establish the "Parent club" where parents can come, discuss different problems, share their experiences, but if we'll face the problem, that we will not be able to solve, we will invite competent people to help us. But parents need to show initiative."

Teachers: "We have space, but don't have time for meetings". The problem can be solved on the level of managers.

2.5. Outdoor spaces

Learning environment outside the classroom and outside the preschool can be used better for activities that encourage exploration, experimentation, and creativity. As everything that can be learned and taught indoors can be done outdoors.

Parents: "I would like for children to have all day activities outside." "Each family has different policy speaking about going out with "bad" weather." "Would be good to be outside all day and work hard outside like they do in the classroom." "Our yard is very small, but very often teachers take children

somewhere to the town, they visit different places and in the evening children tell us where they been, what they saw. Lots of impressions.”

Teacher: “If You go out with “bad” weather, it is OK, but if child get sick it is bad.”

2.6. Ideal space

Physically safe environment is important, but psychologically safe and stimulating environment even more influences children’s development. Parents clearly understand and expect that in the preschool the most important is that their children can learn how to communicate, share, take responsibilities, respect different points of view.

Parents: “A perfect preschool should probably be able to take into account the individual needs of the child and encourage him/her to discover something new, to learn, to reveal themselves.”
“Freedom for creativity, feeling of community, more self-reliance, at the same time, teach more responsibility, discipline.”

Teachers: “For me the perfect school is where the child has a good relationship with the teacher, where his friends accept him as he is, where he can do things he likes, not what he has to do. ”

“The ideal space is where perfect teachers work. If teacher is dedicated to the job, it can really make that place magical. The most important for children to feel safe and loved.”

“Freedom – to have a choice – to sleep or not, to eat or not. Enough space. ”

3. Conclusions

There is communication gap between educators and parents. There are problems which can be solved on the level of managers. The educators should better involve family members in shared decision making about their children’s learning as well as concerning children’s learning environment, invite to work together in order to provide suitable spaces for child development.

Summary of the analysis of the local focus groups in Italy

1. Introduction: some data

In Italy we carried on 5 focus groups: 2 with parents and 3 with teachers, in the 2 ECEC centers involved in the project. The ECEC centers are:

3. Maria Vittoria (in Turin), which is a Childcare Center (0 to 3 years) (Pro.Ges, Torino)
4. Gelsomino (in Parma), which is a Childcare Center (0 to 3 years) and a Kindergarten (3-6 years) (Pro.Ges, Parma).

In total, we have involved 20 teachers (15 teachers of Childcare Center) and 17 parents in the focus groups. 18 teachers were woman, and 2 man; the mean age of teachers' professional service was 9 years; the children's mean age was 29 months for Childcare Center and 52 months for Kindergarten. The parents were 5 fathers and 12 mothers, the parents' mean age was 35 years, all had Italian origins.

All focus groups were coordinated by two people, one facilitator and one assistant, and all participants were arranged in a circle. For introduce the questions concerning the hygienic and toilet/eating/sleeping spaces some pictures were provided in order to facilitate the discussion.

2. Summary of the points of view of parents and teachers

a. Favorite place/not favorite place

In the focus groups, both parents and teachers were asked which was their favorite/not favorite place in our school and what was the favorite/not favorite place for children in their opinion. The table below summarizes the answers that emerged from the discussion with regard to **favorite space**.

TEACHERS	PARENTS	CHILDREN



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My class" • The sleeping space/a flexible space • The garden (<i>Gelsomino</i>) • The places near the glass windows • The pretend play space: kitchen, care... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entrance and welcoming space • The garden (<i>Gelsomino</i>) • The glass windows (<i>Maria Vittoria</i>) • The Family space (<i>Maria Vittoria</i>) • The library space for family (<i>Gelsomino</i>) • The soft space: reading space (<i>Maria Vittoria</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The garden • The pretend play space • The soft space: reading space • The den/the peekaboo space • The entrance and welcoming space (<i>Maria Vittoria</i>)
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The participants, both teachers and parents, greatly engaged in this question and contributed with different reflections. As can be seen from the table, very different spaces emerge. Some of these spaces are preferred by many participants and therefore seem to be very significant in the teachers', parent' and children's experience within the educational context ("**my class**"; **the garden**; **the place near the glass windows**; **the pretend play**; **the soft space**...).

Concerning **not favorite place**, as can be seen from the table below, the answers are less numerous, in particular, both parents and teachers find it difficult to identify a place that is not pleasant for children.

TEACHERS	PARENTS	CHILDREN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The garden (in particular <i>Maria Vittoria</i>) • The entrance and welcoming space • The spaces in front of the classes: narrow (<i>Gelsomino</i>) • The toilet space (<i>Maria Vittoria</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The garden (<i>Maria Vittoria</i>) • The glass windows (too warm in summer) (<i>Maria Vittoria</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entrance and welcoming space (<i>Gelsomino</i>)

In general, from the focus groups, the **garden** emerges as a very popular choice and it is possible note that different points of view and feelings concerning this space come out between adults and children. In specific, the garden space is greatly appreciated from children, contrarily the parents and mostly the teachers recognize in the outdoor space some critical aspects, particularly in *Maria Vittoria* Centre.

Another space that emerges frequently in the discussions in the focus groups is the **entrance and welcoming space**, it seems to be a very important and significant space especially for parents. In

fact, they report that have many affective and relevant experiences with their children in this place. The **pretend play space** and **soft play for reading space** are also considered very significant places both for teachers and for parents.

The motivations that the teachers and the parents reported regarding the choice of the favorite/not favorite place are many varied; the analysis of these motivations allows to highlight very interesting elements about how space is perceived in ECEC centres.

In particular, 5 different **motivations** emerge from the focus groups, that represent different **meanings** of space:

1) Space that **FAVORS LEARNING ACTIVITIES, PLAY ACTIVITIES and EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES**

«I like the peekaboo space because I stay in there with the children and, reading, singing or simply telling stories, we are fine»

«The garden space helps the children to deal with their fears, it helps them to get to know their bodies»

«The laboratory is a space that the children do not recognize and they don't know what to do in it»

2) Space that **FAVORS RELATIONS**

"I like the entrance and welcoming space because it is really an agora, so there are parents who meet ... It's noisy, but there is life, and there are relationships" (favorite place)

«In the den even very agitated children calm down, and here they create significant relationships» (favorite place)

"In the entrance space my baby and I meet after a long day, we hug and tell each other what we have done, important exchanges take place here every day" (favorite place)

"I don't like the entrance space, it's too big, there's too much confusion, it's not intimate, it doesn't favor relationships" (not favorite place)

