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A Critical Literature Review on Home-Based Childcare Settings

The professionalisation and changing profile
of childminders

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FOREWORD

Ever tried. Ever failed.

No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

Samuel Beckett

This dissertation is the result of a two-year education at the University of Ghent with a six month international experience in London at the Institute of Education where I have discovered and explored the field of early childhood education and care. In my quest for ECEC as a public good, I got acquainted with many respected researchers in the field, who have overwhelmed me with insights and experiences and instigated my critical spirit.

*To Lynn Ang, Elizabeth Brooker, Pamela Oberhuemer and Peter Moss, I proudly say
Thank you*

Also, in my search for literature concerning the professionalisation of childminders many ECEC-experts helped me in finding my way into the maze of information.

*To Myriam Mony and Florence Pirard, I would like to say
Merci*

*To Gabriel Schoyerer, I gladly say
Danke*

*To Sandra Van der Mespel, I respectfully say
Dankjewel*

Furthermore, in the long and laborious process of writing this dissertation I was continuously supported via constructive feedback, innovative insights and rightful remarks.

*To Michel Vandebroeck, I sincerely say
Dankjewel*

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*To Sam, Lien, Julia and Rita, I do not say it enough
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OUTLINE

This dissertation aims to explore current evidence about professionalisation in the context of the changing profile of childminders in Flanders, France and Germany. The introduction focuses on the importance and social relevance of the study and justifies following research question:

What can we learn from international research on professionalisation and the changing profile of childminders in light of recent policy changes in Flanders?

Chapter I consists of a brief historical outline concerning family day care and sketches the origin of the childminding profession and its development up to the present day.

Chapter II delineates the used methodology, i.e. a theory-driven multiple case study with the conceptual framework of the CoRe-report as a directory throughout.

In chapter III the existence of family day care in Flanders, France as well as Germany is described and information concerning the current status, qualification level and use of family day care serves as the preamble for this study.

In chapter IV, V and VI the results of the compiled literature are presented for respectively Flanders, France and Germany. In each chapter, the gathered information was categorised according to the framework of the competent system with its four layers: the individual level, institutional level, interinstitutional level and governance level.

Chapter VII presents inspiring practices on the childminding profession and formulates an answer to the initial research question.

Finally, chapter VIII enumerates several limitations of the literature study and suggests possibilities for future research.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAP	Certificate d'Aptitude Professionnelle - Certificate of professional competence
CEGO	Centrum voor Ervaringsgericht Onderwijs - Experience-Based Education Centre
C(N)AF	Caisse (Nationale) Allocation Familiale - (National) Fund for Family Allowances
CoRe	Competence Requirements
DJI	Deutsches Jugendinstitut - German Youth Institute
DQR	Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen - German Qualification Framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ESSSE	Ecole Santé Social Sud-Est - Social Health School South-East
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
IFEF	Institut FEPEM de l'Emploi Familiale - Institute of Family Employment
KIFöG	Kinderförderungsgesetz - Child Support Act
KWAPOI	Kwaliteitsinstrument Particuliere Opvang Instellingen - Quality Instrument for Private Day Care
NOW	New Opportunities for Women
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PMI	Protection Maternelle et Infantile - Maternal and Infant Protection
RAM	Relais Assistantes Maternelles - Network for Independent Family Day Carers (and parents)
TAG	Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz - Day Care Expansion Act
VBJK	Vernieuwing in de Basisvoorzieningen voor Jonge Kinderen - Centre for Innovation in the Early Years
VIZO	Vlaams Instituut voor Zelfstandig Ondernemen - Flanders Self-Employment Institute
WiFF	Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte - Further Education of Early Years Professionals

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to explore the professionalisation and changing profile of childminders or family day care providers. Home-based childcare and more specifically childminding, is historically one of the oldest and more traditional types of care provision for young children (especially for under three years old children). This practice is rooted in the voluntarily provided childcare (Ang, 2013) and still continues to be a common form of the care and education workforce in countries as Belgium (Flanders), France, Denmark and the Netherlands (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari & Peeters, J., 2012; OECD, 2006).

However, despite its large presence, the phenomenon of childminding has been widely underresearched in scope and focus and remains a miscellaneous topic in the Early Education and Care (ECEC) sector. While “much has been published about centre-based childcare, the care of children by non-relatives in a home-based setting has received very little attention” (Mooney & Statham, 2003: 9) and remains largely under the radar. A plausible historical explanation for this could be, as Bruner (1980:1) points out in the seventies, that “we are repelled by the very idea of a national policy for infants and toddlers, for it smacks of invasion of privacy or worse, of totalitarian efforts to shape young minds.” Furthermore, as Moss complements in 1990, “the belief that women have the main responsibility for children pervades every aspect of current discussion and developments” (Moss, 1990 in Ferri, 1992: 10) and any demand for day care needs to be satisfied through the operation of the private market (Ferri, 1992): tendencies that strikingly show the dominant subsidiarity principle and privatised character of childcare in general (Morel, 2007) and especially practices as childminding amplify the invisible and underresearched character of the profession (Statham & Mooney, 2003).

Although the practice of childminding is most probably one of the oldest professions in history, it has long been perceived as a necessary evil (Vandenbroeck, 2009) that had to cater the high economic demand for women in the labour market and the lack of relatives to call upon for needed childcare (Hines, 2008). In Flanders, Henri Velge, prominent spokesperson of this discourse, asserts: “Il faut en plus que la mère se rende compte de son devoir naturel, qui est de venir en aide aux enfants auxquels elle a donné le jour; elle doit comprendre qu’elle ne peut se décharger de ce soin sur les institutions créées à cet effet, que dans le cas d’une impérieuse nécessité.” (Velge, 1919 in Vandenbroeck, 2009: 35)¹

¹ Own translation: “Moreover, a mother should be aware of her natural task, which is to help the children that she has given birth to. She should understand that she cannot pass on the task of taking care to the institutions that were created for that purpose, except in a case of urgent necessity.”

Moreover, childminders and family day care providers in general are perceived as the “Cinderella’s of childcare” (Dalli, 1993 in Peeters, 2008: 174), not invited to the prom of early childhood education and care because of its private character, its ignored history and its undefined profession (Peeters, 2008). Nowadays, the workforce of family day care providers is still referred to as a highly undervalued and underfunded workforce, all too often considered as “what women naturally do” (Urban et al., 2012: 519). ECEC-provisions at large and childminders in particular are outstanding examples of the construction of a social arena where boundaries between public and private spheres are blurred (Vandenbroeck et al., 2010; Mooney, 2003) and childminding is portrayed as a messy business (Urban, 2008). Furthermore, this messy business lacks clarity and clear-cut acidity: a position that is not valued in our neoliberal society, where concepts as effectiveness, efficiency and predictability are put on a pedestal (Moss, 2012).

“What kind of service is it that appears to hover uncertainty between the domains of public sector regulation and the private world of family life?” (Ferri, 1992: 17)

In many (western) European countries, however, the early childhood education and care sector is receiving more public and policy attention than ever before. ECEC (childminding included) is being (re)discovered in order to gain beneficial effects in family and employment policies, long-term education policies and even economic policies (Oberhuemer, 2011). With widespread attention to and fast paced expansion of services for under-threes as a result, concerns about professionalisation and quality are brought to the fore. Thus, topics as quality, competences and the level of professionalism of (private) day care providers and childminders are severely questioned (Oberhuemer, 2012) and tensions between the imperative to increase the quantity versus the quality of ECEC-provisions arise steadily (Pugh, 2010).

Also, this fast paced expansion goes hand in hand with a renewed and dominant focus on the educational function of childcare: early childhood education and care provisions today are seen as crucial for educational attainment, the starting point of a lifelong learning process (Urban, 2008; Vandenbroeck, Coussée & Bradt, 2010). Furthermore, longitudinal studies have pointed out that learning experiences during the early years are related to children’s later developmental outcomes and achievements (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004), which further premises the prevention of educational disadvantage and the overcoming of educational gaps.

More specifically, there is consensus between national policies that educational gaps start at a very young age and that effective early childhood education should be a site for intervention as well as a provider of possible solutions (OECD, 2006; Penn, 2009; Vandenberg et al., 2010).

“The socio-economic argument has been complemented by the recognition that participation in high quality early childhood education and care is beneficial for children, families and societies as a whole.” (Urban et al., 2012: 522)

Early access to ECEC provides young children, particularly from low-income and second-language groups, with a good start in life. ECEC is therefore highly prioritised and attractive possibilities are researched to ensure an equal headstart for every child (Penn, 2009; Urban, 2008). In this way, ECEC is paving the pathway for education as an early investment in a lifelong learning discourse. The hypothesis that early education and care of high quality should benefit all young children has thus been approved and adopted by national policies worldwide, which additionally led to assigning great importance to the buzzword of professionalisation or as Urban (2010: 2) points out:

“The ways we understand children and childhoods shape the institutions: as commodities for working parents, as sites of intervention and social engineering, as means of normalisation, or as forums in a civil society [...]”

In these discourses, professionalisation is portrayed as a condition sine qua non to measure up to social challenges in the childminding workforce such as low status, low pay and a lack of (formal) professional recognition for all practitioners in the field (Oberhuemer, 2011).

Next to aforementioned trends, the relationship between professionalisation and quality in family day care services such as childminding needs to be addressed. Today, there is achieved consensus among practitioners, researchers and policymakers that “the quality of early childhood services depends on well-educated, experienced and competent staff” (Urban et al., 2012: 508) and that a process of professionalisation should be promoted. However, the OECD-report *Starting Strong II* indicates: “much of the child care sector is private and unregulated, with staff training and pedagogical programming being particularly weak” (OECD, 2006: 4; Cooke & Lawton, 2008). Similarly, in Flanders there is overall agreement to focus on qualifications and regulations to increase professionalism (Peeters, 2012) in early childhood education and care.

Moreover, as research points out, the level of professionalism and competence (i.e. being competent as a whole) as well as the quality of services is influenced by (the formal level of) qualification: a factor that can be influenced, inter alia, through training and pedagogical guidance in critical and reflective environments (Urban et al., 2012).

Abovementioned trends in ECEC clearly resulted in “an unprecedented attention in the professionalisation of the early years workforce, often linked to the argument that the quality of early childhood services, and the improvement of opportunities for children and families, are associated with more highly trained staff” (Dalli et al., 2012: 3). Thus, as the demand for quality, alongside affordability and accessibility in childcare continues to rise, so does the importance of evidencing these practices of home-based childcare and its relation to professionalisation (Ang, 2013).

Evidencing these practices of home-based childcare and its relation to professionalisation is also relevant when taking into account the challenges Flanders is momentarily facing, in light of recent policy changes in ECEC. For example, the start of a new decree (April 2014) will install certain challenges for the childminding profession. Next to the installation of a new title as *kindbegeleidsters gezinsopvang* (child mentors in family day care), a qualification certificate will be required for childminders (Kind & Gezin, 2014b). Whilst no formal requirements were needed in the past and trends of deprofessionalisation predominated (Peeters, 2012), the new decree now requires a certain level of education for minding the under-threes.

Although the introduction of this decree is largely in line with the consensus of researchers and policymakers to increase the quality in the early years workforce (Urban et al., 2011) and to install a system of qualification in Flanders’ childcare, the practical outcomes might result in the attrition of an already restricted group of childminders where the attainment of additional skills does not lift these childminders out of poorly paid (gendered) care (Mozère, 2003): increased investment in training is diametrically opposed to low pay and gaining extra qualifications contradicts the existence of an alienated workforce that complains of a perceived lack of job opportunities and a lack of vertical and horizontal mobility (Urban et al., 2011; Cooke & Lawton, 2008). A phenomenon that was also noted in England, where:

“A highly skilled workforce is the decisive factor for delivering early years quality and improving outcomes for young children. However, the current state of the sector presents a real barrier to achieving the high quality, high value workforce that is needed” (Cooke & Lawton, 2008: 16)

Moreover, despite the fact that this new decree in Flanders seeks to provide an appropriate response to the demand of a (more) professionalised workforce, it shall most probably have an enormous impact on the existing workforce and will, for example, put forth additional difficulties in recruiting and retaining early years workers: a detrimental tendency in a society where the growing need for childcare workers shall continue to increase (Urban et al., 2011; Moss, Cameron & Boddy, 2006).

On top of all that, it needs to be stated that the existing international literature on childminding and family day care is predominated by English literature and this mainstream research with a focus on English-speaking countries in research dissemination remains highly problematic.

“[...] the failure of different language groups to make their research known abroad. This tends to leave the field free to English language research. Because of strong links with education research, a high proportion of ECEC research in the English language tends to debate education questions that are often not central to the early childhood concerns of other countries.” (OECD, 2006: 187)

These dominant findings might not correspond to the tradition of childminding in other countries and to their evolving aspirations for young children (OECD, 2006). For instance, English-language research literature focuses on a rather narrow conceptualisation of *education* and attaches less value to *care* in ECEC (Urban et al., 2012). Expanding local participatory modes of research and striving for greater public dissemination in research remains key (OECD, 2006), whilst at the same time allowing a more holistic understanding of concepts such as professionalisation (Urban et al., 2012).

