Controversies around educational projects for gender equality in Italy

Ludovica Anedda

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ABSTRACTS

This study explores the controversial arguments that took place around the "teoria del gender" and its perceived impact on education in Italy, particularly between 2013 and 2016.

An investigation of newspaper articles, media campaigns and declarations of Catholic Church representatives shows how the "anti-gender" movements have influenced public opinion to oppose gender equality and sexuality education in schools. Through an analysis of educational projects in the municipality of Cagliari, the author highlights the main obstacles the actors of these projects had to face: a widespread lack of awareness on gender equality issues; contrasting political dynamics and interests; strong misinformation campaigns led by a mostly Catholic opposition.

This study intends to provide a foundation for further research and for the development of new strategies to respond to these challenges. Education is here understood as a fundamental means to achieve gender equality, because of its potential for the deconstruction of traditional gender norms and for the development of critical thinking.

LUDOVICA ANEDDA

After her undergraduate studies in International Relations and Human Rights at the University of St Andrews, Ludovica Anedda obtained her Master degree in Educational Sciences "Analysis and Intervention in Educational Systems" (AISE) at the University of Geneva. She currently works as a consultant for European institutions and agencies on gender equality and education policies.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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for gender equality in Italy

Cahiers de la Section des sciences de l'éducation

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Dernières parutions

140   Saskia Weber Guisan
Engagement bénévole et développement du pouvoir d'agir

139   Zakaria Serir
Dites-nous pourquoi « ils » sont en difficulté à l'école : étude de la représentation de la difficulté scolaire chez les enseignants genevois du primaire

138   Sonia Revaz
Les enquêtes PISA dans les systèmes scolaires valaisan et genevois

137   Béatrice Maire Sardi
Enseigner la catégorisation pour apprendre à catégoriser

136   Laurent Bovey
Des élèves funambules : être, faire, trouver et rester à sa place en situation d'intégration

Cahier No. 141

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Ludovica Anedda

Foreword by Isabelle Collet

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SERVICE ÉGALITÉ

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Contents

Foreword

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Translated by David Winter

Two major international texts pave the way for incorporating gender equality into public policy: the 1960 Unesco Convention against Discrimination in Education; and a 1975 European directive on implementing the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (which also includes training). Subsequently, in 1999, the Treaty of Amsterdam reinforced the EU's commitment when it introduced the promotion of equality between men and women and the combat against all discrimination, whether based on sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. A final step was taken in 2010 with Recommendation CM / Rec (2010) 5 issued by the Committee of Ministers to member states regarding measures for combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

All that remains, then, is for countries in Europe to take possession of these principles.

At the same time, from 2004 onwards the Vatican has been speaking out against what it calls "gender theory", fearing "that homosexuality, like the right to abortion, will ultimately be recognised, and that ideas about the complementarity of the sexes and the equal dignity of men and women (as opposed to the goal of equal rights) will also be called into question" (Paternotte, 2015, p. 14). But it was only really in 2013 that anti-gender protests were triggered in France and Italy: opponents in both countries brought the debate to the attention of the general public when they succeeded in opening up a front in schools. This is also the strategy adopted by the American religious right when it pits the teaching of creationism against theories of evolution (Fassin, 2014).

As part of her master's research, Ludovica Anedda has examined Italy's efforts to integrate a gender perspective into its educational policy in line with the European directives. More particularly, Anedda has analysed "equality" educational projects in Cagliari, Sardinia, together with the way that the press tries to inform or influence public opinion. Anedda shows that equality projects that had been relatively well-received are now obliged to take on new challenges: Look, we're taking an interest in them... and we've found that they're a danger to society! In the face of these threats to teaching about gender and LGBTIQ equality, Anedda reflects on the development of new strategies for circumventing or repelling attacks.

The first part of Anedda's research focuses on the Italian response to the 2010 European recommendation, which the country's government undertook to deliver in 2012 under the direction of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The implementation paper stressed that preventing, combating and eliminating all forms of discrimination is a priority in the wider context of promoting equal opportunities. The ministry officially delegated the development of a national strategy for opposing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to the National Office against Racial Discrimination (Ufficio Nazio-

nale Anti-Discriminazione Razziale, UNAR). As it stands, the 2013-2015 National LGBT Strategy is somewhat ambitious. Moreover, it features a section focused on education, designed to increase the knowledge and skills about LGBT issues of all actors in the school community; and to help raise awareness about new structures that make up the "family".

A number of training sessions have been organised as part of this project, which meant to include about twenty courses in regions such as Tuscany, Umbria, Basilicata, Calabria and Sardinia – the last-named being the region we are interested in here.

While institutionalisation is in its early stages, attacks against the "*teoria del gender"* are making an appearance. Anedda demonstrates that these form part of a wider international context that is moving across Mediterranean Europe and is "calling on people to question the trans-national dynamics of Catholic protest" (Avanza & Della Sudda, 2017). Although transfers of militant practices have been evident from the 2000s, they became more visible to the general public following the anti-gender movements in southern Europe between 2011 and 2015 (Paternotte, 2015).

This mobilisation started in Spain (Gallan & Valle, 2015) before meeting unexpected success in France. It subsequently arrived in Italy, where the conservative movements were dumbfounded by the enthusiastic mobilisation of a minority in France (that was very visible) which they saw as highly secular (Avanza & Della Sudda, 2017).

As part of the extended debate on legalising same-sex marriage, neo-conservative Catholic groups (amongst others) in France lashed out in January 2014 at the educational trials known as the *ABCD de l'Égalité* (The Basics of Equality), which were designed to combat gender stereotypes in primary schools.

Following in the footsteps of these Catholic groups was Farida Belghoul, a former anti-racism campaigner who now has close links to the extreme right and acts as a mouthpiece for some Muslim groups (Chercuti, 2014). Belghoul organised a *Journée de Retrait de l'Ecole*

(JRE) – Don't Go to School Day – that called on parents to engage in civil disobedience on the basis of a supposed "conscience clause": the "gender theory", argued Belghoul, runs counter to family values. As a result, children needed to be protected from what was described as "brainwashing" with the hint of a conspiracy theory (Cedelle, 2014). Families that were apparently Muslim were targeted by messages declaring that "transsexual men and women would come into nursery schools to give masturbation classes". An internet link to a video of Belghoul was sent out in an attempt to substantiate the rumour. The absurd nature of the accusations should have been enough to raise a smile but on January 24, 2014 – the date of the first JRE – schools in districts on the edges of France's major cities were devoid of pupils. Although the absenteeism caused by the JRE was ultimately quite low on a national level, the story caught the attention of the press, especially since it was widely seized upon in the general right-wing political discourse.

This association with the Muslim population in marginalised districts of large cities is specific to the French context; yet it has undoubtedly contributed to heightening the movement's visibility, including on the international stage.

Anedda analyses this conservative resistance in Italy and more precisely in Sardinia, where the church's spokespersons voice their opposition to the introduction of the "*teoria del gender"* at school in the national and regional press. Anedda shows that the catalyst in 2013 was a proposed law (the *Legge Scalfarotto*, named after one of its main supporters) suggesting that the idea of discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation should be incorporated into the legislation of October 13, 1975. In conservative circles, this was seen as preparing the ground for legalising same-sex marriage. It also marked the first meeting of the *Sentinelle in Piedi*, which took its cue from the French Veilleurs movement and several other associations, such as the Italian branch of the French *La Manif pour Tous*.

Nevertheless, projects for promoting gender equality are being carried out in Cagliari. Anedda introduces three of these: *Alla scoperta della differenza*, *Ci piacCiAmo!... anche in biblioteca* and *SAVE.* The first two apply specifically to children in primary and lower secondary education. The third project is designed specifically for teachers. Anedda shows how the schemes are executed and presents the criteria for their success. In addition, she examines the various obstacles that the people behind the projects have had to contend with, especially when the attacks on "the gender theory" were stronger.

Anedda has collected and analysed "anti-gender" press articles that mobilise a "discursive mechanism for unambiguously and totally identifying a plural object: educational programmes on gender and sexuality in schools, recognition of same-sex couples, gender politics, feminist and LGBTQI theories and movements, as well as abortion and euthanasia on occasion" (Prearo, 2017). Anedda has appended articles that try to defuse the debate and educate the general public so that they do not give in to moral panic (Mathieu, 2015).

Last of all, Anedda suggests possible avenues of action and resistance strategies so that this kind of equality programme can be implemented, even though governments – both in France and Italy – have retreated in the face of minority interest groups.

Anedda's work is an attempt to understand and explain a confused situation that is steeped in ignorance and misinformation. Her research has been recognised by the 2018 Gender Prize awarded by the Equality Office at the University of Geneva. Anedda demonstrates that, although the road to gender and LGBTIQ equality is still fraught with difficulty, people operating in the field, trainers and researchers – both men and women – are working to make progress in Cagliari and across Europe.

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Préface

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Deux grands textes internationaux ouvrent la voie à la prise en compte de l'égalité des sexes dans les politiques publiques : en 1960, la Convention de l'Unesco concernant la lutte contre la discrimination dans le domaine de l'enseignement ; en 1975, une directive européenne relative à la mise en œuvre du principe de l'égalité des chances et de l'égalité de traitement entre hommes et femmes en matière d'emploi et de travail (incluant également la formation). Par la suite, en 1999, le traité d'Amsterdam renforce l'engagement européen en introduisant la promotion de l'égalité et la lutte contre toute discrimination, qu'elle soit fondée sur le sexe, la race ou l'origine ethnique, la religion ou les convictions, un handicap, l'âge ou l'orientation sexuelle. Un dernier pas est fait en 2010 avec la Recommandation CM/Rec(2010)5 du Comité des ministres aux États membres sur des mesures visant à combattre la discrimination fondée sur l'orientation sexuelle ou l'identité de genre.

Reste alors aux pays européens à se saisir de ces principes.

Parallèlement, dès 2004, le Vatican se prononce contre ce qu'il appelle « la théorie du genre », « craignant une reconnaissance à terme de l'homosexualité et du droit à l'avortement, ainsi que la remise en cause des idées de complémentarité des sexes et d'égale dignité (opposée à l'objectif d'égalité des droits) » (Paternotte, 2015, p. 14). Pourtant la protestation anti-genre ne se déclenche réellement qu'en 2013, en France comme en Italie. Dans ces deux pays, c'est au moment où les opposant·es arrivent à ouvrir un front sur le terrain de l'école qu'ils et elles parviennent à amener le débat au niveau du grand public. Telle est d'ailleurs la stratégie de la droite religieuse américaine quand elle oppose l'enseignement du créationnisme aux théories de l'évolution (Fassin, 2014).

Ludovica Anedda, dans le cadre de sa recherche de master, s'est penchée sur les efforts menés par l'Italie pour intégrer, selon les directives européennes, une perspective de genre dans les politiques éducatives. Plus particulièrement, l'auteure analyse, d'une part, les projets éducatifs « Égalité » à Cagliari, en Sardaigne, et d'autre part, la manière dont la presse tente d'informer ou d'influencer l'opinion publique sur cette question. Elle montre que des projets « Égalité » plutôt bien accueillis jusque-là doivent alors faire face à de nouveaux défis : voilà qu'on s'intéresse à eux… et qu'on les trouve dangereux pour la société ! Face à ces menaces contre l'enseignement de l'égalité des sexes et des sexualités, Ludovica Anedda réfléchit alors au développement de nouvelles stratégies pour contourner ou repousser les attaques.

Dans son travail, Ludovica Anedda étudie d'abord les déclinaisons italiennes de la recommandation européenne de 2010. En 2012, le gouvernement italien s'engage à la mettre en œuvre, sous la direction du Ministère du travail et de la politique sociale. Le document de mise en œuvre souligne que la prévention, la lutte et l'élimination de toute forme de discrimination sont une priorité dans le contexte plus large de la promotion de l'égalité des chances. Le Ministère délègue officiellement au Bureau national contre la discrimination raciale (Ufficio

Nazionale Anti-Discriminazione Razziale, UNAR) l'élaboration d'une stratégie nationale de lutte contre la discrimination fondée sur l'orientation sexuelle et l'identité de genre. La Stratégie nationale LGBT 2013-2015, telle qu'elle est présentée, est plutôt ambitieuse. Elle comporte en outre un volet Éducation visant à accroître les connaissances et les compétences de tous les acteurs et actrices de la communauté scolaire sur les questions LGBT et contribuer à la sensibilisation aux nouvelles structures qui constituent une « famille ».

Dans le cadre de ce projet, un certain nombre de sessions de formation sont organisées et le projet prévoit de réaliser une vingtaine de cours, dans des régions telles que la Toscane, l'Ombrie, la Basilicate, la Calabre, et pour la région qui nous intéresse ici, la Sardaigne.

Alors que l'institutionnalisation commence à peine, les attaques contre la « *teoria del gender* » apparaissent. Ludovica Anedda montre qu'elles s'inscrivent dans un contexte international qui traverse l'Europe méditerranéenne et « appelle à interroger la dynamique transnationale de la contestation catholique » (Avanza & Della Sudda, 2017). Les transferts de pratiques militantes sont manifestes dès les années 2000, mais deviennent visibles du grand public avec les mobilisations anti-genre dans les années 2011-2015 en Europe du Sud (Paternotte, 2015).

Parties d'abord d'Espagne (Gallan & Valle, 2015), rencontrant un succès inattendu en France, elles arrivent ensuite en Italie, où les mouvements conservateurs restent stupéfaits devant l'enthousiasme d'une minorité très visible en France, qu'ils perçoivent comme très laïque, à se mobiliser (Avanza & Della Sudda, 2017).

En effet, en France, en janvier 2014, dans la continuité des débats sur la légalisation du mariage pour les personnes de même sexe, des groupes catholiques néoconservateurs (mais pas uniquement) s'en prennent aux expérimentations pédagogiques appelées ABCD de l'égalité, destinées à lutter contre les stéréotypes de sexe à l'école primaire.

À la suite de ces groupes catholiques, Farida Belghoul, ancienne militante antiraciste, maintenant proche de l'extrême droite et person-

nifiant également des groupes musulmans (Chercuti, 2014), organise une Journée de retrait de l'école (JRE). Elle appelle les parents à la désobéissance civile, invoquant une prétendue clause de conscience : la « théorie du genre » irait à l'encontre des valeurs familiales. Il s'agit donc de protéger les enfants contre ce qui est décrit comme un lavage de cerveau, aux accents de théorie du complot (Cedelle, 2014). Des familles supposées musulmanes sont la cible de messages annonçant que des transsexuel·les viendront dans les écoles maternelles faire des démonstrations de masturbation. Un lien internet vers une vidéo de Farida Belghoul est envoyé à l'appui de la rumeur. L'absurdité de l'accusation aurait dû faire sourire, mais le 24 janvier 2014, date de la première JRE, des écoles situées dans les quartiers périphériques des grandes villes se dépeuplent. Si au niveau national, l'absentéisme causé par la JRE est finalement assez modeste, l'affaire alerte la presse, d'autant plus qu'elle est abondamment récupérée dans les discours politiques de la droite en général.

Cette association avec la population musulmane des quartiers de relégation des grandes villes reste une spécificité française, mais a sans nul doute contribué à la visibilité du mouvement, y compris sur le plan international.

Ludovica Anedda analyse ces résistances conservatrices en Italie et plus précisément depuis la Sardaigne, où des porte-paroles de l'église s'expriment dans la presse (nationale et régionale) contre l'introduction de la « *teoria del gender* » à l'école. L'auteure montre que le déclencheur, en 2013, est une proposition de loi (la *Legge Scalfarotto*, du nom de l'un de ses principaux partisans) qui suggère d'inclure la notion de discrimination fondée sur l'identité de genre ou l'orientation sexuelle dans la loi du 13 octobre 1975. Pour les milieux conservateurs, il s'agit d'un premier jalon vers la légalisation du mariage entre personnes de même sexe. C'est à cette occasion qu'a lieu la première réunion des *Sentinelle in Piedi*, inspirées par le mouvement des Veilleurs français, accompagnées de plusieurs autres associations, comme la branche italienne de l'association française *la Manif pour tous*.

Parallèlement, des projets en faveur de l'égalité des sexes sont menés à Cagliari. Ludovica Anedda nous présente trois d'entre eux : *Alla scoperta della differenza*, *Ci piacCiAmo!… anche in biblioteca* et *SAVE.* Les deux premiers projets concernent spécifiquement les enfants de l'enseignement primaire et du secondaire inférieur. Le dernier est spécifiquement destiné aux enseignant.e.s. Ludovica Anedda nous présente leur mise en œuvre, les conditions de leur succès et examine les différents obstacles auxquels les auteur.es du projet ont dû faire face, en particulier au moment où les attaques contre « la théorie du genre » se faisaient plus fortes.

A cette fin, Ludovica Anedda a collecté et analysé des articles de presse « anti-genre » qui mobilisent un « dispositif discursif [qui permet] d'identifier de manière univoque et totale un objet pluriel (programmes éducatifs sur le genre et la sexualité dans les écoles, reconnaissance des couples homosexuels, politiques de la parité, théories et mouvements féministes et LGBTQI, mais aussi parfois avortement et euthanasie) » (Prearo, 2017). Elle y a ajouté des articles qui tentent de dépassionner le débat et de faire œuvre de pédagogie auprès du grand public, afin que celui-ci ne cède pas à une panique morale (Mathieu, 2015).

Finalement, Ludovica Anedda propose des pistes d'actions et des stratégies de résistance afin de pouvoir implémenter ce genre de programme « Égalité », alors même que les gouvernements, tant français qu'italien, ont fait marche arrière devant des groupes de pression pourtant minoritaires.

Ce travail de compréhension et d'explicitation d'une situation confuse, imprégnée d'ignorance et de désinformation, a été salué par le Prix Genre 2018 décerné par le Service Égalité de l'Université de Genève. Il montre que le chemin vers l'égalité des sexes et des sexualités est toujours semé d'embuches, mais que, à Cagliari comme partout en Europe, des actrices et acteurs de terrain, des formatrices et formateurs, des chercheuses et chercheurs, œuvrent pour le faire avancer.

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Introduction

Throughout my studies in International Relations and Human Rights, I have always been strongly passionate about exploring the articulation of inequalities in societies, to better understand ways to challenge them and to move towards a world based on equal opportunities. In the course of my Master's degree in Educational Science, with a focus on the analysis of educational systems, I have grown particularly interested in the integration of a gender perspective in educational policies.

A *gender perspective* or *approach* entails the analysis of a context, or a specific policy, by looking at the way the hierarchy between the *masculine* and the *feminine* is reflected, and the development of strategies to resolve it. In this context, *gender* is understood as a system of norms that organises the masculine and the feminine into a hierarchy, where the masculine is given an advantage to the detriment of the feminine (Dayer, 2014, p. 46). This and other definitions of *gender* are explored in the course of Chapter 1, which provides the conceptual framework for this investigation.

To integrate a gender perspective or a gender approach specifically into educational policies means to formulate policies that are inclusive and that respond to the needs of men and women to guarantee equal opportunities. This process can take different forms and should function at different levels, through the development of specific projects to promote gender equality, through the elaboration of an inclusive pedagogy, through gender equality training (e.g. for civil servants and members of the press) and through gender-responsive policies in all aspects of society, such as health and employment (*gender mainstreaming*).

This research studies the extent to which specific efforts to integrate a gender perspective into educational policies in the Italian reality have been successful, particularly between 2013 and 2016. Through an analysis of educational projects in the municipality of Cagliari, Sardinia, and of the way public opinion on gender issues is shaped, this investigation offers an understanding of the main challenges and obstacles posed to these efforts.

Travelling inside the "anti-gender" movements and the "*teoria del gender*", this study intends to provide a foundation for further research and for the development of new strategies to meet these challenges. Education is understood here as a fundamental means to achieve gender equality, because of its potential for the deconstruction of socially imposed gender norms and for the development of critical thinking.

Chapter 1 provides the conceptual framework for the investigation, exploring working definitions and outlining the main issues that come into play when engaging with gender in education. The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of these issues and to show that they are separate as well as inter-related.

Chapter 2 offers a contextual framework, through an overview of the way gender issues have been perceived and dealt with in Italy, particularly between 2013 and 2016. The objective is to show the

relevance of the issue and to emphasise the controversial nature of the debate in Italy in this timeline.

Chapter 3 presents the research project, through a description of the methodology and structure of the analysis. In the course of this chapter, the main research questions, the detailed steps of the research and a number of challenges and limitations placed on the investigation are outlined.

Chapter 4 presents the central analysis, divided in two major parts (Phase 1 and Phase 2). Phase 1 engages directly with the case study at hand, the educational projects in the municipality of Cagliari, while Phase 2 tackles public opinion on gender issues in the country, and the ways it has been shaped. The characteristics of these sections are provided in detail in Chapter 3.

Finally, Chapter 5 allows for an exploration of the main findings, including ideas for possible ways to further develop this research.

Chapter 1

Gender and education: Conceptual framework

In the course of the ensuing chapter, a conceptual framework for the investigation is provided. The first section (pp. 30-41) deals with the definitions of some of the notions that are central to this research. This task is particularly delicate and important, because too often there is obvious confusion when talking about gender issues (Marzano, 2015). The second section (pp. 41-60) more directly takes into consideration the dimensions and dynamics of gender issues in education. Firstly, I observe how these issues are given expression in educational establishments, looking at the reality within classrooms and at students' educational outcomes. The power of education in the construction and reinforcement of gender norms is underlined here. Secondly, I bring out different ways in which education can serve as a means to deconstruct these gender norms. Through the design of specific projects and programmes meant to tackle gender equality, and through the construction of an inclusive education (Solar, 1998), it is in fact possible to integrate a gender approach into education.

This conceptual framework includes specific references to the Italian context. The fundamental objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of the main issues and concepts that come into play when engaging with education from a gender perspective.

Working definitions

Sex and gender

What does it mean to talk about *gender?* The term *gender* (in Italian *genere*) has been subject to complex developments over time, and it seems to indicate variable realities in accordance with different periods and places. For example, it is used at times as a substitute for the term *sex*, and at times to indicate the "social aspects that come on top of the biological ones" (Bencivenga, 2012, p. 11). Bencivenga highlights that this term is used in different ways in our everyday life, and in particular in opposition to the term *sex*. We have the tendency to use the term *sex* when we speak of sexual actions or sexual preferences, while the term *gender* is used when we speak of lifestyles, discrimination, equality (Bencivenga, 2012, p. 14). Moreover, she underlines that most often, in newspaper articles, for instance, the two terms are interchanged, indicating a lack of comprehension of the differences between their meanings (Bencivenga, 2012).

But what is *sex* and what is *gender*? How do we distinguish between the two? As Butler (1986) points out, most often "*sex* is understood to be the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factic aspects of the female body, whereas *gender* is the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation" (p. 35). However, Butler (1999) sees this distinction in a different manner:

Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical dis-continuity between sexed bodies and culturally

constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males, or that "women" will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. (p. 10)

Butler (2004) argues that sex and gender cannot be understood separately and that it is not easy to make a distinction between what is true in a *material* sense and what is true in a *cultural* sense in a sexed body (p. 87).

For the purpose of this research, the definition of *gender* provided by Scott (1988) is particularly interesting. This consists of the connection and articulation between two clauses: "[1] gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and [2] gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (p. 1068).

Scott breaks down her definition, separating the two parts to better understand them. As a constitutive element of social relationships, gender involves four interrelated components. Firstly, it entails culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations: she takes as an example the representations of Eve and Mary as symbols of women in the Western Christian tradition. Secondly, according to Scott, gender involves normative concepts related to the interpretations of these symbols, which are expressed in religious, educational, scientific, legal and political doctrines that define what it means to be male and female, masculine and feminine. Thirdly, a gendered system constitutes the reality within the household, but also in the labour market, in education, and in the polity itself. More specifically, Scott argues that "gender is constructed through kinship, but not exclusively; it is constructed as well in the economy and the polity" (1988, p. 1068).

The fourth component of gender as a constitutive element of social relationships is its subjectivity.

The second part of Scott's definition explains gender as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power", which means that "gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated" (p. 1068). Undoubtedly, *gender* is not the only way through which power is articulated, but concepts of gender do structure perception and the organisation (both concrete and symbolic) of all social life (Bourdieu, 1980). In this sense, "gender becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself" (Scott, 1988, p. 1069).

Building on Scott's (1988) definition of gender and its dimensions, I shall explore the definition of *gender* as a system of norms that determines a hierarchy of the masculine and the feminine, wherein the masculine is given an advantage over the feminine (Dayer, 2014, p. 46). According to Dayer's (2014) definition, the fact that the masculine is given an advantage over the feminine means not only that in our society these norms establish that men are given an advantage to the detriment of women, but also that elements that socially and culturally constitute what is most often defined as "masculine" are given an advantage and priority over what constitutes the "feminine". Socio-historical factors construct ideas of what is "manlike" and "womanlike" (Stapleton & Wilson, 2004, p. 47), and therefore construct gender norms, where a norm can be defined as "a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore & Sikkink, p. 891).

Gender norms

Gender studies constitute the research field that takes into account gender norms and codes in society. They are composed of a collection of different types of research, which are in line with scientific fields, ranging from natural sciences to social sciences and the humanities (Dayer & Collet, 2014, p. 10). The notion of a present hierarchy

between the different sex categories, and between the norms that define what is masculine and what is feminine (Dayer & Collet, 2014, p. 10), is central to gender studies. Like feminism, gender studies go beyond a simple distinction between the notions of gender and sex: in fact, they do not intend merely to distinguish the different social roles assigned to biological characteristics – they intend to deconstruct and "denaturalise" gender norms (Fassin, 2014, p. 39). Why is it important to deconstruct these norms? One of the reasons is that they are representative of a mechanism of female subordination, which Ortner (1974) identifies through three types of data:

> (1) elements of cultural ideology and informants' statements that explicitly devalue women, according them, their roles, their tasks, their products, and their social milieux less prestige than are accorded men and the male correlates; (2) symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as implicitly making a statement of inferior valuation; and (3) social-structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside. (Ortner, 1974, p. 69)

Being a man and being a woman are not distinct categories, but instead are interdependent and have to do with human relations: "a girl is related to and defined by girls' relationships with boys, and vice versa. [...] Ways of being masculine and feminine form a continuum, rather than distinct categories" (MacNaughton, 2006, p. 130). However, a "social gender dichotomy is present in all known societies, in the sense that everywhere anatomic sexual differences observable at birth are used to start tracking the newborn into one of the two social role complexes" (Ortner & Whitehead, 1981, p. 83).

The way this distinction is carried out responds to certain patterns that "differ radically between societies, and even between generations, social classes, ethnic or religious groups within the same

society" (Skelton, Francis, & Smulyan, 2006, p. 8). In fact, what we call *masculinity* and *femininity* "involve the negotiation of an existing set of culturally defined labels, concepts and discursive positioning, thereby generating variable and contextualised constructions of the categories in question" (Stapleton & Wilson, 2004, p. 46).

Every reference to *masculinity* and *femininity* in this study refers to the way these terms are typically understood, in particular within a framework of "Western" notions, looking at male and female stereotypes[1]. Overall, most often men are considered to be aggressive and competitive, women rather passive and expressive (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 3). The traditionally male stereotype is ambitious, combative, audacious, cold, independent, logical, rational, while the female stereotype generally is represented by docility, emotions, feelings and sensibility (Collet, 2011; Le Maner-Idrissi, 1997).