3) Space that is **DESIGNED and WELL CONCEIVED**

«This year I had the opportunity to make changes in the space and so I feel it much more mine ... I'm fine» (favorite place)

«We dedicated a lot to the pretend play space, so that place was very well thought out and it is a space that all teachers can share» (favorite place)

«The space in front of the bathroom ... we still have to find the right way to use it. We have been thinking about it a lot, but we still haven't reached a solution» (favorite place)

4) Space that **CONNECTS INSIDE/OUTSIDE**

«The glass windows are fantastic, my child likes to look outside: the construction sites, the garden, the arrivals .. a world..» (favorite place)

«The glass windows create a continuous connection between the inside and the outside» (favorite place)

«I like the kitchen because it reminds me of nature, we have a small table made with a piece of a tree trunk, it recalls the forest» (favorite place)

5) Space that has some **PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

«The reading corner is very nice with those lights and that small curtain at the entrance, it is really a beautiful place also aesthetically» (favorite place)



«Even the bathrooms are beautiful because they are suitable for children, with a small sink, with low shelves, low chairs, cushions ...» (favorite place)

«The garden isn't a real garden, it's too sunny, it's grassless and very dusty ...» (favorite place)

All these several meanings emerge both in parents' and teachers' discussions, highlighting a multiplicity of **functions attributed to space**.

The space that “*favors learning activities, play activities and emotional experiences*” is the function that appears most, followed by the space as “*physical characteristics*”. In particular, the teachers' contributions reveal the focus on the concept of “*designed and well designed*” space, while in the perception of parents emerge a focus on the importance of the “*space that connects inside/outside*”.

b. Routine moments

An analysis of the contents that emerged in the focus groups for each of the proposed routines (hygiene and toilet, eating and sleeping spaces) was carried out; three macro-areas were identified: **the description** of that specific place, **the references to education** and learning activities and the **references to care activities** or care moments. This analysis was carried out because the link between **Care/Education** dimensions and space is a central and fundamental aspect of the aims of EDUCAS project.

2.2.1 Hygiene and Toilet Space

PARENTS

DESCRIPTION	EDUCATION/LEARNING	CARE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child-friendly • Coloured • Well furnished • Places to wait your turn: a bench, a little sofa, some books.. • Easy to clean • Visible to the teachers • A pleasant place • A quiet place • A separate space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving autonomies • Telling stories ... • Learning to wait • Learning by imitation of peers • Learning to stay alone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is an intimate moment • Respecting each other's intimacy • Taking care of your body • Taking care of others: older children help the younger ones • Knowing your body and that of others • Having the experience of an



		<p>adult taking care of you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning hygiene habits
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TEACHERS

DESCRIPTION	EDUCATION/LEARNING	CARE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coloured • Well lit • Quiet • Child-friendly: toilet bowls, toilet paper, wash basins ... • Mirrors hanging over wash basins • Drawers to put each child's change of clothes • Equipped to wait your turn: a bench, a little sofa, some books.. • Easy to clean • Visible to the teachers • A pleasant place • A separate space • Personalized space: child's photographs, child's objects, child's personal symbol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving autonomies • Learning to wait • Learning by imitation of other children and teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having the experience of an adult taking care of you • The time for pampering and tenderness • The time for special and individual attention • The time for listening to some children's stories • Respecting each other's intimacy • Knowing your body and that of others • It is an intimate moment for each child



Ashown in the tables, the hygiene and toilet space is described in terms that refer to physical characteristics (**coloured, well lit, intimate place...**), to the experience and perception of children and adults (**a pleasant place, a personalized place, child-friendly, a quiet place...**), and to the adults-children relationships (**visible to the teachers**).

Parents and teachers conceive this space as a place in which activities and relationships that concern both the care dimension (**having the experience of an adult taking care of you; the time for special attention, the time for pampering and tenderness; the time for listening to some children's stories**) and the education dimension (**achieving autonomies; learning to wait; learning by imitation of other children and teachers**) take place.

Some teachers say:

-*"It is the moment when an adult and a child look each other in the eye".*

- *"Some children just wait for that moment to get the pampering of the teacher, some children tell each other ... it's time for deep relationships ... "*

A parent reports:

-*"In the toilet space children learn the ability to take care of others, my child is learning to poop in the potty, she looks very much at her friend, and imitates her. The teacher told me that when she has to go to the bathroom her friend calls her, takes her hand and says: "Come now, it's time!!" and accompanies her to the bathroom".*

2.2.2 Eating Space

Parents

DESCRIPTION	EDUCATION/LEARNING	CARE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well set table: dishes, glasses, cutlery quiet Tidy The same meal for each child No plastic dishes and glasses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieving autonomies: eating by yourself, pouring water, clearing the table... Learning to taste all the food Learning to know when you are full Learning to appreciate the food: flavor, smell, appearance Learning to wait your turn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A moment of sharing: all children eat the same food together Each child has several tasks: learning to take care of others The older children help the younger ones

Teachers

DESCRIPTION	EDUCATION/LEARNING	CARE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well set table: dishes, glasses, cutlery No plastic dishes and glasses Well-designed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A moment of sharing stories... Achieving autonomies: eating by yourself, pouring water, clearing the table... Learning to taste all the food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A moment of sharing: all children eat the same food together Each child has several tasks: learning to take



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to know when you are full • Learning to appreciate the food: flavor, smell, appearance • Learning to wait your turn • Learning food preferences of peers 	<p>care of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The older children help the younger ones • Care in preparing the table
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Regarding the eating space, the importance of a **well-designed, quiet and tidy place** come out from the discussions; much attention is paid to the "care of the table" (**well set table: dishes, glasses, cutlery**) and to the use of ecological material (**no plastic dishes and glasses**).

The eating place is conceived as a moment of care (**a moment of sharing: all children eat the same food together; each child has several tasks; the older children help the younger ones; care in preparing the table**), but also as a place where learning (**achieving autonomies; learning to taste all the food; learning to know when you are full; learning to appreciate the food: flavour, smell, appearance; learning to wait your turn**).

The Care and Education dimensions are present and intertwined in the parents' and teachers' ideas and representations of the eating space.

A parent says:

"One nice thing is that the children have a dish in common, for example in the morning at the fruit interval they have a dish in common, they take a piece and they know that they have to pass it to others. Even the bread, they take a piece and then pass it to others ..."

A teacher reports:

"It is also a moment of sharing, because it is the time when children often tell us about what they did during the weekend with the families ... So it is a time when we talk a lot".