Overall, if we keep all this in mind and endorse that “[...] the meaning of professionalism appears to be embedded in local contexts, visible in relational interactions, ethical and political in nature and involving multiple layers of knowledge, judgement and influences from the broader societal context” (Dalli et al., 2012: 6), the following question is justified:

What can we learn from international research on professionalisation and the changing profile of childminders in light of recent policy changes in Flanders?

The following literature review can “assist policy makers to think more broadly and critically about ECEC” (OECD, 2006: 190) and more specifically about the professionalisation of the childminding profession. This dissertation can therefore be considered as a contribution to the small but increasing body of research in the early childhood education and care sector that pays attention to local knowledge(s) on childminding (Urban, 2010), especially for Flanders, France and Germany.

CHAPTER I FAMILY DAY CARE – A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Although predictions have been made about the future of family day care, illustrated by the juxtaposition between a process of steady attrition and marginalisation versus a process of professionalisation (Moss, 2003), a closer look into the histories, origins and contexts of childminding as a formal service might effectuate a certain level of clarification. Whilst childminding is probably one of the oldest professions in history, as a formal service, childcare initiatives have developed in different ways (Statham & Mooney, 2003).

For Flanders, France and Germany the first childcare initiatives can be situated in the middle of the 19th century during the Industrial Revolution, in a time where infant mortality was alarmingly high. Family day care in general was perceived as an unregulated, unrecognised and private form of care that needed to be tackled, civilized and educated at large (Vandenbroeck, 2006; Alberola, 2005) in order to produce useful members of society (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, childminders were of great importance to provide the much needed childcare, to cater the new economic demand for women in the labour market and to counterbalance the lack of others to call upon for the care of their children. In practice, childminders remained predominant (Vandenbroeck, 2009; Aballéa, 2005; Gelder, 2003).

It was not until the introduction of the welfare state, in a post-war society, that child-mortality rates decreased and policy measures such as enhanced family allowances and unemployment benefits were undertaken. A greater role for the government in social affairs was advocated. In some countries (i.e. the West German *Länder*, the UK, the Netherlands) this welfare state meant that childcare was regarded as a private matter, resulting in low percentages of state-funded initiatives. In other countries (i.e. Belgium/Flanders, France) childcare was considered as a more mixed public-private responsibility, which in turn resulted in higher coverage and actual state funding (Vandenbroeck, 2006). However, duties and charges in the welfare state remained poorly defined and government action was rather modest and unobtrusive (Morel, 2007).

Subsequently, the rise of globalisation marked a profound change in policies concerning childcare and opened up processes of individualisation, where people were less influenced by traditions and rules were negotiated.

In this light, Beck (1997) introduced the notion of a risk society where concepts as efficiency, effectiveness and high predictability were -and still are- ubiquitous in the everyday lives of human beings: globalisation coupled with neo-liberalisation that bequeaths privatisation of services (Penn, 2014), responsabilisation and deregulation appear on current political agendas and the introduction of concepts as efficiency, effectiveness, freedom and autonomy, installs a certain freedom of choice for parents, which in turn *justifies* economic cuts in the field of early childhood education and care (Vandenbroeck, 2009). For example, in the history of childminding, “just like France, Belgium has gone from policies promoting public day-care services to give all children an equal start in life to policies supporting more private and family forms of care. Also, as in France, this shift in policy has been presented as a way to promote ‘free choice’ for families.” (Morel, 2007: 627-628).

CHAPTER II METHODOLOGY

The aim of this dissertation is to produce a concise literature study of current evidence about professionalisation in the context of the changing profile of childminders in Flanders, France and Germany that highlights examples of “good practice and policy” (Peeters, 2008: 39). The importance of this study is emphasised by using literature from different language groups in order to research evidence from non-English speaking countries that tends to be overlooked (Penn, 2014). The study is based on a literature review of Flemish, French and German documents (articles, reports, books, book chapters, etc.) in their original Dutch, French and German language concerning the professionalisation of the childminding workforce. Besides that, the literature review also contains few English publications written by the original Flemish, French and/or German author(s).

The overall intent by putting together and comparing these local and variegated knowledges from different socio-cultural realities is to open up the possibility of constructing new understandings about the commonalities and differences of family day care providers in the debate around professionalisation (Dalli et al., 2012). Also, during this study attention was paid to the fact that different countries are all embedded in their local, national and international contexts and that day care for children differs over time as well as between and within countries (Hennessy et al., 1992).

The study was specified towards the practices and the professionalisation process(es) of the so-called *onthaalouders* in Flanders (Belgium), *les assistantes maternelles* in France and the *Tagesmütter/Tagespflege* in Germany to put non-English discourses of childminding and professionalisation on the radar. These regions were selected based on the practical feasibility and scope of the dissertation and the mere capability of reading and understanding Dutch, French and German literature in its original language. Moreover, these selected regions all share the same tradition of the Bismarckian welfare state (Morel, 2007), which allows for discovering similar as well as different approaches towards professionalisation.

Given that, across countries, the organisation structures and systems of home-based childcare vary considerably according to country-specific policies and regulations, family day care or childminding in this study, will be represented as “the provision of childcare in domestic premises -usually the childminder’s home- for reward” (O’Connell, 2010: 564) or “organised care arrangements taking place either informally or formally involving a main caregiver, [...] providing care for a child or a group of children in domestic premises” (Ang, 2013).

In this study, the term care is also used in its broadest sense to include all the functions that early childhood education and care services of any kind can entail (Statham & Mooney, 2003).

Practically, to obtain the international literature in an efficient and effective manner, regarding the practical feasibility of the study, contact (via e-mail) with researchers in the field of childminding was established. The researchers were asked to provide literature on their national policies on childminding alongside literature concerning the professionalisation of the childminding workforce (i.e. qualification, evolving profiles, means of support, pay, etc.). All academic researchers were selected by dint of their extensive knowledge, expertise and experience within the field of ECEC and their academic contributions (i.e. research) to the early years sector and in that way present a representative sample for the literature review.

The following researchers provided contemporary sources (from the year 2000 and onwards) on childminding and professionalisation in Flanders, France and Germany.

Concerning the Dutch literature, contact with Michel Vandebroeck and Sandra Van der Mespel was established. **Michel Vandebroeck** is chairman of the Flemish organisation VBJK (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years) and is active as a lecturer in ECEC (PhD) for the Department of Social Welfare Studies of Ghent University (s.n., 2008). He also recommended following international researchers in the field.

Sandra Van der Mespel (VBJK, 2014a) works for the Flemish organisation VBJK and is coordinator of several projects on family day care, inter alia, the project *Building Strong Family Day Care*, financed by the European Social Fund.

For the French Community in Belgium, **Florence Pirard** provided very little to no information on childminding. She addresses the fact that literature concerning childminders in the French Community is limited. With this in mind, the scope of the literature review in Belgium was confined to the area of Flanders. As an alternative, Florence Pirard did provide some relevant literature concerning childminding in France. Florence Pirard is lecturer of educational sciences at the University of Luik (Belgium). She is particularly interested in several challenges of providing high quality in ECEC (s.n., 2008).

Myriam Mony has provided interesting literature via a referral to the website www.caf.fr where publications of childminding and the professionalisation debate in France can be found. The publications were manually selected, based on key descriptors such as *assistant(e)s maternel(le)s*, *professionnalisation* and *qualité* and by dint of reading the abstracts and/or content tables of the publications. Myriam Mony is the retired director of the early childhood educator training department at ESSSE (Social Health School South-East) in Lyon and Valence. She was responsible for the initial training of early childhood educators and projects in the field of early childhood education (ISSA, 2014).

The German early years consultant **Pamela Oberhuemer**, referred Dr. **Gabriel Schoyerer** to me as a noteworthy researcher in the field of childminding and professionalisation. Gabriel Schoyerer works at the *Deutsches Jugendinstitut* (German Youth Institute) and is interested in the further development and profile of child day care alongside issues of quality and professionalisation within the early childhood education and care sector (DJI, 2014). Also, additional German literature was selected via a referral to the website www.dji.de that contains publications concerning *Kindertagespflege* and *Professionalisierung*. The publications were, in line with the French literature, selected by dint of reading the abstracts and/or content tables of the publications.

Then, through checking reference lists of the received literature by the Flemish, French and German authors, additional literature was selected that led to a greater range. The chart below represents a summary of the literature for Flanders, France and Germany as well as the additional literature that was selected through a process of reference list checking (marked with an *).

The compiled and selected literature as depicted in the chart resulted out of, inter alia, research conducted by the VBJK for Flanders, the CNAF (National Fund for Family Allowances) for France and the DJI for Germany. These organisations all have their own political agendas, operational goals and authentic mission and vision for they each interact with different stakeholders, professionals and actors in their original, complex policy contexts: any caution is required when interpreting and analysing the data. Furthermore, the purpose of this dissertation is certainly not to fast-track policy transfer but rather to highlight evidence from non-English speaking countries and to discover different non-mainstream English approaches towards professionalisation.