These conceptions of masculinity and femininity are often encountered within a nature vs. nurture debate. On one hand, they are viewed as the results of innate differences between men and women. To support this argument, the animal world is often taken as an example, observing the roles of females and males in certain animal species (Collet, 2016, p. 27). *Masculinity* and *femininity* are thus considered strictly linked to biological sex, by asserting that differences between men and women are proof of biological determinism, and that we should submit to a supposed law of nature that imposes different destinies on individuals because of a different biology (Collet, 2016, p. 26). According to the biological sex, a newborn is identified as a boy or a girl. From this starting point, specific behaviours are directly associated with biological factors (e.g. aggressive attitudes for boys, and predisposition for social inter-

1. A stereotype is "an over-simplified mental image of some category of person, institution or event which is shared, in essential features by large numbers of people [...] Stereotypes are commonly, but not necessarily, accompanied by prejudice, i.e. by a favourable or unfavourable predisposition toward any member of the category in question" (Stallybrass, 1977, p. 601).

action for girls) (Le Maner-Idrissi, 1997, p. 109). In our society, where gender-based inequalities are a constant reality, this biological determinism translates into the notion that men are "the naturally dominant sex" (Ortner, 1974, p. 71). As a result, biological determinists would argue that "women [are] not only naturally subordinate, but in general [they are] quite satisfied with their position, since it affords them protection and the opportunity to maximise maternal pleasures, which to them are the most satisfying experiences of life" (Ortner, 1974, p. 71).

On the other hand, the "nurture" argument of this debate is at the centre of gender studies, which see norms and characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity as socially and culturally constructed. This is not intended to suggest that biological factors are irrelevant or that men and women are not different, "but that these facts and differences only take on significance of superior/ inferior within the framework of culturally defined systems" (Ortner, 1974, p. 71).

Undoubtedly, the construction of norms depends heavily on *socialisation*, namely the process by which "principled ideas held by individuals become norms in the sense of collective understandings about appropriate behaviour which then lead to changes in identities, interests and behaviour" (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999, p. 11). This process of socialisation occurs at different levels and stages of one's life. For the purpose of this research, I am particularly interested in the process of socialisation we go through as children, through the influences of a number of actors, such as siblings, grandparents, babysitters, pre-school educators and others, which make us *social beings* (Collet, 2016, p. 29).

A number of studies show the presence of certain expectations even before children are born, through differentiated representations of children (Le Maner-Idrissi, 1997). For example, parents tend to build a certain environment to welcome the child into the world, including through a specific choice of colours to paint their bedrooms

(e.g. never pink for little boys) (Collet, 2014, p. 28), with simpler rooms for little boys, while using more decorations and accessories for little girls' rooms (Gianini Belotti, 2016, p. 26). Starting from a young age, parents' reactions to children's behaviours and competences tend to be differentiated: they tend to respond more favourably to girls' expressions of emotions, while they are more tolerant of boys being noisy or "turbulent" (Collet, 2011, p. 30). Moreover, parents tend to encourage girls' pro-social behaviour, while reacting more to boys' physical demonstrations (Le Maner-Idrissi, 1997, p. 54). Parents tend to have a specific idea of the model their children should attain: through a variety of verbal stimuli, the adult transmits to the child the values he or she "should" respond to (Gianini Belotti, 2016, p. 75).

By the age of two, children have already integrated their gender roles (Collet, 2011, p. 32). At this point, it is generally more difficult for boys than for girls to go beyond the expectations related to their sex. While girls tend to have access to a wider range of attitudes, little boys already need to respond to expectations of "virility": to love activities that are aimed at girls not only means to lose value, but also to call into question their future sexual preferences (Collet, 2011, p. 33).

In the course of her research, Le Maner-Idrissi (1997) shows that parents' reactions are definitely evident in this context as well. In fact, boys tend to be particularly encouraged by their parents to play with games that are considered appropriate for their sex, while they are often punished when they attempt to engage in activities and games that are generally labelled as feminine (e.g. playing with dolls) (p. 71).

This form of undermining and even oppressing the "feminine" tends to be evident also in adult life. In examining print advertise-ments, Martin and Gnoth (2009) show that men respond more favourably to masculine models and are negative towards feminine ones. This research emphasises the fact that "men face substantial

normative pressure to endorse traditional masculinity and exhibit an aversion to appearing feminine" (p. 356).

Gender studies do not intend to blame parents for the construction and reinforcement of gender norms (Collet, 2011, p. 24). First of all, it is basically impossible to educate two children in an identical manner (Collet, 2016, p. 29). Moreover, as previously underlined, parents are not the only actors of children's education, since they are subject to multiple influences and external stimuli.

One of the most common and obvious examples of these external stimuli is the differentiation of toys for boys and for girls: it is in children's toys and in the way they use them that the reproduction of the social reality they live in becomes evident (Gianini Belotti, 2016, p. 91). Often parents would argue that it is the children who choose specific toys, without, however, considering that children will choose from the range of options that is available to them (Gianini Belotti, 2016, p. 85). On one hand, toys that are most often aimed at boys imply the importance of values such as courage, a spirit of adventure, and interest in discovery. On the other hand, girls' toys tend to make reference to the domestic sphere and external physical appearance (Collet, 2011, p. 35). Toys are the result of a very specific culture within which there appear to be many different options and possible choices, but where, in reality, they are limited (Gianini Belotti, 2016, p. 83). Boys and girls are led very early to identify the "right" and "wrong" toys: "the differentiation in games presented to males and females is such that 'certain preferences' after the age of four or five begin to signify that the male or female child has not accepted their role, therefore something went wrong" (Gianini Belotti, 2016, p. 88).

Toys are not the only objects that contribute to making a strict distinction between categories, between what is supposedly "for girls" or "for boys". The page "Pointlessly gendered products"[1]

1. http://pointlesslygenderedproducts.tumblr.com

on Tumblr[1] provides some examples, by showing a wide range of objects that make a clear distinction between what is pink and "for girls" and what is generally blue and "for boys", with tape, ear plugs, sleep masks, pens, etc. These distinctions clearly contribute to the construction of very specific categories in children's minds, implying that they have to attain one of them in order to be an individual. There is no room for flexibility, and the youngsters perceive this from an early age: there are only two categories, with very specific characteristics, and as a child, not only do you have to belong to one of them, but you are assigned the "right" category by the rest of society because of your biological sex:

> No one can know how many energies, how many qualities are destroyed in the process of forced imposition for children of both sexes in the masculine-feminine schemes, no one could ever tell us what a little girl could have become if she would not have found on the path of her development the obstacles derived simply by her sex. (Gianini Belotti, 2016, p. 9)

Children's books and stories also contribute to the definition of traditional gender role division: the traditional tales of Perrault and the Brothers Grimm constantly present women either as evil witches or as delicate, submissive, resigned (e.g. Cinderella), fragile and abused (e.g. Cinderella, Snow White) creatures who can only be saved by the intervention of a brave, strong, heroic man. These stories already construct certain stereotypes that can be recognised by children, creating the bases for those gender norms that movies, advertisement and television series help reinforce.

Disney animated films constitute further examples that underline the aforementioned gender norms. A study by Towbin, Haddock,

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1. Tumblr is a social networking website, founded in 2007, that allows the sharing of data mainly in form of multimedia in blog-like personal pages.

Zimmerman, Lund, and Tanner (2003) examined a sample of 26 full-length animated Disney films, and found that gender stereotypes have persisted over time (in addition to racial and cultural stereotypes). In their study, five themes related to a definition of boys and men emerged, together with four themes related to the definitions of girls and women. With respect to the former, they underlined that "(a) Men primarily use physical means to express their emotions or show no emotions; (b) men are not in control of their sexuality; (c) men are naturally strong and heroic; (d) men have non-domestic jobs; (e) overweight men have negative characteristics" (p. 28). In terms of the depiction of girls and women: "(a) a woman's appearance is valued more than her intellect; (b) women are helpless and in need of protection; (c) women are domestic and likely to marry; (d) overweight women are ugly, unpleasant and unmarried" (p. 30). The authors of this research also find that Disney movies often give "mixed messages", where "acts of bravery or independence on the part of a female character are often followed by a 'twist' in the plot that places her in a one-down position to a male (e.g. Beauty and the Beast, The Little Mermaid)" (p. 38).

This investigation also shows that, in the sample of movies analysed, no same-sex relationships are portrayed (Towbin, *et al.*, 2008, p. 33). This very fact leads to the next part of this chapter, which explores the notions of heterosexism and heteronormativity.

Heterosexism and heteronormativity

Among the specific characteristics attributed to notions of masculinity and femininity, specific indications of sexuality and sexual orientation are also present. According to Butler (2004), "sexuality is one way cultural meanings are carried, through both the operation of norms and the peripheral modes of their undoing" (p. 15). She states that gender does not determine sexuality: the latter does not directly derive from the former (p. 16).

There is a widespread assumption perpetuated in our society that heterosexuality is the only possible sexuality. The mechanism that relies on this assumption is called *heterosexism*, and it "constitutes a principle of vision and division of the social world, which articulates the exclusive promotion of heterosexuality to the exclusion of homosexuality" (Tin, 2003, p. 208). It is based on the notion of *heteronormativity*, which is defined here as the "vision for which institutionalised heterosexuality constitutes the standard to define which social relationships are possible and legitimate" (Ingraham, 1999).

Heterosexism is strongly connected to the notion of *homophobia*, namely a general hostility towards people who desire individuals of the same sex (Borrillo, 2000, p. 26). Homophobia takes different forms, which lie on a continuum of different types of violence, some more explicit than others, ranging from symbolic and moral, to physical and institutional violence (Dayer, 2013, p. 117). Biphobic and transphobic behaviours and actions are expressed in similar ways. The system of exclusion based on heterosexism affects all those individuals who depart from the established codes that construct masculinity and femininity (Dayer, 2013, p. 117). In other words, mechanisms of discrimination derive from a system based on heteronormativity: this is another important reason why it is necessary to deconstruct traditional gender norms.

The first part of this chapter provided a number of definitions and clarified the terms related to the notion of gender and its many interrelated aspects. Moreover, it highlighted some of the ways in which the categories of masculinity and femininity are constructed and reinforced at different levels in society, for example through books, movies, advertisements, merchandise, and societal expectations developed on the grounds of one's biological sex.

In the following chapter, and in the rest of this book, I specifically focus on these issues in an educational context, emphasising the

power of education in reinforcing social norms and its consequent potential to deconstruct them.

Dimensions and dynamics of gender issues in education

Education can take different forms: "the purposes and methods of education continue to raise philosophical, political and ethical debates; and indeed the boundaries of the application of the term (i.e. what counts as education) remain contentious" (Skelton, Francis, & Smulyan, 2006, p. 7). In this investigation, focus is placed mainly on the notion of formal education, within educational institutions, through pre-primary education and secondary education.[1]

The consideration of gender issues in education is undoubtedly fraught with a variety of difficulties. This stems from the multitude of dynamics that come into play within this framework. One of the problems of gender research in education in itself is to find a way "to analyse gendered classroom behaviour without reference to 'girls' and 'boys' that evokes their biological sex category" (Skelton, Francis, & Smulyan, 2006, p. 15). As a researcher, it is always particularly difficult and paradoxical to address the problems of categorisation, while categorisation itself can be useful, and somewhat necessary, when carrying out an investigation.

Inequality in access to education for boys and girls is generally the first issue considered at an international level when examining the relationship between gender and education. In fact, the education of girls and women has become a development priority for several international organisations, such as the United Nations

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1. See on p. 65 for a specific overview of the structure of the Italian educational system.

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) and the World Bank. These organisations have developed, especially in the last decade of the twentieth century, a number of gender-responsive education policies and strategies, conceptualising and framing the notions of gender, education and equality (Peppin Vaughan, 2010). The main objective of these policies has been to value girls' education as a contribution to economic growth and development (Peppin Vaughan, 2010), making it an especially relevant issue in developing countries. For the purpose of this research, I do not take this issue directly into account, since this investigation is centred on the Italian context, where girls' net enrolment rate is 93.59 % (as of 2012) in pre-primary education and 97.22 % (as of 2013) at the primary level (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016).

In the first section ("The reality within the classroom"), I deal directly with the reality in the classroom by observing the way gender stereotypes and norms are constructed and reinforced, and by looking at the hostile environment often built as a consequence of these dynamics. Furthermore, the first section brings to light the way this reality translates into students' educational outcomes. In the second section ("Engaging with gender issues in education", p. 52), I explore some of the ways in which education can function as a means to deconstruct gender norms and even relations based on power.

The reality within the classroom

As discussed above, stereotypes are constructed and reinforced in a plurality of shapes starting at a child's young age. I engage here with the ways in which the school system contributes directly to the construction of gender norms. In fact, power relations that "impregnate" families, the political system, the private sector and the media also "impregnate" the school system (Collet, 2016, p. 33).

Teachers' expectations and hidden curriculum

Gender norms are constructed and reinforced already at a pre-primary school level. Professionals in childcare centres involuntarily activate certain stereotypes, for example leaving more space to young boys and accepting their behaviour even when it is disruptive, while being more intolerant towards little girls engaging in similar behaviours (Collet, 2016, p. 31). In this reality and through the influence of the other actors and stimuli surrounding them, as it was outlined in the previous section of this chapter, when children enter the school system they have already assimilated the functioning of the gender codes (Collet, 2016, p. 32). Actual competences as well as the perceived competences of boys and girls differ already the moment they enter school (Kriesi & Buchmann, 2015, p. 123).

A number of studies have shown that school tends to transmit values and beliefs through what is generally referred to as the *hidden curriculum*, which implicitly indicates that girls and boys are not equal when it comes to educational processes (Fassa, 2014, p. 69). This hidden curriculum is manifested for example through teachers' responses and reactions to specific behaviours, and through the reflection of their expectations on students. The Pygmalion Effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) is central in this sense. Rosenthal and Jacobson carried out an experiment where students in a classroom were asked to take an IQ test: the researchers then leaked (or rather pretended to accidentally leak) to the teachers a number of names of students with a higher IQ score; however, in reality, they disclosed simply a randomly selected sample. At the end of the academic year, Rosenthal and Jacobson had students take other tests, recording that those same students that had previously been randomly selected scored significantly higher than they had before. This experiment intended to show the effects of teachers' expectations on students, which are proven to be particularly strong in an educational context (Duru-Bellat, 2001, p. 330).

Teachers have a tendency to base their expectations on specific criteria, such as sex and students' ethnic and social background. Social relationships in schools tend to be "strongly bound to biological differences between the sexes, which were modeled on practical gender role expectations derived from eighteenth and nineteenth-century accounts of citizenship" (Dillabough, 2006, p. 48). In this context,

> these expectations, based on these inevitably stereotyped representations of the students that are inclined to succeed and to fail, contribute to the reproduction of statistical regularities on which they themselves are based, because they tend to stimulate the students that are already 'promised' a certain achievement. (Duru-Bellat, 2001, p. 330)

In simpler terms: expectations influence behaviours, which then confirm the initial expectations (Payet & Rufin, 2015, p. 46); "when we expect certain behaviours of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behaviour more likely to occur" (Rosenthal & Babad, 1985). Educational accomplishments reveal themselves not to be the results of students' innate competences, but the result of teachers' expectations, which function as self-fulfilling prophecies (Duru-Bellat, 2001, p. 330).

Teachers tend to expect certain positive results from girls' efforts in education, while considering boys as full of potential but too immature to put enough effort into their educational endeavours (Collet, 2016, p. 34). In an academic context, gender stereotypes are reflected in the conception of girls as particularly good in subjects such as languages and literature, while boys are seen as being more competent in mathematics and scientific subjects (Kriesi & Buchmann, 2015). In fact, based on these stereotypes, boys tend to be oriented more strongly towards scientific subjects (Nidegger, 2008, p. 51). This divergence in expectations becomes evident when

exploring specific educational outcomes and the related external results, which, in fact, are the focus of a latter part of this chapter.

The role of textbooks

The hidden curriculum is not implemented solely through teachers' attitudes and self-fulfilling expectations; it is in fact also expressed through textbooks themselves. As Taylor (2003) underlines, "children's books present a microcosm of ideologies, values and beliefs from the dominant culture" (p. 301). As in the case of traditional fairy tales, as described in the previous chapter, children's textbooks also contain asymmetric and stereotypical social representations. Biemmi (2015) states that "stories and their characters have a considerable impact on the perceptions that children create about themselves and the world around them" (p. 19). Textbooks have a special influence because they are presented in a somewhat authoritative context: the school itself (Biemmi, 2015).

Elhadad and Berton-Schmitt (2012) examine mathematics textbooks published in France using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and provide an example of the role of textbooks in the construction and reinforcement of gender norms. In their analysis, they find a strong numerical under-representation of women. Moreover, they find a lack of differentiation in the representations of the few female characters present in these books: women scientists were most often depicted as laboratory assistants or archaeologists. Furthermore, they find that the illustrations most often represented women in romantic interactions or in the social roles traditionally attributed to them (Elhadad & Berton-Schmitt, 2012). These elements within mathematics textbooks contribute to the message that this is a subject "for boys".

Biemmi (2015) analyses textbooks in the Italian context. She high-lights that the issue of sexism in textbooks was taken into account in the country only in the mid-1980s. This occurred through two major research projects published by the Presidency of the Council

of Ministers. Sabatini (1987) undertook the first one, focusing on the notion of linguistic sexism:

> The Italian language, like many others, is based on an anthropocentric principle: man is the parameter around which the linguistic universe rotates and organises itself. A paradigmatic example: the very word "man" has a double meaning because it can refer to both the "male of the species" and also the "species in general", while the word "woman" refers only to the "female of the species". (p. 24)

This research demonstrates the presence of a clear discrepancy between the adjectives associated with males and females: with adjectives such as "sweet", "delicate" and "gentle" associated with girls, and words such as "bold" and "powerful" used in reference to boys (Sabatini, 1987, p. 33). Furthermore, Pace's (1986) research on the images in primary school textbooks adds to the issue of interest, finding that "women [were] relegated to the traditional positions of busy housewives and at times- being the ultimate concession- of charity workers, and assigned to the role of mothers, according to obsolete clichés" (p. 11).

Biemmi (2015) emphasises a mostly dominant lack of further research in the following years, until the creation of the "Polite Project for Equal Opportunity in Textbooks" in 1998. The fundamental objective of this project was to promote cultural reflection in teaching and publishing, and to "rethink textbooks so that men and women, protagonists of culture, history, politics and science, would appear in the textbooks without gender discrimination" (Biemmi, 2015, p. 18). It was Biemmi herself who carried out research to show that the objective of the Polite project had yet to be attained (Biemmi, 2015).

Biemmi's investigation yields interesting results. First of all, one of the most obvious elements is a clear majority of male characters playing a leading role. In her words, "young and adult females

may not be wholly invisible, but they are certainly obscured by the stronger male presence" (p. 21). Moreover, this is also found to hold true among the secondary characters of the stories (p. 21). The representation of characters in professions also adds an interesting dimension for exploration. Overall in the division of labour represented, male characters were those most often depicted in a professional role (p. 22). Male characters are portrayed as scientists, writers, doctors, poets, journalists, engineers, explorers, architects, orchestra conductors, etc; girls are represented mainly as teachers and housewives, or, alternatively, witches, fairies and diviners: "it is clear that the texts examined do not provide 'equal employment opportunities' for pupils of both sexes" (p. 22).

Like Sabatini in her 1987 analysis of the language and adjectives used in school textbooks, Biemmi also finds that

males are described on the basis of adjectives that sum up positive qualities or otherwise positively connoted in our culture (strength, courage, virtue, wisdom), while the attributes associated with females more often have a negative connotation (e.g. vanity) or denote weakness and fragility. (2015, p. 23)

Furthermore, textbooks contribute to the isolation of LGBTI[1] pupils, by reinforcing heteronormativity through a strong lack of representation of LGBTI families and people (ILGA-Europe, 2018).

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1. The acronym LGBTI – which stands for *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex* – is most often preferred and extensively used in key documents by organisations such as ILGA-Europe. It is fundamental to highlight that the struggles of each group covered by this umbrella term are unique and would need to be taken into account separately. In the course of this research, other acronyms such as LGBT and LGBTQ might be used. This is because of the way these are referred to in the documents taken into consideration. In every other instance, the term LGBTI will be used.

Gender-based violence

The rise of gender-based violence constitutes an important problem in classrooms, as it can take the form not only of physical violence, but also of psychological types of violence, such as insults, disparagement, humiliation and threats (Collet, 2011, p. 79). Gender-based violence constitutes a clear example of the danger of reinforced social norms that establish a hierarchy of the "masculine" and the "feminine".

The construction of virility has a fundamental role (Collet, 2011, p. 79). Especially during adolescence, young boys are pressured to comply with characteristics that can confirm their belonging to what Connell calls "the hegemonic ideals of masculinity": physical strength, sexual power, superiority over women, interest in being transgressive (Connell, 2005). The construction of masculinity within this framework involves processes of affirmation of virility and exclusion of the feminine. It is, however, important to specify that this exclusion of the feminine does not concern solely the oppression of girls, it also concerns boys who do not express signs of virility or who manifest signs that are typically considered as feminine (Collet, 2011, p. 82). This distinction is particularly important, especially to underline the fact that gender-based violence and the asymmetry of power relations are not matters that concern women exclusively.

We often hear about "bullying", which involves "an imbalance of power and can include teasing, taunting, use of hurtful nicknames, physical violence or social exclusion" (Unesco, 2011, p. 11). It is necessary to add to this definition its more recent version: cyber bullying. This constitutes "harassment through e-mail, cell-phones, text messages and defamatory websites" (Unesco, 2011, p. 11). In recent years there has been more awareness about this form of harassment. The 2011 National School Climate Survey (NSCS), carried out in schools in the United States, showed that "when asked how often they were harassed or threatened by students at their school via electronic mediums (e.g. text messages, e-mails, instant messages, or posting on Internet sites such as Facebook), more than half (55.2 %)

of LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] students reported experiencing this type of harassment in the past year" (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2011, p. 26).

The psychological violence perpetuated through bullying can take the form of insults, teasing and side-lining (Collet, 2011, p. 82). Insults can have a very strong effect on their victim (Dayer, 2013, p. 118) and a certain hierarchy and classification are immediately built up, where the perpetrator is assigned a role of superiority. Insults not only devalue and undermine the victims, but they also have the power to hurt them, causing them to lose their self-esteem and to consider themselves different from others (Dayer, 2013, p. 122). The power of insults also lies in the fact that they have no limit, since they can take place at any moment of a school day (Dayer, 2013, p. 121).

Insults are sometimes hidden behind jokes and laughter, and specifically under a form of humour that Collet defines as "hostile humour" (Collet, 2014, p. 139). This can be expressed by one group against another, or specifically against individuals. It is often used by youths as a weapon against those who are identified as weak or those whom they intend to weaken (Collet, 2014, p. 132). It is most often used to marginalise groups of people that distance themselves (consciously or unconsciously) from gender norms, such as boys who do not live up to the expectation of virility, and girls who are not as discreet as they are expected to be or who exhibit behaviours that are defined and identified as constitutive of "bad reputations" (Collet, 2014, p. 132).

A fundamental problem is that teachers do not know how to respond effectively to these insults, and to protect the students effectively in this hostile climate. In examining the issue in a French context, Pasquier (2014, p. 214) points out that, although legislation specifically designed to combat expressions of homophobia does exist, teachers do not seem to be widely aware of it, and therefore it is rarely applied in educational establishments (p. 197). This chapter focuses on the different issues that come into play when speaking of

gender within the school and the classroom. The following chapter addresses the way this environment translates into students' educational outcomes and external results.

Educational outcomes and students' performance
The reality within the classroom created by a hostile environment and the construction and reinforcement of stereotypes are also reflected in students' educational outcomes. In fact, all these elements build the conditions for differences and gaps in educational outcomes.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), established by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1997, provides an investigation of students' performance. The objective of this investigation, carried out every three years, is to evaluate competences and skills as developed by students of 15 years of age at an international level, specifically among the 72 participating countries and economies, in the core subjects of science, reading and mathematics (OECD, 2016b). In each round, one of the core fields is tested in greater detail, allowing for a better comparison of performance over the years. For example, the 2015 PISA investigation focused on science as the major area of assessment. The study found that in science, on average, the number of top performers is higher among boys than among girls (2016c, p. 4). However, PISA found that science is the subject where mean gender differences are the smallest and that these differences vary significantly across countries (2016c, p. 6). As the OECD specifies, "this indicates that gender disparities in performance do not stem from innate differences in aptitude, but rather from factors that parents, teachers, policy makers and opinion leaders can influence" (2016c, p. 6). In reading skills, the gender gap is particularly evident in favour of girls, even if in 2015 it had narrowed by 12 points since 2009 (2016c, p. 4)[1].

1. The full OECD report can be accessed at http://www.oecd.org/pisa

Gender imbalances are evident also at the level of tertiary education: more women than men are now tertiary graduates, but women are less likely to enter and graduate from more advanced levels of tertiary education, such as PhD programmes (OECD, 2016a). Moreover, despite certain developments in the last decade, women remain under-represented in fields such as science and engineering, and over-represented in others, such as education and health (2016a). In 2014, on average in OECD countries and economies, "three times more men than women graduated with a degree in engineering and four times more women than men graduated with a degree in the field of education" (2016a, p. 29).

Even if girls tend to have better overall results than boys in school, their vocational and professional integration is more problematic (Couchot-Schiex, 2016, p. 17). Their educational achievement does not translate into their career paths: women in the workforce are still at the centre of occupational segregation, both vertically (under-representation of women in leadership positions) and horizontally (under-representation of women in specific sectors) (Dayer, 2014, p. 43). Paradoxically, girls do not manage to transform their educational success into professional success in the same way as boys do (Fassa, 2014, p. 69). This reality provides a more holistic understanding of the consequences of an unbalanced educational system that creates, amplifies and reinforces inequalities.

Furthermore, other factors come into play, and it is important not to forget to undertake data analyses from an intersectional perspective. Several studies show, for example, that the experiences of LGBTI students in education differ from those of students that identify as heterosexual. In particular, these studies demonstrate that a hostile school environment negatively affects LGBTI students' performances (Kosciw, *et al.*, 2013 ; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Robinson and Espelage (2011) show that in middle and high school, "youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) are at a greater risk of suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, victimisation

by peers, and elevated levels of unexcused absences from school"
(p. 315).

Students' performances and experiences may be related to other factors and characteristics, such as socio-economic background, race, country of origin, or disability. Within the scope of this research, we unfortunately do not have the opportunity to explore these intersectional dimensions further. It is however fundamental to highlight them.

Engaging with gender issues in education

The previous section outlined the complexity of interconnected questions that arise from an investigation of the school system in relation to gender issues. Because of this, it is necessary to operate directly within schools themselves, in order to engage with these issues and to integrate a gender approach into education.

In the same way in which education contributes to the construction of gender norms, it is possible to exploit its potential to deconstruct them. It is necessary to effectively contribute to diffusing a common culture based on equality among students, to help them become adults who will be free to make choices regardless of their sex (Collet, 2016, p. 69). In order to do so, it would be important to transform the way subjects are taught, to apply a number of different didactic parameters that can be used to fight against the reproduction of gender-based inequalities (Couchot-Schiex, 2016, p. 19).