2.2.3 Sleeping Space

Parents

DESCRIPTION	EDUCATION/LEARNING	CARE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place that gives security • Quiet • Comfortable • Intimate, not too large • Low light • Personalized space: child's sheet; child's photographs, child's objects or dolls... • Beds on the ground, without bars, close to each other 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time for pampering and tenderness between teachers and children • The time for pampering and tenderness between peers • Children search for and receive physical contact



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Teachers

DESCRIPTION	EDUCATION/LEARNING	CARE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place that gives security • Embracing place • Intimate, not too large • Comfortable • Child-friendly • Low light • Music • Possibility for the adult to stay close to children (cushions for adults) • Personalized space: child's sheet; child's photographs, child's objects or dolls... • Beds on the ground, without bars, close to each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomies in sleeping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers take care of children's emotion • The time for pampering and tenderness between teachers and children • The time for pampering and tenderness between peers • Emotionally-charged place • The children learn to trust ...

The sleeping space is described in detail, particularly by the teachers. It is perceived as a **place that gives security**, and as an **embracing place**. Moreover, the sleeping space appears intimate, comfortable, personalized and child-friendly. Teachers and parents report in the focus groups, some physical characteristics of sleeping space that overall refer to a **climate of tranquillity** and **intimate relationships**, such as: *low light, music, not too large, cushions for adults, beds on the ground*.

From the ideas that emerged from the focus, this place is mainly characterized as a place where the

care dimension predominates: *teachers take care of children's emotion; the time for pampering and tenderness between teachers and children; the time for pampering and tenderness between peers; emotionally-charged place; the children learn to trust.*

The teachers and the parents perceive the sleeping place as a place where **deep, intimate and emotionally significant relationships** are being consolidated, both between peers and between children and adults.

A parent says:

"It is the place of physical contact, of the pampering of the teacher but also of the companions"

A teacher says:

"Children recognize their place, everyone has their place.. a personalized and special place..."

c. The space for adults

The perception of spaces for adults differs greatly between the two ECEC centers.

In particular, in the MARIA VITTORIA Centre the space for families is perceived very differently by the parents than the teachers.

Some teachers say:

- "There is space for families, but it is a small and narrow space. I find it unpleasant, it should be taken care of. In the entrance area we also have reading space, but nobody likes it, it should be re-designed, to provide a better space for parents".

- "In the space for families it would be necessary to put some light and a bit of documentation. Recently an armchair has been put in place for mothers who wish to breastfeed, but it should be better furnished ... »

Some parents say:

- "For me the family space, at the entrance is very nice, there we lived the first moments during the welcoming, so it was nice"

- "In the place for the families I chatted with other mothers about separation and small difficulties and even now I am happy to sit there. There is also a collection of documents for parents on different topics that the teachers make available to families. I like it because it is also a time to learn new things"

- "The space for families is a special space for me, here my baby and I have time to say goodbye in the morning and to meet up again in the afternoon"

Parents describe the space dedicated to the families in very positive terms, as a space where two important processes take place: **the reunion between parents and children** and the **transitions between home and school and vice versa**. Instead, the teachers recognize that they do not live daily this space with children; they experience it **less meaningful and less functional**.

In the focus groups of Gelsomino center, the **teachers highlight the lack of an adequate space for them**.

Some teachers say:

- "We need a place for Teachers»



"In some schools in Sweden I remember seeing the beautiful and comfortable spaces for adults, where they could share but also relax, and wind down.

Moreover, both the teachers and the parents of the Gelsomino Center highlight **some critical aspects regarding the spaces for families.**

Some teachers say:

"For the parents in front of the class there are two small armchairs and a small table but it is a too narrow, indefinite and chaotic space"

"We don't have a space inside that allows parents to meet, relate, network ... in fact they stop outside ..."

A parent say:

"Sometimes when I go to get my baby I would like to stop a bit outside the class ... but there is a narrow corridor ... you don't really know where to put things ... then we adapt, but I'd like it to be a little more pleasant..."

d. The ideal space

The last question of the focus group was: *What is/are the most important thing/s of your ideal school for children, in relation to space?*

PARENTS	TEACHERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The light that filters through the large windows Essential and natural materials, like wood, no plastic Unstructured space Unstructured objects that stimulate the imagination A garden like a forest Not too many objects Books Safe and comfortable space all the material and furnishings can be used space that allows the children to move and be free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care and attention for the spaces, which are maintained over time The documentation of the places: the children's photographs while they play and move in the space. A welcoming place The space conceptualized as flexible and continuously changing Child-friendly A space in which to experiment contact with animals. A space in which to carry out the activities like at home: washing, cleaning, cooking (the kitchen laboratory) Intimate space A place in which the children can experiment their body, their agility, in which they can



	<p>practice psychomotricity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A space that allows the relations between children of different ages and from different classes
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The parents report different specific aspects that refer principally to physical characteristics of the space. An important aspect to emphasize is that for many parents it is very significant that in a school there are natural and unstructured materials to stimulate the imagination.

Some parents say:

"The light that filters through the windows here is fantastic! This makes the spaces really very bright, it gave me a sense of serenity, of peace, so having to spend seven hours a day in a kindergarten I chose this place"

"Our children are continuously surrounded by ready-made and plastic things so the kindergarten should be minimal, with essential materials"

"In my opinion, the nursery school should be a space like a house, but also like a park ... children must be able to make discoveries ..."

The perceptions of ideal space of the teachers is more complex, they refer several aspects concerning different levels. Some of these identify an **approach/attitude towards space** and a way of conceiving it (care and attention for the spaces, which are maintained over time; the space conceptualized as flexible and continuously changing; a welcoming place). Instead, other aspects, referred to by teachers, concern an **educational model and certain educational methodologies** (the documentation of the places: the children's photographs while they play and move in the space; a space that allows the relations between children of different ages and from different classes; a space in which to carry out the activities like at home: washing, cleaning, cooking; a place in which the children can experiment their body, their agility, in which they can practice psychomotricity).

Some teacher say:

"In my opinion an essential aspect of the space in a school is the care and attention to materials and spaces, without forgetting them... In this way, we also teach children to take care of things ..."

"In my opinion the most important aspect is to have the space in mind"

"It is important that it is an evolving space ... changing according to the observation of children ... and families ..."

e. Some suggestions to go forward



The topics of the focus groups reveal **different important meanings** of the space within ECEC centers and **different educational functions** of the space: *the space that favors learning activities, play activities and emotional experiences; that favors relations and that connects inside and outside.* An important aspect that emerges, especially from teachers, is the concept of "**space in mind**", that is to say the idea of a space **that is designed and well conceived from each of the teachers**. Furthermore, in the perception of teachers, the educational space has been conceived as **flexible and in continuous change**.

From the focus it emerges that even parents have a very **articulated and complex perception of space**, for most situations **consistent** with that proposed by teachers.