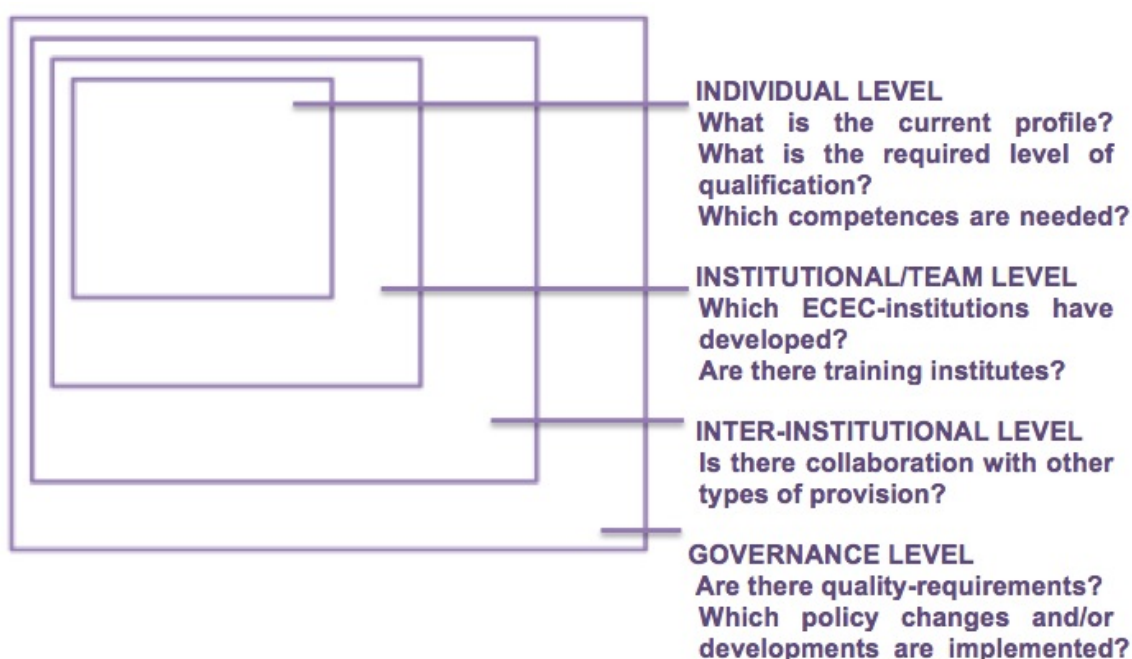
TYPE OF DOCUMENT	TITLE	AUTHOR AND/OR ORGANISATION	YEAR
Annex	Besluit van 22 november 2013. Bijlage competenties	Kind & Gezin	2013
Article	De onthaalouderacademie: groei-kansen voor onthaalouders	Van der Mespel, S.	2011
Annual Report	Het Kind in Vlaanderen	Kind & Gezin	2013
Book	In verzekerde bewaring. Honderdvijftig jaar kinderen, ouders en kinderopvang.	Vandenbroeck, M.	2009
Book	De warme professional. Begeleid(st)ers kinderopvang construeren professionaliteit	Peeters, J.	2008
Book Chapter	Childcare professionalism in Flanders. An Inside-Outside Perspective	Peeters, J.	2012
Book Chapter	De neerwaartse spiraal doorbroken: de professionaliteitsdiscussie in de kinderopvang	Peeters, J. & Vandenbroeck, M.	2012
Book Chapter	Childcare practitioners and the process of professionalization	Kind & Gezin	2010
Brochure	Brochure kwalificaties en attesten in de kinderopvang	Vlaamse overheid	2012
Decree	Decreet houdende de organisatie van baby's en peuters	Peeters, J., Vereist, G., Esch, K., Horn, N. & Boudry, C.	2006
Film	Childcare stories - ouders over opvoeden, werk en kinderopvang	Deglorie, K.	2009
Unpublished document	*Professionalisering en duurzaamheid: een onderzoek bij stoppende onthaalouders	Vindevogel, K.	2006
Unpublished document	De verschillende mogelijkheden om als onthaalouder van start te gaan. Een kritische en praktische benadering	Boonaert, T.	2006
Unpublished document	Onthaalouders in Vlaanderen: een klik vooruit?	VBJK	2014
Website	Projects Ecce Anni!	VBJK & CEGO	2013
Website	Gezinsopvanginfo	VBJK	2013
Website	Onthaalouders sterker maken	Fagnani, J. & Math, A.	2012
Article	Des assistantes maternelles mieux formées et plus qualifiées. Les parents consentiraient-ils à augmenter la rémunération?	Cresson, G., Delforge, S. & Lemaire, D.	2012
Article	La 'qualité' du travail dans le métier d'assistante maternelle. Le point de vue des 'régulateurs' de ce métier.	Cartier, M., d'Halluin, E., Lechien, M. & Rousseau, J.	2012
Article	La 'sous-activité' des assistantes maternelles: un rapport au métier différencié selon le positionnement social.	Brougère, G., Roucoux, N. & Chanu, L.	2001
Article	Des assistantes maternelles à la ludothèque: du jeu dans la professionnalisation	Pierre, M.	2012
Article	Les assistantes maternelles: une composante essentielle de l'offre de garde en milieu rural	Boyer, D. et al.	2012
Annual Report	Baromètre d'accueil du jeune enfant	CNAF	2012
Annual Report	Observatoire national de la petite enfance. L'accueil du jeune enfant en 2012	ESSSE	2013
Book	Relais assistants maternels et accueil de la diversité. Situations et repères méthodologiques	Champlong, F.	2011
Book	*Accompagner la professionnalisation des assistantes maternelles	Bouvé, C. & Sellenet, C.	2011
Book	Confier son enfant. L'univers des assistantes maternelles	Oberhuemer, P., Schreyer, I. & Neuman, M.J.	2010
Book Chapter	*France	Mozère, L.	2003
Book Chapter	*Family Day Care in France	Albérola, E.	2009
Book Chapter	*La professionnalisation des assistants maternels	Abaila, F.	2005
Report	*La professionnalisation inachevée des assistantes maternelles	Heikötter, M., Brüll, M., Kerl-Wienecke, A. & Schroyer, G.	2010
Report	Qualifizierung und Berufsperspektive in der Kindertagespflege. Status quo, Herausforderungen und Impulse des Aktionsprogramms Kindertagespflege	Kerl-Wienecke, A., Schroyer, G. & Schuhschlegel, L.	2013
Article	Kompetenzprofil Kindertagespflege in den ersten drei Lebensjahren	Oberhuemer, P., Schreyer, I. & Neuman, M.J.	2010
Book Chapter	*Germany	Geldler, U.	2003
Book Chapter	*Carving out a Niche? The Work of a Tagesmutter in the New Germany	DJI	2005
Report	DJI Kinderbetreuungsstudie. Erste Ergebnisse. Verlag Deutsches Jugendinstitut	Stempinski, S.	2006
Report	Kooperationen zwischen Kindertageseinrichtungen und Kindertagespflege. Handlungsempfehlungen für Politik, Träger und Einrichtungen	Wiemert, H. & Heeg, S.	2012
Report	*Kindertagespflege - Tätigkeitfeld und Betreuungsform mit Potential. Ansätze einer qualitätsorientierten Weiterentwicklung	Sell, S. & Kukula, N.	2012
Report	Leistungsorientierte Vergütung in der Kindertagespflege. Von der aktuellen Praxis zu einem zukunftsfähigen Modell?	Slothe, S.	2012
Report	Grundmodelle der Kindertagesbetreuung in Deutschland. Grundmodelle der Theorie-Praxis-Verzahnung in der Grundqualifizierung von Tagespflegepersonen	Jaich, R.	2002
Report	Finanzierung der Kindertagesbetreuung in Deutschland	DJI	2014
Website	Professionalisierung in der Kindertagespflege als Dienstleistung	Weiß, K., Stempinski, S., Schumann, M. & Keimeleider, L. (DJI)	2002
Workbook	Qualifizierung in der Kindertagespflege. Das DJI-Curriculum 'Fortbildung von Tagesmüttern'		

Next, the compiled literature was used for conducting a theory-driven (exploratory) multiple case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008) with the overall intent of answering the initial research question.

What can we learn from international research on professionalisation and the changing profile of childminders in light of recent policy changes in Flanders?

In this multiple case study, the conceptual framework of the CoRe-report² (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari & Peeters, 2011) that investigated relevant information with regard to the competences required for the ECEC workforce, i.e. “What approaches do different countries take, and what lessons can be learnt from practices developed by practitioners [...]?” (Urban et al., 2011: 7), served as an anchor throughout the study.

More specifically, the framework of the competent system in the CoRe-report was adopted and applied to the several contexts of the professionalisation (and changing profile) of childminders. The CoRe-report beautifully frames an approach towards competences within “a holistic understanding of early childhood education and care - as education in the broadest sense” (Urban et al., 2011: 32) and unfolds four interconnected dimensions in every layer of the ECEC-system: the individual level, the institutional and team level, the inter-institutional level and a level of governance (Urban et al., 2011).



² Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care

Inspired by the report and acknowledging that ECEC “is determined by the nature of our goals as individuals and as a society” (Urban et al., 2011: 33), these levels alongside the criteria for interpreting the findings were integrated in this multiple case study. In doing so, the fact that the competent early childhood system unfolds in the dimensions of knowledge, practices and values was not overstepped. Furthermore, these dimensions are relevant to all abovementioned layers of the ECEC-system. In line with the CoRe-report, inspiring practices were illustrated as a way of encouraging local experimentalism (Urban et al., 2011).

CHAPTER III FAMILY DAY CARE – FACTS & FIGURES

1. Flanders

In Flanders, childcare initiatives were established in a time where infant mortality rates were high and moral welfare upon the urbanised class prevailed. Whilst this high mortality rate was mainly caused by infectious childhood diseases, it has been attributed to women's labour and negligent parenting habits, accusing mothers in general rather than placing its focus on other contextual variables (Vandenbroeck, 2009). Thus, childcare initiatives arose as an externalisation of educating the masses, i.e. *les classes laborieuses, les classes dangereuses*³ (Vandenbroeck, 2006).

According to Henri Velge (aforementioned spokesperson, ca. 1919) the necessary evil of childcare was only condoned when it concerned childcare initiatives established by the bourgeoisie for the child belongs with its mother. *Crèches* (nurseries) were only condoned when they functioned as medical services for prevention or as a means of normalising the working class. Concerning childminders, it takes until the first half of the twentieth century that legislation is put in place where these *bewaarsters/bewaaksters* (wardresses) were obligated to register with the municipal board: a registration that was instated in order to track down and reduce illegal forms of childcare (Vandenbroeck, 2009). Nevertheless, evidence has shown that despite of a higher cost, these wardresses were preferred: "Placer mon enfant à la crèche? Non, Mme l'Inspectrice, me dit-on. La crèche est un oeuvre de charité. Seules les mères tout à fait pauvres y placent leur bébés!" (Vandenbroeck, 2009: 35)⁴

It is not until the fifties and sixties, in line with reduced infant mortality and the introduction of psychology as the scientific foundation of care and education that opinions towards these *bewaaksters* changed: in this context, childminders were no longer regarded as a necessary evil but approached a new motherhood ideal in terms of attachment and loving care that children need. Even more, in the seventies this type of childcare will evolve to the preferred form for it reproduces the nuclear family model (Vandenbroeck, 2009): the government starts to subsidise (1974) and officially recognises these services for childminders.

³ Own translation: "working classes, dangerous classes"

⁴ Own translation: "Bringing my baby to the nursery? Well, they tell me not to do so. Nurseries are charity work. Only the really poor mothers go there with their children."

Influenced by the pending political question of expanding childcare, a study of *Mens & Ruimte* (Flanders study agency) was ordered to bring clarity. In 1984, this study pleads against further expansion of childcare. The interpretability of the figures aside, the results of the study were mainly used in order to reduce the social role of childcare to its economic function, i.e. employing low-skilled women in times of economic crisis (Vandenbroeck, 2009): a trend that has carried through and accounted for the fast increase of childminders in Flanders (Peeters, 2008).

In terms of policy, however, it is not until 2003 that a social status for childminders makes entry. From then on, the growing group of childminders is insured against illness, disability and accidents and is entitled to child benefits and a retirement pension. They also receive compensation for the absence of children when beyond their control. However, for an important part of childminders, this government action in terms of a renewed status remained insufficient. The mentality shift that advances an upgrade in competencies and qualifications of early years professionals (Peeters, 2008), is difficult to achieve in practice and remains a slow and laborious process. Even more, it shall take until the recent decree of 1 April 2014, which is installed to make childcare clearer, more professional and more accessible (Kind & Gezin, 2014b), that trends of deprofessionalisation are tackled on a policy level.

Also, the history of childminding in Flanders is characterised by the division of early childhood institutions between education and childcare/childminding provisions. Up to today, this business of childcare is split in administration for children under three years old, where care is located under the health or welfare system and for children over three years old, where (free) care is provided under the education system (Penn, 2014). In practice, for the under-three year olds, provision is delegated to Flanders' government agency *Kind & Gezin*.

Concerning these under-three year olds, 50-65% of the early childhood services are provided by the state and 35-50% is private, part subsidised through supply-side funding (Penn, 2014). These private providers are mostly social welfare organisations, non-profit organisations, independent providers, family day care providers, etc. (Penn, 2014). Private for-profit providers are summarised as "not really non-profit, but not really commercial" (Penn, 2014: 440).

Nowadays, the current types of provision for the under-threes are, childcare centres, independent childcare centres, family day care services and independent family day care (Kind & Gezin, 2013). The subsidised forms of childcare are aforementioned family day care services and centre-based settings.

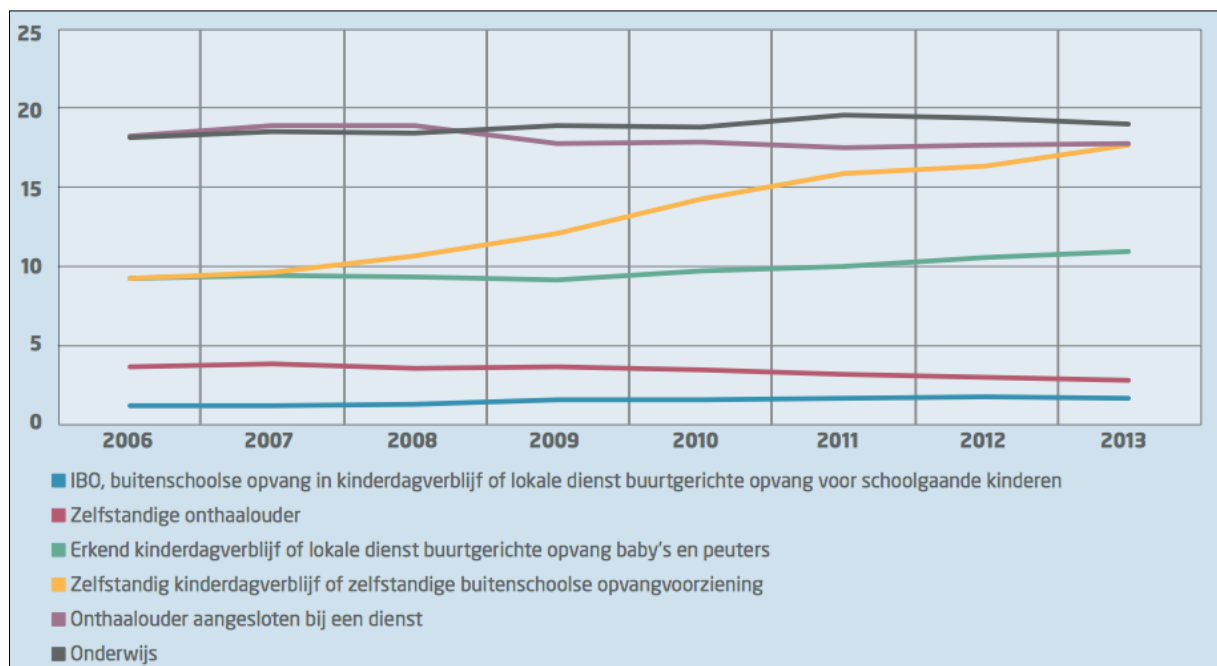


Figure 1 Childcare provision for under-threes in Flanders (Kind & Gezin, 2013)

The figure above (Kind & Gezin, 2013) shows that one of the most common types of childcare is provided by *onthaalouders aangesloten bij een dienst voor onthaalouders* (childminders affiliated to a service), who take care of 17,8% of the under-threes. In comparison, the *zelfstandige kinderdagverblijven* (independent childcare centres) provide care for 17,7% of these under-threes and the number of care provision by *erkende kinderdagverblijven* (certified childcare centres) amounts to 10,9% (Kind & Gezin, 2013). The red line represents the small number of *zelfstandige onthaalouders* (independent childminders), who took care of a mere 3,7% of the under-threes in 2009, a number that has since then decreased slightly every year (Kind & Gezin, 2013).