We should think of education as a means to help us understand the world around us, to determine not only the boundaries of our freedom of action, but also the tools with which to change our reality (Marzano, 2015, p. 127). Education is meant to create and diffuse culture, which also entails helping children to find the words with which to describe what they are going through (p. 127). Education is therefore fundamental to the development of critical thinking, which in turn can allow for the deconstruction of prevailing prejudices and injustices (p. 128).

International organisations' guidelines

United Nations agencies such as Unesco, together with the European Commission and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), provide different recommendations on how to deal with these issues at different levels of education and through different methodologies. This chapter deals with some examples.

"Stopping Violence in Schools: a Guide for Teachers" is an example of Unesco's effort to combat violence in educational contexts, with a particular focus on gender-based violence: "This guide was created to bring about substantial changes by assisting school communities and the broader international community to respond to violence and implement measures to prevent it" (Unesco, 2011, p. 5). Unesco tackles education through a human rights-based approach, which intends to promote student-centred and participatory teaching practices and to create a safe learning environment. The power of education in the socialisation of values is particularly central. Programmes designed to address and fight gender-based violence and discrimination, in fact, not only have the potential to prevent them specifically within schools, but can also contribute to preventing these mechanisms outside of the classroom. An approach such as the one presented by Unesco "lays the groundwork for a culture of peace by fostering respect for differences, which is critical to violence prevention" (2011, p. 7).

Unesco (2011) outlines ten different actions that teachers can undertake in order to combat violence in schools: (a) advocating a holistic approach involving students, school staff, parents and the community; (b) making students partners in preventing violence; (c) using constructive discipline techniques and methods; (d) being an active and effective force to stop bullying; (e) building students' resilience; (f) being a positive role model by speaking out against sexual and gender-based violence; (g) being an advocate for school safety mechanisms; (h) providing safe and welcoming spaces for students; (i) learning violence prevention and conflict resolutions skills and

teaching them to students; (l) recognising violence and discrimination against students with disabilities, and those from indigenous, minority and other marginalised communities (pp. 15-23).

Moreover, Unesco identifies gender equality as one of the two overarching priorities of its mission (2015, p. 16). Including gender equality within the framework of global citizenship education, Unesco (2015) highlights that girls and boys learn about gendered attitudes, roles and behaviours at school as well as at home. It is in this context that global citizenship education

> can support gender equality through the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that promote the equal value of women and men, engender respect and enable young people to critically question gendered roles and expectations that are harmful and/or encourage gender-based discrimination and stereotyping. (Unesco, 2015, p. 16)

In "Promoting gender equality through textbooks. A methodological guide", Unesco (2009) also emphasises the importance of fostering gender equality through textbooks. In fact, as highlighted in the previous sections of this chapter, textbooks have the tendency (and power) to reinforce gender roles and to consequently reproduce the asymmetry of power relations in society. However, as well as having such an effect of reproducing inequalities, textbooks can be used as powerful means to socialise values based on equality and non-discrimination and to deconstruct gender norms:

> Under a quality education policy the textbook is understood as an educational tool of prime importance, being instrumental to culture, to educational attainment and to in-service teacher training. It is also a tool for social change because it disseminates universal values. [...] [For example,] it is essential for textbooks to be covered by policies which respect and include the rights of

girls and women for their full enjoyment of a good-quality educa-
tion. (Unesco, 2009, p. 22)

The European Commission, through the research work carried out by
the Eurydice Network, has provided a number of possible measures for
tackling gender inequalities. Among these measures, Eurydice (2009)
recommends revising school textbooks and display materials; focusing
on teacher-led work and offering greater learning support to students;
providing practical legal guidance to teachers and school managers;
and providing appropriate information to the staff of educational
institutions regarding methods to build an appropriate school climate
for students (p. 110).

Moreover, the Council of Europe's "Istanbul Convention on
preventing and combating violence against women and domestic
violence"[1] identifies education as one of the most useful means to
succeed in the fight against gender-based violence. Article 14 of the
Convention, in particular, states that:

Parties shall take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to
include teaching material on issues such as equality between
women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect,
non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships,
gender-based violence against women and the right to personal
integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal
curricula and at all levels of education. (Council of Europe, 2011)

The World Health Organisation's Regional Office for Europe (WHO),
together with the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA)
published in 2010 a framework for policy makers, educational and
health authorities and specialists concerning "Standards for sexuality

1. The full text of the Convention can be accessed at http://www.coe.int/en/
web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e

education in Europe". This paper intends to break from the traditional focus of sexuality education on the potential risks of sexuality, such as unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Instead, it intends to provide "a holistic approach based on an understanding of sexuality as an area of human potential, [which] helps children and young people to develop essential skills to enable them to self-determine their sexuality and their relationships at the various developmental stages" (WHO & BZgA, 2010, p. 5). The educational projects taken into consideration in this investigation do not engage directly with issues of sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights. However, sexuality education could be considered as part of a framework for integrating a gender approach into education, since it can address issues of sexual orientation and *empowerment*, among others. Some specific references to this 2010 document are brought to light in the course of the analysis.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) sees these initiatives as part of a broader effort that States *should* undertake to integrate a gender perspective into educational policies and design gender-responsive policies. This Agency of the European Union specifically speaks of *gender mainstreaming* as a strategy for achieving gender equality that involves "the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with the view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination" (EIGE, 2017).

Inclusive pedagogy

One of the ways to successfully integrate a gender perspective in education is to transform the way subjects are taught, to apply a number of different didactic parameters that can be used to fight against the reproduction of gender-based inequalities (Couchot-Schiex, 2016,

p. 19). Solar (1998) speaks of an *inclusive pedagogy* (in French *pédagogie de l'équité* ou *pédagogie inclusive*), which should be constructed in all aspects of education and training. This should be intended to move towards "action for the transformation of the social division of resources, power and knowledge" (Solar, 1998, p. 28). In order to build a framework for this inclusive pedagogy, Solar takes into account four areas of focus: (a) silence/speech; (b) omission/memory; (c) passivity/ active participation; (d) powerlessness/assumption of power. She thus argues that inclusive education intends to break silence through speech, omission through memory, passivity through active participation and powerlessness through a takeover of power (p. 31). Solar believes that the framework of these four dimensions should be the basis of future efforts in this matter.

Undoubtedly, the application of these notions is fraught with difficulties and complications. For example, Taylor (2003) underlines the difficulty in making students engage with gender stereotypes. In particular, when it comes to gendered behaviour, he states that students "are inclined to believe that differential outcomes in life for women and men are due to natural or innate differences (particularly differences related to biology) rather than the processes of socialisation and social forces" (p. 300). He further suggests that one possible method to get students to learn about these stereotypes and their process of social construction is to have them engage in qualitative analysis (p. 300).

Lafortune (1998) promotes a feminist approach in education in the context of mathematics classes. In particular, she addresses three ways in which it is important to intervene when teaching mathematics. Firstly, she underlines the necessity (1) of taking into account the situation of girls and women in mathematics. A simple reference to women who have contributed to the development of mathematics would constitute a valuable first step. Moreover, it would be important to explicitly criticise the prejudices and biases of the history of

mathematics (Lafortune, 1998). Secondly, (2) the demystification of mathematics should be emphasised. More precisely, it would be important to deconstruct the misconceptions related to the subject, for example by showing that it is not as complex as people tend to believe, and by deconstructing the stereotype of mathematicians as people that devote their life exclusively to this field (Lafortune, 1998). Finally, it would be useful (3) to take into account the elements of "affectivity" when learning mathematics (Lafortune, 1998), directly tackling three aspects of the affective dimension that come into play: anxiety, self-confidence and motivation (Lafortune, 1998).

Building on her own research in the specific context of mathematics, Lafortune (1998) elaborated a framework for an inclusive pedagogy to be applied when teaching all subjects in educational establishments, by outlining seven fundamental recommendations: (a) to use differentiated documents so that everyone can be concerned and represented; (b) to react to words and attitudes that can devalue and undermine a category of students; (c) to value emotions, creativity, intuition and imagination in all subject-specific learning processes; (d) to use examples and to propose activities that can interest and involve the entirety of the student body; (e) to demystify disciplines, the people who teach them, and their learning processes; (f) to use means to allow everyone to speak up and participate, and to feel comfortable doing so; (g) to build an environment that allows for learning processes based on cooperative models, rather than competitive ones (Lafortune, 1998).

Davis and Steiger (1993, p. 67) built on Lafortune's research in the context of physics lessons, with the intent to implement strategies to improve girls' experience in the classroom. For example, one of these strategies consisted in responding to one of the reasons students reportedly tend to abandon scientific programmes, namely, solitude (Davis & Steiger, 1993, p. 76). Davis and Steiger (1993) recommend building a support mechanism among students, asking teachers to also consider teamwork as part of the evaluation (p. 77).

Within the framework of educational programmes, the teacher is not a neutral actor: he or she has incorporated differentiated values, including gender stereotypes (Couchot-Schiex, 2016, p. 19). The choices that guide the selection, planning and conception of objects at the centre of students' work require the teacher to be particularly vigilant and careful (Couchot-Schiex, 2016, p. 19). Because of this, teacher training is absolutely essential, and it needs to integrate a gender approach to education. As the European Commission underlines, "all teacher education programmes should have a core module on gender equality. Teachers should be assessed in their equality practices during pre-service and in-service education programmes" (Eurydice, 2009, p. 111). This is not the case in the Italian context, however, where, overall, universities in the country rarely engage with gender studies (Bencivenga, 2012, p. 24).

Moreover, for the construction of an effective inclusive pedagogy, the system itself would need to reflect equality. However, the preponderance of women in the teaching profession constitutes an additional reproduction of the division of gender roles. This gender imbalance seems to be common to many parts of the world (OECD, 2014). As the findings of the TALIS research (OECD, 2014) show, 68 % of all teachers across the countries under investigation are female. In the specific case of Italy, 79 % of all teachers are women. The proportion of female teachers tends to be higher in primary education (OECD, 2014).

The idea that women have maternal instincts and that they are the ones in charge of the "care" of children is a particularly strong reason behind these numbers, because of a perceived notion of women as the ones that naturally have a desire to protect children and to respond to their material needs (Gianini Belotti, 2016, p. 132). It would be important to strive to change this structure, as the mere presence of men and women among the educational staff from the pre-primary school level on would contribute to removing the "crystallisation" of the feminine and masculine roles (Gianini Belotti, 2016,

p. 143). Moreover, paradoxically, women are also less likely to become school managers, "even though principals are often recruited from the ranks of teachers" (OECD, 2016a, p. 31).

Looking at the construction of an effective *inclusive pedagogy* and the integration of a comprehensive gender approach to education as an ideal that societies should strive to achieve, different countries have made efforts along these lines, following the guidelines of international organisations and recommendations of the European Commission. These efforts include not only specific references to educational projects, but also the elaboration of strategies to deal more broadly with gender issues at different levels of society (e.g. same-sex civil unions, campaigns to fight discrimination based on sexual orientation, initiatives to promote gender equality and understand asymmetric power relations between men and women, etc.).

Chapter 2
Il gender
in the Italian context

Overview: relation with the Spanish and French cases

From the spring of 2013 onwards (Avanza, 2015, p. 210), a number of efforts aimed at tackling gender issues at a national level in Italy could be identified. However, for every effort, an immediate initiative to combat and oppose it sprang up. In order to better understand the opposition, it is interesting to consider the way in which these initiatives have been opposed in other countries, such as in the cases of France and Spain, which began to deal with these controversies about two years before they came to light in Italy. Mosconi (2014) argues that all educational policies that intend to introduce and educate children and youths to questions of gender equality come up against the present situation. In fact, she argues that societies tend to be egalitarian in principle but are actually based on inequalities, and that these inequalities are

masked under the voice of "gender differences" (p. 270). Examples of this clash have taken similar forms across countries such as Spain, France and Italy.

Interestingly, in recent years in Italy, the term *gender* has been widely used in its English form, even if the direct translation to the term *genere* would not be problematic (Bencivenga, 2012, p. 25). Similarly to the case of France, the use of this term in English contributes to giving some kind of indication that an American colonisation, inspired by "individualist liberalism", is taking place before our eyes (Dayer & Collet, 2014, p. 9). This definitely shows a lack of understanding of the term *gender* itself: in Italy, for example, it is still rare that someone who hears the term *gender* thinks of power relations (Bencivenga, 2012, p. 15).

In fact, in both countries, the opposition has specifically referred to a "gender theory" (i.e. *teoria del gender / ideologia del gender / il gender* in Italy, *théorie du genre / théorie du gender* in France), a term which has cropped up with increasing frequency in numerous newspapers and public statements. It is important to specify that the *teoria del gender,* understood in the way it is most often reported, does not exist: "gender is neither an ideology nor a theory, but simply a concept and a research field based on interdisciplinary studies applied to different situations" (Dayer, 2014, p. 46).

However, in public discourse, associations opposing gender-responsive policies and initiatives have continuously perpetuated the idea that "*il gender*" constitutes a big ideological project that involves feminists, LGBTI activists, gender studies researchers, together with the movements defending abortion, sexual education, contraception, etc. (Paternotte, van der Dussen, & Piette, 2015, p. 14). This ideology is perceived as a "top-down" imposition originating in international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), coming to destroy the "natural society" (Avanza, 2015, p. 219). There has been an overlapping and confusion of notions and issues, mixing

erroneous definitions that, by deforming reality, simply contribute to spreading fear and anxiety (Marzano, 2015, p. 24).

The main actors of the opposition in Spain have been associations composed of primarily Catholic activists, such as *HazteOir, Foro de la Familia* and *Edificación Cristiana* (Pichardo Galán & Cornejo Valle, 2015, p. 179). They have been particularly active since 2005 in the fight against same-sex marriage (p. 183) and in 2006 against the new legislation concerning education, which intended to include the recognition of sexual diversity as an educational objective. The main debate concerned the introduction of a compulsory course on Citizenship and Human Rights Education (p. 184). These associations started a specific campaign in 2007 to incite parents not to bring their children to these courses. Interestingly, in 2009, only 114 students out of 800,000 did not attend (p. 185). However, in 2013, the Government responded to the concerns of the Catholic associations, and the courses on Citizenship and Human Rights Education were removed from the legislation. Despite setbacks like this one, it is worth noting that on the whole, the opposition did not assume strong media-based and political importance in Spain, unlike other countries such as France (p. 178) and Italy, as we shall see in the course of this investigation.

In France, the first opposition movements have mainly developed since 2010, when the Ministry of Education proposed the addition of a chapter called "Becoming a man or woman" (*Devenir homme ou femme*) to school curricula. This was strongly contested and criticised as an imposition of a "philosophical and sociological theory that is not scientific", as Dayer and Collet (2014, p. 8) report. These discussions continued throughout 2011, but remained limited until 2012, when they effectively acquired importance by challenging the *Taubira law*[1]*,* which made same-sex unions legal (Paternotte, *et al.*,

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1. Named after the French Minister of Justice at the time, Christiane Taubira.

2015, p. 11). A strong actor in this case was the association *Manif pour Tous* (which translates as "Demo for All"): founded in France in 2012, it has been a very strong adversary of same-sex marriage since its creation. The association drafted a pamphlet, presenting an *idéologie du genre* (gender ideology) as destructive, antisocial and anti-natural (Paternotte, *et al.*, 2015, p. 11). A movement close to *Manif pour Tous,* the *Veilleurs* ("Watchmen"), developed in 2013 specifically for the purpose of combating same-sex unions.

Mosconi (2014) refers to forms of opposition and resistance that derive from the political sphere, as well as more specifically from educational staff, such as teachers themselves. At a macro-level, certain political movements, mainly related to the country's extreme right, have opposed any effort defending the idea of natural, biological differences between men and women, while basically ultimately defending the structural inequalities of both (Mosconi, 2014, p. 272).

Similar resistance may also be found within educational institutions. Interestingly, Mosconi (2014) addresses the different struggles faced by teachers when obliged to engage with a gender approach to education. She argues that when teachers and educators are faced with the fact that their methods could produce inequality, they find themselves in an uncomfortable position. Because of that, they tend to reject this notion and express their scepticism in this regard (p. 273).

Moreover, teachers already have a multitude of tasks to cope with in the classroom, and they already have to deal with a number of other forms of inequalities, related, for instance, to students' social background and ethnic origin. Finally, engaging with gender as a process of differentiation and creation of a hierarchy of the sexes has the potential to push teachers to examine the dynamics in their personal lives, forcing them to face their role in these dynamics, whether as the dominant actor or the dominated one: neither of these roles is particularly comfortable or easy to accept (p. 273).

These elements are of heightened importance and they can be applied to the Italian context as well.

Structure of the Italian educational system

In order to holistically explore the Italian case and the efforts to integrate international organisations' guidelines and recommendations within the legislation, it is important to provide a brief overview of the Italian educational system. First of all, a distinction of terminology must be highlighted. In the Italian language there are three terms that generally refer to "education": *educazione*, *istruzione* and *formazione*. These terms are most often used interchangeably. It is not particularly easy to provide an accurate translation in English, which generally translates the first two terms simply as "education". The Italian Ministry of Education, in fact, is called the Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR). The term "formazione" most often refers to professional development, and it can be translated more broadly as "training" (Vertecchi, 2008). It should be noted that "teacher training" can be translated as "*formazione degli insegnanti*". As Massa (1997) underscores, "to instruct" means to insert a structure, to build and make others build something (e.g. knowledge) within a determined structure, not simply to transmit information. According to Vertecchi, *istruzione* is part of *educazione* and, more precisely, it is an explicit manifestation of education that intends to transfer a cultural "*repertoire*" (2008, p. 28). Vertecchi makes a distinction between the two terms by specifying that the term *educazione* has a broader scope, and it includes aspects of learning that are not necessarily formalised within an educational establishment.

The Italian educational system is divided into different cycles: a pre-primary school system, the *scuola dell'infanzia,* which is open to children between the ages of three and five, and is not

compulsory. Interestingly, this level of education is also called, in the Italian language, *scuola materna* (literally, "motherly school"; in English: "nursery school"). The first cycle is in turn divided into primary education (*scuola primaria*), which lasts five years, and lower secondary school (*scuola secondaria di primo grado*), which lasts three years and concerns children between 11 and 14 years of age (Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa [Indire], 2013). The second cycle of education consists of upper secondary school (*scuola secondaria di secondo grado*), which lasts five years and can take place in state schools as well as technical and vocational institutes (Ministero dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca [MIUR], 2016). Education is compulsory between the ages of six and sixteen, which covers the whole first cycle and the first two years of the second cycle (Indire, 2013, p. 7).

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the administration at a national level, as it is in charge of determining policy. It is divided into three different departments, with specific tasks: the *Department of Education and Training* is responsible for defining educational and training objectives and the legal and economic status of school personnel; the *Department for the Planning and Management of Human, Financial and Capital Resources* is in charge of financial policy and procurement; the *Department for Higher Education and Research* is in charge of higher education and, especially, of the guidance and funding of universities (Indire, 2013, p. 9). Overall, the Ministry of Education sets:

> the general objectives of the educational process, the 'specific learning objectives' for pupils' skills, the subjects on the minimum national curriculum and the annual number of teaching hours dedicated to them, the total annual compulsory timetable for curricula, standards for the quality of education services, general criteria for pupil assessment, general criteria for the organisation of adult education study paths. (Indire, 2013, p. 11)

School organisation at the regional level becomes decentralised, through the Regional School Offices (*Uffici Scolastici Regionali*, USR), which then operate at a provincial level in Local Offices. Local administration includes the provinces and the municipalities (*Comuni*). Municipalities generally are in charge of delegated responsibilities for functions and services for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary schools, which they carry out through dedicated education offices (*Assessorati*). In accordance with the framework established by the Ministry, schools at pre-primary, primary and secondary level have a certain autonomy: "each school draws up its own Educational Offer Plan (*Piano dell'offerta formativa*, POF), which is the basic document setting out the cultural and planning identity of the school" (Indire, 2013, p. 12). Responsibility for final decisions rests with the school manager (*Dirigente scolastico*), who is the legal representative of the institution (Indire, 2013, p. 12).

When it comes to questions of gender in education, one wonders about the place of a Ministry for Equal Opportunities. However, in Italy, there is only a Department for Equal Opportunities (*Dipartimento per le pari opportunità*), which is generally delegated to other Ministries. For example, the responsibilities of the Department were delegated in the past to the vice-Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Maria Cecilia Guerra, between 2013 and 2014; and to the politician Giovanna Martelli between 2014 and November 2015. Between 10 May 2016 and 12 December 2016, the Department was the responsibility of Maria Elena Boschi, Minister for Constitutional Reforms and Relations with the Parliament. At regional and local levels, it is possible to find specific Departments and Commissions for Equal Opportunities: however, there is no standardised norm for their constitution.

On 12 December 2016, a new government was instituted, after the resignation of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, and following the appointment of former Minister of Foreign Affairs Paolo Gentiloni as his successor. In the new government, once more there was no

specific Ministry for Equal Opportunities. However, the new Minister of Education in 2016 was Valeria Fedeli, a former senator, and a strong proponent of a directive to integrate a gender approach in education. More specifically, on 18 November 2014, she was the first signatory of a proposal to introduce a programme whose objective was to transcend sexist stereotypes into educational institutions of all levels.

Efforts to integrate a gender approach into policies between 2013 and 2016

In Chapter 1 of this study, the elaboration of a conceptual framework brought out the complexity of the issues that come into play when discussing gender in education. Because of the articulation of inter-related yet separate issues in this context, Chapter 1 provides a framework of the Italian context, in relation to gender issues in general, and to gender issues in education in particular. When referring to specific movements and initiatives meant to oppose any elaboration of gender-responsive policies, I use the attribute "anti-gender", as these movements tend to define themselves. In this specific phrase, the term *gender* must be understood as *il gender*, with the connotation that it has acquired in the public discourse in Italy, as previously mentioned.

The commitment of the Italian government to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was represented by its support of the project proposed by the Council of Europe for the implementation of Recommendation CM/REC (2010) 5 (UNAR, 2013). This recommendation focused on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. This commitment was formalised in 2012, in the Directive for political priorities and strategic objectives of the National Department for Equal Opportunities, under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. This document pointed out that preventing,

combating and eliminating all forms of discrimination were a priority in the broader context of the promotion of equal opportunities. The Ministry officially delegated[1] the elaboration of a national strategy to fight discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to the National Office against Racial Discrimination (*Ufficio Nazionale Anti-Discriminazione Razziale*, UNAR), which was to be developed in the course of 2013.

At this point, UNAR, also representing the Department for Equal Opportunities, published the 2013-2015 National LGBT Strategy, a document designed to tackle the issue of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, through the consideration of four priorities: education, access to work opportunities, opposition to violence (security) and media awareness (UNAR, 2013). With regard to the education strand, the 2013-2015 Strategy outlined seven primary objectives: (a) to increase knowledge and competences regarding LGBT issues amongst all actors within the school community; (b) to prevent and combat intolerance and gender-based violence, specifically related to sexual orientation and gender identity; (c) to guarantee a safe environment for students; (d) to gain awareness of the scope of bullying with a particular reference to homophobic and transphobic bullying; (e) to facilitate the empowerment of LGBT people in schools, both teachers and students; (f) to combat and prevent isolation and stigmatisation of young LGBT students; (g) to contribute to raising awareness of new structures of what constitutes a "family" (UNAR, 2013, p. 22).

This strategy was elaborated with the help of LGBT associations and through a collaboration of different local administrations at the level of municipalities, through the network RE.A.DY.[2] (UNAR, 2013).

1. The directive can be accessed at http://presidenza.governo.it/AmministrazioneTrasparente/Performance/direttive/2013/Direttiva_DPO_2013.pdf

2. RE.A.DY. stands for *Rete Nazionale delle Pubbliche Amministrazioni Anti Discriminazioni per orientamento sessuale e identità di genere,* which translates to National Network of public administrations against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

A number of activities were carried out by the municipality of Turin, in Piedmont, in its capacity as the National Secretary of the RE.A.DY. network. In particular, under the RE.A.DY. project, several training sessions were organised based on the four strands of priorities at the core of UNAR's 2013-2015 National LGBT Strategy. Specifically, with regard to the "education" strand, the project included plans to offer twenty courses in local contexts such as Tuscany, Umbria, Basilicata, Calabria and Sardinia.

However, as the report at the conclusion of the activities demonstrates, the specific activities related to the "education" priority were not actually implemented. Only two courses were organised, on 26 and 27 November 2013, with the intent to reflect on the importance of language as a vehicle of stereotypes, to comprehend the reasons for homophobic and transphobic bullying, to reflect on the instruments with which to provide an inclusive education, and to learn from good practice examples. Finally, the courses that came under the education strand were interrupted within the UNAR – RE.A.DY. project. As indicated in the final report of the project, presented on 28 June 2016 in Turin, this was done with the intention of leaving the implementation of training activities concerning all forms of discrimination to the Ministry of Education (MIUR)[1]. No further official explanation was provided. Overall, there has not been any evaluation mechanism and there are no details of an implementation of educational projects under this strategy (ECRI, 2016, p. 36), as found by an investigation of the Council of Europe, through the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI).

Between 2012 and 2013, several publishing houses were established specifically to create and publish illustrated children's books with the intent to counter the heteronormativity and the stereotyped representations of men and women in mainstream children's

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1. The documents of the RE.A.DY. project can be accessed at http://www.comune.torino.it/politichedigenere/lgbt/lgbt_reti/lgbt_ready/

literature, as investigated in Chapter 1. Among these, special mention should be given to *Lo Stampatello*, founded in 2012, and the *Casa Editrice Settenove*, founded in 2013. In addition to these specialised publishing houses, existing publishers also started expanding their repertoire and lists of available publications, with the effort to make literature more inclusive.

In the course of the summer 2013, a particular controversy was sparked by the proposal of a new law (the *Legge Scalfarotto*, named after one of its main proponents), meant to combat homophobia and transphobia[1]. In particular, it intended to include the notion of discrimination based on homophobia or transphobia in the previous Law n. 654 of 13 October 1975, which constituted the ratification to the 1966 International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination.[2] Among the different clauses, the proposal, approved by the House of Representatives in September 2013, also explicitly specifies that the public expression of opinions does not constitute *per se* a form of discrimination or incitement to discrimination. However, since October 2013, the law has been blocked by the Senate and, as of December 2016, was never discussed further.

In response to the elaboration of the *Legge Scalfarotto*, August 2013 saw the first meeting of the *Sentinelle in piedi* (Standing sentinels), a movement inspired by the French *Veilleurs*. While the *Veilleurs* mainly protested against same-sex unions, the *Sentinelle in piedi* focused their efforts specifically against the proposed anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia law. The *Sentinelle in Piedi* openly opposed this legislation, accompanied by a number of other associations, such as the Italian branch of the association *Manif pour tous* (additional proof of a link between the French and Italian cases), often arguing that it constitutes a violation of the right to freedom of

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1. Full text of the *Legge Scalfarotto* can be accessed at http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/BGT/00716085.pdf

2. Full text of Law n. 654, 13 October 1975, can be accessed at presidenza. governo.it/USRI/ufficio_studi/normativa/L. 13 ottobre 1975, n. 654.pdf

expression. This association has recently been renamed the *Generazione Famiglia* (The Family Generation).

