2. BENCHMARKING

FINAL SUMMARY

1. This report is part of the Evaluation report of the SAFE project, commissioned to the Associazione fra professioniste Extrafondente *(association of women professionals)* by the Municipality of Reggio Emilia (project leader) on march 8th 2014. It is part of the overall evaluation plan of *"SAFE: school approaches for familiy empowerment"* project.

2. The specific objective on which our client asked us to focus is expressed in the project text as follows: *B) promoting exchanges, discussion and a systematic and structured benchmarking (based on shared tools and methods) between relevant experiences on a European level*.

3. This report presents a methodological support to develop a benchmarking tool for any experience which, through and with the schools, may empower families on their path to full inclusion into the Italian society.

4. A review of other benchmarking experiences in the social field shows that benchmarking is a well-established practice, way beyond the two cases considered in this work and which is also used in the field of education.

5. Both SAFE and the two other experiences here mentioned highlight the two essential aspects of learning on the one side, and the notion of a necessarily continuous process that the benchmarking entails. It is not thus performance measurement for its own sake, it is rather a systematic element in the 'evaluation-planning-progress' cycle.

6. The benchmarking processes here considered as a useful reference for this work have the advantage of offering a complete overview of the subject they are meant to evaluate, yet the completion of the questionnaire requires a long and hard work. The methodology here proposed, although it is only briefly outlined, does not require a systematic collection of numerical data, it requires instead an evaluation meeting in which all the stakeholders take part.

7. The SAFE model focuses on a subject (foreign families empowerment) that is not explicitly part of other models, yet other models such as, in our opinion, the Social report and the E.O.P. (educational offer plan) do need to integrate this subject into the processes of planning and evaluation of school performances.

8. The validity and repeatability of the model here outlined depend on three factors: a) participation of all stakeholders into the qualitative evaluation of what a local community produces in terms of integration of foreign families; b) minimizing evaluation errors, thanks to the contribution of all stakeholders; c) the evaluation process itself as a tool for inclusion of foreign families.

9. This tool allows to deliver an easy-to-read and to-the point result that is able to communicate in a clear and simple way the outcomes of a more complex and extensive work: in this manner, the exchange of practices is made easier and facilitated.

10. Although incompletely and imperfectly expressed, the content of this work is the result of a joint effort by all the subjects who were actively involved in the project. What was missing was the point of view of the parents and the foreign families, although it was indirectly reported by the intercultural centers.

11. The publication of the model outline on the project web site may allow schools to work together to complete it and then encourage its implementation, once the tool has been fine tuned. The website can also serve as an archive of the successful experiences, a database of good practices made available to anyone interested in replicating them.

12. The benchmarking tool needs to be completed and then tested further in order to completely define the indicators proposed by the project team, clearify items and language.

13. The SAFE model can be subsequently followed up, for example, by defining an accurate descriptor for each indicator, so as to obtain an even more precise evaluation framework with, if need be, a quantitative system along with the already existing qualitative system.

2.1 SAFE IN FEW POINTS

From the project draft we gather that SAFE is aimed at pinpointing and strengthening multi-level local policy experiences in order to involve foreign families and so facilitate the processes of integration and inclusion in the host society. SAFE project was thus aimed at understanding how it is possible to foster the involvement and integration of families of foreign origin by leveraging schools as a privileged space for interculturality, with special attention to the families of second generation immigrant youth.

The methodology sketched out in the project draft in based along two lines:

a. Activating a multi-level comparison between different territories and detecting what subjects – along with the local institutions – can support effective and inclusive actions for the young generations and their families. The project partnership reflects the adopted method: the Municipality in collaboration with the intercultural centers and some schools of the local community.
b. Dialogue and exchange between partners and with the groundbreaking Lewisham City Council (London), the experiences of the Council of Europe and the Efus (European forum for urban security).

Unfortunately, Extrafondente could not rely on an initial thorough review and analysis of the policies of family empowerment through the school, which would have been of much help in the definition of the benchmarking system. The time constraints and some criticalities encountered along the way in fact slowed down the completion of this work.

The reconstruction of the project outcome and output hereby proposed (and validated by the stakeholders' assembly held in Arezzo on may 14th 2014) can be represented as shown below:

Project output	Project outcome
Guidelines for foreign family empowerment through school	Definition of the indicators for the benchmarking of foreign family empowerment

2.2 BENCHMARKING

Despite the short time available, on occasion of the assembly of may 14th we agreed on the lexical semantics of the two key words contained in the definition of the output and the outcome, partly based also on official MIUR documents.

Empowerment

Family empowerment in the context of school has the meaning of "education co-responsibility": the role of parents in school life, from mere participation in the governing bodies, becomes authentic cooperation in the educational planning and processes. All of which entails the need to support and improve the full integration and inclusion of foreign families in Italian society, through school.

Benchmarking

"A systematic and continuous process of comparing the performances, the functions or the processes of the organizations […] aimed not only at achieving those performances but also at improving them" (European Commission, 1996). It is about identifying the most competent peer subjects in the activity one seeks to improve in order to use them as a benchmark in relation to which to improve one's own standards. It is the disposition to discussion and to competition with "the best" peers.

The concept of benchmarking is derived from the field of economics and finance and is shown in the fig. beside. [*fig*: PLANNING – PLACEMENT – PROGRESS] It involves a three-steps analysis that considers how one's performance ranks compared to the best performance, the planning of improvement strategies to get closer to the top performances and finally a new measurement of the progress made.