With its origin as an informal service of substitute mothering, as a private matter that needs to remain obscured or as a necessary evil, the need for a national policy about the status of childminders has long been ignored.

Although these *onthalouders aangesloten bij een dienst voor onthalouders* provide care for a large part of the under-threes, the realisation that childminding is more than the mere guarding of children, in Flanders, is quite recent (Vandenbroeck, 2009) and the meaning of family day care is being questioned:

“Is family day care a merely residual support in the education and care of children or should family day care be seen as a social right to support families?” (Bouverne-De Bie, 2008 in Peeters, 2008: ix, own translation)

2. France

In France, the history of childminding originated with *nourrices* (wet nurses) living on the countryside, taking care of city children in times of high infant mortality and poor living conditions (Mozère, 2003).

As a way of moralising and disciplining the working class, in 1844 the *crèches* who catered for children from birth to three years old, made entry. However, these *crèches* only formed a small part of the initial day care system and therefore could not outweigh the predominant unregulated and privatised care that *nourrices* offered (Champlong, 2011; Aballéa, 2005). It is not until the Roussel law (1874) that organisation with the eye on child protection makes entry through monitoring by the local authority, statistics in child mortality, etc. (Champlong, 2011). Slowly but steadily the nourishing function is replaced by a guarding function; i.e. *les gardiennes* (attendants) (Champlong, 2011). As women continued to work outside their home, informal family day care kept growing. After world war II, these family day care providers were perceived as mother-substitutes, a type of childcare that was preferred for being the second best alternative besides maternal care (Mozère, 2003): a conception that traces back up to the present day.

Although childcare was considered a mixed public-private responsibility with actual state funding (Vandenbroeck, 2006), duties and charges in the welfare state remained poorly defined and government action was rather modest (Aballéa, 2005). For example, the organisation CNAF created a new family allowance (1980) for families that would enlist with registered childminders, *les assistantes maternelles agréées*. In terms of policy, the act of 1977 gave family day care providers greater professional status, a salary, social security, an entitlement to a retirement pension, agreed working hours/holidays and their new title; *les assistantes maternelles* (childminders) (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011; Mozère, 2003). This new form of allowance and the act of 1977, however, did not counterbalance the advantages for appealing on unregistered childminders or -as aforementioned- referred to as *les gardiennes* (Aballéa, 2005).

Next, it shall take until 1992 for childminders to acquire a new status through the installation of obligatory training (60 hours with 20 hours accomplished within the first two years) on the one hand and the introduction of four new elements on the other hand: the publication of national criteria (1); the appeal on experienced childminders when assessing the profession (2); the requirement of a minimum competence level in mastering the French language (3) and the requirement of certain educational skills (4). In line with this new status, the act of 2005 further emphasises the importance and value of training and thus the requirement of an enhanced training of 120 hours was installed: 60 hours between *l'agrément* (registration) and the start of the profession and 60 hours within the next two years (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

Just like in Flanders, the history of childminding in France is characterised by a split administration system for under-threes (health system) versus over-threes (education system) (Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neuman, 2010). Furthermore, the business of childcare for the under-three year olds is provided for over 90% by the state and consists out of 95% (and more) non-profit provision (Penn, 2014). The regulatory body is CNAF and organised family day care and *crèches* are funded by the *Caisse d'allocations familiales* (regional family allowance funds), local authorities and parental fees (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

In France, the current types of childcare provision for under-three year olds are, *les assistantes maternelles*, *crèches*, *halte-garderies* (part-time *crèches*), *crèches familiales* (family day care networks), *relais assistants maternelles* (network for independent family day carers and parents) and *lieux d'accueil enfants parents* (open-door service for parents, children, independent and registered family day carers) (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

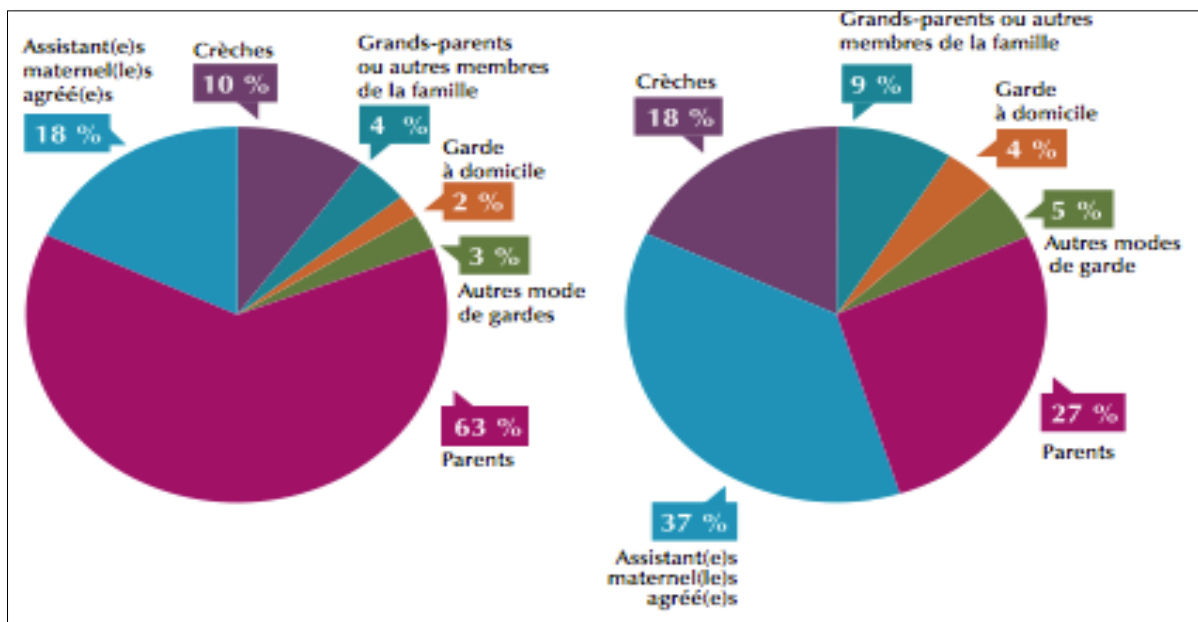


Figure 2 Childcare provision for under-threes in France (CNAF, 2012)

In 2007, *les assistantes maternelles* (figure 2) were the main care providers right after parental care during weekdays (Monday to Friday) between 8 am and 7 pm (figure on the left). When both parents work full-time, the percentage of care by these *assistantes maternelles* increased up to 37% (figure on the right). Childcare in *crèches* was used significantly less with respectively 10% and 18% (CNAF, 2012).

In 2012 (figure 3) *les assistantes maternelles* are still the most used type of ECEC-provision, right after parental childcare provision: parents accounted for 51% of used childcare and *les assistantes maternelles* accounted for 33% of used childcare provision (Boyer et al., 2012). In comparison, childcare in *crèches* amounted to a mere 13%.

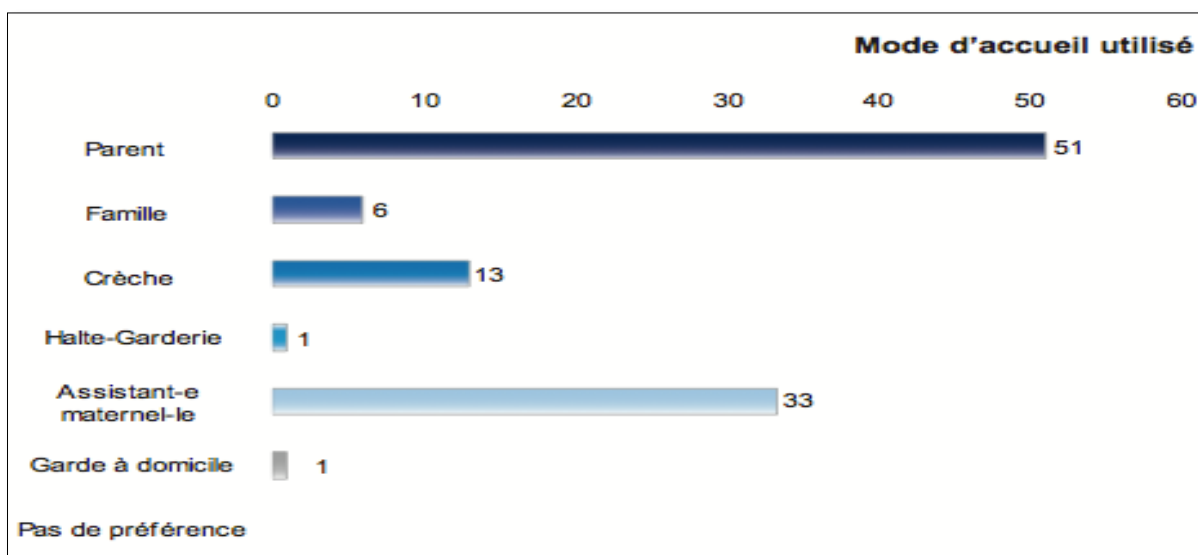


Figure 3 Childcare provision for under-threes in France (Boyer et al, 2012)

3. Germany

Like Flanders and France, the first childcare initiatives in Germany originated during the Industrial Revolution as a means of producing useful members of society (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Although former East Germany had a high level of publicly funded childcare, several economic and political developments created the need for other forms of childcare to arise: family day care (services) with considerable variations between the different *Länder* (states) and significant regional differences made entry (Gelder, 2003).

In terms of policy, it is not until the unification of the *Länder* into the West German political system that the growing sector of family day care (which was not officially acknowledged in former East Germany) came under the legal framework of the *Kinder-und Jugendhilfegesetz* (Child and Youth Welfare Act) that further anchored the existing principle of subsidiarity (Gelder, 2003; Oberhuemer et al., 2010). A trend that up to today leaves childcare initiatives allocated to non-governmental bodies and only obligates public authorities to provide childcare if the former are not in a position to do so (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). In Germany, the federal government has a mere stimulatory role and may develop legislation but the municipalities are in charge of funding and organising ECEC-provision. Responsibilities are shared between the federal government, the *Länder* and the municipalities. At a local level the individual boroughs (under umbrella municipal associations) are responsible for decision making about ECEC (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

In 1993, the federal government provided a Qualification of *Tagesmütter* in rural areas (Gelder, 2003), consisting of courses that were “taken up eagerly by women, particularly unemployed trained childcare workers or workers who feared impending redundancy” (Gelder, 2003: 42). Nevertheless, beginning legislation was put in place that prescribed the assessment of the suitability of self-employed *Tagesmütter* by the *Jugendamt* (Youth Office) and that corresponded to the demand for the qualification and integration of *Tagesmütter* into the qualification system of childcare staff. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that this legislation only applies to family day care workers who care for more than five children at the same time. Furthermore, a specific framework concerning family day care is mainly set out by local authorities such as municipalities or by the family day carers themselves for they are mostly self-employed. In this context, Oberhuemer et al. (2010) report that:

“[...] informal and unregulated types of family day care organised and paid for by parents are used more frequently in the western *Länder* with large rural areas, whereas public and regulated services are the preferred form in the city states (Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg) and the eastern *Länder*.” (Oberhuemer et al., 2010: 180)

Recent key policy acts in Germany are the *Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz* (TAG) in 2005 and the *Kinderförderungsgesetz* (KiFöG) in 2008, respectively translated as the Day Care Expansion Act that equates institutional day care and family day care and the Child Support Act that documents political will for the further expansion of day care for children in the first three years of life and that arranges family day care as a second, equally important pillar in the system of childcare (Kerl-Wienecke, Schöyerer & Schuegger, 2013).

Nowadays, the system of early education and care in Germany is part unitary (welfare led) where 34% of the childcare business is provided by the state and 66% through publicly subsidised private provision (Penn, 2014), whereas education and schools are the responsibility of the different *Länder* (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Free providers of childcare are subsidised by the state according to aforementioned subsidiarity principle and run their service(s) independently. Remarkable for Germany is that all private provisions for the under-threes are non-profit organisations such as the church, the German Red Cross, parent initiatives, youth organisations, etc. (Penn, 2014).

In Germany, formal types of provision for the under-threes are, inter alia, the *Kinderkrippen* (nurseries) on the one hand and the *Kindertagespflege* (family day care) on the other hand. Following figures indicate the formal use of *Kindertageseinrichtung* (childcare centres) versus *Tagespflege* (family day care) in 2005 in respectively eastern Germany and western Germany (DJI, 2005).