However, with reference to some spaces that parents experience more with their children (*welcoming and entrance space*), it is possible to observe a **different perception** between parents and teachers. This is an extremely interesting evidence that emphasizes the importance of **paying attention to parents' points of view**.

Moreover, hygienic and toilet, eating and sleeping spaces emerge **as important places of caring, but also learning**, both in adults-children and in peers relationships.

Finally, some **critical aspect** of the space emerge in each ECEC center involved, such as: the garden and the toilet space in the Maria Vittoria centre and the welcoming space and the teachers space in the Gelsomino centre. The case studies provided for by the EDUCAS project could focus on some of these aspects in order **to observe and design possible changes**.

Contexts in dialogue: Which differences and commonalities in the 3 countries²

From the analysis of the Italian focus groups the University of Parma identified **5 main categories of meanings** that emerged from the answers of Italian teachers and parents when they talked about their favorite or not favorite spaces.

The University of Parma analyzed also the Belgian and Lithuanian focus groups, trying to understand if the same categories were used by Belgian and Lithuanian teachers and parents and if there were similarities or differences between the countries.

The five main categories of meanings are:

1. Space that favors **EXPERIENCES** (in terms of learning/play/emotions...)
2. Space that favors **RELATIONS** (between parents/professionals/children...)
3. Space that is **CO-DESIGNED** (thought on space/ sense of belonging)
4. Space that shows **CONNECTION** between inside and outside (indoor vs outdoor/service vs world...)
5. Space that has some **PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS** (beauty, light, functionality...)

For each category, here below are reported some examples taken from the focus groups in the three countries:

1. Space that favors (or doesn't favor) EXPERIENCES

Italy

«I like the peekaboo space because I stay in there with the children and, reading, singing or simply telling stories, we are fine» [Maria Vittoria]

«I like the entrance because when I arrive at the entrance I feel that sensation of well-being that the whole structure transmits to me» [Gelsomino]

«The laboratory is a space that the children do not recognize and they don't know what to do in it»

Belgium

«In the hall, for example in the evening at half six or so, we gather there for a booklet to read or so, or

² This paragraph come from the Ph.D research of Sara Berti, from the University of Parma, who is involved in the EDUCAS project and is connecting her research to this project. The 5 categories have been found out during her Ph.D research.

just I often call that "coffee chatter", but the kids find that super fun.» [Hippo's Hof]
«That place in the garden (...) There I find always a very nice atmosphere with the food forest next to it and that green that gives you peace.» [De Tandem]
«There are also few things to play with, outside, so apart from the sandbox, there aren't really many things they can play with.»

Lithuania

«I would think yard. We don't run in the classroom and we can do it outside.» [Sodelis]
«You feel much more free, more space. Children exude energy, joy.» [Austelke]
«Maybe children don't like the place where you need to focus or get bored. (...) this is a place where your child can concentrate and I think they may be less comfortable with them.»

2. Space that favors (or doesn't favor) RELATIONS

Italy

"I like the entrance and welcoming space because it is really an agora, so there are parents who meet ... It's noisy, but there is life, and there are relationships" [Maria Vittoria]
"That is a particular place because for us (0-3) it is a connection with the kindergarten (3-6), so children often come from the kindergarten, and we know many of them and then it is often an opportunity to see each other, keep in touch again" [Gelsomino]
"I don't like the entrance space, it's too big, there's too much confusion, it's not intimate, it doesn't favor relationships"

Belgium

«Here you come into the building along the hall, you have the hall where you meet everyone. At the previous school we had nothing like that.» [Hippo's Hof]
«I think it's nice that they go in groups out of the living space and they get mixed with other children.» [De Tandem]

Lithuania

«They like to go to a different group as guests because of new toys, new kids. (...) It is sometimes useful to come and enjoy the guests. [Austelke]
«When I bring my kids to kindergarten, they are in different groups, but I see that I really like it. My son is timid and has difficulty to adapt to the environment, but with their help it is very successful and everything is fine.» [Austelke]

3. Space that is (or is not) CO-DESIGNED

Italy

«This year I had the opportunity to make changes in the space and so I feel it much more mine ... I



feel fine» [Gelsomino]

«We dedicated a lot to the pretend play space, so that place was very well thought out and it is a space that all teachers can share» [Maria Vittoria]

"The space in front of the bathroom ... we still have to find the right way to use it. We have been thinking about it a lot, but we still haven't reached a solution»

Belgium

«I chose the multipurpose room, because I like to move with the toddlers and because that is good, with the music system and so... And also because the celebrations are there too and because that is an important part of... Our school.» [Hippo's Hof]

«I like also the space where I can take decisions (...) I arrange the space to focus on what I choose for myself and I like this very much » [De Tandem]

Lithuania

«I like my class. Because the classes that we are responsible for, are set up as we like.» [Sodelis]

«Since I started working from the autumn, we were in another class, and now we moved to larger rooms. I somehow found it easier to breathe when we moved into a new space and then we could create it for ourselves. It's more fun now for me to have that other space.» [Austelke]

4. Space that shows (or doesn't show) CONNECTION between inside and outside

Italy

«The glass windows are fantastic, my child likes to look outside: the construction sites, the garden, the arrivals .. a world...» [Maria Vittoria]

«I asked her 'Why do you like being here so much?' And she answered 'Because this is the secret part of the garden and it is near the house of the nannies'» [Gelsomino]

Belgium

«We actually started in the other side... And I found that place more nice with that window on the outside and so, but then we had to move.» [De Tandem]

«I actually find this is the nicest place, because you also have the swing window there and I find that a very nice aspect is that you see the people pass by, the parents see you leave and forward, and also for the kids it's the last time they could go to their mum and dad. This leads to very nice scenes. So parents who do peekaboo games to the window or so.» [De Tandem]

My child passed half an hour standing crying, because he has seen me run away (...) I find that two windows (and shakes with her head)... The windows should be higher!

Lithuania

«Sometimes we don't go to the playground but go for a walk. If the weather is kind of wet and we don't want the kids to get dirty, we go for a walk. A walk around the village.» [Austelke]

«We had a goose domesticated last year. The geese could hear from afar that the children were



coming and clapping. it was very interesting for children.» [Austelke]

5. Space that has (or has not) some PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Italy

«The reading corner is very nice with those lights and that small curtain at the entrance, it is really a beautiful place also aesthetically» [Maria Vittoria]

«Even the bathrooms are beautiful because they are suitable for children, with a small sink, with low shelves, low chairs, cushions ...» [Gelsomino]

«The garden isn't a real garden, it's too sunny, it's grassless and very dusty ...»