From September 2013 onwards, an increasing number of "anti-gender" conferences could be noted. In the Province of Brescia alone (in the Region of Lombardy), more than 100 anti-gender conferences were held between 2013 and mid-November 2014 (Avanza, 2015, p. 210). Avanza (2015) underlines how associations of the "pro-life" (anti-abortion) movements are in the front line of "anti-gender" initiatives (p. 208). She explains this phenomenon by outlining not only the fact that these movements are in line with the Catholic Church's doctrine, but also that the members of these movements defend the image of women as mothers above all else (p. 209). The notion of "gender" (most often referred to as *il gender*, *teoria del gender*, or *ideologia del gender*), as they understand it, constitutes a threat to the political identity of the movement, and to the personal life choices of the majority of its members (p. 209). This observation is related to what Mosconi (2014) highlights as one of the reasons why even teachers have often rejected gender-responsive educational projects in France: the questions posed by gender studies force people to evaluate their lives and to question themselves, which can be an uncomfortable and challenging task not everyone is willing to take on.

Avanza (2015) emphasises that the growing reactions and mobilisation of these movements are certainly related to the political agenda, in particular in connection with the previously mentioned *Legge Scalfarotto* (p. 211). Avanza proceeds in her analysis of "anti-gender" conferences, emphasising that they take place all over the Italian territory, before audiences that range from just a few dozen parents of a small Catholic school to more than 300 people (p. 214). Within these conferences, the "emotional" element is often the centre of the conversations brought to the table, especially through the use of people's testimonies (p. 214). Among these, we could mention the story of Luca, "who was gay but *found* himself in Medju-

gorje"[1], or Anna, "who was lesbian, until Marco asked her out for coffee" (p. 217).

Especially between the last few months of 2013 and 2014, the notion of gender equality in education started to become central to the controversies. On 4 October 2013, the Ministry of Education, together with the Department for Equal Opportunities (at the time the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy), directed an internal memo, *Circolare Ministeriale*,[2] to school managers at all levels of education throughout the country, informing them of an official "National Week against violence and discrimination". The Ministry invited all educational institutions to activate relevant and significant channels whereby to raise awareness, provide information, promote prevention and combat all forms of violence and discrimination. While exploring the issue of discrimination broadly, the memo makes direct reference to the fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Moreover, the Ministry announced an information campaign, promoted in collaboration with UNAR, meant to provide educational institutions with stimuli and support for implementing projects to educate and raise awareness about the issues at hand.

As part of the 2013-2015 National LGBT Strategy, UNAR prepared three short booklets called "*Educare alla diversità a scuola*" (Educating to diversity in schools), aimed at primary and secondary establishments (lower and upper level), with the specific intent to combat homophobic bullying in educational establishments[3]. The

1. Medjugorje is a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina that in the last decades has become a destination of Catholic pilgrimage since alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

2. A *Circolare ministeriale* basically constitutes an official memo issued by a Ministry to provide certain information to members of a service. In this specific case, coming from the Ministry of Education, it is directed to school managers and teachers at all levels of education.

3. The booklets can be accessed at banner.orizzontescuola.it/File completo Scuola Primaria.pdf; banner.orizzontescuola.it/File Completo UNAR Medie.pdf; banner.orizzontescuola.it/File completo UNAR Liceo.pdf

booklets provide recommendations and suggestions for a teaching methodology that aspires to be more inclusive and respectful of differences, through definitions and suggested activities that deal with gender identity, homophobia and bullying.

This initiative accelerated the protests and opposition of the "anti-gender" associations (Avanza, 2015, p. 211), which were expressed in different forms, such as with the development of a petition, circulated by different associations. This petition also made a stand against the framework of the "Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe", published in 2010 by the European Regional Office of the World Health Organisation and the BZgA Research Institute. These movements eventually managed to put so much pressure on the Government that, in the end, the distribution of the booklets was stopped.

More precisely, the vice-minister of the Department for Equal Opportunities (under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy), Maria Cecilia Guerra, issued a letter of protest to the Director of the National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR), arguing that they had published the booklets without the authorisation of the Ministry. This is particularly interesting, especially since Maria Cecilia Guerra was one of the signatories of the internal memo distributed in schools on 4 October 2013, which had mentioned precisely the elaboration of an awareness-raising campaign about violence and forms of discrimination, in collaboration with UNAR.

At a national level, there have been more efforts to integrate a gender-responsive approach into the Italian educational system. More precisely, Article 16 of the new legislation on educational reform, the so called directive of the *Buona Scuola* (literally "the Good School"), presented in September 2014, "ensures the implementation of the principles for equal opportunities, promoting within schools at all educational levels, an education to gender equality, and to the prevention of gender-based violence and all types of discrimi-

nation", directed to students, teachers and parents[1]. More precisely, the legislation makes a direct reference to Law 15 October 2013, n. 119[2], specifically providing urgent instructions to ensure safety and combat gender-based violence. Article 5(c) specifically recommends

> appropriate training for all school personnel against gender-based violence and discrimination and to promote [...] students' awareness, information and education in order to prevent violence against women and gender-based discrimination, also through an appropriate development of the subject in textbooks.

Foti (2015) points out that merely to talk about the promotion of equality is not enough to actually make a difference in our society, especially since these recommendations can potentially be lost in school autonomy and could encounter obstacles at the time of their implementation. A study by Eurydice (2009) showed that in Italy gender equality policies are implemented at the regional or local level, within provinces and municipalities.

The formulation of this directive is a compromise reached between the different political parties, compared to what had initially been proposed and discussed, which had intended to integrate a more complete gender approach to education (Foti, 2015, p. 1). In fact, as previously mentioned, on 18 November 2014 senator Valeria Fedeli presented a bill to the Senate, with the purpose of

1. Art. 16: "Il piano triennale dell'offerta formativa assicura l'attuazione dei principi di pari opportunita' promuovendo nelle scuole di ogni ordine e grado l'educazione alla parita' tra i sessi, la prevenzione della violenza di genere e di tutte le discriminazioni, al fine di informare e di sensibilizzare gli studenti, i docenti e i genitori sulle tematiche indicate dall'articolo 5, comma 2, del decreto-legge 14 agosto 2013, n. 93, convertito, con modificazioni, dalla legge 15 ottobre 2013, n. 119, nel rispetto dei limiti di spesa di cui all'articolo 5-bis, comma 1, primo periodo, del predetto decreto-legge n. 93 del 2013". The full *Buona Scuola* directive can be accessed at http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it

2. http://www.lexitalia.it/leggi/2013-119.htm

introducing a form of *gender education (educazione di genere)*[1] at all levels of education, from primary schools to universities (Foti, 2015). This project intended to integrate a form of *inclusive pedagogy*, proposing the introduction of a new didactic approach, across the different subjects, and through a consideration of all material (e.g. textbooks). At the same time, another project was presented to the House of Representatives, addressing the issues of "sentimental education", based on the recommendations of the 2011 Istanbul Convention (Foti, 2015).

However, the directive *Buona Scuola* did not include the recommendations of these proposed bills. Also the Council of Europe, through the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) requested the implementation of the *Buona Scuola* directive in all schools in the Italian territory and the implementation of UNAR's National LGBT Strategy, to promote tolerance and respect in schools. In particular, it wants educational projects to include a more explicit reference to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, not limiting it to discrimination against women (ECRI, 2016, p. 36). However, even though the final legislation of the *Buona Scuola* refers only to the promotion of gender equality, it has still received strong criticism from political representatives (and their political agendas and reasons to oppose a directive coming from left-wing former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi) and "anti-gender" movements.

In 2015, a legislation proposal to legalise same-sex civil unions was elaborated and put forward by some representatives of the *Partito Democratico* (PD), the centre-left political party in power. This bill was generally referred to as the *Disegno di legge (Ddl) Cirinnà*[2], named after its first signatory, the senator Monica Cirinnà. The "anti-gender" associations responded by stepping up their initiatives. In the midst of these discussions, on 19 June 2015, the newly

1. senato.it/leg/17/BGT/Schede/FascicoloSchedeDDL/ebook/45005.pdf
2. *Disegno di legge* translates to "bill".

appointed Mayor of Venice, Luigi Brugnaro, representative of a coalition of right-wing political parties, only four days after his official appointment, announced the removal of 49 children's books from schools of the municipality. The list includes stories that deal with issues of discrimination and equality, giving voice and representation to same-sex couples and their children, single-parent families, and adoptive families (Furlan, 2015). On 20 June 2015, the association *Difendiamo i nostri figli* ("Defend our children"), supported by a number of other groups and "anti-gender" movements, organised the so-called *Family Day*[1]. This was a meeting for families all over Italy to meet in Rome to protest against the new legislation proposal, and to oppose the introduction of the notion of gender equality in schools (Marzano, 2015, p. 11). The protests were accompanied by the slogans "*Giù le mani dai nostri figli*" ("Keep your hands off our children") and "*No gender nelle scuole*", which translates to "No 'gender' in schools", where 'gender' is understood once more by these movements as an entity in itself, and specifically an ideology (*teoria del gender* or *ideologia del gender*).

On 5 September 2015, the representatives of right-wing political parties in the Region of Veneto presented a motion "against the gender ideology", which the Regional Council accepted (Corlazzoli, 2015). A similar motion was then presented on 24 September 2015 in the Region of Sardinia: in this case, however, it met with opposition and was not approved. These motions also made specific reference to the booklets published by UNAR in 2014 (Mulas, 2015). Opposition was so strong within political parties as well that, as in the case of the *Buona Scuola* directive, the final version of the *Legge Cirinnà*, when finally approved by the House of Representatives on 11 May 2016, ended up being the result of a "compromise" between the political parties, containing many elements that differed from the initial bill.

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1. The phrase "*Family Day*" has been used in the English language, not with its translation in Italian.

On 15 September 2015, the Ministry of Education (MIUR) circulated an internal memo, directed to school managers and teachers all over Italy, in response to the attacks received from the "anti-gender" movements and associations. In particular, the internal memo aimed to clarify that the *Buona Scuola* directive had been misinterpreted: the memo specified that this directive was based on the principles of equal dignity and non-discrimination, making reference to the Italian Constitution. While noting the need for the school to integrate these principles, the memo concluded by underlining the importance of families and parents being involved in children's education.

In March 2016, Mario Adinolfi, political representative and journalist for the Catholic newspaper *Avvenire*, among other publications, founded the political party *Il Popolo della Famiglia*. This movement is particularly active on social media and it strongly presents itself through the slogan "*No gender nelle scuole*", which also appears in the official logo of the party. The logo features an illustration of a "traditional" family, with a mother, a father, a little boy and a little girl, all recognisable by their blue t-shirts and pink dresses (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The official logo of *Il Popolo della famiglia*.

On 12 December 2016, as previously mentioned, Valeria Fedeli was appointed as the new Minister of Education, under the leadership of new Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni. From the very first day, her appointment came in for a great deal of criticism, attacking not only her position as a "*Ministra del gender*", but also contesting her academic qualifications and her official statements in this regard. This opposition was initiated and led by Mario Adinolfi, founder of *Il Popolo della Famiglia*.

In the course of this chapter, I have provided a framework of the Italian context in relation to governmental efforts and initiatives concerning gender-responsive policies in education, and in other aspects of society. For each effort, it was possible to identify a prompt response of "anti-gender" associations. In conclusion, this chapter found that the opposition of these movements occurs in different forms, as Avanza (2015) highlights:

- petitions;
- peaceful actions and protests (e.g. the *Family Day*);
- actual political lobbying;
- legal actions;
- cultural mobilisation, through "anti-gender" conferences and other initiatives.

The following chapter outlines the research questions at the core of this investigation, its main objectives, a description of the methodology, and the challenges and limitations of the research.

Chapter 3
Research Project

The conceptual framework has shown the articulation of multiple issues that come into play in education when speaking of a gender approach. This investigation explores how these issues are translated in the Italian reality. Since 2013, this has been a pressing issue, and it presents similarities with the cases of other countries around Europe, such as France. The objectives of this investigation are:

- To understand the extent to which the efforts to integrate a gender approach in education have been successful.
- To identify examples of projects in educational institutions.
- To identify the obstacles posed to these efforts, and to understand at what level of implementation they arise.
- To provide an understanding of how the issues are perceived in the Italian context: this would offer an overview of public opinion and, therefore, of the way any effort to integrate a gender approach into education is potentially received and understood.

The fundamental question at the core of this research is: to what extent have educational projects that tackle gender issues been successfully implemented in the Italian context? Quite early in the research, it emerged that these projects have stirred up strong opposition. Therefore, this investigation addresses the way this opposition is expressed and how it is reflected in public opinion.

In order to do so, I take into account a number of sub-questions, which I attempt to answer through two different phases of analysis. The first phase (Phase 1) is focused on a specific case study, in order to better understand the implementation of projects aimed at integrating a gender approach into education in the municipality of Cagliari, in the region of Sardinia. To this end, the following questions are asked:

- How are these educational projects implemented in schools?
- What are the support mechanisms and obstacles at the time of the implementation of such educational projects?
- What is the nature of the obstacles and at what level are they encountered?

As seen while outlining the conceptual and contextual framework of this research, the articulation of gender issues in education is a complex matter. It emerged that often many of the terms at hand are not clearly presented and not fully understood by the public. This is one of the reasons why Phase 2 of the analysis specifically intends to explore the way public opinion on gender issues tends to be shaped in the Italian context. More precisely, I tackle the following sub-questions:

- How is public opinion concerning gender issues constructed and reinforced in the Italian context?
- What is the role of media, and specifically newspapers?
- What is the role of religious representatives?
- What is the role of associations and civil society, and specifically the leaders of the "anti-gender" initiatives?

– What are the common elements that can provide us with insight into the "anti-gender" movements?

Methodology, phase 1: Projects in educational establishments between 2013 and 2016

Phase 1 of the research explores more specifically the projects implemented in educational establishments that apply to students between primary and lower secondary schools in the city of Cagliari. With a population of 154,460 inhabitants (Istituto nazionale di statistica [Istat], 2015), the municipality of Cagliari is the main city of the Region of Sardinia.

The context in Cagliari is particularly interesting because since 2011, with the election of Mayor Massimo Zedda, of the left-wing political party *Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà* (SEL), the city has been particularly active in the context of gender equality and LGBTI rights. The first Sardinian Gay Pride parade took place in Cagliari in June 2012, with the Mayor marching in the front line; in 2012, the Mayor established an Office for Equal Opportunities (*Assessorato alle Pari Opportunità*), which operated directly through the Commission for Equal Opportunities; and, especially between 2012 and 2014, the Commission for Equal Opportunities carried out a number of projects tackling issues such as gender-based violence and sexism in the Italian language. A network of associations interested in issues related to the mandate of the department (e.g. in the context of gender equality, discrimination, gender-based violence and LGBTI rights) was created thanks to the efforts of the Commission for Equal Opportunities, under the name "*Le opportunità in rete*", which roughly translates to "The network of opportunities". Moreover, the municipality of Cagliari was one of the members of the "education" strand of the RE.A.DY. project, organised under the 2013-2014

National LGBT Strategy. However, as previously mentioned, the activities related to this strand of the strategy were not carried out and, therefore, the city administration did not ultimately have the opportunity to participate.

At the centre of this investigation are the local efforts that have been made in the context of education, such as the project *Alla scoperta della differenza* (Discovering diversity), funded by the city administration through the Commission for Equal Opportunity and carried out in 2013 by the social cooperative *Agape* and the association *Se non ora, quando* ("If not now, when"). It also examines the project *Ci piacCiAmo!...anche in biblioteca* (We like each other... also in the library!), carried out by the association *Menabó*, thanks to funding from the Department of Culture of the City Administration. Furthermore, I shall briefly explore the 2015 project *SAVE (Stereotypes and violence in Education*), carried out as part of the Master's in Gender Equality of the University of Cagliari with funding at a regional level.

Phase 1 of this investigation attempts to respond to the following questions, specifically taking into account these projects and the context in Cagliari as the case study: (a) How are educational projects concerning gender issues implemented in schools? (b) What are the support mechanisms and obstacles at the time of the implementation of such educational projects? (c) What is the nature of the obstacles and at what level are they encountered?

The following experts were interviewed:

– The former President of the Commission for Equal Opportunities of the City of Cagliari. The main objectives of this interview are to understand the involvement and role of the city administration in matters of gender in education and to understand their specific involvement in the implementation of the project *Alla scoperta della differenza*. In this sense, I am particularly interested in the extent of the support

provided by the city administration to the schools, and to the social cooperative and the association in charge of the implementation of the project (*Agape* and *Se non ora, quando*).

– The President of the Social Cooperative *Agape*, the person in charge of the implementation of the project *Alla scoperta della differenza* and, in particular, of the part of the project that applied specifically to children in the classroom. The main objectives of this conversation are: to understand the nature of the project *Alla scoperta della differenza*; to understand the aspects of its implementation; to get to know the enablers and obstacles in its implementation; and to have a clearer overview of the context surrounding these issues in a city like Cagliari.

– The president of the association *Se non ora, quando* (SNOQ), the person in charge of the part of the *Alla scoperta della differenza* project that applied to parents and teachers. The main objectives of this interview are similar to those of the interview with the *Agape* representative, even if some of the questions do specifically concern the involvement of parents and teachers.

– The coordinators of the association *Menabó*, who are in charge of the educational project *Ci piacCiAmo*, which was developed during the academic year 2013 / 2014 and funded by the Education Department of the *Comune di Cagliari*. Once more, the main objectives of this interview were to understand the steps of the implementation of the project, identifying enablers and obstacles, and to identify potential differences or similarities with the implementation of the other projects.

– The Director and Professor of the University of Cagliari's Master's Programme in Gender Equality, *Strategie per l'equità di genere*, and coordinator of *SAVE* (Stereotypes and violence in education), a project designed for teachers all over Sardinia. The primary objectives of this interview are to understand the implementation of an educational project such as *SAVE*, which is focused on gender-based violence and directed to teachers; to identify the enablers and potential obstacles for its implementation; to identify differences between the implementation of this project and that of a project such as *Alla scoperta della differenza*; and to see the response to the Master's programme in Gender Equality at the University of Cagliari.

The objectives of these semi-directed interviews are to gain a better understanding of the possible implementation of projects concerning gender issues in educational establishments; to observe whether the context in Cagliari allows for such implementation; to look at the potential enablers and obstacles; to notice differences in the implementation of different projects (e.g. in what way it is easier/more complicated to implement a project directed to children rather than teachers); to understand the support system around these projects; to understand the obstacles encountered; to understand the nature of these obstacles.

Methodology, phase 2: public opinion

Phase 2 of this investigation centres on public opinion on gender issues in education in Italy. For this purpose, data was collected mainly through media, such as newspaper articles and websites. In order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, the analysis should be undertaken at different levels. Therefore, I selected three different

types of data: (a) newspaper articles, in order to understand their role in the way they present these issues to the public; (b) declarations of religious representatives and, specifically, of representatives of the Catholic Church; (c) examples of "anti-gender" initiatives.

In the course of this phase, I keep in mind the following sub-questions: how is the public opinion concerning gender issues constructed and reinforced in the Italian context? What is the role of media, and specifically newspapers? What is the role of religious representatives? What is the role of associations and civil society, and specifically the leaders of the "anti-gender" initiatives? What are the common elements to these ways of shaping public opinion that can provide us with insight concerning the "anti-gender" movements?

As outlined by Koopmans and Olzak (2004), "movement activists communicate messages to fellow activists and potential adherents, and they thereby gain crucial information about the actions and reactions of authorities, political opponents, allies and sympathisers" (p. 199). Koopmans and Olzak theorise the notion of *discursive opportunities*, defining them as the aspects of public discourse that determine the chances of a message being diffused in the public sphere. In particular, they argue the articulation of three elements: *visibility*, *resonance* and *legitimacy*.

Visibility is a necessary condition for a message to influence public discourse, and is generally produced by the "gatekeepers of the public discourse", such as editors and journalists who have the ability to select and shape public messages (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004, p. 203). According to Koopmans and Olzak, a message, even if visible, does not have a real impact if it does not provoke reactions from other actors in the public sphere. This dimension is defined by these researchers as *resonance*, the element that enhances reproduction of a message. The third and last element of *discursive opportunities* is public *legitimacy*, defined as "the degree to which, on average, reactions by third actors in the public sphere support an actor's claims more than they reject them" (p. 205). Koopmans

and Olzak also note that, at times, highly legitimate messages may have no resonance because they are not controversial, while highly illegitimate messages might have strong resonance (p. 205). This distinction is a particular issue to consider in the course of this analysis. It is with these definitions in mind that I made my choice of sources for this analysis.

The newspaper articles, official statements and initiatives I have chosen are all dated between 2013 and 2015, which I identify as the key years of this controversy, as became evident while outlining the Italian framework in Chapter 2 and in Phase 1 of the analysis (p. 106). Phase 2 of our investigation allows us to have an overview of the public opinion at a national level, to better understand the nature of the opposition and the way its main discourse and arguments are reinforced.

Moreover, this part of the analysis allows for a better understanding of the environment surrounding the educational establishments where the specific projects have been implemented. In fact, teachers, school managers and other educational personnel, as well as parents and political representatives at a local level, are exposed to this discourse and consequently respond to educational projects presented in their establishments according to their preconceptions and constructed understanding of these issues.

Newspaper articles

Newspapers definitely have an important role in shaping public opinion, since they are one of the main sources of information. Moreover, not only do newspapers shape public opinion, they also reflect it. Keeping in mind the relation between *visibility*, *resonance* and *legitimacy* as outlined by Koopmans and Olzak (2004), I look at articles retrieved from different online newspapers, attempting to provide an overview of the way gender issues are reported. I chose to investigate Catholic

newspapers, such as *Tempi* and *Famiglia Cristiana*, because the opposition expressed by the "anti-gender" movements appears to be most often of Catholic affiliation.

It is vital to examine a wide range of newspapers, with different orientations, in order to have an overview of multiple perspectives. This also allows for a better understanding of the way newspapers with a large audience frame these issues. This analysis is centred on articles from online versions of the following newspapers, selected according to specific criteria, used to identify sources with different characteristics: the two main daily Italian newspapers (i.e. *Il Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica*); two Catholic newspapers (i.e. *Tempi* and *Famiglia Cristiana*); two newspapers with more limited circulation than *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* and that have characteristics that set them apart from mainstream newspapers (i.e. *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *Internazionale*); two newspapers that can report the reality in the specific context of Cagliari, our case study (i.e. *L'Unione Sarda* and *Casteddu On Line*).

– *Il Corriere della Sera*, according to the data collected by the company *Accertamenti diffusione stampa* [1] (ADS) in June 2016, is the highest-circulation daily newspaper in Italy, including both paper and digital versions. Founded in 1876, *Il Corriere della Sera* does not have an official political affiliation. It has a tradition of moderate orientation.

– *la Repubblica*, according to the data collected by the ADS in June 2016, is the daily newspaper with the second highest circulation, including both paper and digital versions. Created in 1976, *la Repubblica* does not have an official

1. The ADS is a company founded in 1975 that specifically collects statistics on newspapers' printmaking and circulation. The reports can be accessed at http://www.primaonline.it/2016/08/05/242313

political affiliation. However, it can be argued that it often represents principles in line with the left-wing moderate political agenda. In the course of this analysis, we will also take into account one report published by the newspaper *L'Espresso*, an important weekly newspaper, edited by the same publishing company as that of *la Repubblica*.

–   *Tempi* is a weekly Italian newspaper affiliated with the Catholic Church, founded in 1994.

–   *Famiglia Cristiana* is also a weekly Italian newspaper affiliated with the Catholic Church, founded in 1931. According to the data provided by the ADS in June 2016, it boasts the fourth highest circulation of all weekly newspapers in the country, in its paper version.

–   *Il Fatto Quotidiano* is a younger newspaper, published daily and founded in 2009. The reason I chose this newspaper was that it is particularly difficult to identify a specific political affiliation, and that its specific intent at the time of its establishment was to be free from political parties and their pressures. It is possible to argue that this in itself was one of the reasons for its appeal to the Italian public.

–   *Internazionale* is a weekly Italian newspaper founded in 1993. Modelled on the French newspaper *Courrier International*, it features articles from foreign newspapers translated into Italian. This allows for a certain variety of perspectives, which is the reason I have chosen it.

–   *L'Unione Sarda* is the main and oldest Sardinian newspaper, founded in 1889. It does not officially express a political affil-

iation. I chose it because of its circulation in the region, both in its printed and digital versions.

– *Casteddu Online* is an online newspaper founded in 2011. The specific intent is to use communication technologies and social media for the diffusion of information, and it presents itself as "il primo quotidiano di Cagliari", the first daily newspaper from Cagliari, entirely online. Recently, it has been at the centre of criticism, especially on social media. However, I have decided to use its article because, even if it is not considered as reliable as the other newspapers we have mentioned, it has a strong diffusion online. Its Facebook page, for example, is very active in sharing news on a daily basis, and has 105,592 followers. This does not mean that all these followers actually read all the news, or that they are all within the municipality of Cagliari, but if we take into account that Cagliari has 154,460 inhabitants (Istat, 2015), it is worth noting the extent of its diffusion.

I identified three main themes, in order to divide the newspaper articles and make sense of their content. The first group of articles discusses gender and the integration of a gender approach into education. The second group relates to a specific issue: the educational booklets published by the National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR) in 2014, meant to provide teachers with possible means of dealing with issues of bullying and cyber bullying in schools, especially in the context of homophobia and transphobia. Lastly, the third group of articles reports on the reactions to the same projects that are at the centre of Phase 1 of this investigation. For each article, I outline three main considerations concerning its content (e.g. main arguments for or against educational projects) and one consideration concerning the way the author of the article intends to convey their message, through

which expedients (use of sarcastic comments, neutral language, etc.).

As previously outlined, the first articles deal with a gender approach to education, and more broadly to gender issues as a whole. This allows for a general overview of the way gender issues are reported in the media and, specifically, in online versions of newspapers:

- "*Educazione al genere, la mappa delle 'buone pratiche' nelle scuole italiane*"[1], published on 12 June 2013, written by journalist and blogger Stefania Prandi for the online version of the newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. This article is one of the first articles to deal with these issues, before the controversy really "exploded" in the country. This characteristic justifies its incorporation in the analysis.

- *"Gender a scuola. Prima che i nostri figli subiscano l'inculturazione LGBT di Stato, sarà bene provare a resistere"*[2], published on 26 January 2014, written by journalist Luigi Amicone, on the online version of the newspaper *Tempi*, which he himself co-founded. The term "LGBT enculturation" itself calls for an interesting analysis. My choice was also guided by the fact that this is one of the older articles published on these issues and that it comes from the Catholic newspaper.

- "*Tutti pazzi per il gender*"[3], published on 31 March 2015, and written by journalist Chiara Lalli for *Internazionale*. This article constitutes an attempt to clarify what it means to talk about "gender".

1. "Gender education, the map of 'good practices' in Italian schools."
2. "Gender at school. Before our children are subjected to the state LGBT enculturation, it would be good to attempt to resist."
3. "Everyone [going] crazy about '*il gender*'."

- "*La crociata del gender. Il fantasma che agita i Cattolici*"[1], published on 22 June 2015, written by Michela Marzano, and published in the online version of the newspaper *la Repubblica*. I have incorporated this article in the analysis, mainly because *la Repubblica* is one of the main Italian newspapers, as previously underlined.