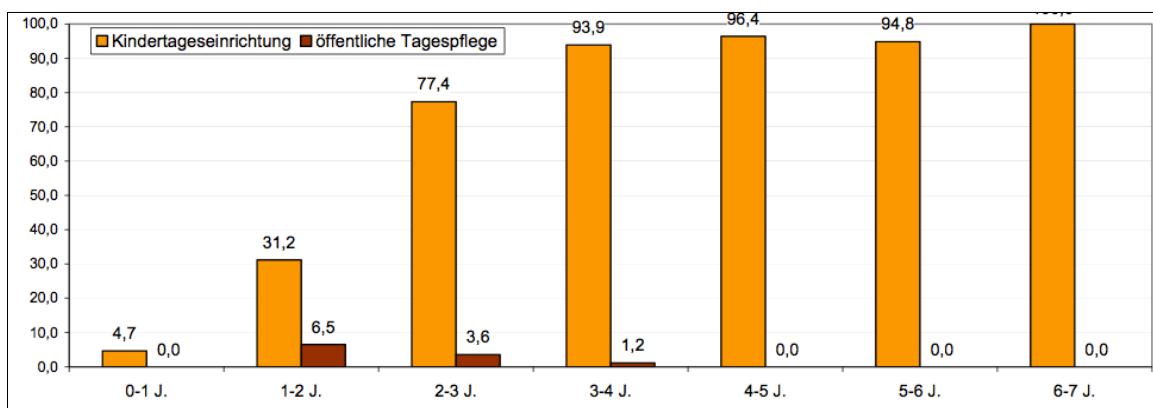


Figure 4 Childcare provision in eastern Germany (DJI, 2005)

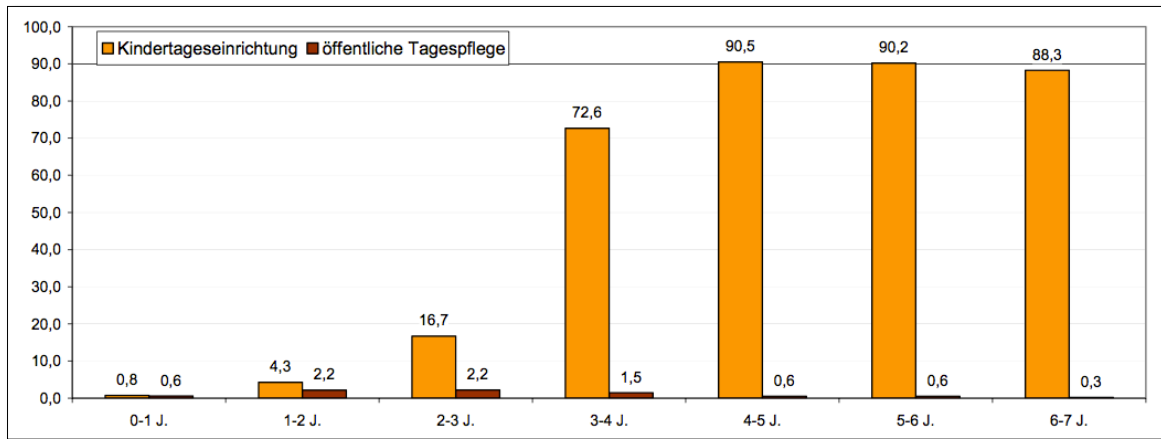


Figure 5 Childcare provision in western Germany (DJI, 2005)

In 2009, legislation was put in place where the government guaranteed provision for all children aged one to three years. In that year, the enrolment rate of the under-threes (in family day care) revealed a percentage of 2,1% (3,6% in the eastern *Länder* and 1,7% in the western *Länder*). These figures are in line with the results of 2005, where the percentages are significantly small in comparison to the enrolment rate of the under-threes in other types of childcare. The overall enrolment rate of the *Kinderkrippen*, for example, amounted to 13,5% in 2009 (37,4% in the eastern *Länder* and 8,1% in the western *Länder*) (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

4. Conclusion

Despite slow progress concerning childminders' formal existence, status and required level of professionalisation; similar trends are pinpointed in Flanders, France as well as Germany. The first childcare initiatives arose during the Industrial Revolution in times of high infant mortality as an externalisation of educating the masses where *onthaalouders*, *assistantes maternelles* and *Tagesmütter* were appealed to in order to cater the high demand for childcare in a privatised, unregulated sphere. On the one hand, it appears that women were victimised to the labour market, where low-skilled women were inserted into the childminding workforce (Flanders) or courses were installed that were eagerly taken up by unemployed women who feared impending redundancy (Germany). On the other hand, childminders were appreciated for their substitute mothering within an existing predominant motherhood ideal. This trend, that traces back up to today, has impeded perceptions about the need for further qualification and training. If we take a closer look at this need for qualification in terms of policy (acts), especially Flanders is lagging behind. Nevertheless, the start of the new decree (1 April 2014) is trying to make up for this arrears.

Early education and care provisions in Flanders and France are split in administration, where care for the under-threes is located under the health or welfare system and care for the over-threes is located under the education system. In Germany, ECEC-provision is located under the health or welfare system and responsibility for the education system belongs to the different *Länder*. For Flanders, early childhood provisions are delegated to the government agency *Kind & Gezin*, whilst for France the regulatory body is CNAF and for Germany the local boroughs are in charge of funding and organising ECEC-provision.

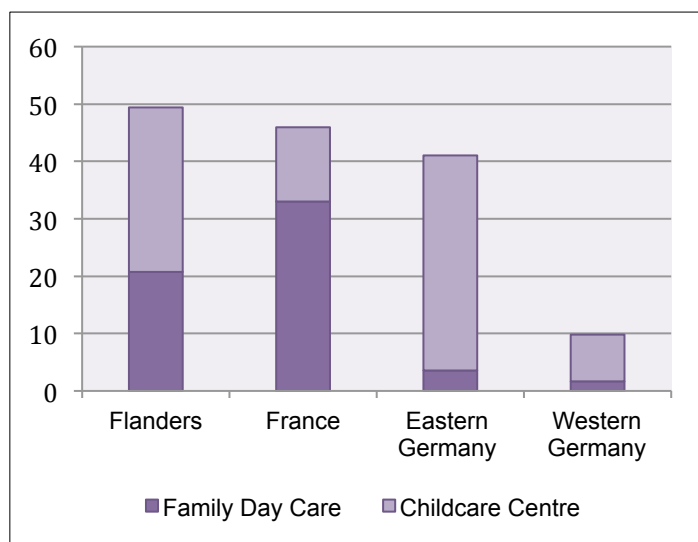


Figure 6 Family day care in Flanders, France and Germany

Nowadays, the use of family day care (figure 6) in Flanders amounts to an estimated 20,8%, where 17,8% constitutes of family day care services and ca. 3% accounts for independent family day care. The percentage of childcare centres amounts to 28,6% where 17,7% constitutes of independent childcare centres and 10,9% of childcare centres certified by *Kind & Gezin*.

In France, there is a reverse trend, where 33% of the children are allocated to family day care providers versus 18% to the childcare centres. In Germany, the formal enrolment rate of the under-threes accounts for a mere percentage of 2,1 versus a percentage of 13,5 in the childcare centres. However, in Germany, there is a significant difference between the eastern and the western *Länder*. In the eastern *Länder*, family day care accounts for 3,6% versus 37,4% in the childcare centres. In the western *Länder*, the percentage of family day care totals 1,7% versus 8,1% in the childcare centres. This small percentage of family day care in the western *Länder* can partly be explained due to the fact that informal and unregulated types of family day care organised and paid for by parents are used more frequently in the western *Länder*.

Concerning state versus private provision (figure 7), Flanders has an average of 57% state provision (50-65%), whilst France has over 90% state provision. The percentage of state provision in Germany totals 34%. Private provision in Flanders amounts to an average of 42,5% (35-50%), divided into non-profit and for-profit, where private for-profit providers are

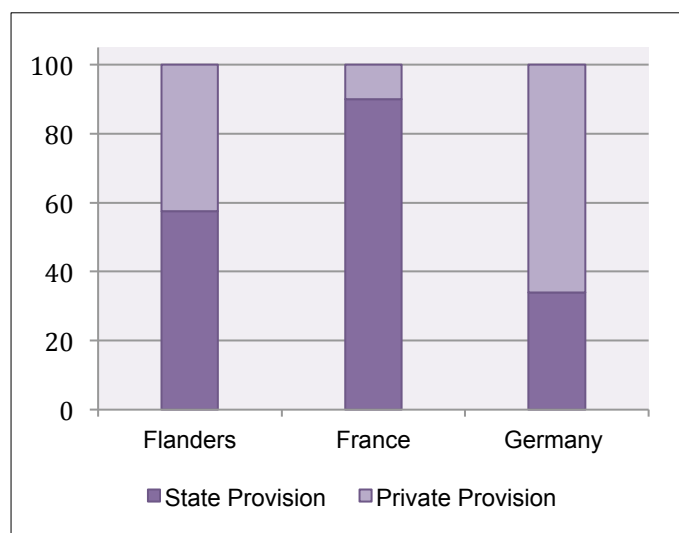


Figure 7 State versus private provision in Flanders, France and Germany

“not really commercial, but not really non profit” (Penn, 2014). France only

has ca. 10% of private provision, which consists for over 95% out of non-profit provision. Germany has a 66% publicly subsidised private provision rate that is completely allocated (100%) to non-profit organisations. These results, conducted by Helen Penn (2014) for the European Commission are highlighted, for previous research has shown that “high levels of systemic professionalism are more difficult to achieve when ECEC is predominantly private and market-oriented” (Urban et al., 2011: 46).

This historical outline concerning the existence, status, qualification, use and required level of professionalisation of childcare in general and the childminding profession in particular functions as the preamble for this study: different histories, contexts and policy decisions were highlighted and need to be kept in mind when discussing inspiring practices and paying attention to local knowledge(s) on childminding in a society where the need for childcare is rapidly and continuously growing.

CHAPTER IV FLANDERS

1. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

1.1. What is the current profile?

Where degree requirements in Flanders were a condition sine qua non for every job in the early years sector about 30 years ago; today a trend of deprofessionalisation is key (Peeters, 2012): in Flanders, access to the early years profession is less directed by degree requirements and there is a strong growth of childcare places in jobs where no such requirements are stated (i.e. the growing private sector). Moreover, for the childminding staff working conditions are precarious which is in contrast with the current increasing demand for quality (Peeters, 2012).

The present group of childminders is a very heterogeneous group where variety is key (Boonaert, 2006) and where heated discussion concerning the concept and level of professionalism is the rule rather than the exception. In a society where quality requirements are steadily increasing and educational needs are abandoned, there is a clear juxtaposition between childminders who strive for further professionalisation, paving way for better working conditions: the childminding profession is characterised by low pay, no acquired status, high work pressure, lack of horizontal and vertical mobility and social isolation (Peeters, 2008, 2012; Van der Mespel, 2011). Meanwhile, for an important part of childminders, further professionalisation is considered otiose: a trend that is influenced by the fact that a career in childminding often served as a temporary fix lacking other job possibilities at the time or earning an extra income whilst raising their own children (Peeters, 2008).

Nowadays, the childminding part of the early years sector is coping with high outflow levels and the attractiveness of the job is virtually non-existent (Peeters, 2008, 2012; Van der Mespel, 2011). These high outflow levels can partly be explained by an evolution in age where the average age of the childminder is higher and partly because of novice childminders with limited experience who quit their job fairly quickly: research conducted by Deglorie (2009) has shown that childminders practice their job for an average timespan of six years, which merely confirms aforementioned temporality of the profession. In her research, Deglorie repeats push-factors as the childminder's children growing older, social isolation, financial incapability as well as a lack of space, health issues and/or other career opportunities (Deglorie, 2009).

1.2. What is the required level of qualification? Which competences are needed?

“The educational level and working conditions of family daycarers are lower in comparison to staff who work in group care” (Peeters, 2012: 136).

Over time awareness grew that qualifications (could) make an important contribution to qualitative childcare. However, in the Flemish childminding sector, the required level of qualification has always been an agitated topic. Despite parents' quest for a higher level of professionalism, this has not been translated in the instalment of higher qualification levels that, in turn, affect a higher quality level of care (Peeters, 2008). The difficulty lies in the fact that the heterogeneous group of childminders is divided onto this question. On the one hand there are family day care providers who perceive themselves as mother-substitutes and are truly convinced that maternal competences are sufficient (Peeters, 2008). Besides that, for a long time common belief about childcare for the under-threes being limited to physical care that can be undertaken by anyone prevailed (Peeters, 2012). On the other hand, an important group of childminders does strive for continuous training and promotes professionalism (Van der Mespel, 2011; Peeters, 2012, 2008).