Belgium

«It is important that the rooms have a lot of light. I don't like those first two spaces, I'm not that happy there, because I love daylight.» [De Tandem]

«I have chosen the playground with the trees, because when the trees have leaves in summer and spring there is shadow and half shade there.» [Hippo's Hof]

«And the space that I do not like is the toilets. It's dark there, it smells there it's chaos there.»

Lithuania

«the classroom itself is big enough and bright enough. On one hand, you see that everything in it is structured - for space and space for children. You can visually see what the zone is for, but at the same time there is no spirit of such an institution, the place is really cute.» [Sodelis]

«For me those tables are good, if the tutors come up with something to do, the children sit there and something works.» [Austelke]

«I don't like the class with less light. Really, it is so dark and uncomfortable for me .»

Frequency of categories in the focus groups of the three countries

The analysis indicate that the five categories were used in all the three countries. Then, the frequency in the use of the categories during the focus groups in each country was analysed.

The findings indicate that the most used category in all the three countries is SPACE THAT FAVORS EXPERIENCES: for the participants at the focus groups it seems to be the most important role of ECEC spaces.

The less used category in all three countries is SPACE THAT CONNECTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE: it seems a very appreciate aspect of space, but among the five it is the less used.

In Italy the second most used category is SPACE THAT IS CO-DESIGNED (almost on par with RELATIONS and PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS.

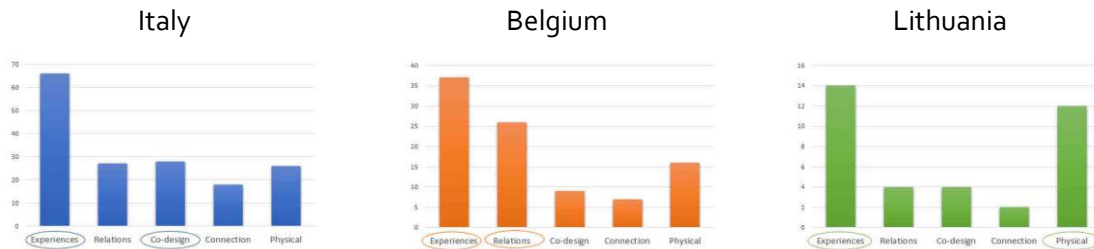
In Belgium the second most used category is SPACE THAT FAVORS RELATIONS

In Lithuania the second most used category is SPACE THAT HAS SOME PHYSICAL



CHARACTERISTICS

Here below the graphics for each country are reported.



Limitations

Some limitations should be considered:

- The 5 categories have been identified analyzing the Italian focus groups, then Belgian and Lithuanian focus groups have been analysed through "Italian lens".
- The transcriptions of Belgian and Lithuanian focus groups were done with on-line translators, so there some words or sentences could have been misunderstood and probably the Italian team had been not able to catch all the "nuance of meaning" of the concepts expressed.
- The Italian focus groups dedicated a lot of time to the first questions (preferences/non-preferences about ECEC spaces) that is the part used to identify the categories: actually the University of Parma analyzed 217 sentences of the focus group in Italy, 143 in Belgium and 43 in Lithuania. So the "comparison" between the focus groups in the three countries is not "equal"

Taking these specifications into account we'll expose some comparative insights concerning the focus groups in the 3 countries

Conclusions

The 5 categories of meanings identified in Italy seem to be applicable also in Belgium and Lithuania.

The participants in the 3 countries often use similar sentences and similar concepts, that may mean that there are common visions and values about the ECEC spaces across countries. In addition, the most used and the less used categories were the same.

The main differences in the frequency of the categories across the focus groups of the 3 countries emerge on the second most used category, that is different in each country. This finding may indicate a good balance in the vision of space issues among the partner of EDUCAS Project.



As a limitation of the analysis, it should be considered that in the Belgian and Lithuanian focus groups there could be other more representative categories that weren't get, due to Italian perspective bias during the analysis or reductive interpretations of the other languages.

The points of view of children

Comparative insights concerning the children's drawings and interviews in the 3 countries

During the C1 Meeting in Parma (June 2019) the partners decide to investigate also the point of view of children on the spaces of their ECEC centers. In June, during the meeting, the University of Parma exposed the tools of the preliminary project conducted in Italy for the PhD project (drawings, model and circle-time).

In July the University of Parma proposed "drawings+interview" for the final project. In September, the University developed the tool together with VBJK and UIC. Children's drawings were collected between October and December in the three countries and in January 2020 the material from the three countries was available on Dropbox.

Unfortunately in Italy data were not collected in the ECEC services involved in EDUCAS, because Maria Vittoria it's a 0-3 service and children are too young to be interviewed and Gelsomino is still getting the informed consents. However for the PhD project the University involved other 9 services of Proges and delivered about 800 informed consent. For the PhD project, the University have already collected more than 200 drawings and for the present preliminary analysis some of them were analysed.

For the present analysis were collected 26 drawings+interviews from De Tandem e Hippi's Hof (Belgium), 31 drawings+interviews from Austelke e Sodelis (Lithuania) and 29 drawings+interviews from Girasoli e Tartaruga (Italy). In total 86 drawings+interviews were collected in the three countries with children from 3 to 6 years old.

The analysis have been conducted through some main topics:

1. The main themes emerged from children drawings+interviews
2. If and how Eating, Sleeping and Toilet spaces were represented by children
3. If and how Nannies, Teachers, Family and Friends were represented by children
4. Some situations that children like, but...
5. What children think is missing in their schools
6. The contribute of two school-aged children

1. Main themes emerged

The main themes emerged from the analysis of the drawings are:

- The pleasure of playing indoor
- The pleasure of reading, writing, drawing (...learning!)
- The pleasure of playing outdoor
- The pleasure of observing nature
- The pleasure of experiencing the body

Here below some examples are reported for each theme.




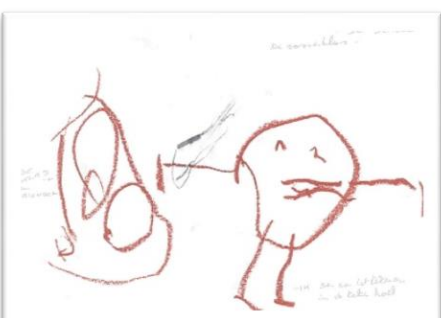
The pleasure of playing indoor

	<p>I like playing in the car corner. If I want to play in this corner I have to stick up my finger, and then the teacher says if it's ok that I play there.</p> <p>(Adam, 4, De Tandem)</p>
	<p>I like to play inside in my classroom. I drew me and my personal 'basket'. I have a crown on my head.</p> <p>(Hermien, 3, Hippo's Hof)</p>
	<p>I like the bench, because I like to play with the little animals that are in there.</p> <p>(Pietro, 5, Tartaruga)</p>
	<p>I drew that kind of tower that is in the corridor. Alberto, Chiara and I often play there, for example we play Frozen castle.</p> <p>(M.Vittoria, 4, Girasoli)</p>







	<p>I love the place where there's a box with lego. I like to built garages and walls.</p> <p>(Arnas, 4, Austelke)</p>
	<p>I like the class because I can play there.</p> <p>(Teodoras, 3, Sodelis)</p>

The pleasure of reading, writing, drawing (...learning!)