The second group of articles concerns issues of gender in education, specifically at a national level, and in the specific instance of the booklets against homophobia drafted and published by UNAR in 2014:

- "*Ma re e regine fanno male ai bambini? La guida contro la discriminazione sconsiglia ai genitori di leggere le fiabe ai bambini: promuovono solo la famiglia*"[2], published on 15 February 2014 on the online version of the newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, and written by the journalist Isabella Bossi Fedrigotti. I have chosen this article once more because, as in the case of *la Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera* is one of the main Italian newspapers and, as such, it should be investigated so as to explore the position of a newspaper with a large readership.

- "*A scuola di gender (con le famiglie escluse)*"[3], published on 23 March 2014, and written by Antonio Sanfrancesco for the Italian Catholic newspaper *Famiglia Cristiana*. I have chosen this article as one of the articles by Catholic newspapers that directly report the publication of the booklets by UNAR.

1. "The '*gender*' crusade. The ghost that scares Catholics."
2. "Do kings and queens harm children? The guidelines against discrimination discourage parents from reading fairy tales to their children: they promote only the family."
3. "At school to learn about *gender* (with the families being excluded)."

– "*Omofobia: a scuola la Chiesa censura. Essere gay in classe è un calvario. Ma non eravamo uno stato laico*?"[1], published on 16 April 2014, and written by Michele Sasso and Francesca Sironi, for the weekly newspaper, in its online version, *L'Espresso*. As specified earlier, *L'Espresso* is an important Italian weekly newspaper, edited by the same publishing company as *la Repubblica*. I have chosen this article because of its potential readership, and because of its very explicit position on the matter.

The final newspaper articles deal explicitly with the projects at a local level within the municipality of Cagliari and, specifically, the projects that we have dealt with in Phase 1 of this investigation:

– "*Zedda spende 10mila euro per spiegare ai bambini che esistono i gay*"[2], published on 9 February 2014 by Jacopo Norfo for the online newspaper *Casteddu On Line*. I have chosen this article because of the local audience of *Casteddu On Line* in the reality of Cagliari, and because of the clear misinformation evident already from the title of the article.

– "*Cagliari, scuole elementari. Il progetto gender bloccato dalle famiglie è riapparso in altri istituti*"[3], published on 26 October 2014, by Benedetta Frigerio for the online version of the newspaper *Tempi*. I have chosen this article because *Tempi* is a newspaper that deals with issues at the national

1. "Homophobia: at school the Church censors. To be gay at school is an ordeal. Were we not a secular State?"
2. "Zedda spends 10 thousand euros to explain to children that gay people exist."
3. "Cagliari, primary schools. The gender project previously blocked by families has reappeared in other institutes."

level, and in this specific case it takes into consideration the case of Cagliari and the educational project *Alla scoperta della differenza*.

– *"Scuola, polemica sui corsi gender. 'Spetta a noi educare i nostri figli'"*[1], published on 28 November 2014, written by Manuela Arca for the online version of *L'Unione Sarda*. I have chosen this article primarily because *L'Unione Sarda* is the main newspaper in Sardinia.

Declarations of religious representatives

Some examples of public declarations made by representatives of the Catholic Church on the issue of gender in education and specifically on the *teoria del gender* are relevant to this investigation. In the course of the investigation, I use as an example only a limited number of declarations, such as remarks made by Pope Francis, rather than declarations from representatives with a smaller audience, and evaluate their potential impact.

The nature of the opposition posed to efforts to integrate a gender approach into education is most often of Catholic affiliation. Moreover, the strong link between religion and politics in Italy is particularly relevant. In fact, in Italy, the presence of the Catholic Church seems to be able to affect not only public life but politics as well. Garelli (2014) points out that this could potentially derive from a number of reasons, such as the fact that the Italian Church is well structured all over the country and, therefore, it manifests not only the need for shared values, but also specific interests to defend. Moreover, political institutions have proved to be particularly weak

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1. "School, controversy on the gender courses. 'It is up to us to educate our children'."

in the last few decades and consequently need to take the Catholic representation into account.

Garelli (2014) also emphasises that over the years, the Church had lost some of its voice in the political reality. It is in this context that, especially from the mid-1990s, the Italian Catholic Church initiated the so called *Progetto culturale della Chiesa italiana* (Cultural project of the Italian Church). This project, led at the time by Cardinal Camillo Ruini and later overseen by Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, means to reunite Catholics around the country under the typical values and principles of Catholic tradition, such as the promotion of family and freedom of education, and to push Catholics to become once again the protagonists of the cultural life in the country (Garelli, 2014). It is for these reasons that I choose to engage with official statements made by representatives of the Catholic Church and, more precisely, by Pope Francis and Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, president of the CEI, the Italian Episcopal Conference (*Conferenza Episcopale Italiana*). These statements have been reported by the Catholic newspapers *Tempi* and *Famiglia Cristiana*, as well as by the Catholic newspaper *Avvenire*[1].

– Statement by Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, president of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) and archbishop of the city of Genova, in an interview for Radio Vaticana on 17 October 2014, in the conclusive phase of the synod[2]. I have chosen this statement because Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco often speaks out in the public sphere in Italy, not only in

1. The newspaper *Avvenire* was created on 4 December 1968, according to its website as a response to a call from Pope Paul VI to create a new daily newspaper that could unite Italian Catholics, as explained in its website. Together with *Famiglia Cristiana* and *Tempi*, they constitutes the main Catholic newspapers in Italy.

2. The audio and transcript of the interview can be accessed at http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/10/17/bagnasco_teoria_del_genere,_calpestati_diritti_genitori/1108826

this specific context, but on broader issues as well. In fact, as the president of the CEI, he can be considered one of the Catholic Church's main spokespeople in the Italian context. As previously underlined, he is at the forefront of the *Progetto culturale della Chiesa italiana* after Cardinal Camillo Ruini.

– Statement by Pope Francis in response a to journalist's questions on a flight back from Manila, Philippines, on 20 January 2015. The video was posted on YouTube and reported by a number of news outlets.[1] I have chosen these statements by Pope Francis, first of all, because of his position as the leader of the Catholic Church. Moreover, I believe his remarks have special impact. He is particularly loved by Italian Catholics, and on multiple occasions in recent years he has been considered more open to gender issues, for example in relation to homosexuality, than his predecessorss. Therefore, the impact of his statements and words in relation to gender issues is particularly strong among different generations of Catholics.

– Statement by Pope Francis during one of the public papal audiences, held most Wednesday mornings in St Peter's Square. Specifically, this statement is an extract from the audience that took place on 15 April 2015[2].

1. The video of the statement from 20 January 2015 can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rl4nudTT-dk
2. The video of the statement from 15 April 2015 can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iu6xxvoy04

Within this framework, focus is placed on the nature of the declarations, outlining the main arguments presented in the discourse. It would definitely have been interesting to analyse in depth the particularities and details of the specific language and discourse used in each statement. However, in view of the scope of this research and the barrier posed by the translation of terminology from Italian to English, this will not be the chosen aspect of this analysis.

"Anti-gender" initiatives

Some examples of "anti-gender" initiatives allow for an overview and a general understanding of the activities carried out by different associations. For each resource, I also outline three main considerations concerning content, and one consideration concerning the way the message is conveyed, when relevant.

- Firstly, I analyse some flyers that have been circulated as printed copies during events and conferences organised by the different associations involved in the so-called "anti-gender" initiatives, and shared on Facebook and WhatsApp. These flyers were published initially in response to the publication of the UNAR booklets in 2014. These have been used for different purposes and on different occasions in relation to educational projects and this is the reason why they are taken into consideration here (e.g. according to my informants' testimonies in Phase 1 of this investigation, these flyers were shared on WhatsApp at the time of the implementation of the *Alla scoperta della differenza* project).

- Next, I examine a petition published in March 2014 on the website *Notizie pro-vita* against the UNAR strategy and against the "Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe"

of the World Health Organisation and the BZgA Research Institute. This petition shows a specific action carried out by the associations and it combines the UNAR strategy with the framework for sexuality education provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO). This element is of particular importance because it emphasises the multitude of issues that are associated with the notion of "gender" in the Italian context and public opinion.

- Lastly, a video published and disseminated by the Italian branch of the association *Manif Pour Tous*, now named *Generazione Famiglia*, is of particular relevance. The video was published on YouTube on 4 December 2014 and posted again on Facebook on 24 April 2014 [1]. I chose this video because of its presence on social medias. Accompanied by the hashtag #nogender, it was shared on social media such as Facebook and spread by the association, for a total of around 200,000 views on YouTube by December 2016, and 87,000 views on Facebook, with the link having been shared 36,000 times. These numbers should be treated cautiously, since, for example, YouTube counts every view from the same account. Moreover, it does not necessarily mean that all the people who shared the video agreed with it: there could be cases of people criticising it. However, the numbers do give an idea of how widely the video was circulated.

1. The video realised and shared by *Generazione Famiglia* can be accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3hndmjeUhc

Limitations and challenges

Before proceeding with the main analysis, it is imperative to first highlight the limitations of the investigation's research design and to present some of the reasons behind my methodological choices.

First, the language of investigation is a fundamental issue. In fact, I needed to alternate the use of English, Italian and French, owing to the use of different academic sources and because of the specific case study at hand. Especially in the context of specific translations, this is particularly complicated. What makes it even more complex is the fact that in Italian certain terms – and, in particular, the term "gender"– are used in their English form, having however acquired different – and in fact inaccurate – meanings and connotations for the public (i.e. "*il gender*" as an ideology, often interchanged with the phrase *teoria* or *ideologia del gender*). This issue is undoubtedly inherent to every translation.

Furthermore, for example, French and Italian are both "gendered languages", where every term is either masculine or feminine. This is not the case in English, which can be problematic when attempting to highlight certain subtleties of the translations. To eliminate this limitation, I have decided, beginning in the conceptual and contextual framework, to directly translate the different elements to include French and Italian literature. This allows for more accurate translations of terms in the specific context of this research. In fact, as the person that is most aware of the content, objectives and direction of the research, I believe I can better translate the connotations and implications of the main terms at hand, rather than a third person. This can in turn be limiting, determining for example the lack of "fluidity" in certain translations.

Furthermore, I needed to undertake this process being fully conscious not to change any term to "favour" my hypotheses. Being aware of this limitation, the translations I provide are instrumental in

presenting the issues to the reader more clearly, and are not central to my analysis. In order to further counteract this limitation, I have asked some English native speakers, from different fields of research as well as specifically from a background in gender studies, to proof-read my translations and make sure that grammatical accuracy is maintained.

Choosing Cagliari as a case study can be both an enriching and a limiting choice. In fact, the fact that I am particularly familiar with the context gives me a certain insight: at the same time, it being a very familiar context, I am also strongly attached to the issue at an emotional and personal level. It is certainly impossible to be impartial or completely detached from the matter. However, it is my responsibility as a researcher to exploit the familiarity, without letting myself be overcome by my preconceptions. At each stage, I needed to constantly reflect on my preconceptions and to critically deconstruct them before going on to the next step of the research.

Another limitation of this methodology is the scope, unfortunately also "dictated" by the nature of this research as a Master's thesis. With respect to Phase 1, the research could be developed further, interviewing teachers and school managers, as well as representatives of the different associations that express open opposition to the implementation of educational projects. For example, it would have been particularly interesting to specifically analyse the arguments at the centre of the "anti-gender" discourse. As previously mentioned, due to the scope of a Master's dissertation and the limitations posed by the language and the need to translate from Italian to English, I have chosen not to develop the analysis in this direction. However, this can definitely constitute an opportunity to further develop the research in the future.

Another element in Phase 1 is the nature of the interviews and the manners in which they were carried out. The experts and coordinators of the projects welcomed me and were particularly keen

to share their experiences. Because of this, from the outset, all the interviews were more like conversations than actual interviews. This is definitely a positive element for a number of reasons.

Firstly, a more informal conversation, often in an informal setting like a café, allowed interviewees to feel comfortable enough to share certain information with me, sometimes even expressing an additional comment "off the record".

Secondly, this meant that no uncomfortable situation was created, as can sometimes happen when either the interviewer or interviewee feels they are in an inferior position. In no instance were any awkward or uncomfortable feelings generated, as demonstrated also by interviewees' explicit feedback. However, this informal interaction can also be problematic. In fact, the casual nature of our conversations made it so that I felt somehow close to them, especially when they entrusted me with a precious element of information for my research. This could have been uncomfortable had I wanted to analyse the projects more directly, for example, and possibly criticise their structure and their implementation. In this case, I could have felt as if I were somehow betraying their trust and their openness with me. Specifically analysing the problem was not my objective, so this was not a problem *per se*. However, I believe it is important to highlight this element because it is a potential challenge, and I believe it is fundamental to take note of it in order to adapt my position as a researcher depending on my main objectives for future research projects.

Furthermore, it would have certainly been interesting to further develop these interviews, for example engaging with teachers and school managers and perhaps even participants in these projects. However, because of the schedule and regulations of the Ethics Committee of the Psychology and Educational Sciences Department at the University of Geneva, and because of the time frame for the elaboration of this research, I could not carry out actual fieldwork.

Thus, these interviews focused on the projects themselves and the coordinators' experience and expertise in their implementation.

Moreover, one of the challenges derived from not having access to the same amount of material and information for each project. Therefore, in a way, the investigation can appear somewhat asymmetric. For the *SAVE* project, for instance, I did not have access to specific material on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project; all I had was the information available on the website of the University of Cagliari and the information I gathered from my interview with its representative.

In terms of Phase 2, engaging with public opinion at three different levels, under three different themes, is quite complicated without going into depth. For example, it would have perhaps been preferable to have a more "symmetrical" number of articles *per* chosen newspaper. However, one of my primary objectives for Phase 2 is to provide a *general* overview of public opinion. In a different context, had I decided to investigate the specific area of public opinion exclusively, it would have been more worthwhile to select a greater number of articles and explore them in greater depth.

Furthermore, the fact that the newspapers I have chosen are in their online versions and not also in their paper version could be considered as a limitation. It would have perhaps been more exhaustive, for example, to look in archives of the printed versions, or to expand the analysis to include televised news outlets and political programmes. However, I intentionally chose to use online newspapers because of the power of social media in informing the public about daily news, as previously outlined. Whether the information is reliable or not, social networks such as Facebook allow for immediate sharing and exchange of articles and news, and this is unprecedented. For the same reason, I have chosen campaigns that were developed both online and in print as well as strictly online campaigns, such as the distribution of flyers against the UNAR book-

lets and the video shared by the association *Generazione Famiglia*. Moreover, an expansion of the analysis to include additional news outlets would have been more appropriate if the analysis of public opinion had been the central research question, which is not the case in this book.

It was particularly challenging to collect the required data so as to investigate the Italian situation of the last couple of years. However, I had the opportunity to engage with relevant academic papers (e.g. Avanza, 2015; Foti, 2015; Marzano, 2015). It was also possible to identify similarities with the French case, and French academic literature has been more developed in recent years on these issues.

At a practical level, there were a great many concepts to define in order to provide an exhaustive yet concise conceptual framework. It was incredibly challenging to choose the appropriate concepts to define, and to find a structure that would appear clear and comprehensive. This was something I was particularly interested in, especially since we have found that there are so many misunderstandings and so much lack of awareness about the distinction between the different concepts, as well as their interconnection.

Chapter 4
Analysis: case studies and the public opinion

Governmental efforts in the context of the implementation of gender-responsive educational projects have been promptly opposed and blocked in different ways. This has happened, especially since 2013, through petitions, peaceful actions and protests, political lobbying, legal actions and cultural mobilisation, through the "anti-gender" conferences and initiatives previously mentioned (Avanza, 2015).

The first part of this investigation (Phase 1) is centred on the implementation of educational projects at a local level, specifically in the municipality of Cagliari, Sardinia. I therefore focus on the obstacles posed to the development and implementation of these projects. Thanks to the contribution of the main projects' coordinators, I have the opportunity to outline the main steps of the implementation of some of the projects, while attempting to understand the ways in which these projects have been boycotted. The objective of this section is to understand at what level these obstacles arise, and in what form, in order to be able to develop strategies to engage with them at a later date.

Based on the hypothesis of the presence of a strong confusion of terms and meanings related to gender issues broadly speaking, and specifically to gender issues in education, the second phase of my investigation (Phase 2) explores public opinion in Italy. In particular, I consider some of the ways it is shaped and reinforced. In order to do so, I look at (a) the role of newspapers and the way they present these issues to the public; (b) the role of civil society and campaigns, which specifically lead "anti-gender" initiatives; (c) the declarations of representatives of the Catholic Church. The objective of this section is to understand the environment and the general perception of these issues. Understanding public opinion also provides us with an understanding of how teachers, school managers and parents are informed about these issues, and how they are consequently influenced in their responses and reactions.

Phase 1: three projects in Cagliari

This phase of the Analysis observes the implementation of different educational projects, which represent efforts at a local level to integrate a gender perspective into education. More precisely, three projects are central to this analysis: *Alla scoperta della differenza*, *Ci piacCiAmo!... anche in biblioteca*, and *SAVE*. The first two projects are directed specifically to children between primary and lower-secondary educational establishments. The last one targeted specifically teachers.

For each project I present its objectives and its planned structure, the actors at the centre of its organisation, and its actual implementation. Moreover, for each project, I outline some remarks concerning the obstacles its coordinators had to face. In conclusion, I highlight differences and similarities in the implementation of the different projects and, more specifically, in the obstacles they encountered. The objective of this analysis is precisely to understand at what level these obstacles arise, and in what form. This insight will

make it possible to develop strategies to engage with them and make a stand against them.

For the description of the projects, I collected information through the websites of the different associations and coordinators, through material provided directly by their coordinators and through the interviews conducted with them. It was these conversations in particular that enabled me to outline the ways in which the obstacles unravelled.

Alla scoperta della differenza

Main actors

The *Alla scoperta della differenza* (Discovering diversity) project was funded by the Commission for Equal Opportunities of the City of Cagliari. More precisely, on 3 December 2013, the Commission issued a call for proposals, for projects meant to deconstruct gender stereotypes through educational solutions, for a total amount of 8,500 euros. In particular, the main objectives presented were:

- To combat gender stereotypes that produce segregation and limit the full expression and fulfilment of one's self.
- To make children reflect on their own gender identity and their own aspirations and wishes.
- To show how children have a certain perception of themselves based on their gender identity.
- To lead children to think about discrimination and about the positivity of "diversity".
- To promote and spread a culture of equality among teachers, families and other educational staff involved in the project, to create a shared path meant to deconstruct discriminatory logic and to promote integration of diversity, while fighting the fundamental causes of gender-based discrimination, gender-based violence and homophobia.

Three broader objectives were defined as:
- – To acquire the knowledge and skills required to exercise citizenship and responsible development.
- – To integrate diversity.
- – To integrate the school and the districts.

The initial call for proposals indicated three preferred schools as the primary schools of the municipality of Pirri and in the Mulinu Becciu district in Cagliari. As indicated by the former president of the Commission, the initial choice of institutions was determined by an investigation that intended to look at the availability of funding and projects of the schools all over the Cagliari territory. In fact, the schools chosen were among the ones to have received less funding and projects in the previous academic year.

On 30 December 2013, the Commission officially assigned the *Alla scoperta della differenza* project to the Social Cooperative *Agape*. *Agape* is a Social Cooperative that centres its work on activities based on "social assistance and psycho-educational services" (Agape, 2014). The fundamental objective of their work is to create better opportunities for their clients, planning, carrying out and managing consultant operations and support for people and services all over Sardinia. They thus manifest a particular interest in mental health-related issues and in creating support for people with disabilities. The director of the cooperative pointed out that the work it does is rooted in the expertise and competence of its professionals, who are extensively trained to work in delicate situations, such as in an educational context.

Agape, through the work of a psychologist, took charge of the part of the project designed for children in the classroom. The representatives of the Social Cooperative then contacted the association *Se non ora, quando* ("If not now, when"), to ask them to take charge of the part of the projects designed for families, teachers and other educational staff involved in the lives of the children. This associa-

tion was created by a number of women from different backgrounds, coming from different feminist groups and associations, from the world of politics, education and journalism, with the specific intent to make women's voices heard in Italy. The association has offices all over Italy: the one involved in the *Alla scoperta della differenza* project is the Sardinian office, based in the city of Cagliari.

The project

The first part of the project, targeting children and led by Agape's psychologist was composed of two sub-parts. First of all, the children were required to fill out a questionnaire of 15 questions. This would help to frame and elaborate the following part of the project, which was planned to be composed of a series of simple activities, especially games, designed to treat themes such as gender roles and gender stereotypes. This project did not intend to tackle sexual differences, gender identity or sexual orientation. The interviewee highlighted that they believed that the "field" was not ready to engage with these issues, due to a lack of awareness campaigns.

The questionnaire was elaborated by using and readapting some of the items in a questionnaire distributed in 25 primary schools in other cities in the rest of Italy. It was divided into two sections: the first nine questions were meant to understand the way children conceive of what it means to talk about something being masculine or feminine. Moreover, it intended to identify the most frequent gender stereotypes, concerning for example what constitutes feminine and masculine characteristics *per se*. The second section of the questionnaire, composed of six questions, more specifically intended to investigate the children's perception of professions as masculine or feminine.

The second part of the project consisted of activities to be carried out by the psychologist directly in the classroom: for example, working with images and with the realities that are more personal

and closer to children. The questionnaire could be useful in framing this part of the project more precisely to this purpose.

As previously noted, the association *Se non ora, quando* (SNOQ) was in charge of the part of the project targeting parents, teachers and other educational staff, to effectively involve them in the execution of the project. The main objective of this initiative was to "activate" the understanding of diversity as a value. Because of this, these sessions were meant to tackle issues related to the realities where gender-based discrimination too often occurs in our society, such as the family and the school, engaging specifically with questions related to stereotypes and how they are communicated. These sessions were planned with the intent to be dynamic and to put parents' thoughts at their centre, to stimulate their reasoning and opinions. The materials for such activities were books, stories, games and videos. Three main sessions were initially planned.

Implementation

When it was time to implement the projects, the cooperative *Agape* realised that the school managers had not been previously informed about the projects: therefore, they needed to contact them themselves. At this point, the school managers would have had to present the projects to their teachers, and ideally certain teachers would have been keen to participate and, therefore, would volunteer their classes. However, this is not how it turned out. Some school managers did not even allow the conversation to start, while in some other cases, the project was halted at a second stage.

For example, *Agape*'s representatives organised a meeting with different representatives of one of the schools, the *Istituto comprensivo Colombo*, involving the school manager and teachers. Some of the teachers seemed particularly interested in the project, while others demonstrated some doubts, especially concerning the potential reactions of parents to the initiative. From the outset, some parents attempted to thwart the project, and their initiatives led

some of the teachers who were initially interested to turn down the opportunity. In the course of the interviews I was not able to find out precisely how many parents were involved in this opposition. However, all the experts specified that they were few in number, but that their opposition was strong and united. In this specific case, the school manager defended the project and attempted to push for its implementation, organising some preliminary meetings with the parents and sharing the information (such as the questionnaire) with them to make them more comfortable with the content of the project. However, one group of parents was very determined to put a stop to it. By mounting a strong campaign on social media, they put enough pressure on the school manager and the other school representatives to have the project officially stopped.

As a result of this strong opposition, none of the three schools that were initially considered in the call for proposals by the Commission was willing to integrate the initiative *Alla scoperta della differenza*. At this point, the Cooperative *Agape*, with the help of the Commission for Equal Opportunities, was able to identify another school that approved it. In this specific case, the school manager of the *Istituto comprensivo Ciusa* was familiar with *Agape*'s work in other instances and trusted their expertise.

At the beginning of September, *Agape* organised a meeting with the school manager and the teachers to present the various steps of the project, and to establish the dates for each activity, together with the association SNOQ. Between the months of September and October, *Agape* organised sessions for all teachers from the second to the fifth grade of primary school, for a total of 12 teachers, all women. Through three sessions, each lasting two hours, the cooperative stimulated a conversation about gender stereotypes, specifically identifying a link with the different subjects taught at school. As a conclusion of the session, the professionals provided some possible ways for teachers to integrate a gender approach to their daily lessons. After that, they organised one introductory meeting

to explain the different steps of the project to the parents, which 16 parents attended.

SNOQ took charge of additional sessions specifically directed to the parents and other educational staff of the school. These meetings were supposed to take place on 18 November, 3 December and 19 December 2014. At the first meeting, no one showed up. At the second meeting, five people attended: two mothers, one grandmother and two staff members. The session was particularly focused on the theme of stereotypes, prejudices and different forms of discrimination. The third session was not met with any response, and once more, no one attended.

Next, the project took place in the classrooms, involving in total 66 children (41 boys and 25 girls), of which 16 were from the third year of primary school, 15 from the fourth year and 35 from the fifth, for an age range between 7 and 10 years old, in a total of five classes. After presenting the questionnaire to the children, the activities were carried out by the professional psychologist of the Cooperative *Agape* through three sessions, each lasting two hours, for each class. The teachers actively participated in the different activities and were fundamental in seeing the project through to a successful conclusion.

A report provided by *Agape* and the Commission for Equal Opportunities shows the results of the questionnaire[1]. For example, some of the games and toys identified as "for boys" include playing soccer, playing basketball, using little toy cars and airplanes (identified as masculine especially by the girls) and pretending to fight, or to box (identified as masculine especially by the boys). The games and toys identified as "for girls" are playing with dolls and dancing, putting make-up on or playing as a hairdresser. It is important to note that an evaluation of these results needs to be taken into account, also in relation to the population of the schools. In fact, it is certainly possible to argue that other elements come into play in the different

1. The report can be accessed at http://slideplayer.it/slide/5654810

choices identified by children, such as pressures and influences related to social status, for example.

On 2 July 2015, the Commission for Equal Opportunities organised a session to discuss the project and to give a voice to the Social Cooperative *Agape*, the association S*NOQ*, and the teachers and school managers of the school where the project was carried out, and also to deal with the opposition put up by the associations *Sentinelle in Piedi* and *Associazione famiglie numerose*. This session was open to the public.

Remarks

Some considerations concerning the obstacles encountered, especially thanks to the conversations with the interviewees, can be provided.

All experts highlighted the political dynamics that came into play. The implementation of this project came at a time of political elections in Sardinia, specifically on 16 February 2014, which saw Francesco Pigliaru, from the centre-left party *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party, PD), elected President of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia. School managers themselves are part of the political dynamics, as they are part of the politics of the districts where their schools operate. Therefore, a great deal of political pressure was brought to bear, and defending or opposing these projects became a political issue. The opposition was expressed strongly against the City Administration, specifically referring to the Mayor's intentions and his political agenda.

Nevertheless, the nature of the opposition should also be explored. The leaders of this movement were the associations affiliated with the Catholic Church, the *Associazione Famiglie Numerose* and the *Sentinelle in Piedi*. According to the experts, it seemed that the people openly opposing these projects did not read the actual project and its description: in fact, a strong campaign of misinformation was carried out, showing an obvious lack of knowledge concerning the content of the project. The opposition was strongly

directed against the Commission for Equal Opportunities of the City Administration and the Mayor, and particularly the association SNOQ. This could possibly be due to its nature as an association composed of women activists and because it had reportedly previously supported the candidature of Massimo Zedda as the Mayor of Cagliari in 2011. SNOQ's president underlines that some of the attacks particularly focused on the association as a *feminist* organisation, referring to feminism with a negative connotation. Some of the misinformation provided by the associations, especially on Facebook, was for example related to the amount of funds directed to the project, sums which were always exaggerated. On WhatsApp, groups of parents would share false information about the content of the projects, making (inaccurate) reference to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) framework of "Standards for sexuality education".