Until the implementation of the new decree (1 April 2014), no qualification requirements were installed to start a career as a family day care provider (Van der Mespel, 2011; Peeters, 2008). In becoming a family day care provider, a certificate of supervision (1988) that safeguarded a minimum level of quality and that was promulgated by *Kind & Gezin*, sufficed (Vindevoel, 2006). In practice, however, this intervention no longer measures up to the standards in our current reality, where many questions concerning the level of professionalism in terms of qualification remain unanswered.

Concerning training, family day care providers *aangesloten bij een dienst voor onthaalouders* have received a short training course of five days (Peeters, 2012) and acquired training through their family day care service manager. In the best-case scenario, childminders did obtain a certificate of *Kinderzorg* (Childcare) which consists of a one-year education after secondary education and is mainly criticised for its technical interpretation of professionalism.

A transparent and clear competence profile for the family day care provider was not developed until 2005, when *Kind & Gezin* approved a vision text (Peeters, 2012). In contrast, today, the required competences are, caring for children (both the individual child as well as in group) and to support their development (1); working together with the child's family as partners in care (2); working together with others as a function of childcare (3); installing collaboration with colleagues as well as mentors (4); reflecting on pedagogical/educational practice and to improve (5); consorting with diversity in children, families, professionals, colleagues, etc. (6) (Kind & Gezin, 2014a).

Concerning the level of qualification, the new decree states that by 31 March 2024 every current early years professional should have obtained a degree on a vocational level. Exceptions only apply to those who can evince sufficient experience. For example, childminders who have worked for a minimum of three years as family day care providers with a certificate of supervision, an acknowledgment or assent provided by *Kind & Gezin* do not need any additional qualifications. For childminders who cannot evince sufficient experience or who have not acquired the needed qualification level, a transitional period is installed: they need to obtain the required qualification level through modular and customised training (Kind & Gezin, 2014b).

Nowadays, when novice childminders apply for a certificate of supervision, acknowledgement or assent by *Kind & Gezin* and are not (yet) qualified, they must register for the module *Werken in de kinderopvang* (Working in childcare) (20 hours). This module provides insight into themes as the early years professional, working together with families and care/safety regulations. Moreover, all novice childminders, titled *kinderbegeleidsters gezinsopvang*, need to accomplish the module *Kennismaken met de gezinsopvang* (Introduction to family day care) (20 hours). This module provides insight into the family day care profession, i.e. the impact on family life, financial viability, organisation, tasks and competences and is delivered by the centres for adult education. In sum, 40 hours of training is required and in return these novice childminders receive 40 hours of earlier-acquired competences in the overall education *Begeleider in de kinderopvang* (Mentor in Childcare) (Kind & Gezin, 2014b).

2. INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

2.1. Which ECEC-initiatives have developed?

In the 80s, under the guise of a “refresher course optimism” (Peeters, 2012: 133), short (and cheap) in-service training was implemented to impart knowledge towards Flemish childminders and to provide the growing sector with a certain degree of professionalism (Peeters, 2012). In 1986, VBJK conducted research towards the training needs of practising childminders *aangesloten bij een dienst voor onthaalouders* which unravelled the heterogeneous character and multiplicity of the group. As a means of intervention, VBJK developed training packages that included long-term courses as well as short-term courses alongside the instalment of training evenings. In times of crisis, these kits reaffirmed social belief that the competences of unqualified childminders could be tackled with short training courses and muffled the underlying cry for the reform of existing education possibilities (Peeters, 2008). Conveniently, building a coherent pedagogical vision was promoted via extensive guidance, pending reform and education at a higher level. In that time, the notion of modular training also made entry, for common belief stated that different possibilities should be opened up for acquiring the needed competences (Peeters, 2008).

In 1987, research of independent family day care providers highlighted the overall struggle for training, an ethical code, appropriate valuation, a valid statute and the high need for funding. As a way of tackling social isolation and to further research childminders’ need for training and qualification, Drop-in Centres and training weekends emerged. Whilst handling a perspective of early years workers as reflective practitioners, these training weekends exposed childminders’ paradoxical position: childminders are valorised as well-beloved mother-substitutes versus demonised as low-skilled women (Peeters, 2008). In reality, the predominant *mother ersatz model*, their popularity with parents as well as the invisible nature of the job impeded an underlying need for training, qualification and the further quest for professionalism (Peeters, 2008).

In practice, a workbook for childminders titled *Kinderopvang thuis* (Childcare at home) was developed where several aspects of the childminding profession were beautifully portrayed and where the struggle for social valuation was precluded: independent family day care providers considered their work as meaningful and appreciated the level of autonomy but at the same time reported low job valuation (Peeters, 2008). During an international conference for childminders, aforementioned issues were repeated.

In contact with other countries, these *Cinderella's of childcare*, got excited about the English model of childminding where autonomy was highlighted versus the Swedish or Danish model where childminders were much more state controlled. In general, the need for a higher level of professionalism was reaffirmed and childminders' paradoxical position between freedom and autonomy on the one hand versus (state) security on the other hand, was appointed (Peeters, 2008).

In 1992, in a context where family day care services gained popularity and territory, the NOW-project⁵ (ESF) introduced an *Opleiding medewerker kinderopvang* (Training for Childcare Workers) for candidate childminders within the family day care service. This five-week course (42 hours theory, 40 hours of practice and 60 hours tutorial) made entry and central aspects were, inter alia, the childminders' caring role, the location (private versus public), household and the overall relation with the family day care service. Also, aforementioned workbook was implemented to highlight childminders' specific contexts and functioned as a self-study guide throughout. Where candidate childminders appreciated the variegation between theory and practice, the family day care service managers appreciated organisation by a third neutral party (VBJK). In total, 70% of the 267 candidates acquired a certificate. In practice, this project led to the effectual start-up of an initiation course that needed to be organised or outsourced by family day care services within the first year of childminding. VBJK joined forces with other training institutes.

Within this NOW-project, VBJK also contacted independent family day care providers to tackle the general invisibility and the private nature of the sector: great displeasure in the sector was observed and VBJK was confronted with additional difficulties in developing communicative spaces between policy and practitioners. Moreover, it appeared that the trend of "the refresher course optimism" (Peeters, 2012: 133) had not influenced the private sector, which only complicated any possible quest for professionalisation. As a means of intervention, VBJK developed an initiation course similar to that of the family day care services. This course (250 hours) focused on aspects as care and hygiene, organisation, interaction and equipment. Unfortunately, after evaluation, this course did not lead to any certificate and lacked opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility: independent family day care providers were insufficiently prepared for a childminding career path. As a solution, VBJK, Kind & Gezin and VIZO (Flanders Self-Employment Institute) created a new course, titled *Beheerder Particuliere Opvanginstelling* (Manager Private Day Care) (512 hours – two nights a week for two years) where business economy, psycho-pedagogical modules as well as hygienic-caring modules variegated. After successful accomplishment, a certificate was handed out (Peeters, 2008).

⁵ NOW: New Opportunities for Women

Next, in 1998, *Kind & Gezin* assembled a focus group in order to outline a pedagogical interpretation of professionalism within the childminding profession: as a result, a vision text was internationally assayed and themes as location, play, relationship childminder versus child, primary needs, interaction, education, relation with parents, etc. were exemplified. In practice, this vision text functioned as a basis for inspiring independent family day care providers. As an additional tool, VBJK developed a film, titled *De kleine onderzoeker* (the little researcher) where childminders with an inspiring pedagogical vision were depicted. Later on, this film was also used for informing novice independent family day care providers and was implemented into the already existing training course(s) for family day care services (Peeters, 2008).

In 2000, *Kind & Gezin* ordered a professor of the University of Ghent to develop a factor analysis based on the results of the implemented quality instrument KWAPOI (Quality instrument for private day carers) that was developed in 1997 and the self-assessment tool that was developed in 1998, to improve overall quality. As a result, seven crucial factors for quality were determined: the degree of the childminders' involvement (1), the level of repose for the child due to the childminder's attitude and efficiency of the organisation (2), freedom of choice for the child through the organisation of care (3), the way in which the child is appealed to in activities (4), the way of getting in touch with the child during routine activities and in terms of the child's wellbeing (5), passive (environmental) safety (6) and active safety established through the daily operations of the childminder (7) (Peeters, 2008). Sequentially, in 2001, VBJK decided to develop a film, titled *Creatief omgaan met kwaliteit* (A creative approach towards quality) that was offered to novice independent family day care providers and that depicted several reflective practitioners at work.

Concerning childminding, in 2006, VBJK led the European EQUAL-project *ecce ama!* Childcare in learning networks. An objective of the project was to improve professionalism, quality employment and training for new as well as experienced childminders (Peeters, 2008). As a result, since 2008, family day care services, VBJK, *Kind & Gezin* and (adult) training centres are working together on the project; *de onthaalouderacademie* (the family day care academy) to develop an integrated competence policy for family day care providers (Van der Mespel, 2011). The main objectives were, inter alia, increasing access to childcare for different target groups, promoting men's involvement towards childcare, tackling the current quality level of childcare as well as increasing the overall quality of family day care services (VBJK, 2014c).

Practically, the family day care academy informs novice childminders about all aspects of the childminding career path, functions as a guide towards certified competences, opens up greater vertical as well as horizontal mobility and offers a pedagogical framework throughout (Van der Mespel, 2011). The academy builds on existing foundations, training and experiences and only adjusts or refocuses where necessary. Moreover, a selection tool was developed where information concerning motivation, knowledge, suitability of the residence and the combination work versus family life was gathered.

Where family day care services are responsible for delivering a competence profile that is adjacent to reality which consists of training, internship, theory, etc., the academy developed an introductory route where childminding is considered an informed choice. In total, the academy comprised of four theoretic modules (40 hours), including a learning platform for distant learning (i.e. discussions, online assignments and person-centered e-learning) and a framework for supervision. Concerning the development of e-learning, research conducted by Tom Boonaert (2006) showed no significant differences in comparison to traditional and conventional learning methods. Although independent family day care providers did encounter more thresholds (i.e. the time-consuming aspect, difficulty, more expenses, meaningfulness, etc.) in comparison to family day care services when using the computer. Today, when completing the trajectory of the family day care academy, childminders receive the needed certificate as well as 40 hours of earlier-acquired competences for the overall education *Begeleider in de kinderopvang* (Kind & Gezin, 2014b).

2.2. Are there training institutes?

Today, several training centres for (adult) education in Flanders organise aforementioned courses *Working in childcare* (20 hours) and *Introduction to family day care* (20 hours) for novice childminders. These modules not only function as an acquaintance with the childminding profession but –starting from 1 April 2014– also serve as a precondition for a career path in the childminding sector. Concerning the instalment of aforementioned earlier-acquired competences, the training centres for adult education still have a long way to go (Van der Mespel, 2011): earlier-acquired competences were considered a lever for social participation, opening up possibilities for horizontal as well as vertical mobility, paving way for greater recognition and better working conditions (Boonaert, 2006). Nevertheless, more political will as well as (financial) support is needed for the further practical implementation.

At present, there are still no official support structures for independent family day care providers, although education centres such as *CEGO* (Experience-Based Education Centre) and *Komma vzw* are trying to support these providers through imparting knowledge about pedagogical as well as qualitative aspects in childcare (Van der Mespel, 2011): mentoring these childminders via training courses exemplifies the continuous process of lifelong learning that needs to be (re)evaluated with regard to the individual needs of and in dialogue with the childminders (Van der Mespel, 2011).

On a higher level, in 2009, Kind & Gezin convened three colleges in order to develop the education *Pedagogie van het jonge kind* (Pedagogy of the Young Child). As a result, graduates of this three-year bachelor level training function as pedagogical mentors that guide childminders within a larger pedagogical framework and that (re)direct low-skilled people into a process of qualification (Peeters, 2012). Despite a good start, further research needs to be conducted about the outcomes and results.

3. INTERINSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

3.1. Is there collaboration with other types of provision?

The past decades, a large group of (independent) family day care providers, service managers, training staff, adult education centres, policy makers as well as researchers have cooperated and collaborated on the development of actions and tools with the common goal of making childminders stronger (VBJK, 2014b). Today, the result of the largest cooperation, i.e. with family day care services, (adult) education centres, CEGO, Kind & Gezin, VBJK and/or others, is without a doubt the family day care academy. Also, as a result of the cooperation between VBJK and CEGO, the website www.gezinsopvanginfo.be provides detailed information about a career path in childminding for novice childminders, experienced family day care providers as well as service managers. For (future) childminders, information can be found concerning themes such as childcare, relationships with parents, health issues, safety regulations and practical organisation. Moreover, the website refers childminders to the family day care academy and gives practical information about the training modules that are offered in cooperation with adult education centres. For pedagogical trainers information entails, inter alia, tools for peer learning as well as several ways to strengthen childminders. The website functions as an overall result of the attempts made to increase the amenity of the childminding profession (VBJK & CEGO, 2014).