	<p>I drew me, in the tent, with branches that hold the tent. The tent is a sheet. There are also books in the tent. I like staying there because I like to read books.</p> <p>(Josse, 4, De Tandem)</p>
	<p>This is me in the drawing corner. There is the class and my friends. I like stay there because I just draw with pleasure.</p> <p>(Loes, 3, Hippo's Hof)</p>



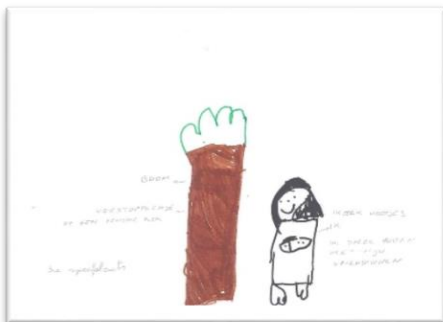
	<p>One place where I like to be at school is where we read books. Because my mom read me the books.</p> <p>(Lea, 5, Girasoli)</p>
	<p>I drew class library with friends: they read books, draw and sleep. I drew it because I like reading books.</p> <p>(Azuolas, 3, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>I like to take a book and listen fairy tales which the teacher is reading before a noon nap."</p> <p>(Benita, 3, Austelke)</p>
	<p>I drew morning circle. Teachers are reading morning letters. I like it because I can write letters on board.</p> <p>(Teja, 3, Sodelis)</p>

The pleasure of playing outdoor



I like to play outside where there are camps. I also drew the sun, because **with the sun we can go outside and play in the camp.**

(Maxime, 6, De Tandem)



I like to play outside **seek and hide**. But I cannot tell you where we play because they are secret places.

(Jasmine, 5, Hippo's Hof)



I like playing outside, because **I run races with Giovanni** and in this way I can also train even more to become even faster.

(Davide, 5, Tartaruga)



I drew me outside, on the grass, because I can play many beautiful games outside: **I can play on the slide and I can also climb.**

(Irene, 4, Girasoli)



I like to be outside. **There is a swing.** I love the swing.
There is also a slide rink.
(Greta, 4, Austelke)



I like to stay in the **schoolyard**
playing with my friends
(Sarinas, 5, Sodelis)

The pleasure of observing nature



I drew me and my friend Kaat and the tree house. I am making a mountain with the **tree leaves**. We also made a little hill for **the hedgehogs**, and we've put some steps, so that they can get upstairs.

(Ilian, 5, De Tandem)



I drew me, a tree and nuts. I play outside with my friends and **I am looking for nuts.**

(Jasmine, 5, Hippo's Hof)



	<p>This is me in the garden seeing butterflies</p> <p>(Chiara, 5, Girasoli)</p>
	<p>This is me in the garden of the school, looking for sticks, because I make the collection of sticks, so I can find them outside.</p> <p>(Giovanni, 5, Tartaruga)</p>
	<p>I was outside, this is a house, clouds, this is the wheel, tree, butterfly, rainbow, and sun.</p> <p>(Ingvaras, 5, Austelke)</p>
	<p>This is (...) the rainbow, the grass, the water next to the grass, the rain, this is mud, the rain, carrots are growing.</p> <p>(Emilis, 4, Austelke)</p>

The pleasure of experiencing the body

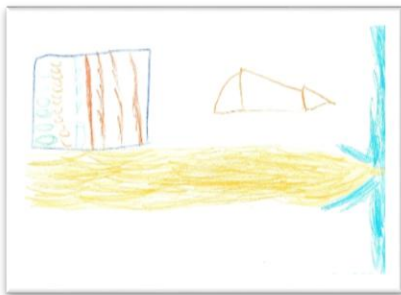


	<p>I like to climb the trees outside, to play with my friends.</p> <p>(Siem, 3, De Tandem)</p>
	<p>I like running with my friend and I can bike very fast.</p> <p>(Soubhan, 5, Hippo's Hof)</p>
	<p>I like the corridor because I have to do races every day with Matteo, and we do wwwwwwmmmm... I run faster than him.</p> <p>(Matilde, 3, Girasoli)</p>
	<p>I like outside because there are so many games to play: we go on the slide, we do climbing, we go on the wheels that we have to jump...</p> <p>(Giacomo, 5, Girasoli)</p>



I drew outside space, where is skating ring, because **it's where is skating ring** and sand.

(Emil, 4, Austelke)



I like the library because **there are stairs that you climb**.

(Varariu, 5, Sodelis)




2. If and how Eating, Sleeping and Toilet spaces were represented by children

In relation to the EduCare approach, the analysis focused also on the drawings which represent "Caring Spaces" as Eating spaces, Sleeping spaces and Toilet spaces.

Some children represented them in the drawings and some other talked about them during the interview. Here below the drawings and the citations from the interviews are reported for each space.

Eating spaces

Only five children decided to represent eating spaces. Here below the drawings are reported:

	<p>I drew teacher giving food to children, because my mum picks me up after I eat there (Tadas, 5, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>My friend and my sister. We are all eating there. Because I like eating with my friends. (Rytante, 5, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>Here there are me and Giovanni eating the food prepared by nanny Isa. This is nanny Isa and this is me helping with the plates because. I like to be the waiter. (Iris, 5, Tartaruga)</p>



	<p>I drew the nanny and me. And the school. We are inside the school and we are going to eat Because i like to eat. I eat everything. (Elliot, 4, Tartaruga)</p>
	<p>I drew a large table where you can eat, play and look a book. There are me and the other children. We are eating, playing and looking a book. (Lou, 3, De Tandem)</p>

Sleeping spaces

Only two children decided to represent eating spaces. Here below the drawings are reported:

	<p>I drew the place in the group where there is bookshelf and pillows on which the children are sitting and listening fairy tales. There is a broom in the corner. There is no people, because all children are taking a noon nap. (Ugne, 3, Austelke)</p>
	<p>I drew me cuddling a little girl and this is the kiss I give her. I like it because I can cuddle children and make them fall asleep, because they're small. (Bianca, 5, Tartaruga)</p>

However, other three children cited them during the interview:



- *"I like to take a book and listen fairy tales which the teacher is reading before a noon nap." (Benita, 3, Austelke)*
- *I like sleeping in my school. (Vanesa, 3, Sodelis)*
- *I love to cuddle. Sometimes with boys and girls who are big and medium, we go to cuddle the little ones, but sometimes I go there alone (Alice, 5, Tartaruga)*

Toilet spaces

No children drew toilet space. However, one child cited them during the interview:

- *I like to go to the toilet with my daddy. Once we were all wet. (Nour, 4, Hippo's Hof)*



3. If and how Nannies, Teachers, Familiars and Friends were represented by children






In relation to EduCare approach and Inclusion, the analysis focused also on the representation of nannies, teachers, familiars and friends

Nannies and teachers

11 children represented nannies and teachers. Here below the drawings are reported. It is interesting to note that both Edu and Care practices were represented by children.