All the coordinators highlighted the need to involve parents and relatives in order to actually have an impact. However, they also recognised that this is a very delicate and complex issue. They stressed the importance of preparing parents to understand these issues. The members of the associations at the front line of the opposition did not numerically constitute a large group of people. However, they were very vocal about their disapproval and very active, carrying out specific (and aggressive) campaigns, and spreading information through WhatsApp and Facebook, as mentioned earlier. The main problem is that there was not a strong and united block in favour of the projects, except for the association and social cooperative involved in the project, the City Administration and the association *ARC onlus Cagliari*[1], which expressed and reiterated their support for the initiative. However, the experts argue that parents were not properly aware of the issues at stake and, therefore, they tended to

1. The association *ARC onlus Cagliari* was created in 2002 in Cagliari to promote and defend LGBTI rights. Its website can be accessed at http://www.associazionearc.eu

be influenced by those parents who were active members of those associations.

Concerning the actual implementation of the project in the *Istituto Comprensivo Ciusa*, and the absence of parents in the sessions run by SNOQ, the coordinators believe that the difficulties might have depended on the complicated situations of the students and their families. In fact, issues of gender equality did not seem to be a priority.

Overall, all experts highlighted in different ways one main problem: a strong lack of general awareness. There is no way to properly defend these projects, present them and explain them step by step, because people are given a tremendous amount of misinformation, which reinforces their fears and their misunderstanding. Political agendas and interests come to the fore, with politicians exploiting this misinformation, so that efforts are strongly opposed simply because a specific political party is putting the proposals forward.

Ci piacCiAmo!… anche in biblioteca

The project
The project *Ci piacCiAmo!* was organised by the cultural association *Menabó*, which conducts cultural activities with the purpose of knowledge sharing, and in particular to spread scientific, historical, archaeological, artistic and cultural knowledge. Many of its activities are centred on the fight against all types of discrimination. The members of the association strongly believe in the power of education: acting with the young so that they can contribute to creating and reinforcing models based on mutual respect.

In 2013, the educators of this association decided to build a project around illustrated books for children. Strongly aware of the importance and potential of the messages often found (indirectly and

directly) in these publications, they decided to construct a project that could address *differences* and diversity. *Differences* need to be interpreted in their broad meaning, including gender differences, differences in sexual orientation, ethnic differences, language differences and religious differences. This project was initially meant for children within their educational institutions, but was also designed to talk to adults "with the images and words of the very young".[1]

On 24 September 2013, the Department of Culture of the city administration (*Assessorato alla Cultura*) issued a call for proposals of projects meant to strengthen cultural opportunities within public libraries, for the academic year 2014[2], offering a budget of up to 5,000 euros. The focal point of the projects presented was to be the promotion of reading, and they should be carried out through creative and expressive activities. The main objectives of the projects should be: (a) to stimulate children to see reading as a creative discovery and expression; (b) to foster an image of libraries as a place of exchange, discovery and socialisation for children and the adults involved in their lives; (c) to promote and facilitate teamwork; (d) to facilitate the development of creativity; (d) to promote the integration of diversity.

It is in this context that the *Menabó* association adapted their project *Ci piacCiAmo!* to be carried out specifically with children from 6 to 9 years old, in local public libraries. The association presented a project designed to educate children to recognise gender stereotypes and learn about the widespread actions of discrimination in our society. It then became: *Ci piacCiAmo!... anche in biblioteca*, which translates to "We like each other!...also in the library". The name of the project refers to the illustrated book "Ci piacCiAmo!",

1. The website of the association Menabó can be accessed at http://www.associazionemenabo.it/ci-piacciamo
2. "*Bando per la selezione di percorsi progettuali finalizzati al potenziamento dell'offerta culturale nelle biblioteche comunali per l'anno 2014.*"

by JuanolO, whose fundamental message is that as humans, what we have in common is that we all like each other, and that it does not matter who you like, as long as you like them a lot (JuanolO, 2006).

The libraries at the centre of the project were the public libraries of the city of Cagliari, the Mediateca del Mediterraneo, the Biblioteca Regina Elena, the Biblioteca G.B. Tuveri, Biblioteca del Lazzaretto di Sant'Elia and the Biblioteca di Pirri.

The target group included children between the ages of 6 and 9, from five different classrooms, coming from schools geographically close to the libraries of reference. The direct involvement of teachers was included in the project. Moreover, it intended to directly involve the children's families, who could be asked for example to help them find material that could be useful in carrying out the activities (e.g. images, photos, texts). In the presentation, the *Menabó* association specifically highlighted the importance of working with adults and families in order to make for a continuity of the activities carried out in class and in the libraries. The fundamental objectives of this project are grouped under four main areas of focus:

1. Deconstruction of gender stereotypes
– To develop critical skills in the context of the recognition of stereotypes.
– To get students used to listening and to comprehending the potential, expectations and needs of others.
– To share the experiences of the value and potential of diversity.
– To experience the positive results of participative and inclusive collaboration, without conflicts.
– To develop a sense of satisfaction in succeeding in understanding one another.
– To promote respect for freedom of all forms of expression
– To spread good inclusive practices.

2. Individual development and awareness
- To facilitate knowledge of themes related to gender-based discrimination.
- To stimulate young people to research all resources and means of information and communication.
- To promote the development of language and educational achievements.
- To give access to cultural expression in all its forms.
- To stimulate individual imagination and creativity.
- To develop manual skills.
- To prepare to engage with different methodologies and types of didactic approach.
- To learn how to recognise and communicate one's needs.
- To strengthen young people and support them in their pursuit of freedom and security.
- To encourage young people to develop critical skills.

3. Integration and good practice
- To encourage dialogue and peer cooperation.
- To develop the competences and awareness of each participant, to the advantage of an inclusive social life.
- To attain common objectives, with benefits for each member of the community.
- To strengthen the use of information technology.

4. Strengthening of the role of public libraries
- To create and reinforce the habit of reading in the students.
- To stimulate curiosity towards books and the perception of reading as a moment of discovery and creative expression.
- To foster an image of libraries as a place of exchange, discovery and socialisation.
- To create a "listening" habit.

In order to attain these objectives, the educators of the *Menabó* association thought up a variety of activities. Their work was centred on illustrated books (e.g. from the publishing house *Lo Stampatello* and *Settenove*), through the recognition of the potential of combining written text and drawings, between poetry and prose, and their visual translation and interpretation. Moreover, they intended to present a comparison with books produced in different countries, to allow children to be confronted with different representations of different realities. The main focus of the activities was to work together with the children to construct and understand common objectives. The educators would constantly encourage children to be creative and to stretch their imagination by producing drawings, texts and compositions. In order to do so, the activities would involve different instruments in addition to the illustrated books, such as videos (e.g. shorts and brief documentaries) and music. In total, the educators of the *Menabó* association devised six sessions for each library, for a total of 30 sessions directly with the children. In addition to these, they also planned for some sessions directed to teachers and library staff.

Implementation

Menabó's proposal was accepted by the *Assessorato alla Cultura* of the city of Cagliari, and obtained the full funding of 5,000 euros, to implement the project between October 2014 and January 2015. First of all, the association asked the representatives of the city administration themselves to make initial contact with the schools, which had been selected according to their geographical proximity to the libraries of reference. Interestingly enough, one of the school managers was actually in charge of two different institutions and, therefore, two different classes of students that then took part in the project. The relevance of this element will become evident.

Choosing the schools and finally the classes was part of a process. However, some headmasters were not responding positively. When the school manager agreed, then the offer of the project was

presented to the teachers, who then volunteered their classes. As a result of negotiations and exchanges, in the end the age range of the students was finally between 5 and 11. This was initially problematic for the educators of the association, since not only they were out of the range for which they had built the project, but also because there was now a six-year age gap. At this point, the educators made sure to adapt the project and its main activities accordingly.

The teachers of the classes that were finally chosen, according to the coordinators, appeared to be very enthusiastic and ready to cooperate and be actively involved. The opposition started once the activities were already under way: after one session in one of the institutions, one of the educators received a phone call that simply said that it would be better not to continue with the following activities. No additional information was ever provided by the teacher or by the school manager, even after several attempts on the part of the members of the *Association Menabó* to contact them.

This shows that even in the schools where the project had been given the green light, not all school managers were fully aware of its nature and, therefore, were not able to defend it. In this specific case, the school manager was also managing another of the institutions involved in the project. In that reality, there were no complaints and the project was successfully carried out. In a third institution, some parents opposed to the project made sure that the class initially selected interrupted the project. However, the school manager, strongly believing in the activities and the opportunities stemming from them, suggested that another class would take their place. In fact, other teachers were interested in involving their own classes. The fourth and fifth school also had no problem or interference: the project was welcomed and carried out in an effective manner, with the involvement of teachers and families.

When the school actually put a stop to the project, four of the sessions were opened to the public. However, these sessions were

boycotted: parents spread the word and in the end no one brought their children to attend them. As in the case of the *Alla scoperta della differenza* project, the opposition was often filtered by Facebook and by campaigns on WhatsApp.

Remarks

The interviewees emphasised that the nature of the opposition revealed a fundamental misunderstanding about the objectives and content of the project, with a subsequent campaign of misinformation. The question that arises (and will keep arising in the course of this research) is whether this misinformation is provided by individuals who are conscious of its misguided nature or whether it is the result of an honest misunderstanding. Moreover, the interviewees stated that there are not many people defending these projects and those that do, do not necessarily have the full knowledge and understanding of the purpose of the projects, apart from the actors directly involved in their implementation.

They emphasised a particular challenge in dealing with the opposition. Sometimes it is difficult to take the criticism seriously, because it seems somehow absurd. Therefore, the instinctive reaction is either to laugh or to react with anger. Both approaches can be problematic and can be detrimental to the implementation of the projects. Moreover, a poor response can also generate a basis for the opposition to develop more easily, having something specific to attack.

As was the case with the project *Alla scoperta della differenza*, interviewees underlined the timing with the political election and political pressures. It is important to point out that I did not explicitly ask questions related to political dynamics, but all the experts made spontaneous reference to political interests and agendas in the course of our interviews.

SAVE (Stereotypes and Violence in Education)

The project and its implementation

The *SAVE* project was funded by the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Region of Sardinia for the academic year 2015–2016. This project is different from the previous projects, which received funding at the level of the municipality. This project is relevant to this investigation because of its nature and because it belongs to the context of Cagliari. The funding allowed for courses that were free for the participants. The project was carried out by a research team at the University of Cagliari, as part of the Master's programme in Gender Equality. The activities of the project were directed to teachers and school managers throughout the region, from different levels of schooling. The objective was to provide teachers with the skills to deal with gender issues in the classroom.

Working with teachers constituted a very specific choice, as they are the ones who can interact with the students on an everyday basis and really impact students' behaviours and attitudes. It is extremely important to prepare teachers to deal with these issues effectively. Participation in the project was on a voluntary basis: this means that a self-selection bias might be introduced, as only those already interested and/or aware of gender issues in education would participate. However, it should be emphasised that even if teachers are aware of and interested in these issues, they do need guidance and they need to be prepared to deal with these issues delicately and in the appropriate manner. In fact, as the coordinator highlights, even willing and well-meaning teachers can involuntary reinforce specific stereotypes when trying to guide the deconstruction of other ones.

The specific objectives of the project were to improve teachers' competences concerning gender-responsive policies and the deconstruction of stereotypes, and to make a first step in a process

towards the production of measurable results[1]. The activities were structured in three different phases. The first phase was directed to school managers and the political representatives of the different provinces, in order to illustrate the objectives of the training and the expected results, to involve all participants in the process and to adapt the different parts of the course according to the participants' needs and expectations. The second phase was composed of eight seminars, which would take place in different parts of the Region of Sardinia, to more fully involve participants all over Sardinia. Through an interactive structure, the courses were directed to teachers and focused on seven main themes:

– The influence of stereotypes on society and in everyday life.
– Nature, structure and transmission of "man" and "woman" stereotypes.
– Stereotypes in the educational context.
– The effect of stereotypes on male-female relationships and on violence against women.
– Different types of gender-based violence.
– The modification and reduction of stereotypes and of their effect on men-women relationships and on violence against women.
– The application of these modification and reduction strategies in the school system.

The third and last phase of the project was directed towards the participants who were interested in deepening specific knowledge in relation to the different school disciplines and subjects. In this case, the number of participants was limited to 25 per seminar, to allow more exhaustive interaction. Through these seminars, the participants would address specific examples of best practice, to comprehend

1. For a description of the project: sites.unica.it/mastergenderequality/save

how to apply the concepts and competences they had acquired and how to adapt them to their own professional reality. The six seminars tackled different issues:

- – Gender stereotypes in children literature.
- – Breaking down gendered language.
- – Disability and gender stereotypes.
- – Gender differences in sport.
- – Deviance and gender.
- – Educating to diversity.

Remarks

Overall, the course was well received by the public, and there were around 700 participants in total over the region. For this reason, the organisers contacted the regional Commission for additional funding, in order to be able to further develop the project in the course of the following academic year (2016–2017), to accommodate the people who had not previously had the opportunity to participate. However, the Commission had already directed the annual funding towards other projects. Thus, although the project might be renewed, this time the participants would need to pay a fee.

In the case of this project, there has not been significant opposition. As the coordinator points out, a special effort was made not to mention the term "gender" or "*genere*" in Italian when advertising the project. However, she received a number of e-mails asking for clarifications about the project, especially because of her role as Professor and coordinator of the Master's programme in Gender Equality at the University of Cagliari. However, none of this turned into active measures of opposition as we have seen in the case of *Alla scoperta della differenza* and *Ci piacCiAmo!...anche in biblioteca*.

Key findings

The first two projects appear to have a number of similarities. In fact, they were both funded by the City Administration, and they were both directed to children in educational establishments. In both cases, the associations at the centre of the opposition were the *Associazione famiglie numerose* (as part of the network *Forum delle famiglie*) and the *Sentinelle in piedi*. The two projects were developed in the course of the same academic year, 2014–2015. In both cases, with *Alla scoperta della differenza* and *Ci piacCiAmo!… anche in biblioteca*, it was possible to identify three fundamental problems, interrelated in many ways, connected to the obstacles they encountered in the implementation of the projects:

– There is a general lack of awareness in all directions and on all sides and, consequently, a lack of effective dialogue. In fact, the "anti-gender" associations demonstrate a misunderstanding of the main concepts and notions at hand. However, this seems to be a problem because the people who could be in a position to defend the projects do not have the means to make their voices heard or to express and formulate their arguments in favour of these initiatives.

– These projects were dragged into the middle of political dynamics, at the centre of clashes between political agendas and interests. This means that projects are often attacked by specific political parties not on the basis of their content, but because they have been proposed and supported by opposing parties. These dynamics can be identified at a local level, and also more broadly at a national level, such as in the example of the different debates surrounding the introduction of the *Buona Scuola* directive itself.

– The nature of the opposition appears to be mostly of Catholic affiliation. Even where the information about the projects is accurate, there is explicit opposition to some notions that are at the core of gender-responsive educational projects. In fact, the coordinators highlighted the fact that some of the people who opposed the projects have very clearly expressed their understanding of homosexuality as out of the norm and "not natural", their specific opposition to same-sex unions and their understanding of sexual differences as strongly determined exclusively by biological differences. Even if the projects taken into account do not specifically tackle issues of sexual orientation, they certainly intend to promote respect and the fight against discriminations in all its forms.

The lack of strong opposition in the case of the *SAVE* project could be explained by the nature of the project.

First of all, participation was voluntary. Notably, the representatives of the *Social Cooperative Agape*, the association *Se non ora, quando* and the *Association Menabó* all emphasised that associations leading the opposition often referred to "an imposition" on the schools and the students, perpetuated by the City Administration. The voluntary participation in the *SAVE* project could, therefore, perhaps constitute an element that is not controversial.

Moreover, this project was directed exclusively to teachers and school managers. Therefore, there was no direct involvement with children. In fact, as the coordinators of *Alla scoperta della differenza* and *Ci piacCiAmo!...anche in biblioteca*" pointed out, one of the slogans often used against their actions was: "*Giù le mani dai nostri figli!*", which literally translates to "keep your hands off our children".

Thirdly, the focus of the project concerned the issue of violence in an educational environment. Most likely, it is comparatively more

difficult for parents to object to the importance of engaging with the problem of violence, also in terms of bullying and cyber-bullying. This can perhaps be an example that shows that teachers' training might be more straightforward to implement. However, to verify this preliminary finding, further research should be carried out, perhaps through a comparative research design.

Phase 2: public opinion

Phase 2 of this investigation centres on public opinion concerning gender issues in education in Italy. For this purpose, information was collated mainly through media, such as online newspaper articles and websites. This was based on the assumption that, in recent years, social media have been the protagonists of the controversy over gender issues in education. This has been evident in many ways in the course of Phase 1, for example through the testimonies of the projects' coordinators, who found themselves in the middle of attacks on Facebook and who had to clarify the content of their projects following misinformation campaigns led via WhatsApp.

At the national level, Mario Adinolfi and his political party *Il popolo della famiglia* were at the centre of active "anti-gender" movements online. As previously mentioned, their logo explicitly includes the slogan "*No gender nelle scuole*" (see Figure 1, p. 78), and they were involved in many "anti-gender" initiatives. Their interest in social networks as a means of mobilisation is evidenced also by the fact that, as a quick search on Facebook reveals, many of Mario Adinolfi's Facebook followers had the official logo of the party as their profile picture at the time of this investigation. Moreover, Mario Adinolfi himself frequently published Live Facebook Videos on the official page of the "community". The strong involvement in social media is also accompanied by the hashtag #nogender.

It is especially because of the strong digital nature of the "anti-gender" initiatives that I have decided to exploit online resources for Phase 2 of this investigation. In order to get a clear overview, I engage with three different types of data: (a) newspaper articles, in order to understand their role in the way they present these issues to the public (below); (b) declarations of religious representatives and, specifically, of representatives of the Catholic Church, promptly reported by newspapers and shared on social media (p.151); (c) examples of "anti-gender" initiatives (p. 156).

Newspaper articles

The first group of articles focuses on the integration of a gender approach in education. The second group relates to a specific issue: the educational booklets published by the National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR) in 2014, meant to provide teachers with possible means of dealing with issues of bullying and cyber bullying in schools, especially in the context of homophobia and transphobia. Lastly, the third group of articles reports the reactions to the same projects that are at the centre of Phase 1 of this investigation, in the specific context of Cagliari, Sardinia.

For each article, I outline three main considerations concerning its content (e.g. main arguments for or against educational projects) and one consideration concerning the way the author of the article intends to convey their message, through which expedients (e.g. use of sarcastic comments, neutral language, etc.).

Gender issues

Article 1: *"Educazione al genere, la mappa delle 'buone pratiche' nelle scuole italiane"*[1], 12 June 2013

The first article was written by journalist and blogger Stefania Prandi for the online version of the Italian newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and published on 12 June 2013.

– The article immediately emphasises the attempt to break stereotypes as the central objective of a gender-responsive education. The author provides some examples of what gender stereotypes imply, such as the idea that women need to take care of the children while men focus on their career. This is particularly interesting because breaking stereotypes and engaging with stereotypes are definitely at the centre of the three educational projects that we have investigated in Phase 1 of our analysis.

– This article also considers another aspect that many readers can certainly relate to: the role of TV and media in representing sexist visions of society. In fact, the article presents examples of programmes that stimulate students to critically analyse the shows that they watch on TV, in order to get them to relate to the shows and challenge their *common sense*. The article tends to highlight the positive effects of such programmes on the students, describing them as full of curiosity and the desire to call their perceptions into question. These programmes are directed to secondary school students, mainly upper secondary.

1. "Gender education, the map of 'good practices' in Italian schools."

- In order to outline other positive aspects of these programmes, the article also speaks of sexual education, emphasising the importance of such education in order to prevent sexual violence and crimes, and in order to better approach sexuality, both as men and women.

This article attempts to outline good practices of gender education in Italian schools without expressing a negative judgement, instead seemingly appreciating the efforts of the different institutions. This article mainly provides a description of the programmes, rather than expressing an opinion. It is particularly interesting that in the title of this article, the term *good practices* is written within inverted commas. It probably means to imply that they can be arguably defined as *successful* practices, since we cannot measure at this stage the social impact of such programmes. However, indicating this expression in this way, without further explanation, may induce the reader to somehow start reading the article with a sceptical attitude. Nevertheless, this article also reveals that there are efforts and initiatives that have been developed and that were successfully implemented, before the whole controversy developed.

Article 2: "*Gender a scuola. Prima che i nostri figli subiscano l'inculturazione LGBT di Stato, sarà bene provare a resistere*"[1], 26 January 2014

The second article is an electronic article written by journalist Luigi Amicone and published on 26 January 2014, by the online version of the Catholic newspaper *Tempi*, which he himself co-founded. Three considerations regarding the content of this article can be formulated.

1. "Gender at school. Before our children are subjected to the state LGBT enculturation, it would be good to attempt to resist."

– The author emphasises the role of the State and the fact that public funding supports the programmes of gender education. This article supports the statement that 10 million euros of state expenditure have been used to "brainwash" children with a process that Amicone calls "LGBT enculturation". The writer intends to appeal to the reader, to make them feel that their money has been used for projects that intend to damage children. This reference to a form of enculturation, together with the rest of the article, emphasises a sense of *imposition* associated with gender-responsive educational projects.

– A link is drawn between Marxist ideology and the idea of a gender-responsive educational structure. More specifically, the writer talks of Marxism and of what he names "genderism". This correlation is particularly interesting, and it attempts to make a reference once more to the idea of *gender* as an ideology, *il gender*, or *la teoria del gender*, to be compared to Marxism or socialism. Moreover, the choice of the term Marxism can be appealing to readers from specific political parties that are going to respond negatively to the comparison.

– In the same article, the author makes references to LGBT issues, sexual education, and the "*Legge Scalfarotto*", among other things. It is incredibly difficult to really "open up" this article and respond to each point step by step: this overlap of notions contributes to a mass of misinformation. An example of this is the explicit reference to "standards for sexual education", which probably refers to the document of the Regional Office of the World Health Organisation (WHO) already mentioned in the conceptual framework (see on p. 55). However, the author emphasises that these stand-

ards come from the representatives of the European Union, whom he refers to as the "*colletti rainbow di Bruxelles*", which literally translates to "Brussels' rainbow collars". Not only does this remark highlight the fact that the author has a particular interest in attacking and criticising the European Union and its framework, but he also provides inaccurate information, since this document is published by the European office of an Agency of the United Nations and not by the European Union.

In terms of the way in which the author intends to convey his message, he exploits what is generally defined as *common sense*. The whole tone of the article tends to be particularly sarcastic, making constant jokes based on notions of *common sense* and common knowledge, while heavily attacking the notion of gender education as "LGBT enculturation" or "brainwashing". For example, he undermines and trivialises the concepts brought out by gender education by phrasing them in a way that could seem almost ridiculous to the audience. More specifically, for example, he affirms that the issues at the core of these projects should not be presented to young children, because they have as little to do with children as "cabbage does with breakfast". The expression "as cabbage for breakfast" (*Come il cavolo a merenda*) is a playful Italian expression, which intends to indicate things that have nothing to do with each other.

Article 3: "*Tutti pazzi per il gender*"[1], 31 March 2015

The article was published on 31 March 2015, and was written by journalist Chiara Lalli for the newspaper *Internazionale*. The author engages

1. "Everyone [going] crazy about '*il gender*'."

with different issues and, in particular, responds to specific arguments against what is defined as a theory and ideology based on "*il gender*".

– Dividing her article into different chapters, Lalli takes on various issues. First of all, she points out that there is no such thing as *ideologia del gender*, and she underlines the distinction between *ideologia del gender* and *gender studies*. Moreover, she responds to the argument that the *ideologia del gender* intends to impose a system where there are no differences between men and women. However, Lalli highlights that this is not the case. In fact, as she points out, it is generally the opposition that intends to impose specific rules, while gender studies operate in a certain fluidity of models. Lalli's response is initially structured in two steps: maintaining that "*il gender*" is not an ideology, and yet having to delineate and clarify the content of what people think is contained in this presumed ideology.

– Lalli also outlines some of the main arguments posed against "*il gender*", mentioning the declaration of don Angelo Perego, a priest from a small town in the Region of Lombardy, who stated during a mass that "the gender ideology is more dangerous than ISIS". She highlights the religious element of the opposition. However, she does not argue in any way that the opposition is exclusively Catholic, taking into account a multitude of "anti-gender" elements and initiatives.

– She concludes the article with a reference to questions posed by Paul B. Preciado (2013) in an article written two years earlier, wondering: "Who is going to defend the rights of the child that is 'different'?". It is interesting to notice how children tend to be at the centre of this controversy.

On the one hand, children are seen as beings that need to be protected from what are considered to be inappropriate conversations and issues that could endanger them. On the other hand, there is an intent to protect children, in this case from social norms that place them in a world of inequalities. Perhaps it is through this issue that it is possible to define and lay common ground to move forward in this controversy.

Some observations concerning the way the article is structured can be made. Despite an attempt to divide the main concepts by chapter, the article remains complex to read and understand. In the text, certain definitions are provided and clarified. However, these tend to be inserted within other definitions; doing so does tie all the concepts together, but the connection this brings out is not clearly defined and is, therefore, not identifiable. This is all the more true given the sarcastic tone of some parts of the article, which leaves room for confusion and misunderstanding. Moreover, its colloquial style, which most likely was used to make the article more accessible, contributes to a confusing structure.

Article 4: "*La crociata del gender. Il fantasma che agita i Cattolici*" [1], 22 June 2015

The fourth article was written by Michela Marzano, and was published on 22 June 2015 in the online version of the newspaper *la Repubblica.* Michela Marzano was one of the proponents of the *Ddl Cirinnà* for the law concerning Civil Unions in Italy (see on pp. 76-77) and the author of one of the books that we have used in our research of academic literature for the elaboration of the conceptual framework of this investigation

1. "The '*gender*' crusade. The ghost that scares Catholics."

– Marzano mentions some of the main slogans of the associations that participated in *Family Day* in Rome on 20 June 2015: "*Giù le mani dai nostri figli*" (Keep your hands off our children); "*Uomo e donna siamo nati*" (We are born man and woman); "*Stop gender nelle scuole*" (Stop *'gender'* in schools); "*Il gender è lo sterco del demonio*" ('Il gender' is devil's excrement). Moreover, she makes specific reference, as the title indicates, to the fact that the majority of participants were Catholics. However, by calling attention to the participation of the Imam and the Rabbi of the city of Rome in the event, she does underline that however significant the Catholic opposition is, it is not the only opposition to a gender approach.

– Marzano clarifies the use of the famous phrase by Simone de Beauvoir "*On ne naît pas femme, on le devient*", "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". In particular, the author of this article emphasises that this did not mean to tell women that they can choose whether or not to be women, but simply that they can rethink and question their role within society, going beyond the stereotypes that, for centuries, have put them in an inferior position to men.

– Marzano also points out that the only objective of speaking of a gender approach in education is to promote and facilitate mutual respect, regardless of your identity or sexual orientation. This seems to be a message that is not easily brought out. The opposition conducts campaigns that argue that this is not true, that gender-responsive educational projects have other "real intentions".