Also according to the glossary of the AIV (Associazione Italiana Valutatori) edited by Bezzi (2012), *benchmarking* is defined as "a technique based on the systematic comparison between the products, services and processes of an organization and those of another organization that is valued as the best. The aim is that of activating processes of learning and change with relation to critical factors that are considered capable of yielding better performances. *Benchmark* is the indicator that is specifically constructed or selected as the reference standard or the basis for comparison of *benchmarking*".

The *benchmarking* certainly qualifies as a tool for collaboration, between cooperating organizations and not between competitors, used to identify the best related practice and compare one's own practices to that. It cannot be considered as the tool for a one-off event, but rather it must be integrated in a regular cycle of planning and improvement of the organization or the sector of the organization that one seeks to improve. Which entails the repetition of the *benchmarking* in order to systematically measure one's performances against the best and so assess the progress made.

Some consider as a weak point of *benchmarking* the possibility that the differences observed could be put down to the non-comparableness of the systems that one seeks to compare. This issue hardly has any bearing on the area of interest of SAFE, since the project is concerned with a comparison between best related practices by definition, in this case a comparison between schools all belonging to the Italian public education system. The problem may arise in the comparisons with Lewisham (and, more generally with the experiences of other countries), since the schools and their respective contexts are situated in different legislative and regulatory frameworks of formal education. Nevertheless our long-standing experience in the field of international collaborations and *peer assessment*, just as the literature, leads us to suggest that the perceived non-transferability of the experiences is very often mistaken with the well-known resistance to changes being introduced in the organizations, while, in many cases, the differences should be rather ascribed to the better techniques or the greater efficiency and effectiveness of one of the two organizations compared.

It is useful to present the "CODE OF CONDUCT" published on http://qualitiamo.com , which can be applied in any *benchmarking* process:

1. Always be honest and open;
2. Identify peer organizations' success factors;
3. Observe the differences between how we work and how peer organizations work;
4. Plan how to integrate successful ideas into our practice;
5. Implement the appropriate improvement actions.

2.3 USES OF BENCHMARKING IN THE SOCIAL FIELD AND EDUCATION

We examined two relevant experiences of the use of benchmarking in the social field: *Intercultural Cities* and *Benchmarking e misurazione delle performance nel sistema di istruzione e formazione lombardo* (*Benchmarking and performance measurement in Lombardy's education and training system*), published on "ReQus – La rete per la qualità nella scuola" website: http://requs.it/default.asp?pagina=3839). What follows is a summary of their key characteristics.

Intercultural cities

Intercultural cities is a joint program of the Council of Europe and the European Commission aimed at supporting cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realize the advantages inherent in diversity. The program proposes a set of analytical and practical tools to help local stakeholders through the various stages of the process. The participating cities subject themselves to an assessment and evaluation of their intercultural strategies and their implementation carried out by a team of experts; also, they compare their own to the peer member's policies, governance and practices.

The narrative form in which the member cities' relationships and their profiles are recorded makes it difficult to monitor the progresses made and so communicate the outcomes. Thus an *Intercultural Cities Index (ICI)* has been made available, that is a benchmarking tool consisting of a certain number of indicators which allows to assess where one city stands in some policy and governance areas, in order to assess its progress over time and understand what areas of intervention must be targeted in the future, by identifying the member cities' best practices and so enabling city-to-city learning. Also, this benchmarking tool illustrates the city profiles very clearly and "visually", highlighting the level of achievement of each city, progress over time, comparison with other cities or the network as a whole.

Data are collected through a questionnaire to be completed by municipality officials and more information is also gathered from the Policy assessment grid which must be completed by different departments within the same local institution. A team of experts then analyzes the results and writes a SWOT analysis report with a series of recommendations. The *ICI Index* is based on a questionnaire of 66 questions grouped under 14 indicators involving a combination of three different types of data:

> FACTS: demographic data in particular (primarily quantitative)
> INPUTS: policies, structures (primarily qualitative)
> IMPACTS: attitudes and behaviors (primarily qualitative)

The different indicators have been classified in terms of their importance and for each indicator the higher score a city can get is 100. The tool thus developed contains a limited number of strong and significant indicators that allow to assess and communicate where one city stands in matters of "intercultural integration", pinpoint the future areas of intervention and identify which cities can offer good practices in the specific areas. The radar graph, which provides a synthesis of the whole spectrum of collected data, of which we give an example below, "visually" illustrates the profile of a city, highlighting its level of achievement; its progress over time; a comparison with other cities or the network as a whole.

Fig: commitment – intercultural lens – mediation – language – media – international perspective – intelligence/competence – hospitality – governance

Benchmarking and performance measurement in Lombardy's education and training system

MIUR's network for quality in school provides an answer to the question "why benchmarking in school?" by identifying the fundamental reason in the promotion of self-directed learning through dialogue: building a network of schools willing to exchange experiences in an organized way, also with the help of information technologies, will speed the school's improvement process, according to ReQus, while at the same time cutting down the costs associated with the introduction of good practices.

The Lombardy project was aimed at creating shared and consistent ways of collecting useful data in order to define indicators that allow to measure the outcomes of the education and training system and evaluate the performances of individual stakeholders; to measure and compare the outcomes of the services management in order to promote a continual improvement process of the system's performances; to promote dialogue, the exchange of experiences and sharing good practices.