4. GOVERNANCE LEVEL

4.1. Are there quality-requirements?

Today, there is international consensus about the preconditions for quality in terms of the number of children, pedagogical staff qualifications as well as the continuity of staff (Peeters, 2012). However, in Flanders, the level of quality was largely equated with the phenomenon of the *ersatz mother model*, leaving the quest for qualitative childcare kindly unspoken. The mentality shift that an upgrade of competencies and qualifications was indispensable (Peeters, 2008), was difficult to achieve in practice and remained a slow and laborious process.

Over time, debate about the growing private for-profit sector being characterised by “fragmented, low-quality, poorly paid jobs” (Peeters, 2012: 134) arose and despite parents’ demand for a higher quality level of care (Peeters, 2008), in reality, this has not been carried through. It is not until the vision statement, developed in 2008 and refined in 2010, that the acquirement of competences and training is very much premised (Van der Mespel, 2011).

Prior to the effectuation of the new decree, there were almost no quality requirements for the childminding sector (i.e. a minimal certificate of supervision and factor analysis of seven determinants for quality). Also, any willingness for lifelong learning that is internationally appointed as a herald for tackling inadequate quality levels and reducing high staff turnover (Peeters, 2012), was virtually non-existent. Flanders was characterised by an increasing inconsistency between uprising quality requirements on the one hand and the abandonment of educational needs to meet these requirements on the other hand (Peeters, 2012).

Besides that, the imposition of long-term quality requirements was (and is) anything but evident when the childminding sector itself is coping with fundamental issues such as low pay, no acquired status, high work pressure, social isolation, etc. (Van der Mespel, 2011; Peeters, 2008). According to Peeters (2012) and Van der Mespel (2011), continuous training and increasing professionalism are still key factors in addressing the overall quality level of the job whilst offering an alternative for the existing technical topdown patchwork into childminding (Peeters, 2012; Van der Mespel, 2011).

4.2. Which policy changes and/or developments are implemented?

As aforementioned, it is not until 1974 that the Flemish government started to subsidise family day care services (Vandenbroeck, 2009). Throughout history, the childminding profession in Flanders was constructed by the political choice to invest in non-qualified childminders as a function of prioritising the economical function of childcare. Example given, in the eighties, care work (i.e. childminding) was used as a way to insert unqualified workers into the workforce as a short-term measure for reducing unemployment (Peeters, 2008; 2012).

Besides that, policy only acquiesced in a childminders' statute (2003), when the percentage of independent family day care providers decreased heavily. As a result, the statute of childminders was tackled: a late political response to the overall dropout of childminders that many considered as too little, too late and that -in practice- had little to no impact for the childminders themselves. A full status has still not been reached because childminders are not entitled to an end-of-year bonus or holiday fees and due to the lack of an employment contract, there is no notice period or severance for that matter (Boonaert, 2006).

As mentioned before, it shall take until the latest decree -that is installed to make childcare clearer, more professional and more accessible- that trends of deprofessionalisation are tackled on a policy level. The implementation of the new decree hopes to stimulate childminders towards further training and guidance and was developed as a means of investing in quality childcare, upgrading the current status in combination with appropriate competence requirements and growth opportunities (Van der Mespel, 2011).

Although lack of political will to evolve towards an integrated system of early childhood care and education has been predominant in Flanders, the need for a comprehensive approach towards the amelioration of qualification levels has led to advocating a certain level of professionalism (Peeters, 2012). With the European project *ecce ama!* as an inspiring example for the instalment of the new decree, the Flemish government joins the international trend where the need for qualification is endorsed and in that way -hopefully- ruptures the current cycle of deprofessionalisation. With the new decree, (baby) steps are made to alter the dominant *mother ersatz model* that might still influence the childminding profession and a quest for professionalisation has -finally- started.

CHAPTER V FRANCE

1. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

1.1. What is the current profile?

In France, nowadays, “[...] debate about an ‘ethics of care’ is needed in order to move away from a situation where unqualified women remain confined [...] as an archipelago of small, ill-paid feminine jobs” (Mozère, 2003: 163). For example, in 2011, on average 87,7% of the childminders were married women, approximately 45 years old (Fagnani & Math, 2012; Champlong, 2011), low-skilled and with a (relatively) low income (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

Today, for the childminding staff established working conditions remain insufficient: there are high levels of isolation, low levels of recognition and job valorisation and an overall low remuneration that is in stark contrast with the impeding demand for more professionalism (Mozère, 2003). Also, there is a high turnover rate, i.e. an estimated percentage of 40,8 between 2005 and 2020 which is detrimental in comparison to the high and growing need for early years professionals (Fagnani & Math, 2012).

The awareness that “[...] childminding is more than an activity grounded in the private sphere of the home” (Mozère, 2003: 172) is quite recent and childminders today are dealing with a professionalisation process where the early years profession is not just a simple transfer from motherhood but entails a process of triangulation between childminder, child(ren) and parent(s) (Brougère, Roucous & Chanu, 2001). For a long time, this professionalisation process was hampered by the predominant image of childminders as *nounous* (nannies): modest and low paid substitute-mothers, little monitored, isolated and lacking any training (Alberola, 2009). Despite trends as low pay and low valuation (Aballéa, 2005), “[...] as mothers they were naturally qualified to care for young children.” (Mozère, 2003: 170)

Also, choosing to become a childminder was often considered *un choix par défaut*⁶, where mothers remained at home whilst their own children were young as an attempt to reconcile family life versus professional life, lacking other job possibilities at the time (Aballéa, 2005; Mozère, 2003).

⁶ Own translation: “a choice by default”

Today, childminders are still in this paradoxical position, entangled between balancing professional life versus private family life (Mony, 2013; Cresson, Delforge & Lemaire, 2012): home planning is transformed into professional development during the day and childminders often have to weigh the possibility of minding more children in terms of more money versus ensuring the quality of care and balancing their own capacity, strengths and family life (Champlong, 2011): an increase in quantity can lead to the degradation of working conditions and thus influences quality (Fagnani & Math, 2012). As a way of example, in rural areas, childminders -whether or not registered- are often the only childcare solution, amounting to a high workload when taking care for more than four children at the same time (Pierre, 2012).

The current group of childminders is characterised by heterogeneity (Fagnani & Math, 2012; Delforge, Cresson & Lemaire, 2012; Bouve & Sellenet, 2011), which is reflected by a clear disagreement on topics as training, qualification and recognition (Delforge, Cresson & Lemaire, 2012). In her research concerning the professionalisation of childminders, Alberola (2009) distinguishes several types of professionals that have developed over time. On the one hand, there are *les nounous envers et contre tout*⁷ who persist in their role of mother-substitutes and applaud the popular maternal image of the *nounou* (Alberola, 2009; Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). For them, maternal experiences and moral qualities are represented as professional competences (Aballéa, 2005; Alberola, 2009). On the other hand, there are *les professionnelles de la petite enfance*⁸ who value the importance of know-how and training, feel comforted by an institutional framework and plead for professional experience. They envision themselves as partners in childcare, as liaison officers between parents and their children, promote continuous training and plead for further job mobility in the early years sector (Alberola, 2009): these professionals are asking for (additional) support and guidance (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

Besides that, a third early years professional profile was appointed, i.e. *les assistantes maternelles* that do not theorise their practices but are aware of the need for some expertise and know-how when exercising their daily practices. These pragmatic childminders are in search of a clear perspective about required skills and need further awareness in terms of training, support (listening) and pedagogy to detach them from the maternal motherhood ideal (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

⁷ Own translation: “nannies against all odds”

⁸ Own translation: “early childhood professionals”

Thus, over the last years a large part of childminders is advocating a professional identity where choosing to become a childminder is less and less experienced as a constraint, that no longer prioritises elements of (maternal) spontaneity but puts childminding on the radar as a learned and skilled profession (Fagnani & Math, 2012; Alberola, 2009; Champlong, 2011): “un métier comme un autre, mais pas pour tout le monde⁹” (Alberola, 2009: 52).

1.2. What is the required level of qualification? Which competences are needed?

Before the entry of an obligatory training requirement in 1992, no qualification requirements were installed. The capability of the applicant was *assessed* based on the inspector’s judgment about the childminders’ capability in terms of being a good mother (Champlong, 2011; Mozère, 2003): a phenomenon that is rather unthinkable in our current reality where the demand for qualitative childcare continues to rise (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Today, it is the president of the general council that acts on applications for *l’agrément* and decides whether or not childminders measure up to the conditions that guarantee the child’s safety, health and development, whilst taking into account the educational abilities of the applicant (Champlong, 2011). In practice, however, applicants summarise this process as an annoying obstacle and criticism is uttered: research showed that when registering, standards are only loosely applied to prevent job overload for other childminders in the area. Also, senior applicants register in order to receive an extra income (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

Practically, in 1992, the required training (60 hours) focused on four domains such as the development, rhythm and needs of the child (1); the relationship with the children’s’ parents (2); educational aspects and the role of the childminder (3); and the institutional and social context in which the childminder operates (4) (Champlong, 2011; Mozère, 2003). Nevertheless, this training was soon criticised for its lack of suitability and applicability in childminders’ daily contexts: insufficient training for judging situations and a lack of opportunities for applying learned skills were appointed (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011; Champlong, 2011). It took until the decree of 2005 for an acknowledgment of the importance of educational attitudes/skills through the requirement of 120 hours of training and the installation of national criteria for registration (Alberola, 2009; Fagnani & Math, 2012).

⁹ Own translation: “a profession like any other, but not for everyone”

Today, the training of 120 hours for *les assistentes maternelles* includes following competences: the childminder must ensure the care of the child, identifies children's needs and establishes dialogue with parents (1); the childminder is able to organise, i.e. planning, organising activities, managing the workstation, adapting to unforeseen situations, establishing communication with other professionals, securing safe living spaces, providing food preparation according to specific rules, ensuring prevention and safety (2); the childminder contributes to the development and socialisation of the child, i.e. tailoring activities to the needs and age of the children, listening to children and offering emotional, cognitive and motoric support, promoting language development and autonomy (3) (Alberola, 2009; Champlong, 2011).

The doubling of the required training (from 60 to 120 hours) was seen as a lever for social participation, career mobility, breaking down isolation and promoting a decent childminders' statute. Nevertheless, this mandatory training "[...] est parasitée¹⁰" (Champlong, 2011: 47), remains insufficient and is heavily criticised. Although a process of professionalisation through training and schooling is positively valued for the revalorisation of the profession and the acquisition of new knowledge, its practical implementation remains inadequate, ad hoc and heterogeneous (Champlong, 2011; Alberola, 2009). Furthermore, the exam *Unité 1 de CAP* (certificate that guarantees fitness for practice) at the end of the 120 hours of training is not adjusted to reality on the one hand: it is too artificial, too theoretic, offers no continuity in learning, etc. On the other hand, passing this exam is not a precondition for exercising the profession (Fagnani & Math, 2012) and the registration of the profession -that for other than safety reasons is rarely refused- happens before any training is installed: childminders only prove an effort commitment, a tendency that is perceived as a denial of their ability to succeed (Alberola, 2009).

Although research conducted by Brougère, Roucous & Chanu (2001) showed that parents did favour the childminder as a mother-substitute (Brougère, Roucous & Chanu, 2001) and that they are appraised due to their flexibility in living arrangements and work schedules, today, the childminders' competences are still insufficiently valorised (Alberola, 2009).

Albeit that a large part of childminders nowadays subscribes to the importance of the educative function in childcare (Alberola, 2009), the practical implementation of a 120-hour training requirement is in stark contrast with other early years professions such as *les éducateurs de jeunes enfants* (educator of young children) and *les puéricultrices* (nurses) where degree requirements are officially stated.

¹⁰ Own translation: "[...] is parasitized"

Thus, despite fairly good progress in favour of childminders on a policy level, access to the childminding profession is not directed by obligatory and specific degree requirements, i.e. there is no such phenomenon as *un diplôme d'assistante maternelle* (a degree in childminding) which could contribute to further validation and recognition of the childminding sector (Alberola, 2009).

2. INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

2.1. Which ECEC-initiatives have developed?

As the childminding profession operates largely at the intersection of professional life and private family life (Aballéa, 2005), ECEC-initiatives in France focused on support as well as regrouping initiatives in order to tackle social isolation and to accompany childminders in a process of professionalisation. In search of recognition and a legal statute, the construction of a professional identity and protection from harsh competition is key (Alberola, 2009): today, there are still compelling reasons for childminders to remain unregistered (Mozère, 2003), reinforced by the high demand for childcare and a shortage of early years professionals in the field. However, under social pressure and with the eye on further vertical/horizontal mobility of the childminding workforce, over time, alternatives emerged (Pierre, 2012).