Marzano's article is quite simple and linear, and it attempts to focus only on the main issues and respond to the main arguments offered

by those who oppose issues of gender in education. In doing so, she attempts to explain the meaning of "gender" and the fact than in itself it can only constitute a subject of study, not a theory. Once more, as in the case of Lalli's article, it is possible to recognise a need to provide definitions, to clarify the concepts at hand.

UNAR booklets: reactions

> Article 5: "*Ma re e regine fanno male ai bambini? La guida contro la discriminazione sconsiglia ai genitori di leggere le fiabe ai bambini: promuovono solo la famiglia*"[1], 15 February 2014

This article was written by Isabella Bossi Fedrigotti and published on 15 February 2014 in the online version of the *Corriere della Sera*.

- Referring to the three UNAR booklets, the writer makes a conscious choice to refer specifically to the fact that one of the recommendations made to teachers was not to use traditional fairy tales and stories. This is definitely interesting, because among all the characteristics and elements of the UNAR booklets designed to fight homophobia in an educational context, the author chose to underline one specific element. This promised to elicit an emotional response in the readers, who most likely grew up with these stories and fairy tales, and would, therefore, probably find this suggestion somewhat outrageous.

- At the beginning of the article, the author seems to agree

1. "Do kings and queens harm children? The guidelines against discrimination discourage parents from reading fairy tales to their children: they promote only the family."

with the content of the UNAR booklets. In fact, she argues that, if the characters of the stories that we love so much actually are harmful to our children, then we should indeed stop reading them. But although she is apparently in agreement with the statement, she uses particularly "dramatic" images, for example describing the stories as capable of "ruining [children's] lives". Moreover, she makes specific reference to the work of researchers when emphasising that it is a shame to eliminate stories that, indeed according to researchers, help children cope with their fears. This is interestingly the only instance, in the whole article, that she makes specific reference to some studies.

–   The conclusion of the article is particularly noteworthy: at this point, in fact, the author more explicitly expresses her opinion, by stating that the recommendations made in the UNAR booklets are probably "too rushed". Moreover, she argues that the real objective of these recommendations is to prepare children, adolescents and families for same-sex marriages. This conclusion clearly represents a personal opinion and an interpretation of the purpose of the booklets. Moreover, these words seem to entail a form of judgment, implying that UNAR has purposely hidden their *true intentions*, and that the preparation of children, adolescents and families for the notion of same-sex marriages in itself carries negative connotations.

The writer not only makes a specific choice of content when referring to something like the fairy tales, but she also chooses to set some specific sentences in her article in boldface for emphasis, wishing to underline what she supposedly considers important issues and points of her article. Moreover, the tone of the article is ironic in different

parts, once more undermining and belittling the concepts put forward by the booklets. Interestingly, this article is cited in another article from the online version of the Catholic newspaper *Tempi* [1]. In particular, while criticising the UNAR booklets, the author highlights that "even the *Corriere [della Sera]*" was on their side, citing in particular the conclusion of the article. Moreover, it is also cited in another article analysed in this same section. In this specific case, the authors identify it as one of the examples of the extreme reactions generated by the publication of the UNAR booklets.

Article 6: *"A scuola di gender (con le famiglie escluse)"* [2], 23 March 2014

The article was published on 23 March 2014, and written by Antonio Sanfrancesco for the Italian Catholic newspaper *Famiglia Cristiana*.

- Sanfrancesco begins the article with five specific recommendations from the UNAR booklets. He uses examples that could sound particularly "shocking" to his readers, and in fact, does not take the recommendations in the real order in which they are presented in the UNAR booklets. Among these, the author chooses a recommendation that suggests to teachers, when formulating homework, to make references to different familiar structures. For instance, when referring to the protagonists of a story or of a mathematical problem, teachers could make reference to a child with two fathers or two mothers (e.g. "*Rosa e i suoi papà*").

1. The full article can be accessed at https://www.tempi.it/bagnasco-in-atto-persecuzione-contro-la-famiglia-corriere-i-libretti-unar-preparano-il-terreno-al-matrimonio-gay/#.WFvHAbYrLBI
2. "At school to learn about *gender* (with the families being excluded)."

– Some inaccurate statements can also be identified. Firstly, as is the case in several of the articles analysed here, the author refers to *gender* as an ideology, speaking once more of an "*ideologia del genere*". Secondly, he puts under the umbrella of this "ideology" a number of concepts that are not accurate and that he attributes to the integration of a gender-responsive approach into education and, therefore, to gender studies. In particular, he states that, according to the "*ideologia del gender*", everyone has the right to choose their own identity and their own sexual orientation, regardless of biological sex. This is once more a common mistake that is definitely problematic, and also delicate. First of all, it shows once more an attempt to put gender identity and sexual orientation at the same level, as if they were the same thing.

Furthermore, in order to better understand this argument, it should be divided into two statements: the first one saying that gender studies argue that everyone has the right to choose their own identity; the other one saying that gender studies argue that everyone has the right to choose their sexual orientation. Both statements provide inaccurate information. In fact, as previously also mentioned in Marzano's article published by *la Repubblica* on 22 June 2015 (see p. 134), gender studies simply argue that as *individuals* we can rethink and question our role in society, becoming aware of the impositions and constructions established by societal norms. The difference is subtle and perhaps too complex to be highlighted at all times.

The inaccuracy of the second statement is, however, not subtle. In fact, arguing that someone has the right to choose his or her sexual orientation would mean that sexual orientation is the result of a choice. This is an element that

is often found not only in arguments against gender studies, but also in arguments of people defending them (e.g. "they can choose to do whatever they want, that does not affect me"). This is certainly problematic, and constitutes one of the bases of discrimination on the grounds of one's sexual orientation.

– As the title indicates, Sanfrancesco highlights in his article that families feel that these programmes exclude them from the education to sexuality that *they* should provide their children. In this specific case, he does not highlight it as a perception, but presents it as fact. This is a recurrent theme, and it goes back to the notion that parents do not seem to want schools to take charge of issues that they consider appropriate exclusively within the walls of their own homes. This definitely ties in with some of the statements outlined by the experts in Phase 1 of this investigation: it is fundamental to involve parents and families, and it is an essential part of the process.

Sanfrancesco puts emphasis on some sentences, in order to accompany the "shock effect" of some statements or phrases directly cited from the UNAR booklets, e.g.: "In Western societies we take for granted that the sexual orientation of a healthy adolescent is heterosexual." Through this expedient, the author seems to argue that these statements are to some extent trying to defy *common sense*.

Article 7: "Omofobia: a scuola la Chiesa censura. Essere gay in classe è un calvario. Ma non eravamo uno stato laico?" [1], 16 April 2014

The article was published on 16 April 2014, and written by Michele Sasso and Francesca Sironi for the online version of the weekly newspaper *L'Espresso*. This article constitutes in itself more of an investigative report on the different reactions to the introduction of the UNAR booklets.

– The title of this article makes an explicit reference to the Church as an institution and to the secular nature of the Italian State. In this report, the authors refer to the different reactions of religious representatives, such as the President of the *Conferenza Episcopale Italiana* (CEI), Angelo Bagnasco, who declared that the UNAR booklets intend to propagate misconceptions against families and faith. This approach is relevant because, if the opposition to a gender perspective comes primarily from Catholics, the role of their representatives would definitely have an impact.

– This report takes into account certain testimonies by young LGBTI students, who explain and talk about their personal experiences in facing bullying and discrimination in an educational context. Moreover, the authors also interview some teachers, who witness this type of situation more directly and are challenged by the situation, especially by the introduction of cyber-bullying. One teacher specifically reports that among teachers themselves there is often not enough

1. "Homophobia: at school the Church censors. To be gay at school is an ordeal. Were we not a secular State?"

willingness or enough means to deal with these issues, which are sometimes considered too complex.

– The report concludes with a sense of hope, noting the differences of opinion between the youth and their parents. To support this, it uses as an example the case of high school students in the city of Modena, who invited politician and former Member of Parliament Vladimir Luxuria[1] and the president of the association *Arcigay* to talk about transsexuality. Initially a number of parents opposed the initiative, succeeded in influencing the school manager and teachers, and eventually prevented the event from being held. However, the conversation moved on to Facebook and the mobilisation was strong enough that after three cancellations, on 16 April 2014, the event took place in an overcrowded auditorium, where the speakers talked about bullying, transsexuality and rights. The authors of the report conclude by reiterating that educating students to respect should indeed be one of the main objectives and tasks of the school.

The report is structured in a clear manner, with different chapters that take into account different issues – the role of the State as a secular entity, the reality in schools, the challenges of not treating these issues in the classroom without a framework, and the differences between a younger and an older generation (*Figli vs Genitori*, Children vs Parents). This allows for a clear understanding of the issues at hand. The position of the authors is quite clear and explicit, and expressed in a simple way. However, this article most likely has a smaller audience than the

1. Vladimir Luxuria is a former politician and the first openly transgender Member of Parliament in Europe.

ones that have been previously analysed. In fact, *L'Espresso* is not a daily newspaper, and in itself it is structured more as an investigative report than a newspaper article. As previously mentioned, this report also makes reference to the article published on the *Corriere della Sera* by Isabella Bossi Fedrigotti.

The context in Cagliari

> Article 8: "Zedda spende 10mila euro per spiegare ai bambini che esistono I gay"[1], 9 February 2014

The article was published on 9 February 2014 by Jacopo Norfo for the online newspaper *Casteddu On Line*, which deals with news specifically in the municipality and province of Cagliari. The article focuses on the discussions surrounding the implementation in Cagliari of the *Agape* and *Se non ora, quando* (SNOQ) project *Alla scoperta della differenza* that we have presented in Phase 1 of our investigation.

– The first consideration is related to the title itself. The use of inverted commas indicates that it is a quote, but it does not specify who is being quoted. The title is undoubtedly important, since it is the first sentence that is read by any reader. Moreover, given that *Casteddu On Line* is an online news outlet, this article is most likely shared on social media such as Facebook: the title, in this case, is the only thing a user can see before even accessing the link. The reason why this is problematic is that the title states that the mayor, Massimo Zedda, has spent 10,000 euros to "explain to children that

1. "Zedda spends 10 thousand euros to explain to children that gay people exist". In this context, the expression "*i gay*" actually better translates to "gays", rather than "gay people".

gay people exist". Immediately, a reference to the funds of the municipality of Cagliari is made. Like the second article of this analysis, the waste of public funding is in some cases brought out as one of the arguments against the elaboration of educational projects in the context of gender issues and gender equality. Moreover, not only does the title trivialise the nature of the project through one simple sentence, it also provides false information, since the objectives of the project *Alla scoperta della differenza* were multiple and complex, and did not in any way intend to simply explain to children that "gay people exist". The effect of this title is thus to undermine the nature of the project and its content, whatever the intention of the author was originally.

– The article sets out to present both sides of the discussions about the project *Alla scoperta della differenza*, making reference to political representatives, such as Mauro Pili and Edoardo Tocco from the right-wing party *Forza Italia*, Salvatore Deidda from the party *Fratelli D'Italia*, and Daniele Caruso, from the political party *La Destra*. Defending the project, the author mentions Silvia Doneddu from the left-wing political party *Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà* (SEL, the party of Mayor Massimo Zedda). On one hand, the four remarks of the right-wing representatives, even if they explicitly attack the left-wing parties, also tackle the content of the projects, by arguing that it is not appropriate to speak of these issues in the classroom. On the other hand, the author includes a comment by Silvia Doneddu that is not specifically concerned with the project's content, and that instead attacks the politician Edoardo Tocco, and invites him "to shut up" and "to avoid talking too much not to embarrass himself". This definitely undermines the content of the statements and it does

not provide a voice to both sides. Moreover, he provides the objectives of the project, as stated in the call for proposals by the city administration, only at the end of the article, after leaving an open question to the reader: "who is right?".

– Overall, political dynamics are central to this article. This provides a link to the analysis carried out in Phase 1 of the investigation. In fact, the political elements and dynamics in Cagliari seemed to be particularly evident in the context surrounding the projects, constituting a strong factor in the obstacles posed to their implementation.

The article presents a number of inaccuracies. The author himself does not use specific expedients to explicitly express a political or ideological opinion. However, the way he structures the article conveys a very clear message. As previously specified, the number and content of the declarations by representatives of the different parties that he chooses to include already convey a specific message.

Particular mention should be given to the statement of Daniele Caruso that the author of the article chose to set in bold for emphasis. The politician states that some concerned parents "are reporting that two Italian schools are preparing an 'experimental project' to educate children to the phantom 'five sexual genders'". The author puts an additional emphasis, the only one in the article, on the phrase "phantom 'five sexual genders'". Not only does the author of the article fail to verify the information given, but by putting emphasis on the expression, he makes his intention unclear.

Article 9: "*Cagliari, scuole elementari. Il progetto gender bloccato dalle famiglie* è riapparso in altri istituti"[1], 26 October 2014

The article was published on 26 October 2014 by Benedetta Frigerio for the online version of the Italian Catholic newspaper *Tempi.* This article specifically refers to the call for proposals of the City Administration and the *Agape* and *SNOQ* project *Alla scoperta della differenza.*

– This article focuses particularly on the concerns expressed by Eugenio Lao, the regional coordinator of the *Associazione famiglie numerose*, and member of the *Forum delle famiglie della Sardegna*. In fact, he expresses his specific concern with the implementation of the project *Alla scoperta della differenza* in schools.

– The author of this article, through the words of Eugenio Lao, focuses on the first reactions of the association *Famiglie Numerose* to the call for proposals issued by the City Administration, under the Commission for Equal Opportunity with Elisabetta Dettori. He highlights the core of the opposition by citing letters that were sent to the school managers of the schools initially contacted by the City Administration and the associations, the very managers that had denied the possibility of implementing the project as a result precisely of these criticisms. These letters argue that the projects tend to "sexualise" children through games, fairy tales and theatre performances. Moreover, the letters again mention a "gender ideology". Unlike the other articles that I have investigated, which associate the *ideologia del gender* with false

1. "Cagliari, primary schools. The gender project previously blocked by families has reappeared in other institutes."

attributes and principles, in this case some of the statements cited in these letters are accurate and are actually at the centre of gender studies, such as the fact that homosexuality is innate, and that indeed homosexual couples constitute a family, a new version in a way of the traditional family so strongly defended by the Catholic associations. The opposition to these statements shows that the opposition is not only based on misunderstandings and misinformation, but it also stems from specific ideas about what the world should be and what societal structures should represent.

– Finally, it is possible to identify that the main concern at the centre of these debates is the *family*. The author poses the question: "who represents the families?". Eugenio Lao states that if the family is excluded by these projects and is not represented by anyone, then it needs to represent itself, going back to educating without delegating any task, being present in all aspects of society, educational but also economic and political. This last point speaks of the *family* as a defined and definitive entity in itself, which is often the case when looking at these statements and arguments, and as shown multiple times, as in the case of the *Family Day* that took place on 20 June 2015.

The author divides this article into four chapters, outlining the main issues in a clear manner. The statements made by Eugenio Lao are definitely at the centre of this publication, even if it is not structured exactly as an interview. This might be the case also because this being a matter specifically concerning the town of Cagliari, the writers of the newspaper that generally investigates news at a national level were interested in giving voice to some of the actors more directly involved in the local context.

Article 10: "*Scuola, polemica sui corsi gender. 'Spetta a noi educare i nostri figli'*"[1], 28 November 2014

The article was published on 28 November 2014 by Manuela Arca for the online version of *L'Unione Sarda*. This article makes reference to the project *Ci piacCiAmo!...anche in biblioteca* organised by the association *Menabó*. In the case of this article, simply because of its structure, I provide four considerations that integrate both the content and the ways in which the author conveys the information.

– At the centre of this article lies the controversy surrounding the project of the association *Menabó*. The author presents the controversy in quite a linear manner, noting the central idea of the project, then outlining the opposition and the fact that the project has been interrupted in some of the educational institutions, outlining the clarifying statement by Giulia Balzano, president of the association, and finally also outlining the remarks of the school managers involved in the projects and of the City Administration, through Enrica Puggioni, the representative of the Department of Culture of the City Administration, which funded the project.

– Here the author gives space to clarifications on the project by the people who promote it and defend it. Therefore, even if the language used seems quite neutral and not explicitly for or against the project, it is possible to assume that the author wants to outline positive elements of the project, giving a forum to those who intend to explain the project's intentions and objectives more clearly.

1. "School, controversy on the gender courses. 'It is up to us to educate our children'."

– Even if the author's intention seems to be to generate a positive impression of the project, she also provides certain misinformation or simply poses a basis for misunderstanding. This is the case specifically in the first paragraph, where the author indicates that certain movements argue that the activities central to the project deal with themes and subjects that they consider inappropriate for children, such as homosexuality. However, the author does not specify that it is these movements that consider homosexuality an inappropriate subject for children: she phrases the sentence in a way that seems to agree with the statement, which is in contrast to the hypothesis that she intends to present the project positively. Providing this "judgment" in an article that is not explicitly criticising the project can implicitly convey the message that homosexuality is indeed an inappropriate issue for children.

– The declarations of the school manager of two of the schools involved in the project, and the way these declarations are presented by the author of the article are also noteworthy. In fact, Arca refers to "*rassicurazioni alle famiglie*" and when presenting the school manager's statement, she states that he "guarantees" that the activities of the project do not deal with questions related to gender identity or sexuality. This is certainly a clarification that even the coordinators of this project, as well as those of the *Alla scoperta della differenza* project, were led to make, since one of the main concerns coming from the families and the Catholic associations was indeed that they did not want these issues to be treated in the classrooms with their children. However, by presenting this statement as a form of "reassurance to the families" and by saying that he "guarantees" that it is not the case,

the author (most likely involuntarily) undermines and gives a negative connotation to those projects and those initiatives that do intend to deal with issues of gender identity and sexuality. This is a recurrent problem that we are going to explore more fully in the following concluding remarks.

One of the common elements is that these articles make reference to actions of associations, such as *Sentinelle in Piedi*, *Comitato per le Famiglie*, *Associazione Famiglie Numerose* (in the Sardinian case), and to the declarations of political and religious representatives. The rest of this chapter is centred precisely on these issues.

As the preceding analyses show, a certain amount of misinformation was provided not only by the newspapers with a specific orientation and religious affiliation (i.e. *Tempi* and *Famiglia Cristiana*), but also by the main news outlets, such as *la Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*. This element is particularly problematic, not only because quantitatively they have a broader audience than other newspapers, but also because they insert certain elements of misinformation into expressions of positive arguments towards the projects, or while attempting to simply provide "neutral" information (where the inverted commas indicate that newspaper articles are very rarely *purely neutral* because they most often imply and entail less obvious issues). Even people who are interested in understanding the questions studied by gender studies and who seek information in mainstream media might still be exposed to misinformation, which then is more likely to be internalised, because it is implicit.

A number of these articles appeal to the notion of *common sense*, understood as something that is obvious to everyone and therefore that, according to these movements, constitutes the *reality* of things. In the name of this *common sense*, as Avanza (2015) also highlights, the members of the "anti-gender" movements tend to present themselves as the only protectors and defenders of this *reality,* founded on biological determinism. Thus, in this equation, gender studies and

what they define as *teoria del gender* are the enemies of the truth and are therefore perceived as highly dangerous for society and need to be combated.

Finally, these articles also show, once more, that the "anti-gender" arguments are generated by Catholic-affiliated movements. To further explore this aspect, the next section specifically investigates some official statements and declarations of representatives of the Catholic Church.

Declarations of Catholic Church representatives

Phase 1 of this analysis, and the first section of Phase 2 showed us that the "anti-gender" initiatives tend to be driven by principles in line with those of the Catholic Church. For this purpose, I provide statements by Pope Francis and by Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, president of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) and archbishop of the city of Genova. For each statement, I make three considerations.

Statement 1: Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, 17 October 2014

The first analysis can be carried out in the context of an interview of Cardinal Bagnasco for Radio Vaticana on 17 October 2014 [1], in the concluding phase of the 2014 synod [2].

– Cardinal Bagnasco argues that the "West", and specifically Europe, is not the centre of the world, but that European culture still expresses a certain type of arrogance. According

1. The interview can be accessed at http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/10/17/bagnasco_teoria_del_genere,_calpestati_diritti_genitori/1108826
2. Synods are Councils of Bishops who meet to discuss specific themes that are deemed important. The 2014 synod was centred on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization".

to Bagnasco, international organisations operate in a framework that is particularly Western-focused, while he argues that this framework now rotates around the "*teoria del genere*". First of all, he makes a point that can be recognised as relevant. The work of international organisations, if we even think of the formulation of human rights themselves, was (and still is to a certain extent) centred on an understanding of the world that is typically Western. This is indeed a limitation of the work of international organisations and of any entity that attempts to speak in the name of "standard" values. The relevance of this statement, even if it can be contested, for example in light of the gradual changes and evolutions in the agendas of international organisations, is what indirectly gives an impression that the following statement, referring to the "*teoria del genere*", is also somewhat accurate. Moreover, we could argue that a gender approach is indeed a priority for different international organisations at the moment. However, the issue is grounded in the fact that a gender perspective, in the way international organisations and academics mean it, does not correspond to the *teoria del gender*, in the way Cardinal Bagnasco understands it.

– Cardinal Bagnasco specifically talks about the integration of a gender-responsive approach into education, referring to it as an attempt by institutions to diffuse this "theory" in the classrooms. He therefore argues that this constitutes a terrible offense, which takes away the "natural right of parents" to offer their own cultural vision to their children, a vision that they consider the best option for them. He further argues that not only should parents be informed of the projects, but their authorisation for these issues to be presented to their children should be sought. The use of the

term *natural* in relation to a *right of parents* to offer their cultural vision to their children is of heightened importance, because it constitutes in itself a contradiction.

– Cardinal Bagnasco concludes by stating that the Church has to be a solid and present entity to support families and parents. This highlights the importance of the declarations of religious representatives: manifesting it through official declarations, the Catholic Church shows its support for the initiatives carried out by the "anti-gender" movements. This element, in turn, gives them legitimacy.

Statement 2: Pope Francis, 20 January 2015

The second statement is Pope Francis' response to a journalist's question on a flight back from Manila, Philippines, on 20 January 2015 [1]. In particular, the journalist makes reference to a previous statement of the Pope, requesting clarification concerning the rise of an *ideological colonisation* and asking for specific examples.

– As a first example of *ideological colonisation* Pope Francis presents an anecdote, referring to a Minister of Education who, in 1995, reportedly requested some funding to build schools for the poor. However, she was confronted with a dilemma. In fact, *they* told her they would give her the funding only on the condition that, in those schools, there would be one textbook, well prepared from a didactic point of view, to specifically teach the *teoria del gender*. This

1. The full video of the statement can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rl4nudTT-dk

Minister, according to Pope Francis, decided to accept but then prepared another book that could respond to the one meant to teach the *teoria del gender*. The Pope provides this anecdote as his own testimony, something he has himself witnessed. However, he does not provide any precise or exhaustive information.

- He speaks of an ideological colonisation, understanding the *teoria del gender* as a way to impose and *colonise* people in a specific context with a specific idea meant to change a structure or a way of thinking. Pope Francis clarifies that it is possible to speak of an ideological colonisation by arguing that *ideologies* such as *la teoria del gender* exploit the need of certain populations for help, and they then exploit that opportunity to insert themselves in that reality.

- Moreover, he specifies that this is not something new: he argues that this is what dictatorships of the last centuries have also done, making specific references to the Hitler youth. This powerful statement is representative of an intention to "shock" the audience.

The Pope's statement shares a common element with that of Bagnasco: in both cases, there is a discussion of an imposition, of something coming from *outside* to impose itself in certain specific realities, without considering their specificity.

Statement 3: Pope Francis, 15 April 2015

The last statement is another address by Pope Francis, this time during one of his public papal audiences in St. Peter's square, on 15 April 2015 [1].

- Pope Francis centres his remarks on the importance of the family and, in particular, of the God-given gift of the creation of men and women, and of the sacrament of marriage, noting a complementarity between men and women. He specifically refers to the creation of the man and the woman as described in the Bible. He also adds that the sexual difference is present in many forms of life, but that "only in men and women does this difference entail the image of God himself", thus highlighting a need for reciprocity between men and women.

- Pope Francis specifically makes reference to the *teoria del gender*, describing it as an "expression of frustration that means to cancel sexual differences because of incapability to deal with them", and stating that it constitutes "a step back". He argues that cancelling differences constitutes the problem, not the solution to the problem. This point is particularly recurrent: there is a general understanding that gender studies mean to propose that we eliminate all differences between men and women. It is important to wonder how it is possible to effectively communicate that, far from denying or eliminating differences between men and women, gender studies state that there are many ways to be a woman and many ways to be a man, and that indeed we are all so different that we cannot limit and define such diversity under these categories.

1. For the video of the statement, see youtube.com/watch?v=5iu6xxvoy04

– In the final part of this remarks, Pope Francis emphasises the importance of granting women the same dignity and rights as men, giving women an actual voice within the Church and within society. This is connected to the observation made in Chapter 3. In fact, I believe Pope Francis to be an appealing figure in the Catholic Church: he offers statements and declarations that express openness and appear quite "modern" compared to his predecessors. However, in the end, these declarations show that he tends to stay crystallised in the same block of misinformation and misunderstandings, and contributes to reinforcing it.

"Anti-gender" initiatives

Specific initiatives and campaigns of the so-called "anti-gender" movements, which are very active in the controversy surrounding an integration of a gender approach into educational policies, are the centre of this analysis. For each initiative, I outline some considerations concerning the content and the way the message is conveyed. In the case of the newspaper articles, some of the considerations that I have made are the result of an interpretation of expedients and ways of writing, while in this case we have specific examples of active campaigns with the specific objective to "*stop gender nelle scuole*", to stop *il gender* in the schools, as one of their slogans reads.

Initiative 1: *Family Day* Flyers

Firstly, I observe some flyers that have been circulated both in their printed versions, during events and conferences organised by the different "anti-gender" associations, and on social media (i.e. Facebook and WhatsApp). These flyers were initially published in response to

the publication of the UNAR booklets in 2014, and later circulated by the association *Difendiamo i nostri figli* for the advertisement of the *Family Day*, to take place on 20 June 2015.

– The cover of these flyers bears a particular title: "*Aiuto! Aiuto! Siamo soli. L'ideologia gender sta entrando in tutti gli ambienti specialmente nella scuola*", which translates to "Help! Help! We are alone. The *ideologia gender* is entering all contexts, especially schools". Using images that represent two families of same-sex couples[1], they direct a question to the parents reading these flyers: "Do you want this to be taught to your children?". It is with this premise that the flyer then indicates the appointment to meet in Rome, on 20 June 2015, to reunite with all families (i.e. the *Family Day*). The cover then concludes with the request, in capital letters, to join them, because "*abbiamo bisogno di te*", "we need you". The phrases "we are alone" and "we need you" highlight a certain sense of *urgency*. This flyer undoubtedly constitutes a call for action, and it presents these initiatives as the centre of a strong movement, a movement intended to protect children.

– The inner part of this flyer is divided into two pages, one that answers the question: "what happens in schools?", and the other one that responds to "what is the '*teoria gender*'?". On the first page, the description provides an explanation of the educational projects focusing on three main points:
   – The government, the regional offices and the local admin-istrations are funding courses and projects based on the

1. The images used in the flyers are taken from the illustrated books *Più ricche di un re*, by Cinzia Barbero (2011); *Benvenuti in famiglia*, by Mary Hoffman (2014); and *Perchè hai due papà*, by Francesca Pardi (2014).

ideologia gender, led by biased associations, for millions of euros.