The system of indicators developed, according to its authors and MIUR, allows to evaluate through a shared and consistent method that provides reliable and comparable data which, in the case of Lombardy, comprise the given School's general information, number and type of school complexes, classes, staff, economic data, the level of satisfaction. The questionnaires from which quantitative information is gathered are completed by a satisfaction questionnaire addressed to the students, teachers, families and the technical and administrative staff.

In the context of the education and training system, according to the authors, benchmarking constitutes a useful tool in the hands of schools and training organizations, providing them with substantial help in sharing and promoting the development and transferability of experiences and solutions to problems. Benchmarking is not aimed at leading all organizations to adopt the same processes and practices, rather it aims to foster a methodological competence that enables the organizations to learn from the others and seek excellence.

The nine criteria selected from the Lombardy project are shown in the figure below. This project uses the radar graphs to clearly and synthetically illustrate the performances of different schools, with relation to the 9 criteria.

Fig: Lombardy education system benchmark // leadership – policies and strategies – personnel – partnership and resources – processes – results oriented towards the students and the families – personnel results – society results – results in the key performances

2.4 BENCHMARKING INDICATORS: SAFE MODEL

As always, when trying to make similar things comparable, it is not easy to find indirect indicators able to effectively and completely express a phenomenon, all the more so a complex, articulated and ambiguous concept as that of empowerment; moreover, it is difficult to find irrefutable cause-effect relationships between policies and practices on the one hand and their presumed effects on the other.

While recognizing the above mentioned difficulties, nonetheless the here summarized SAFE benchmarking model suggests a way of analyzing and appreciating data that allows not so much to draft mere school rankings as to carry out a qualitative analysis which every stakeholder will contribute to develop and then translate into numerical grades on the adopted scale from 1 to 10. We certainly agree with the authors of Lombardy's benchmarking when they state that it is all about providing schools with a way to develop a methodological competence that enables them to learn

from the others and seek excellence. A working method capable of activating a networking system operating on two levels: the level of the local community where all the different stakeholders meet and the benchmarking network level whose hub is SAFE web page.

The SAFE model is structured along the following lines:

- Creation of a local group to which every local stakeholder interested in the subject at issue take part.
- The qualitative and subjective evaluation of each stakeholder carried out during a seminar, by means of the two specified tools: the questionnaire on the indicators with an evaluation scale from 1 (least satisfaction) to 10 (most satisfaction); the description of indicators; 4 variables of the quality evaluation.
- Submittal of the questionnaire to the SAFE web administrator who processes data and creates the graphic benchmarking tool.
- Submittal to the SAFE web administrator of the narrative report on what is considered the best experience (or more experiences and projects), to be published online.
- Communication to the group of peers of one's placement according to the benchmarks.
- Planning of the actions deemed necessary to improve weaknesses.

2.4.1 Shared qualitative analysis

The validity and repeatability of the SAFE model depend on three factors: a) participation of all stakeholders to the qualitative evaluation of the outcomes of the policies and processes of inclusion of foreign families through school in the local community; b) minimizing evaluation errors, thanks to the contribution of all stakeholders with their different standpoints; c) the evaluation process itself as a tool for inclusion of foreign families. Let us take a look at these three aspects.

a. **Participation**. Participation of all stakeholders assures that everyone has a voice and all different standpoints are taken into account. Neither the perspective of the direct beneficiaries (foreign students and their families) nor that of the indirect beneficiaries (teachers, technical and administrative staff, school principals, local entities with a connection to the benchmark's four dimensions, Municipalities, intercultural centers etc…) will be missing, according to the characteristics of the local community and depending on the stakeholders' willingness to contribute to reach the goal.

b. **Scientific basis**. SAFE model finds its scientific basis in the analysis, evaluation and planning seminar where all stakeholders have their place. Similar models have been implemented for decades within the project cycle management (PCM) developed by the European Commission (see 2004 handbook) for the application of the Logical Framework Approach (first developed in the late 1960's) in project planning and management. Similarly, the SWOT analysis is considered an effective tool, though it is based on subjective judgments, since it is capable of bringing together different points of view. It is when the entirety of the various points of view is represented that the picture of reality is more faithful.

c. **SAFE model as the foremost tool for inclusion**. The first and foremost step in the benchmarking process with a view to inclusion is the establishment of the evaluation group. The inclusion of the students' families, making sure that foreign parents too are represented, in the creation of a work team of stakeholders for the analysis and the planning that go into drafting the E.O.P. (educational offer plan) and, possibly, the school's social report, is in itself an act of inclusion and empowerment of the foreign families. It is also a working method that can be fully integrated into the cycle of evaluation and planning already implemented in schools, as explained above.

As far as we know about the two examples of *benchmarking* in the social field (the above mentioned *Intercultural cities* and *Benchmarking in Lombardy's education and training system*), even though it is not clear how the issue of the validity and reliability of the qualitative information they also contain is dealt with and how this information is integrated in their index, it seems that the task of collecting a great amount of data and transcribing it into the questionnaires weighs too much on the school or the local municipality officials.

SAFE model introduces a mode of operation that, besides being scientifically valid as argued before, is meant to take in activities that are already carried out in schools. The first example is the provisional and final social report, which should always be written with the contribution of all stakeholders and should not be restricted to an economic and financial analysis, as it happens with some social reports observed in high schools of Emilia Romagna.