	<p>I drew the class and the teachers: they are working</p> <p>(Cristas, 5, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>Teachers and children doing school work</p> <p>(Nicole, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>Art area. Trips. Teachers and my friends. Teachers watch us draw.</p> <p>(Rasa, 5, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>I drew teachers reading morning letters</p> <p>(Teja, 3, Sodelis)</p>



	<p>There is our volunteer Ali from Turkey, he is playing outside with children.</p> <p>(Julius, 6, Austelke)</p>
	<p>Me and my teacher In the school, waiting for the other children</p> <p>(Lore, 5, De Tandem)</p>
	<p>This is nanny Monica and this is me.</p> <p>(Carlo Elia, 4, Girasoli)</p>
	<p>The teacher is reading fairy tales before a noon nap.</p> <p>(Benita, 3, Austelke)</p>
	<p>This is nanny Isa and this is me helping with the plates, because. I like to be the waiter.</p> <p>(Iris, 5, Tartaruga)</p>

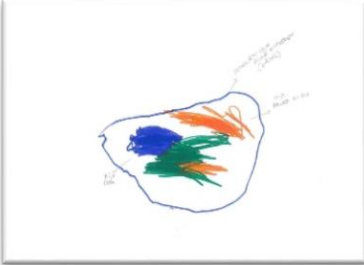

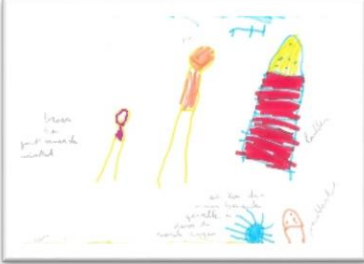

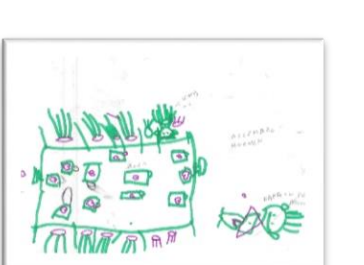


	<p>I drew teacher giving food to children</p> <p>(Tadas, 5, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>I drew the nanny and me. And the school. We are inside the school and we are going to eat.</p> <p>(Elliot, 4, Tartaruga)</p>

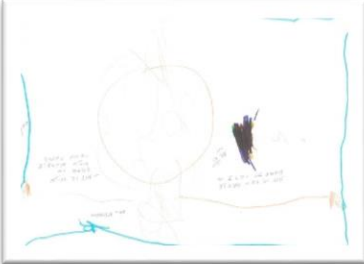

Familiars

10 children represented familiars: mums, dads, brothers, sisters. Here below the drawings and the citations from the interviews are reported.

	<p>I drew all the kids here. Also mother, father, brother, sister.</p> <p>(Benas, 5, Austelke)</p>
	<p>I drew little people, mother and Mija.</p> <p>(Mija, 5, Austelke)</p>

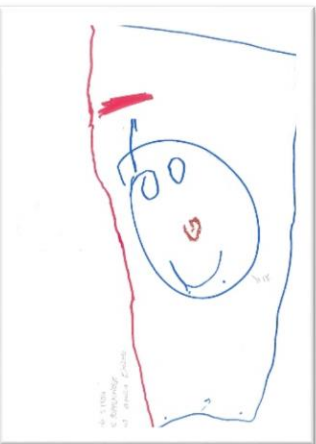
	<p>It's me, my daddy, sister, brother and other children in the school. We are in the circle time.</p> <p>(Nour, 4, Hippo's Hof)</p>
	<p>My friend and my sister. We are all eating there. Because I like eating with my friends.</p> <p>(Rytante, 5, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>Me and my brother going to the shop.</p> <p>(Arthur, 4, De Tandem)</p>
	<p>Me, mommy, daddy, my sister, the snow and the sea We are eating a cake.</p> <p>(Tilde, 4, De Tandem)</p>
	<p>Me on a chair at the table with a lot of books on the table. And daddy in the shower.</p> <p>(Isolde, 4, De Tandem)</p>







	<p>This is the basket and there is something special in the basket. In my basket there is a picture of my daddy.</p> <p>(Hermien, 3, Hippo's Hof)</p>
	<p>Me with mum in the garden.</p> <p>(Alessandro, 3, Girasoli)</p>
	<p>drew myself as a zombie, my little zombie brother, the Halloween-themed school, a spider, two hearts and two pumpkins.</p> <p>(Virginia, 5, Tartaruga)</p>

Friends

34 children represented one or more friends. Here below some examples of drawings and citations from the interviews are reported.

	<p>It's me drawing in the drawing corner. There is the class and my friends. I like to play in the classroom with my friends. I like to play everywhere and everybody is my friend.</p> <p>(Loos, 3, Hippo's Hof)</p>
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	<p>Me and my friend Elias outside. We are looking for branches to make a campfire. Not a real one, but 'as if' we have a real campfire. I like to play outside with my friends and look for branches.</p> <p>(Siem, 3, De Tandem)</p>
	<p>Outside spaces where is a lot of kids: Toma herself (she is getting to slide on skating ring), Lèja, one angry kid and one who is smiling.</p> <p>(Toma, 3, Austelke)</p>
	<p>Teachers and children doing school work I like being with my friends.</p> <p>(Nicole, Sodelis)</p>
	<p>I drew my friends: Davide, Adam, Michele e Isamel. We were playing together.</p> <p>(Pedro, 4, Tartaruga)</p>



I am here, this is Alessandro and this is Giacomo. We are playing thieves and police in the corridor: one has to escape and the others have to take him.

(Federico, 5, Girasoli)

4. Some situations that children like, but...

The interviews also reveal that, although most of children like certain situations, other children have some conditions to specify. Here below are some examples.

We like to stay with other children....