– Through the school, they intend to teach children that the masculine-feminine duality is a cultural imposition we need to get rid of.

– Some schools in Rome, Trieste and Turin for example, have already started substituting the terms "mother" and "father" with the terms "parent 1" and "parent 2", to abolish Father's Day and Mother's Day, and to read children fairy tales with characters of same-sex families.

The second page contains a description of what, according to the association *Difendiamo i nostri figli*, the *ideologia gender* entails:

– The first point reiterates what was said before: the masculine and the feminine are cultural impositions that have nothing to do with human nature. According to the *ideologia gender*, individuals are born as "neutral" beings, and they can then choose from infinite "gender identities".

– To summarise, the flyer points out that to respect all "gender identities", the *ideologia gender* expects us to eliminate any reference to the complementarity between masculine and feminine, modifying legislation concerning families, and intervening in the education of children and youth.

In the middle of both pages, we can see a text, written as a *warning* in capital letters (the text reads: "*Libri già in distribuzione in alcune scuole*"), telling parents that the books from which these images of same-sex families are taken are already being distributed in some educational establishments. These two pages definitely provide a certain amount of inaccurate information: as in many other cases encountered in the course of this book, first of all, there is reference

to an *ideologia gender* or *teoria gender*. Moreover, once more, the notions associated with such a *"theory"* are inaccurate compared to what gender studies actually research. For example, these flyers state that according to this "theory", all individuals are born "neutral" and can then *choose* their own gender identity. A specific reference to Facebook highlights once more a certain interest in social networks and the fact that they represent something everyone recognises and understands. More precisely, the flyer refers to the fact that Facebook offers many different options to indicate one's gender identity, in addition to "male" and "female" (e.g. queer, transgender, intersexual, gender fluid).

– The last page of this flyer is titled: "the WHO guidelines for sexual education in schools". To represent this, the association provides a summary, simply writing a specific age range, and indicating some topics[1]. This does not specify anything, nor does it clarify each issue. It simply gives the impression that these are the subjects to be taught by teachers, according to these guidelines, to children of those specific age ranges. The association *Difendiamo i nostri figli* took into account only some of the terms mentioned in the framework, and has taken them out of context in this list. The choice of terms is definitely made with the intent of "shocking" the parents, the target of these flyers, such as the specification of the issue of early childhood masturbation for children before the age of 4. Even an issue such as "love towards people of the same sex", indicated as the topic to

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1. "Fascia 0-4 anni: masturbazione infantile precoce; fascia 4-6 anni: amore verso persone dello stesso sesso; fascia 6-9 anni: contraccezione, auto-stimolazione; fascia 9-12 anni: libera scelta del partner, gravidanze indesiderate." This summary translates to: age range 0-4 years: early childhood masturbation; age range 4-6: love between people of the same sex; age range 6-9: contraceptives and auto-stimulation; age range 9-12: freedom to choose one's partner, undesired pregnancies.

be introduced to children between the age of 4 and 6, is outlined here as one of the issues that are deemed inappropriate for children. This constitutes in itself a problem, since it implies an understanding of homosexuality as something negative and inappropriate.

Another particularly problematic element of this description is that this summary of the WHO guidelines has been propagated in different instances and in specific cases, implying that this is the content of all educational projects that deal with issues of gender equality, discrimination, etc. In fact, as it was clear from the interviews carried out for Phase 1 of this investigation, this summary was propagated via WhatsApp in Cagliari when the projects *Alla scoperta della differenza* and *Ci piacCiAmo!...anche in biblioteca*" were being organised and about to be implemented. In this case, once more, it constitutes a divulgation of false information. Not only does it present an erroneous and misleading simplification of the WHO and BZgA's (2010) "Standards for sexuality education in Europe", but none of the projects and initiatives that have been attacked through these flyers deal even slightly with the WHO and BZgA's framework. Projects that respond to this framework would definitely be interesting to take into account: however, these are not the projects at the centre of these controversies in Italy, nor at the centre of the legislation indicated by the *Buona Scuola* directive.

Initiative 2: Petition against UNAR and the WHO

A petition published in March 2014 on the website *Notizie pro-vita*, by *Pro Vita onlus*, an association that is particularly active against abortion laws, can be considered. This petition specifically demands that people

take a stand against UNAR's 2013-2015 LGBT strategy, including the booklets we have previously mentioned, and against the "Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe" of the World Health Organisation and the BZgA Research Institute.

Concerning the first part of the petition, focused specifically against the "2013-2015 Strategy to prevent and combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity", some considerations can be outlined:

– The first point of the petition argues that this strategy contains the principles of the *teoria del gender*. In particular, the petition provides an introduction to what, according to them, this "theory" entails. In this particular context, it is possible to identify clear misinformation and an overlapping of notions and definitions. For example, this paragraph states, at different points, that the *teoria del gender* argues that sexual orientation is an "absolutely subjective decision". Among the false information, it is possible to also identify real statements that lie at the core of gender studies, such as the statement that each sexual orientation has equal dignity. However, in this petition, even a statement such as this one is presented as something "shocking" and something people need to actively oppose. Moreover, the petition explains the term *heterosexist* as a word associated generally with people "who believe the family and heterosexual marriage to be the only legitimate form of marriage". By providing an inaccurate definition of the term, the petition undermines its value. The petition also attempts to base its statements on scientific research, arguing that behaviours and social roles are intimately linked to the biological sex, and that not only does this derive from genetic determinism, but it also determines obvious differences in terms of hormones, for example, and even in the structure of the brain. All this is specified through

the use of medical terms, so as to give more "authority" and legitimacy to the text.

– Another element of the UNAR strategy that the petition underlines as inappropriate and problematic is its open support for LGBT associations. In particular, the petition argues that it is unacceptable for a government to express so clearly a position in favour of LGBT associations, especially for a state that presents itself as "ideologically neutral".

– Lastly, this section argues that the majority of the Italian population does not agree with the core principles of this strategy, and that these therefore constitute an imposition. The petition even argues that such ideas go against the Italian Constitution. The authors of this petition thus call for the defence of freedom of religion and endorse the fact that the main religion of Italian citizens clearly states that, even if performed with respect and solidarity, "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered", making specific reference to the Bible. Moreover, the petition argues that the UNAR strategy harms freedom of thought and freedom of education. A reference to articles 18 and 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is also mentioned in the petition. The choice to include this reference shows a lack of knowledge and understanding of the issues at hand: in fact, the UDHR was drafted and ratified by states through the United Nations, the same organisation that is at the front line of the fight for LGBTI rights and that is behind the introduction of the "Standards for sexuality education in Europe", which the association takes a stand against in the same petition.

In fact, the second part of the petition focuses specifically on the WHO and BZgA's 2010 document "Standards for sexuality education in Europe".

- This petition presents these standards as another expression (at least partial) of the *ideologia del gender*. First of all, its authors provide an inaccurate and false summary of what this document entails. A particularly powerful example concerns the accusation that certain points in the document "basically promote paedophilia". This statement is a result of the interpretation of a statement that was reported using false information. In fact, the petition states that the framework provided by the WHO and BZgA indicates that between the age of 0 and 4, children should be informed "on the pleasure of touching their own body and on early childhood masturbation". However, in the actual framework the notion of early childhood masturbation is introduced for the age range 4-6 years old. Furthermore, the petition refers to this by arguing that this would then constitute an "instigation to paedophilia", because teachers would then have to be the ones to demonstrate what "touching one's own body" means, especially since the document recognises that early childhood education more broadly is expressed through gestures and images. This constitutes a free interpretation of the document, and a specific malicious intent to scare and shock parents who access this petition.

- However, once more, even in the parts where the information reflects the real framework provided in the 2010 publication, the association *Pro Vita* offers strong opposition (e.g. to the notion that all types of sexual orientation are of equal value). It seems that it is not only a matter of misinfor-

mation and misleading "propaganda", but rather fundamentally different ways of perceiving social structures that are different and discriminatory in themselves. This is where one of the fundamental difficulties in dealing with these issues lies: in fact, it is particularly difficult to make people aware of the discriminatory nature of these statements.

Initiative 3: *Generazione Famiglia*'s video

Lastly, I take into account a video published and propagated by the Italian branch of the association *Manif Pour Tous*, now named *Generazione Famiglia*. The video was published on YouTube on 4 December 2014 and posted again on Facebook on 24 April 2014[1]. The video, shared and accompanied by the hashtag #nogender, is named "*Capire il 'Gender' in meno di 3 minut*i", which translates to "understanding '*il gender*' in less than 3 minutes". In precisely 2 minutes and 30 seconds, in fact, a voice narrates a specific interpretation of what it means to talk about gender differences, of being female and being male.

– The content of the video in general gives inaccurate information about the problem raised by gender researchers. As Marzano (2015) also highlights, everything is mixed together, going back and forth between the notions of *gender identity*, *sexual differences*, and *gender* itself (p. 51). The "danger" of this video is its quasi-professional structure. It appears to be an actual informational video, but then it provides false information and it reinforces, once more, a misconception of what it means to talk about *gender*. Particularly central to this misinformation is the concept of equality: in fact,

1. The full video can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3h-ndmjeUhc

the video argues that these educational projects intend to make everyone the same, eliminating all differences, and that this is what will make people equal. This is a common misinterpretation of the issue of equality. In fact, it should be clarified that to be equal in terms of opportunities does not mean to be the same. What's more, equality values diversity and calls for people from any background, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc. to enjoy equal opportunities, even through and thanks to their diversity.

– The video approaches its conclusion with a particular focus on the school. According to the narrator, it is precisely at school that children would then learn how to "mix everything", between what is "for boys" and what is "for girls". This seems to be the greatest concern expressed by the video, a certain fear of *confusing* children.

– The video thus poses a central problem: how can a boy then be sure of being a boy? How can a girl know she is a girl? According to the video, all this talk about *gender* just creates confusion and raises problems of identity for children. This description is visually accompanied by symbolic signs and specific colours: *pink* for the girl, *light blue* for the boys, and *grey* for the figures that do not have any characteristics and that are questioning their own identity. It would be necessary to point out that children in their development are bound to encounter issues concerning their identity and to ask questions. Introducing gender-responsive educational projects would simply allow them to express their doubts and not to feel out of place, and consequently discriminated against, for having them in the first place.

What really contributes to conveying the messages at the centre of the video is the tone of the narrator, which accompanies certain statements with irony, undermining their value. The definitions of the notions that the narrator herself is attempting to undermine are actually incorrect, as previously highlighted. Moreover, the voice is guided by inspirational music that "grows" as the video continues, until the final statement:

> We do not want a school that confuses our children. We want our children to learn how to read, how to write, how to count. We want a school that makes them learn ethical respect through culture. Let girls be girls. Let boys be boys.

Furthermore, the narrator simply refers to the people on the other side of "*il gender*", as "*qualcuno*", which simply translates to "someone", not giving a specific characterisation and, arguably, undermining the issue even further.

Key findings

Strong misinformation has been evident across the analysis of these newspaper articles, official declarations of religious representatives, and specific "anti-gender" initiatives. It would be necessary to make a distinction between conscious intentions to spread misinformation, and a result of a lack of understanding of the issues at hand.

As previously highlighted in the course of the analysis, even the newspaper articles that intend to provide a neutral account or even express support for gender-responsive initiatives in education some-times use terms that "accidentally" reiterate and reinforce stereo-types and problematic dynamics. In more than one instance, for example, a lack of distinction between what constitutes a *choice*

of sexual orientation and what entails *understanding* and *relating to* one's own sexual orientation could be identified. This can take different forms, like referring to homosexuality as a "lifestyle decision" or arguing that all people should have the right "to do whatever they please".

Overall, there is a preponderance of articles actively opposing these projects. The others tend to outline the reasons why the projects are opposed, but it is not possible to find as many newspaper articles that actively defend the projects. Support tends to be given on blog posts in specific websites of LGBTI associations (e.g. *Arc Cagliari, Arcigay*) or by the associations that are in charge of the projects themselves. The articles that actively oppose these projects are mainly published in newspapers affiliated with the Catholic Church (i.e. *Tempi, Famiglia Cristiana*).

Regarding this type of misinformation, social media occupy a central role as a means to spread news and, in the same way, facilitate the diffusion of false information. The fact that the creators of the social network Facebook are now working to introduce a way to fact-check the news outlets and sources shared in people's profiles and official pages shows that there is a renewed and growing awareness of the danger of news sharing on social media, that goes hand in hand with their incredible value and potential (Isaac, 2016).

A question needs to be answered: why do people go to social media for information in the first place? One of the reasons could be that too often politicians, members of civil society and even researchers present certain issues in a complex manner. A specific example of this in Italy was the case of the recent referendum, which took place on 4 December 2016. The new constitutional reform was presented in quite a complex manner, and summaries and simplifications were mainly provided by the specific campaigns from the specific political parties and related associations defending or attacking the proposal. In this specific context, a lot of people got these summaries and clarifications, which were clearly biased, from

social networks and through campaigns carried out via the messaging application WhatsApp.

In relation to this digression concerning the referendum, the way we present certain issues should come under close scrutiny, for example when it comes to the clarification of technicalities and the use of complex multi-faceted definitions. I am specifically taking this case into account also to provide an example that is instrumental to our investigation. In fact, the association *Difendiamo i nostri figli* also participated in this campaign against the constitutional reform. Specifically, they inserted this campaign into their agenda concerning the fight against "*il gender*" by preparing a poster, which was mainly shared on Facebook and via the association's official web page. This presented what they argue to be the steps that the government would have taken if the constitutional reform were to be approved (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Difendiamo i nostri figli: flyer against the proposed constitutional reform.

Figure 2 shows the eight different steps "against Men and family" as announced by the association, including gay marriage, adoption for same-sex couples and single people, surrogacy, euthanasia, and finally: "homophobia/ transphobia". The final point constitutes the epitome of a clear example of the confusion of terms and concepts that is central to the "anti-gender" initiatives themselves. Once more, one must ask the question whether such confusion is perpetuated purposely or whether it is the result of a lack of awareness and understanding of these issues. Either way, there is a lack of a stable and consistent response, which simply allows for the reproduction of such confusion.

Moreover, it is necessary to underline that Phase 2 of this analysis was specific to articles and initiatives in the context of gender issues in education. However, each newspaper contributes to the construction of certain notions all across its publications. The same newspaper might publish a particularly delicate article one day, and it might then "accidentally" provide misinformation in another article concerning a related issue. This will continue to be the case if actions are not taken and if proper awareness campaigns are not carried out at all levels of society. Phase 2 of our investigation led us to a conclusion similar to that of Phase 1. In fact, in this case too, the newspaper articles, the "anti-gender" initiatives and the statements of representatives of the Catholic Church have shown three main elements.

The sources analysed in the course of Phase 2 show a certain *block* of misinformation continuously reinforced by newspapers, purposely or through lack of awareness. Religious representatives, and specifically leaders and authoritative figures of the Catholic Church, additionally do not demonstrate a real understanding of the issues, or they even purposely encourage the same misinformation. And in the case of "anti-gender" initiatives, there are people who operate with the specific intent to misinform the public and frighten everyone in order to maintain "traditional values" and the status quo, and there

are people who believe that the amount of information they have at hand is genuine, and that they are fighting for a specific cause.

The specific agenda and beliefs of Catholic-centred associations and movements, represented by associations such as *Difendiamo i nostri figli*, *Sentinelle in piedi*, *Generazione Famiglia* and, in the case of the Region of Sardinia and Cagliari, the *Associazione famiglie numerose,* become evident. In addition to these movements, official statements by the highest representatives of the Catholic Church in Italy, such as Pope Francis and Cardinal Bagnasco, clearly express the Catholic Church's position on these matters, thus legitimising the initiatives carried out by the associations.

Specific political agendas guiding certain initiatives and efforts to oppose the integration of a gender-perspective in education are also central to this controversy. As outlined also in the course of Phase 1, there are many political dynamics that come into play, where political parties exploit these controversies simply to attack opponents to the detriment of valuable and valid projects and initiatives, as was shown at a local level (i.e. through the articles engaging specifically with the case study of Cagliari) and at a national level (i.e. through the articles that point out, among other things, a waste of State funding when it comes to carrying out gender-responsive educational projects).

Chapter 5

Moving forward: strategies and further developments

The following chapter constitutes the conclusion of this investigation. The first part provides a synthesis of the research and outlines the main findings. In relation to the main findings, I provide possible strategies to engage with them. The second part proposes possible ways to further develop this research, by pointing out different aspects that would be interesting to explore in depth beyond the scope of this book.

Key findings and potential strategies

The main question I initially intended to discuss is: to what extent have educational projects that tackle gender issues been successfully implemented in the Italian context? Already at the beginning of this investigation, when simply articulating the conceptual and contextual framework, strong opposition to these projects became evident. This research fundamentally engaged with this opposition and the way

specific obstacles were posed to these projects and were represented and reflected in the public opinion in Italy, especially between 2013 and 2016. Throughout Phase 1 and Phase 2, three inter-related aspects in relation to this "anti-gender" movement could be identified: (a) general confusion of issues and lack of awareness; (b) political dynamics; (c) Catholic and ideological opposition. In the course of this chapter, I explore each theme and attempt to provide relevant possible strategies to tackle each of these aspects.

The first issue entails a certain general confusion about the issues at hand and a lack of awareness. Phase 1 and Phase 2 showed the presence of profound misunderstandings, which take different forms and are expressed at different levels of society. First of all, there is a strong misunderstanding expressed by the "anti-gender" movements themselves, through the work of associations such as *Difendiamo i nostri figli* and the *Sentinelle in piedi*. This became evident in the course of the interviews with the projects' coordinators analysed in Phase 1 and when specifically analysing "anti-gender" initiatives meant to shape public opinion in Phase 2. However, this lack of awareness became evident also among the people who are in a position to defend the educational projects and the gender-responsive initiatives, both at a macro (political) level and at a micro level (in educational establishments).

A distinction must be made between three notions that come into play: *lack of awareness*, *misunderstanding* and *misinformation*. There is a general lack of awareness concerning gender issues: the notion of gender itself is particularly complex. As shown in chapter 1, it entails a multitude of questions and is often perceived as complicated to understand. This lack of awareness gives rise to a number of misunderstandings, for example concerning the distinction between issues such as gender identity and sexual orientation. This is true on a broad scale: this research showed that a certain confusion is also expressed by people who intend to defend specific educational projects for gender equality. On one hand, this lack of awareness

is evidenced by the lack of a strong block of people in defence of these projects. On the other hand, this room for misunderstanding is then exploited by the leaders and proponents of the "anti-gender" movements, who have often purposely twisted existing information to influence the public and particularly to kindle fear and instil scepticism.

This misinformation then appears to be strongly reinforced by the media, for example through newspaper articles. This is true not only for newspapers with a specific affiliation, such as the Catholic *Famiglia Cristiana* and *Tempi*, but it was also clear when looking at mainstream newspapers such as *la Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*: in fact, even when attempting to provide neutral information about educational projects, they have used inaccurate terms that can then contribute to reinforcing certain stereotypes.

As a result, it is possible to identify in Italy an actual "block" of misinformation, where a term like *gender* has acquired a completely different connotation than what it actually means and entails. In fact, as previously outlined, *il gender* is now perceived as an extensive ideological project that involves feminists, LGBTI activists and gender studies researchers, together with the movements defending abortion, sexual education, contraception, etc. (Paternotte, *et al.*, 2015, p. 14).

This ideology is perceived as a "top-down" imposition originating from international organisations such as the UN or the EU, coming to destroy the "natural society" (Avanza, 2015, p. 219). Additional proof of the misinformation is the intensity of this opposition against projects that simply intend to tackle stereotypes, without, for example, engaging directly with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, which are generally the issues considered delicate especially by Catholics.

It is necessary to study how to oppose this block of misinformation. The first method, as also outlined by the experts interviewed for Phase 1 of the analysis, is to carry out awareness-raising campaigns

prior to devising and implementing projects. This can take place in the form of numerous conferences and initiatives, meant to spark discussion and to clarify the terms and issues central to a gender perspective in education. Moreover, issues of gender equality may need to be discussed in another framework. One way could be to follow the example of Denmark, which works to implement school programmes to develop empathy. Working to develop empathy could already be an interesting step towards understanding inequalities. In line with this strategy, perhaps it would be interesting to focus on gender-based violence, and act specifically against bullying. However, as the reactions to the National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR) booklets showed, this is particularly complex since it is also perceived as an imposition and as one of the issues that only parents should discuss with their children. Moreover, speaking of gender-based violence can often be particularly delicate for another reason as well: the risk of reinforcing certain stereotypes and a hierarchy between men (as the strong actors and as the abusers) and women (as the weak victims).

Another way could be by inserting issues of gender equality under a framework of Human Rights Education. However, this could be problematic since human rights can be complex to define and since Italy, specifically, seems to be particularly *sceptical* towards anything that is perceived as coming from outside and, even more so, if it comes from international organisations.

The same problem is true if these issues are inserted from a health-based approach. In fact, this would inevitably engage with the issue of sexuality education, which still appears to be a taboo in the Italian reality. In the course of this investigation, in fact, it was possible to see how sexuality education was brought into the picture even when not relevant, simply to create a "shock effect" to scare parents and families.

A more effective way of integrating a gender perspective to fight a lack of awareness would be to invest in teacher training. As shown

by the almost complete lack of opposition to the *SAVE* project, this could perhaps be considered an effective strategy. In fact, since children would not directly be involved in the projects, there might be less opposition and fewer obstacles. Moreover, working on teacher training would definitely have a lasting impact and it would allow for the implementation of an inclusive pedagogy. Overall, such an action could involve not only teacher training but also the introduction of gender equality courses in different fields at university level. These actions, in my opinion, then contribute to providing the public with means to better distinguish and understand the issues at hand: if this is achieved, the campaigns of misinformation often led by "anti-gender" associations would find less space to impact the public. In fact, ideally, this type of initiative would then lead to the construction of a stronger *block* in defence of gender-responsive policies.

However, none of these strategies can be successfully implemented without a political commitment to fund these projects and defend them. This brings us to the second fundamental issue found in this investigation: the political dynamics. These educational projects often tend to be proposed and implemented by left-wing political parties and opposed by right-wing ones. As we saw in Phases 1 and 2 of the investigation, sometimes the projects appear to meet with particularly strong opposition simply because a specific political party has shown its support.

These educational projects are not enough: they are easily stopped at different levels and the strong block of misinformation limits their impact. It would be necessary to integrate a gender perspective in all aspects of education, both through an inclusive pedagogy and in all other aspects of planning and implementing an educational policy. In particular, at an international level, actions have been taken to operate in the context of *gender mainstreaming*, which entails integrating a gender perspective into all aspects of education and all policy areas. Even if education is one of the main actors in the construction and reinforcement of stereotypes and

social structures, it undoubtedly does not stand alone. Therefore, it is necessary to act at different levels. In order to do so, however, civil servants need to be effectively trained and aware of the issues at hand.

This is clearly not the case in the Italian context. There are a number of issues with an effective implementation of gender mainstreaming. First of all, coming once more from international organisations and the European Union, it might be received with scepticism. Moreover, at an international level gender mainstreaming mainly engages with issues of inequalities between men and women but does not go in depth with issues of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, I believe that operating at a political level through gender mainstreaming has the potential to be an effective means towards the achievement of gender equality. Further research should be developed in this direction, to understand what it entails at a practical level and how to successfully implement it, for example in a reality such as the Italian one.

Lastly, the third issue that became evident in the course of the analysis is the nature of the opposition as mainly Catholic, with very specific ideological concerns. The opposition certainly proved itself to be dominated by large amounts of false information. While some of this opposition was indeed misguided, it is possible to argue that there are, at the basis of it all, very specific conceptions and understandings of the world that do not leave room for the subjects explored by gender studies.

This raises a different question for researchers in gender studies, mainly related to communication. How can gender studies researchers effectively communicate their main research findings? First of all, I believe it is particularly important not to dismiss the opposition. As the experts interviewed in Phase 1 also pointed out, there are often two spontaneous reactions to the statements and actions of "anti-gender" initiatives: laughter and anger. Neither reaction is ultimately constructive. It is necessary to find common ground

in order to move forward in future discussions. It is important to find ways to communicate effectively, not only with the people who are aware of gender issues, but also with those who see "*il gender*" as an enemy. If "*il gender*" acquired this connotation and if this block of misinformation was so successfully reinforced, perhaps there are some problems within the field of gender studies itself and some gaps that need to be filled.

Further developments

In order to further develop this research, I believe it would be particularly useful to consider issues of *intersectionality*. In fact, when speaking of gender in education, especially depending on the context, there are a multitude of other factors that come into play, such as race, socio-economic background, country of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, among others. Ward and Robinson-Woods (2006) highlight an example:

> There is increasing awareness of the myriad influence on girls' developing self-concept and the importance of integrating one's multiple identities (racial, gender, social class and sexual orientation). For Black girls, obstacles to academic success are multiplied by the effects of colliding pressures and challenges, ranging from lack of access to resources to race, gender and class biases.

Although this remark is specific to the context of the United States, it raises issues that are relevant to other realities, including the Italian one. Moreover, it would be interesting to investigate the intersection between gender and disability, as well as gender and students' socio-economic background, in relation to their performance and experiences. Unfortunately the scope of this research did not allow to dive

further into these intersections, as well as into issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIECS). It would be important to develop this research further by taking these dimensions into account. In fact, gender is at the centre of a system where sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism and classism interact with each other through an "epistemology of domination" (Dayer, 2014, p. 46).

It would be interesting to further develop Phase 1, by specifically investigating the nature of the projects and actually analysing their content and planning. The projects need to be always carefully designed and need to take into consideration many aspects and factors. People who carry out these projects should always be trained. That is one of the reasons why it is important to have a centralised approach to the matter and why support should come from political institutions and *trained* policy makers. Phase 2 of this investigation also has the potential to be further developed independently, for example through an analysis of paper copies of newspapers and a look at TV news outlets.

Furthermore, it would be fascinating to analyse the opposition in more detail, by engaging with the specific arguments and the specific discourse, which was not possible because of the limitations posed by the language barrier and the need to carry out translations from Italian to English for the purpose of this book.

Finally, it would be interesting to further research the strategies suggested in the first part of this chapter, in order to explore whether they could be successfully implemented at a national level. In this context, I believe it would be particularly interesting to further study how to effectively communicate and how to constructively frame gender studies research so as to combat and go beyond the block of misinformation that seems to dominate the public scene on gender issues in Italy.

It is fundamental to continue moving forward, to develop new strategies and evaluate the existing ones. Situations are most likely

developing in different forms now compared to the time when educational projects were implemented between 2013 and 2016. We can identify positive efforts in children's literature (e.g. examples of the publishing houses *Settenove* and *Lo Stampatello*); efforts in children's movies (e.g. "Frozen" [2013] and "Moana" [2016]); a general interest in speaking of gender studies at a governmental level and in making it one of the priorities in the context of education; efforts by media to provide accurate information (e.g. the articles and reports by *L'Espresso* and *Internazionale*); and especially the constant efforts of civil society, through associations, non-governmental organisations, research institutions and social cooperatives to raise awareness, to inform the public and to engage directly with educational institutions, among which *Agape*, *SNOQ* and *Menabó* constitute only some of the many examples.

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Table of contents