Fig (Benchmarking cycle): EVALUATION GROUP Creation of an evaluation group with inside and outside stakeholders / BENCHMARKING EVALUATION Participated seminar for (re-)evaluation and placement / IMPROVEMENT PLANNING Drafted in a start-of-the year seminar along with the E.O.P. and the social report

A second example, shown in the fig. illustrating the benchmarking cycle, is the the E.O.P. (educational offer plan), to which the SAFE model can contribute with its seminar, that is by providing the occasion to exchange views and spark discussions that will positively influence the drafting of a plan which is expected to be truly representative of all the stakeholders involved. The SAFE model is organized in such a way as to favor a kind of evaluation which includes the points of view, knowledge, experiences of all the subjects involved, allows to register the opinions and views of all the stakeholders, while, at the same time, it delivers a simple, concise and easy-to-read result, that is able to communicate rapidly and easily the outcome of a complex process: it is thus a way to make easier and facilitate the exchange of practices.

2.4.2 Measurement against the others

The attached document A sums up and outlines the considerations and the work of the participants and experts who took part in the SAFE project activities, in a way that is functional to the SAFE benchmarking system.

Although incompletely and imperfectly expressed, the content is the result of a joint effort by the project experts, the partner Municipalities' representatives, the intercultural centers and their partners, the teachers and the evaluation consultants; in other words, all the subjects who were actively involved in the project. What was missing was the point of view of the parents and the foreign families. To overcome this problem a series of individual and group interviews to parents of foreign origin was conducted, whose results were not considered in this section but can be found in the first part of the *Guidelines*. We hope that, in this first stage of what we regard as an ongoing process, those opinions too can help develop the description of the indicators.

In many respects, the SAFE model surely does not have much to offer in terms of methodologies, since it seems that a great deal remains to be done also about some relevant matters, not without the help of all the subjects involved and first of all the families of the students of foreign origin that, as it has been pointed out, were involved only indirectly (that is they did not participate in the local work teams).

SAFE model rests upon two levels: the level of the local group of all the stakeholders who, by leveraging the school, evaluate the outcomes according to the primary and secondary indicators of SAFE evaluation questionnaire; the level of the benchmarking network website, where any

further contribution to the indicators description can be posted (especially to the missing or incomplete descriptions), the completed questionnaire is uploaded and, as more local groups register, the online community exchanges views in order to identify the appropriate benchmark for the weak areas.

Both SAFE and the two above mentioned experiences stress the importance of the key aspects of learning and of the necessarily ongoing process which is entailed in the very idea of benchmarking. Benchmarking is thus not just measurement as an end in itself but as a systematic element of the 'evaluation-planning-progress' cycle every organization should adopt to properly manage its tasks, with a view to accomplishing its goals. Four dimensions have been identified; for each dimension, a set of primary indicators (that is essential indicators, without which there can be no empowerment, at least as far as this is understood in the context of SAFE) and a set of secondary, though nonetheless relevant and effective indicators. Such secondary indicators would not figure into a given local group of stakeholders' calculation of the average of "foreign families empowerment", if the group decided not to make use of them because they are too far from their practice. In the following graphs, the asterisk (*) indicates the primary indicators.

DIMENSION A. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Innovative communication*

Social report*

Community network and relationships*

Agreement for co-responsibility in education

Foreign parents participating in class meetings and the school Committee

DIMENSION B. PARENTING SUPPORT

Improve foreign parents' language proficiency*

Presence of a school counsellor or welfare coordinator*

Direct relationship with social services*

School: hub for local public initiatives*

Work groups with specific objectives and competences

School and external entities in a network of projects and practices

Support to children's ambitions in the fields of education and work

DIMENSION C. CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Tackling racism and discrimination*

Active participation in community life*

Environmental and sustainable lifestyles education*

Local community and cultural-artistic heritage awareness

Experimenting democratic practices and conflict management

Understanding the Constitution as citizenship and peace education

Working teams of mixed composition (teachers, staff, parents, students) for specific projects *

Ways to communicate with the "absent" parents*

Intercultural mediation between educational institutions and families*

Peer-to-peer students*

Peer-to-peer parents

Voluntary work for the schools

Occasions for discussions (also extra-curricular)

Local community group for family empowerment should consider 4 important variables when evaluating their intervention:

Effectiveness	The project or program reached the expected results
Scale	The dimensions of the intervention justify the effort
Sustainability	The intervention is economically and socially sustainable
innovation	There is a degree of originality and innovation to the intervention

2.4.3 Comparative graphic representation

The radar graph, also used in the other works mentioned, is no doubt the most effective tool that helps understand how an individual local group for foreign family empowerment through school placed in any dimension identified by the benchmark. Through the graphic representation of the answers of the project groups of Reggio Emilia and Turin (who experimented the pre-test), we show below, by way of example, how the benchmarking tool will appear to SAFE website users.

The following graph shows the answers of the group of Reggio Emilia on the "Citizenship education" dimension. Although there is no comparison here represented, the graphic medium clearly shows the strong points and if these coincide with the primary indicators.

(Fig.) *DIMENSION C. CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION* Local group: Reggio Emilia / Primary indicator /
Tackling racism and discrimination
Active participation in community life
Environmental and sustainable lifestyles education
Local community and cultural-artistic heritage awareness
Experimenting democratic practices and conflict management
Understanding the Constitution as citizenship and peace education

In the following graph we can see a comparison with Turin group and we can clearly see the indicators where the two performances distance themselves. On account of this information, Reggio Emilia may reach out to Turin, also through the website, and learn about their programs on democratic practices experimentation and conflict management, an area where they performed better, according to their self-evaluation.

