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### Children's Participation within Alternative Care Settings: First Findings from a Narrative Literature Review

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This paper aims at presenting the first results of a narrative literature review (Bourhis, 2017), that is currently being conducted, that revolves around the following main questions: "What does child participation mean?" and "What does child participation in alternative care settings mean?" Children's rights and needs are at the centre of the *United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and education is viewed as crucial for providing the opportunities for sustainable, peaceful and equitable co-existence in a changing world.

In this framework, it is necessary to understand, not only how the human rights policies define child participation (UNCRC, art.12; UNCRC General Comment No. 12) and child participation in alternative care settings (UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2012) but also to understand if they do justice to children's rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that children's views are relevant and should be considered in all matters concerning them (art.12) but it also uses ambiguous language when referring to the "capability" of the child to form his/her own views or when referring to "maturity". Furthermore, other articles (art.3 and 19) mention the duties of adults of doing the "best interest" and "protecting" the child. To this end, it can be noted that it is adults that frame the possibilities through which children can play their role in society by devoting or granting certain spaces to them (Biffi, 2018). In the declaration of the *UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, it is cited that one of the aims of the SDGs is to provide the grounds for full participation of children in society. Furthermore, it emphasizes that it is necessary to "strive for nurturing environment for the full realization of their (children's) rights and capabilities..." (SDG's Declaration, para.25).

By linking to this last point, a reflection on child participation in alternative care settings (UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2012) becomes relevant. Since these educational settings are concerned with more vulnerable children, they can be considered as a sort of "field test" or "magnifying glass" on how the progress in striving to the implementation of the goals is proceeding. Mechanism to ensure children's participation in alternative care settings have been implemented (CoE, 2012) but there seems to be a gap between what is declared and its implementation. Children feel their voices are not being taken into account (Munro, 2011) and this view seems to be shared also by workers, especially when referring to young children (Kriz & Skivenness, 2015; Van Bijleveld et al., 2014).

This matter, that can be translated into a simple question: "What is each person (child) able to do and be (in alternative care settings)?" (Saraceno, in Nussbaum, 2002, p.9) is therefore relevant to the debate on social justice, with specific concern to the *Capability Approach to Social Justice* (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2002).

To summarize, this review aims at keeping together and crossing the level of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, that sets the goals nations should strive for, with the level of the policies and strategies concerning children (in alternative care settings), that can be seen as paths to follow in order to reach those goals and that are, at the same time, at their base, with the level of the *lived experience* of children (in alternative care settings), according to the perspective of the *Capability Approach to Social Justice*.

Educational research is crucial for both investigating if there are gaps, as it seems, between the declared and the experienced and for providing the grounds for developing a culture of education (Macinai, 2016) that is sensitive to social justice.

#### Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used

The review is being organized according to thematic criteria, but the progression of time is also an important factor being taken into account. Official policies are being analyzed and so are peer-reviewed articles, together with milestone publications on the issue. This paper will focus on the presentation of the international panorama.

More specifically, these are the macro-themes that are being investigated:

- Participation of children in human rights policies: specific attention is being given to the United Nations' policies, such as the UNCRC and the UNGCs and to European policies. Policy documents are being reviewed since 1989 (year of the adoption of the CRC by the General Assembly and year it was opened to signature), with a specific focus on years: 2015 – present (2015 is the year the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted)
- Childhood participation in educational research, with specific focus on the years from 2015 to present.
- International policy concerning the participation of children in alternative care settings, with a specific focus on the years from 2015 to present.
- International educational research concerning child participation in alternative care settings, with a specific focus on the years from 2015 to present.

In addition, literature concerning the cultural-historical (Ariès, 1968; Becchi, 1994; De Mause, 1983) and pedagogical (Dewey, 1916; Macinai, 2016; Alessandrini, 2014) framework in which the concept of child participation developed and is maturing is being analyzed. Because of the objectives of this paper, this section will be summarized.

#### Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

It is expected, at the end of the review, to have a better and systematic definition and comprehension of the concept of child participation and of child participation in alternative care settings, not only from a human rights point of view but also as a matter of social justice, so in terms of the concrete possibilities each child has to participate and contribute to his/her own life project and to society.

Major debates on the issue will be identified, together with areas that need more studying. Possible new and/or different pedagogical interpretations of the background in which these matters developed, together with new and/or different pedagogical paths to explore the matters in the future are also expected outcomes.

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