- This is me in the dolls corner It's me in the dolls corner. **I play there with other children. I like to play with my friends** (Loes, 3, Belgium)
- I am inside and Jacopo is outside. I'm getting dressed to go out with Jacopo and he's waiting for me to go for a run and play. I drew it because **I like to play with others... If there is nobody, then who am I playing with?** (Matteo, 5, Italy)
- "I like to stay in the group. **I like all the group of my kindergarten, because it is warm and really good.**" (Emilis, 4, Lithuania)

...But not too many children!

- I drew one day in which we were just with 2 children in the class, and I could go with my teacher to the door to wait for the other children. **I liked that day very much because there were a few children and it was calm.** Normally there are too many children and it's noisy. (Lore, 5, Belgium)
- I drew me and the foam blocks that are in the corridor. With the foam blocks sometimes we do a dan with friends, **but only few friends because sometimes we are many and then everything is thrown down.** And we do the dan a little tight so that no-one has to come in anymore. (Alessandro, 5, Italy)
- "**I would like that there would be less children in the group.** Because there is not enough toys for all." (Arnas, 4, Lithuania)

We like to stay outside...

- I also like the garden, because there **we can play freely** and hide behind the bushes. (Davide, 5, Girasoli)
- I like to play outside. **There I can choose my games.** (Quin, 5, Hippo's Hof)

- I like to play outside **because there is space**. (Annabelle, 5, Hippo's Hof)
- drew many friends playing outside.
- I also like going outside. Because I go on the slide and **there is more space** to play with my friends. (Giorgia, 6, Girasoli)
- I also like the garden because **there is many space and more air**. (Bianca, 5, Tartaruga)
- I also like staying outside in the garden, because **we can do whatever we want and even scream**. (Pietro, 5, Tartaruga)
- I like outside because **we can play as long as we can**. (Karolis, 5, Austelke)
- I like to be in outside, play in playground. I like **when the sun is shining, the rain is raining**. (Nojus, 6, Austelke)

But sometimes it's too cold (at least in Italy)

- I like to go out, too, but not so much, because it's cold and my legs and feet always freeze. And my eyes also burn. And around my mouth it becomes red because of the cold. (Iris, 5, Tartaruga)
- There is snow, so when you are out in the snow then you are cold and freeze a lot. But I didn't freeze, thanks to my dad, who put me in the car, and inside the cars it's never cold. (Matilde, 3, Girasoli)

We like school, but we also think at home.

- I am in school early in the morning, I give a kiss to **my mother** and she goes. **My sister** is the school next door. (Jasmine, 5, Hippo's Hof)
- I like **my sister's** school. A school close to mine. (Elliot, 4, Tartaruga)
- I am happy if my **daddy, brother and baby sister** are here in the school. (Nour, 4, Hippo's Hof)
- Can I say the things I like **at home**? At home I like to play with tablets and I like to watch movies. And on my tablet I like to play Angry Birds. And then I like playing on the computer, on my mom's phone and watching cartoons. (Davide, 5, Tartaruga)

5. What children think is missing in their schools

When asked to think of something missing in their school, children provide interesting answers. Here below the citation from the interviews are reported for each ECEC service.

Hippo's Hof:

- More flowers (especially sunflowers) (1)
- I would like to have pigs. I have pigs at home. I want animals (1)
- I miss chestnuts to eat. I take them in the woods (1)

De Tandem:

- I miss my mummy and daddy sometimes (2)
- Some 'poles' to hang and do some tricks: more sport (1)
- A rope and small trees to build a roof for the camp (1)

- A piece of land on which I can build, with a lot of children, real houses with cement and bricks (1)
- A barbie corner (1)
- A computer game in school (1)
- A bed to sleep. Sometimes I am tired in school and I miss a bed to sleep (1)
- A red bike. Here we have bikes, but sometimes we have to wait for our turn and I don't like it very much. (1)

Girasoli:

- More toys (1)
- A beautiful friend (1)
- The collection of photos that I have at home ...When mom and dad got married (1)
- A book of Gormiti all for free (1)
- I wish there was a balcony, so I can look out (1)

Tartaruga:

- More toys (2)
- Paintings on the walls (2)
- A little bit more darkness in the sleep room and the lights off (1)
- A room only for resting, not for sleeping... That one reads a book and you listen and, in the meantime, maybe you fall asleep a little (1)
- A mega giant pretend-play room, but only for superheroes (1)
- A construction room (1)

Austelke:

- Less children (1)
- More puzzles (1)
- Springers (as cars) in the playground (1)
- More toys in outside spaces (1)
- Common sand toys, not only our group (1)
- More books (1)
- More pillows and trampoline for jumping in outside spaces (1)
- Baby broom (1)

Sodelis:

- More toys (6)
- More pencils (1)
- More time for drawing (1)
- More time for playing (1)

6. The contribute of two school-aged children

In De Tandem, two school-aged children were present during the data collection and they gave



their interesting contribution to the research. Both from the drawings and from the interviews it seems that the translation from preschool age and school age was deeply felt, in terms of more responsibility and more work to do... But with pleasure.

	<p>These are me and my little sister, we sit each on a chair, and we have paper and pencil. I am drawing at the table. I like to draw, but we have to 'work' a lot. Working means writing letters and learning, also with our book. I do it with pleasure, but just a little pleasure. I also draw with pleasure outside.</p> <p>(Djenna, 6, De Tandem)</p>
	<p>I am doing math at the table. I sit there with other children and the teacher. I have to 'work' a lot in school and I do it with pleasure. When I was in kindergarten I could play more, but now I have to work. But I like it.</p> <p>(Lou, 6, De Tandem)</p>

Conclusion

The analysis of children's drawings helps us to get the point of view of children on their ECEC spaces.

It emerged the pleasure for children to play both inside (they represented blocks, dolls, cars, little animals...) and outside (they represented slide, swing, seek and hide...)

It emerged the pleasure for children to observe nature in the outdoors: they represented carrots growing, butterflies flying, hedgehogs walking, looking for nuts and sticks...

It emerged the pleasure for children to challenge and experiment their body, both inside (they represented stairs to climb, corridors to run...) and outside (they represent activities like climbing trees, jumping, biking...)

It emerged the pleasure for children to learn: they represented reading, writing, drawing activities... And 6 years old children represented also the pleasure to "work".

It emerged the need for resting spaces and the pleasure to cuddle smaller children during sleeping time.

It emerged the pleasure to stay with teachers, in both «educating» and «caring» space and times.

It emerged the pleasure to enjoy the presence of parents, brothers, sisters in the service context.

It emerged the pleasure to stay with friends, but sometimes the need to be not too crowded.

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