Fig. = (+ local group: Turin)

The third graph adds a (so far) hypothetical simulation of statistical average of all the evaluated subjects with relation to the same dimension. The statistical average comparison will make sense only after numerous SAFE evaluations are carried out. What is really important is that who performs poorly learns from those who excel.

Fig. = (+ hypothetical statistic average simulation)

ATTACHMENT A. DIMENSIONS AND INDICATORS

DIMENSION A. DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

The dimensions and indicators hereby presented, as well as their description, are the result of SAFE project group's teamwork. This is an unfinished and imperfect text, so much so that some indicators are either defined by very few words or are left totally undescribed; yet it is the draft providing the framework for the final benchmark that schools (and local groups) may discuss and complete if they intend to implement SAFE benchmarking model for the empowerment of foreign families.

Primary indicators

Innovative communication
Clear, two-way information.
The first primary level of information is the school's organization, its deadlines, the role of staff and parents.
Clear information means a two-way communication whereby the information given satisfies the foreign parents' needs and expectations about the school or the requested service. These days, more and more often, schools try to establish a two-way communication by means of an array of tools and devices.
There is also another level to the bi-directionality of the communication: it expresses the teachers'/school's need to acquire information about the life stories, the living conditions, the needs and expectations, the individual migratory projects of each foreign family, all of which apparently affects the families' relationship with the school and the local community. "Teachers can be better informed and more competent without being intrusive and nosey".
Among the various tools and devices for a two-way communication is the wide array of bilingual/multilingual tools and informative materials. These various materials written in L1 (native language) – many of which can be found on internet – have been available for a long time and they provide explanations about how the school is managed and how it operates or they give formal/institutional information. The availability of these materials and their use, besides answering to specific information needs, conveys a real and not just symbolic message to the families. The more effective the communication, the more parents become aware of the lead role they play in supporting their children's education. A recent and meaningful practice in schools today is the increasing active involvement of parents into the discussion of the informative materials' contents and their translation in the L1 (native language).
Examples of such materials, written by the schools or the Municipality (containing information about the school services of its own responsibility like, e.g., school canteens) are the multi-language booklets/handbooks on the Italian education system and those offering the students vocational guidance on the choice of the future school (High School choice guidance); also, the school profile by which the school introduces itself, translated into multiple languages (with the help of the foreign parents); the welcome letter in multiple languages delivered to the

freshmen's families when they enroll their children (written by the teachers and translated with the help of the foreign parents); a briefing note in two languages with some basic information on the student's integration; a summary of the E.O.P. in the native language (containing the main guidelines of the E.O.P., it is usually a 6- or 8-page brochure); various materials written in native language that help manage the school-family formal communication (notices or messages about the most frequent events in school); a menu of the school canteen written in multiple languages (delivered to all children); other materials in multiple languages (pictures, posters, notices …) affixed in school hall-ways and boards; school presentation videos with subtitles in the target languages or the most widespread languages in school; an entrance questionnaire translated into multiple languages aimed at obtaining the views of the parents (how they see their children as persons and learners, how they have changed since they have attended school, how much they trust the school, etc.)

Social report

The Social report can be defined as a voluntary process through which a public or private, for-profit or non-profit organization evaluates and communicates to its stakeholders the outcomes and the effects of its own choices and actions in relation to its own mission and the ethical values that constitute the basis of the institutional activity.

Premises of the Social report are the responsibility and the obligation to extensively involve the stakeholders throughout the whole process, from the needs and expectations analysis, through consensus building around the choices to be made, up to the monitoring and the communication of the actual value creation. (…) Putting at the heart of the Social report the school, understood as an autonomous institutional entity, means to demonstrate the school's ability to reach an equilibrium between the task of education and the resources available to support it over time. (…) The Social report is not just a document, it is an organizational process. It is a managerial system of the school through which the Principal and the governing bodies decide to commit themselves to manage a long-lasting relationship with their interlocutors.

The Social report must necessarily involve the parents in the definition of the activities that characterize school life and school's relationship with the local community and its stakeholders. Many school now have taken on the task of drafting a Social report.

Community network and relationships

The experiences observed highlight the importance of the presence of a network of schools (and school networks for integration, as in some regions of Italy) dedicated to developing common services and activities and to exchanging experiences.

Secondary indicators

Agreement for co-responsibility in education

The agreement aims to:

Convey the message that the school is open to dialogue and exchange of opinions;

Share the agreement between school and family; building an alliance with the family is essential to obtain the expected result;

Take into serious consideration the parents' criticisms and remarks directed at the Italian school: like, e.g., religious or ethical problems, respect of authority and discipline, problems with competence acquisition, especially language competence in cases of a possible return to the home country or movement to another country.

Basically, the agreement for co-responsibility in education allows to build an alliance with the family which entails a great deal of commitment on the part of the school. The school must

commit itself to present and share its educational model in order to build an effective relationship based on trust and to overcome the resistance to devolve upon the school the responsibility of children's education that is sometimes observed in parents. In this context, teachers develop a greater disposition to dialogue and an open-mindedness that help overcome easily the critical initial situation.

Foreign parents participating in Class meetings and the school Committee

This indicator refers to the involvement in the school governing bodies of the parents of students of foreign origin.

Although gradually, we are witnessing more and more foreign parents participating as representatives in the school Committee *(Consigli di Istituto),* the Class meetings *(Consiglio di Classe*) and the parents Committee composed by the Class and School representatives.

This indicator is able to detect the effectiveness and the limitations of a communication that is meant to support the parents' active participation in the Class meetings, which is usually scarce on the part of all parents no matter their nationality.

This indicator must be anyhow carefully considered: the presence of the parents in Class meetings is not necessarily a positive aspect. For one thing, theirs may not be an active and involved presence, no matter their origins and nationality. Besides, the absence of foreign parents in the school governing bodies may result from the early empowerment of their children, by which the young take on responsibility and their parents consider their presence in school life absolutely unnecessary (a good case in point, e.g., is the role of mediators children of immigrants must assume since their early childhood and the well-known resulting effect of inversion of roles).

DIMENSION B. PARENTING SUPPORT

Primary indicators

Improve foreign parents' language proficiency

This indicator refers to specific projects implemented in some schools with this distinct objective. We are talking about courses that are held at school. They represent an opportunity, especially for the mothers, to meet their children and overcome differences and preconceived representations. Some schools also implemented computer literacy courses addressed to foreign mothers and also aimed at learning Italian. The benefits of such courses are evident: parents participate in school life and so are able to monitor their children, while the school gets to know the parents and learns how to better relate with them.

The need to create many opportunities for non-native speakers to learn Italian (even better if the courses are not too formal and apply a "situated learning" strategy), as well as to encourage important opportunities for all parents to meet, is indeed very pressing, although there still remain doubts about the available resources and the parents' actual participation and involvement.

Presence of a school counsellor or welfare coordinator

We refer to the presence of a counsellor or coordinator assisting students who are dealing with adaptation and integration issues, whether in school or outside school, especially from a social and psychological perspective. To this end, schools opened help desks and outreach counselling points, intended first of all for foreign families. As is always the case with innovations, the extension of a particular right that was previously reserved for a minority group opens up new perspectives of improvement for the majority groups too, who may similarly benefit from a very important service that, in our case, is indeed aimed at any kind of family.

In some schools there is an outreach counselling point also providing cultural/linguistic mediation and functioning as an info-point in multiple languages, operated by a teacher coordinator and the cultural mediators, intended not only for the parents, but also for the teachers. Among the objectives it is aimed at, it is worth mentioning the early diagnosis pinpointing problematic issues related to integration into the school context and the social fabric of the neighborhood. Other projects that can be classified under this indicator are related to, e.g., the counselling service aimed at providing an effective and expert support to the school community as a whole within a structured outreach point. We are not referring to a service that is specifically and exclusively dedicated to intercultural or migration issues: rather, it represents the opportunity for the students but also the teachers and the parents to find support and advice, to be helped with their problems, their anxieties and their fragility, with a view to finding possible solutions, make decisions and monitor their progress.

Direct relationships with social services

Reaching out to parents by visiting them in their homes whether it is necessary, in the face of problems arising (prolonged absence, psychological issues..). This is managed with the help of the social services, immediately contacted by the school or it is directly dealt with by the school staff who visit parents.

School: hub for local public initiatives

Secondary indicators

Work groups with specific objectives and competences

This indicator refers to different experiences involving Italian and foreign parents in initiatives and activities held by the school or other entities: collaboration between Italian and foreign families, families helping other families' children with their homework, self-managed Italian language courses, parents keeping the school open on weekends to hold cultural initiatives and more. In these experiences, a key role is played by the associations of parents (and sometimes even grandparents) who are engaged in mutual-aid activities, in the recovery and shared management of public spaces inside and outside the school. It is worth mentioning the participation and active involvement of foreign parents in these associations, even though the initiatives are still prompted primarily by the "natives".

That is to say, the schools open themselves to the local community thanks to the central role of the families; parents support other parents and their children. Different generations, different origins, different associations are all united in building relationships and fostering a more inclusive and shared notion of education.

School and external entities in a network of projects and practices

Parents associations also act as watchmen and whistleblowers when they expose unfortunate episodes involving foreign parents: for instance, the case of recently arrived underage migrant students who bounce from school to school in search of a place, or more or less evident cases of classroom segregation. The presence of parents associations emphasizes the importance for the school to be part of a collaborative network in the local community.

Support to children's ambitions in the fields of education and work

Learning support and vocational guidance. Frequently, foreign parents lack the necessary skills, first of all language skills, to support their children in their learning activities, especially if they are low-performing students. It is indeed not easy to master the language of instruction with all its jargon and its specific terms, not even for those who have become italophones. Indeed, a problematic issue in the school-family relationship foreign parents pointed out is their inability to

support their children in the after-school time. Hence the demand for more school hours for their children.

DIMENSION C. CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

UK experience.

"A decade later there was an historic shift, when in 1998 the Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools, chaired by Sir Bernard Crick and managed by QCA, undertook a policy review of citizenship education. Starting from the idea that the apprehended values can change attitudes and behavior, Bernard Crick (1998) put citizenship education firmly on the map, recommending that it become a statutory entitlement and a separate, discrete subject in secondary schools rather than merely a cross-curricular theme. Crick's lens was largely pointed at addressing the perceived apathy of young people, their lack of interest in politics and their waning sense of belonging to the community; in the face of all this, Citizenship education was introduced as a compulsory component of the national curriculum, at key stages 3 and 4, in 2002. In Crick's view, Citizenship education is aimed to enable young people to develop the skills, values, attitudes and knowledge needed to relate positively to others, take responsibility, participate fully in the community and develop an understanding of citizenship, that is develop the competence and skills for community involvement and a preparation for involvement as citizens. The Crick Report (1998) thus defines Citizenship education in relation to a notion of citizenship that is conceived in terms of three strands: social and moral responsibility; community involvement; political literacy (Ajegbo 2007).

Here is a framework of reference of one of SAFE project partners which, even though it is related to the context of another European country, it traces the path that led to the introduction of Citizenship education as a necessary subject (if we may use this term) in school, though it is not always mandatory (if we did not misunderstand our friends form Lewisham). Such an effort seems to us to be in step with SAFE mission since citizenship education might well serve the purpose of involving all parents (not just foreign parents).

Primary indicators

Tackling racism and discrimination

Raise awareness about the plurality of cultural diversity through specific activities such as intercultural education workshops, anti-racism meetings and other events, coordination with other agencies engaged in tackling racism and discriminations.
Important actions involving both the parents and the students were implemented in Arezzo. These initiatives were sponsored by the school in collaboration with other local community entities (local institutions, associations, etc.).

Active participation in community life

Increase the awareness of one's role as a citizen who not only does access and enjoy services but also is a pro-active subject who relates to his fellow citizens and is able to make changes, thanks to his active involvement in associations or the traditional institutions.

Environmental and sustainable lifestyles education

Raise awareness of environmental issues, promote respect of the environment and the natural resources, with a view to the citizens' participation in a socially responsible and environmentally friendly economy.

Secondary indicators

Local community and cultural-artistic heritage awareness

Inform citizens of the available local services and their specific functions, of the institutions and the help and support these can possibly offer in the citizens' everyday life challenges; also, raise awareness of cultural-artistic heritage as a resource and as an opportunity for growth and enrichment.

Experimenting democratic practices and conflict management

Promote actual experiences of direct democracy in structured contexts where interaction with the traditional institutions of democracy is involved, with the aim of empowering the subjects and raising awareness of their own responsibilities, rights and obligations as citizens.
Promote a relational attitude based on the respect of differences and diversity and on mutual understanding, with a view to peacefully sharing spaces and life experiences with others. Peace and conflict resolution education.

Understanding the Constitution as a form of citizenship and peace education

Understanding the fundamental principles of the Constitution as the bedrock of the Italian Republic is a necessary and indispensable condition for an active and responsible citizenship, a condition that must be considered as the general framework inside which all citizenship education activities must be implemented.

DIMENSION D. COOPERATION WITH THE FAMILIES

Primary indicators

Working teams of mixed composition (teachers, staff, parents, students) for specific projects

Within the context of the specific projects developed inside and by the school (also in collaboration with external agencies) it is useful to involve all the subjects who interact in the everyday school processes, including the parents, whenever they can offer an important contribution that helps improve the quality of a specific intervention and, at the same time, raise the awareness of the rights and obligations of their own children of school age.
An example of an activity that can be classified under this indicator is the establishment of a "school family" work group of foreign parents dedicated to the transcription of the E.O.P. in the L1 (native language): this action fosters a collaboration with the families that is based on the appreciation of one's own competences.

Ways to communicate with the "absent" parents

Devise ways and tools for communication between the school and parents who, for different reasons, do not guarantee their active presence. The aim is to identify people who take the responsibility of reaching out and communicating to the parents, both within and outside the institution, provided that an effective and efficient communication with the school who deals with the parents is ensured.

The introduction of the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, which has provided a new resource to ease the relationship with the Chinese families (usually seen as "inscrutable" and self-segregated, who do not speak Italian at all).

Intercultural (or cultural-language) mediation between educational institutions and families

Intercultural mediation is all the more necessary in the plural language context of today's schools and it needs to be implemented through structured interventions by which a dedicated staff is appointed.

The linguistic or intercultural mediator serves as a useful resource to overcome language barriers attributed to the poor Italian proficiency of the parents (which does allow for a general understanding of what the teacher says but not for the teacher to go into detail) and so go beyond the superficial level of communication on which teacher-parents conferences are usually carried out.

Meetings with teachers with the help of mediators. We refer to meetings aimed at foreign parents, in which intercultural mediators-interpreters take part (whenever language or cultural barriers arise), to introduce the many actions to be taken in the course of the school year and present, explain and share (share one more time if necessary) the school's educational model. Mediation helps build an effective relationship that is based on trust, on the use of a simple and clear language, on communicative empathy, on a spirit of collaboration.

It is necessary to give time to the parents and actively communicate with them so that they eventually understand what a school/education service such as does not exist in their country of origin is.

The presence of a mediator during a conference helps create a relationship of trust between school and parents, especially when language barriers prevent deeper communication. However, "schools tend to resort more and more to informal mediation, that is to foreign parents, who, on account of their longer experience in their adopted country, can give useful advice to the recently arrived migrants"(L. Luatti). Nonetheless – as Luatti points out – an expert mediation such as that provided by intercultural mediation professionals may be more appropriate.

Peer-to-peer students

Peer tutoring scheme: it is a structured experience of peer-mediated intervention consisting of a conference conducted by the teacher who is responsible for the intercultural mediation and also of language facilitation interventions inside the secondary school of 1st grade (middle school). The teacher is not left to carry out the conference alone though, in fact a long-time settled student of the same nationality of the recent immigrant student helps the teacher whenever the use of the native language becomes necessary. Both the teacher and the peer-student give the recent immigrant student the necessary background information to get oriented in the new school, they show him around the school premises and escort him into his new class on his first school day. By means of this scheme, new students and their family asking for help and advice (about how the school system works, its organization, fees and other practical matters) can turn to the teacher but also to the peer-student, whenever they feel the need for more confidentiality and privacy (parents are left alone with the peer-student). The peer-student then reports to the teacher about the new students' or their family's concerns and worries: starting form this very first information an orientation program for the first weeks of school is carried out with very positive results. The peer tutors share the same nationality and native language of the new students and they are selected from the most sensible and mature students in school, that is they are well adjusted students who developed a positive affiliation with the school and are academically engaged. Their task is basically to inform.

Besides the linguistic mediator, sometimes schools also avail themselves of the help of foreign students who are proficient in Italian and can work as tutors to facilitate the inclusion of a new immigrant students coming from the same country as them. Since this is essentially an informal type of support service, there exist no projects created for the specific purpose of favoring communication between the school and the new student. Serious attention should be paid on

the fact that, on the one side, this kind of informal mediation is a resource both for the new student and the school, but on the other the risk is that of leaving it all to chance.

Student/children support to achieve curriculum standards

Promote extra-curricular activities aimed at supporting struggling students, like, e.g., starting a program of courses of Italian or specific tutoring schemes.

Secondary indicators

Peer-to-peer parents

Schools resort more and more often to long-time immigrants for informal mediation, that is they turn to foreign parents who, on account of their long-standing experience in our country, may give useful information and advice to the recent immigrants. Schools have developed different strategies in this respect.

As an example, it is rather common for schools to turn to long-time immigrant parents/families coming from the same country or sharing the same native language as the new immigrant families and showing a good proficiency of Italian language.

There is a risk implicit in this indicator, resulting from the recourse to mediators with no specific training. If on the one side peer-to-peer communication can favor parental involvement in their children's school, on the other, criticalities may arise due to the informal nature of this kind of intervention. Furthermore, this mode of operation is not feasible nor effective during group meetings, when teachers address the whole audience and many foreign parents, mothers especially, do not understand.

Voluntary work for the schools

Define possible areas of interventions where parents may be involved in activities aimed at refurbishing the classroom settings and improving the children's learning experiences.

Occasions for discussions (also extra-curricular)

In the first school grades, sharing events where children listen to the parents' personal stories represent another common form of family involvement in which parents' personal knowledge and competences can contribute to the educational outcomes. In order to increase participation and create a positive school-family relationship, schools offers sharing nights and similar events which provide an opportunity for parents to share interesting information on the history, the customs and traditions of their home country and also to showcase their handicrafts and enjoy their traditional food. Stories and tales, food, games and parties… are multiple occasions for capitalizing the competences, abilities and knowledge of the parents. Families usually seem to appreciate such modalities of involvement and feel they are esteemed and their worth is recognized.

Parents' active involvement in school life is a long term objective. By "involvement" we mean a form of active participation by which parents do not confine themselves to the traditional role of mere beneficiaries of a service, instead they take on a new role by which they offer their knowledge and competences to their children's school environment. Recognition and appreciation of parents' competences (not infrequently neglected or simply latent) is key to a successful involvement and empowerment of migrant families, first of all those competences which are a significant expression of the foreign parents' personal identity and cultural heritage; that is why it is appropriate to encourage a positive and proactive attitude that may leverage

such knowledge and abilities, which can be achieved by identifying effective forms of communication and creating meaningful experiences as an opportunity to share and use them.

ATTACHMENT B. SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Identify the benchmark

Local group: _____

Find here below the 4 dimensions and their respective indicators defined in the course of the project.

You are asked to evaluate just migrant family empowerment projects and programs implemented by the school or the local stakeholders group; assign a number on a scale from 1 (least satisfaction) to 10 (most satisfaction) to each indicator.

PRIMARY indicators are marked by an asterisk (*), all other indicators are SECONDARY. In order to complete the questionnaire stakeholder groups will necessarily have to measure their performance according to all primary indicators: in case no activities match a given indicator, assign 1.

A. DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

It refers to actions and projects aimed at fostering parents' active involvement in the school governing bodies and other forms of representation within the school and out in the greater community. **From 1 (least satisfaction) to 10 (most satisfaction), how do I measure my experiences according to the following indicators?**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Innovative communication *	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Social report *	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Community network and relationships *										
Agreement for co-responsibility in education										
Foreign parents in Class meetings and School Committee										

B. PARENTING SUPPORT

It refers to all actions and projects aimed at parenting supporting. **From 1 (least satisfaction) to 10 (most satisfaction), how do I measure my experiences according to the following indicators?**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Improve foreign parents' language proficiency *	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Presence of a school counsellor or a local coordinator *										
Direct relationship with the social services *										
School: hub for local public initiatives *										
Work groups with specific objectives and competences										
School and external entities in a network of projects and practices										
Support to children's ambitions in the fields of education and work										

C. CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

It refers to actions and projects aimed at fostering the ability to develop an understanding of active citizenship, exercise rights and obligations and participate fully in the community. **From 1**

(least satisfaction) to 10 (most satisfaction), how do I measure my experiences according to the following indicators?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Tackling racism and discrimination *										
Active participation in community life *										
Environmental and sustainable lifestyles education *										
Local community and cultural-artistic heritage awareness										
Experimenting democratic practices and conflict management										
Understanding the Constitution as citizenship and peace education										

DIMENSION D. COOPERATION WITH THE FAMILIES

Parents express their opinions and give their contribution to the school and the local community.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Working teams of mixed composition (teachers, staff, parents, students) for specific projects *										
Ways to communicate with the "absent" parents *										
Intercultural mediation between educational institutions and families*										
Peer-to-peer students*										
Peer-to-peer parents										
Voluntary work for schools										
Occasions for discussion (also extra-curricular)										