In the sixties, in the suburbs of Paris, the first initiative for regroupment, i.e. the *crèches familiales* (family day care networks) arose. These *crèches familiales* were created in order to reproduce the mother-child relationship with the overall objective of overcoming the separation from the mother as a source of deprivation for the child (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). Nowadays, in a *crèche familiale*, a *puéricultrice* or an *éducateur de jeunes enfants*, employed by the local authority, accompanies (ca. 30) childminders in the fulfilment of their profession. Childminders are supported in administering their budgets, collecting parental fees and the childminders are regularly (monthly) visited and provided with a training programme. These *crèches familiales* also organise activities for the children at least once a week, where they can interact with peers.

In the seventies, working in a *crèche familiale* guaranteed professionalism and was socially recognised: the family day care network functioned as a place for training and socialisation, responded to questions and concerns that childminders might have, acted as a third party to enrich professional practices and promoted continuous observation, professional exchange and reflection (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

Over time, these *crèches familiales* became an anchor point in terms of continuous training, further education and contributed to the overall quality of childcare. Additionally, childminders did not have to recruit families themselves, which was perceived as a great advantage (Bouve et Sellenet, 2011). The childminders participate in stimulating activities for children, socialise with the educator of young children or nurse, attend information evenings, receive training about specific themes and exchange knowledge and/or experiences with others (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011; Champlong, 2011; Mozère, 2003).

However, certain evolutions have decreased the attractiveness of these *crèche familiales*, inter alia, *la prestation de service unique* where parents pay for each hour instead of each day; a phenomenon that had financial repercussions and lead to a decrease in funding. Also, a lack of autonomy on the job and the entrance of other initiatives have decreased the popularity of these *crèche familiales*. Nowadays, the remaining *crèches familiales* are better known under the denomination of *les services d'accueil familiales* (family services) (Alberola, 2009; Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neuman, 2010).

The *Relais Assistentes Maternelles* (network for independent family day carers and parents, RAM) are organised differently across several regions but all entail support and guidance for childminders (Mozère, 2003): “[...] de créer un environnement plus favorable aux conditions et à la qualité de l'accueil chez les assistants maternels¹¹” (Mony, 2013: 24). This support service organises encounters and information evenings, encourages non-certified childminders to register and promotes training (Mony, 2013; Champlong, 2011). In practice, the *animatrices de Relais* (facilitators of the network) organise a place that childminders can visit as a forum for information, offer guidance and access to rights, participate in observation and contribute to an overall process of socialisation and professionalisation: the support service functions as a service at the interface of childminders, children and parents in order to cater the existing and complex legal framework (Alberola, 2009; Mony, 2013; Champlong, 2011).

From 2011 and onwards, the global offering of the RAM was modified and consisted out of a double entry for families as well as professionals. Today, the support service still provides information on all childcare initiatives, improves the quality of care and enhances the attractiveness of the childminding profession but also mediates and facilitates the relation between parents and professionals (Champlong, 2011).

¹¹ Own translation: “[...]creating an environment that is beneficial to the conditions and reception by the childminder”

The service is neither an employer, nor a controlling organisation but helps to construct a professional identity within a complex structural framework. Through the introduction and guiding of educational practices, confrontation with different points of view and/or new ways of thinking are established, “[...] mais sans savoir précisément à l’avance ni la portée, ni la nature des résultats qui seront obtenus¹².” (Pirard in Mony, 2013: 87).

In practice, the possibility to frequent these services is appreciated by childminders as well as parents. However, a few downsides include the little involvement of managers and local partners in the daily management of the RAM, leaving the facilitators sufficient autonomy to tinker in their own way. Besides that, these facilitators promote professionalisation but do not receive any basic training themselves and learn on the job (Champlong, 2011). Also, there is a representation bias in the childminders that actually frequent the RAM, i.e. more skilled women with intrinsic motivation: a picture that does not correspond to the current heterogeneous group of childminders (Champlong, 2011).

In France, the phenomenon of the *ludothèque* (toy library) was investigated as a tool for further professionalisation. According to Brougère, Roucoux & Chanu (2001), the existence of the *ludothèque* shows that a process of professionalisation can be achieved outside the sphere of the private home and puts the importance of support through informal situations on the radar. This initiative can be summarised as a space where play functions as an informal form of education. This initiative welcomes families, childminders and parents and although childminders working in a *crèche familiale* are obligated to visit, it is a great alternative to find and attract independent childminders: they take initiative to visit or are persuaded by parents to visit. The *ludothèque* functions as a meeting place for discussion with colleagues and professional exchanges as well as a place for relaxing and settling (Brougère et al., 2001).

This tool for professionalisation serves as an interesting place for children to discover, acquire autonomy, interact with peers as well as an area for childminder’s professional enrichment (Brougère et al., 2001). In practice, the little ones are installed on playmats with cushions, toy boxes, etc. The older ones are watched from a distance and can play age-appropriate games. The *ludothécaire* (toy librarian) serves as a facilitator throughout the process: answering questions during informal discussions, informing parents, increasing knowledge and know-how, intervening verbally in terms of difficulties or observed behaviour and facilitating the transition from home to the *ludothèque*: “la ludothèque...c’est comme une formation¹³” (Brougère et al., 2001: 44).

¹² Own translation: “[...] but without knowing in advance neither the scope nor the nature of the results to be obtained.”

¹³ Own translation: “the toy library, it’s like a training”

However, a downside is that the *ludothèque* is strongly influenced by the maternal model: the childminder does not position herself as an active co-creator of knowledge rather the *ludothèque* creates conditions to leave the child to play alone, keeping the maternal model ideal intact. Also, the informal character of the *ludothèque* is twofold: on the one hand this informality lowers any existing thresholds to go outdoors, away from the private home. On the other hand, it serves as an escape away from formal learning initiatives (Brougère et al., 2001).

Starting from 2007, other childcare initiatives, such as *microcrèches* (micro-nurseries) made entry (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). Here, up to nine children (under six years old) are cared for at the same time under fixed criteria set up by the *Protection Maternelle et Infantile* (Maternal and Infant Protection). The personnel should have obtained level V (CAP) and two years of professional experience, childminders are allowed if they have five years experience in the sector. The manager of these *microcrèches* can be a local authority, an association or a private nursery (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011) and the structure resembles the structure of collective childcare. The manager appoints a coordinator, who is responsible for the development, monitoring and implementation of the project (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

Practically, *microcrèches* are under supervision of a *puéricultrice*, an *éducateur de jeunes enfants* or a doctor (Alberola, 2009). Overall, *microcrèches* are presented as a middle ground between individual versus group care (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). In practice, all actors in early childhood education and care in the region decide whether or not to establish *microcrèches* and although the regulations are very diverse, these initiatives are linked with already existing local childcare networks (cf. RAM) (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

As a result of the decree Morano (2010), childminders were officially allowed to regroup in *les maisons d'assistantes maternelles* (childminders' homes) (Champlong, 2011), that offer a collective perspective on the individual job of the childminder outside of the private home. With assent from the general council, a maximum of four childminders (caring for a maximum of 16 children) can collaborate together. The initiative was established to break the barriers between individual versus group care and tries to reconcile private family life versus professional life: this project caters flexible and diversified childcare (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). These initiatives arose in a context where childminders needed to take action and produce their own knowledge, build their own profession, etc. (Delforge, Cresson & Lemaire, 2012).

These *maisons d'assistantes maternelles* can be organised and controlled by the community, a private company or by the childminders themselves. These childminders retain their statute and other benefits and continuity of care is provided in case of the absence of a childminder. Unlike in *microcrèches*, there is no *puéricultrice* or *éducateur de jeunes enfants* in charge of group coordination and the parents are still the employers (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011; Alberola, 2009).

2.2. Are there training institutes?

Although research conducted by Brougère et al. (2001) addresses that “la ludothèque... c’est comme une formation” (Brougère et al., 2001: 44), on a national level the professional branch of childminders is designated to the organisation *AGEFOS PME* as financier of the required training policy. This organisation has mandated the *Institut FEPEM de l’Emploi Familiale* (Institute of Family Employment, IFEF) to implement the obligatory training policy for childminders in all regions of France. The IFEF coordinates continuing professional development of employees and supports the validation of earlier-acquired experiences and competences in childcare (Champlong, 2011). In practice, some departments have their own training centres and/or in-service training but in terms of costs and due to organisational restrictions, most departments have delegated the required training to a service provider (Alberola, 2009).

In reality however, in some departments this required training as well as continuous monitoring is almost non-existent due to a lack of sufficient means (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011) and the established preconditions for training are unsatisfactory: funding for training is considered insufficient and childminders are continuously tackling the problem of a constant renewal of contracts, working alone (isolated) at home and trying to safeguard the continuity of care as well as their income which impedes any existing motivation for training (Cresson, Delforge & Lemaire, 2012).

Moreover, concerning job mobility, it is important to highlight that studying for (Unité 1) the CAP is not an easy challenge in the absence of spousal support or in an environment that lacks information: childminders do not know who to turn to or what financial possibilities are available in times of job insecurity (Cartier, d’Halluin, Lechien & Rousseau, 2012). Besides that, additional facultative training is not easy accessible, leaving problems such as a lack of training as well as social isolation untouched (Champlong, 2011; Alberola, 2009).

Remarkably, in Alberola's research (2009), the surveyed teachers are also struggling with the heterogeneity of the childminders and the unsuitability of the exam in daily life. They report the need for a degree in childminding specific to its activities, practical knowledge(s) and experience(s) on the one hand and plead for the possibility to integrate this degree as an objective for a homogeneous qualification in the early childhood education and care sector on the other hand. Lest, they also plead for training that starts before any registration as a way of preparing childminders for the job (reflection, terminology, construction of a professional project, etc.) (Alberola, 2009).

3. INTERINSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

3.1. Is there collaboration with other types of provision?

At first, several *crèches familiales* were merely adjacent to *crèches* and collaboration with other types of provision was to be further explored. Over the last years, however, the concept of *multi-accueil* (combined reception) arose in order to cater the demand for more flexible childcare. In practice, this was translated into the cohabitation between regular childcare initiatives as well as other occasional, individual or group initiatives. As a textbook example, *les crèches satellite* (satellite nurseries) made entry. More specifically, this initiative consists out of the attachment of (two or three) childminders to a *crèche collective* (nursery). *Les assistantes maternelles* mind the children at home and are employed by the parents, however, once a week they spend half a day in the *crèche collective*, supervised by a *puéricultrice* or *éducatrice*: the childminders are inserted into a team where they can share educational practices, ask professional questions, etc.

Moreover, the children can play within a larger group of peers as a function of social interaction and parents have a back up for the care of their children during the childminders' holiday, illness or training. Besides that, the individual support of the childminders continues, similar to the support previously offered by the *crèches familiales* (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). Although this initiative clearly tackles the childminders' feelings of social isolation, the challenge remains to transfer this project into clear pluriprofessional teams with a proviso of time and money for training (Alberola, 2009; Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

Overall, the initiative of regrouping and collaboration with other types of provision was applauded for several reasons such as the quest for professional recognition, tackling social isolation, caring for children on a neutral territory without intrusion into private family life and to envision the childminding job as a real profession with the development of know-how and educational practices (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). However, on the downside, competition between these initiatives is harsh (the playing field needs levelling) and their statute is not similar, which -in turn- might endanger the quality of care (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

Concerning collaboration with services such as the *Protection Maternelle et Infantile*, a lack of time and resources is impeding the fulfilment of their mission to support childminders' professional practices. It appears that when services do visit a childminder at home, this is most often triggered by a complaint or as a professional social intervention, rather than as a means of support (Alberola, 2009). In that way, it appears that a policy of control and risk management transcends overall support.

4. GOVERNANCE LEVEL

4.1. Are there quality-requirements?

The concept of quality is a very multidimensional concept that covers many loadings (Cresson, Delforge & Lemaire, 2012). According to Cresson et al. (2012) quality comprises of material and pragmatic aspects on the one hand and specific expertise on the other hand. Pragmatic aspects are, inter alia, ensuring security and hygiene, identifying the needs of others through listening, training, guarding the continuity of care, etc. Specific expertise comprises of the general social, the mini-collective of children and their parents as well as the opportunity of a childminding group to share information and experiences (i.e. attendance to RAM) (Cresson et al., 2012).

Today, the quality of care is still investigated by the general council as a function of registration. They decide whether or not applicants measure up to the conditions that guarantee the child's safety, health and development, whilst taking into account the educational abilities of the candidate childminder (Champlong, 2011). When complaints are made about the quality of care, the PMI investigates whether or not these complaints were grounded and intervenes (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). Concerning the development of new initiatives such as *multi-accueil*, *crèches satellites*, *minicrèches*, etc., Bouve & Sellenet (2011) point out that no word is said about the quality of care, a question that should be continuously revisited in an early childhood policy (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011).

4.2. Which policy changes and/or developments are implemented?

According to Aballéa (2005), the difficulties for further professionalisation of the childminding sector are, the long history of minding children within the private character of the home where being a childminder was free of charge without the need for any certification, guaranty of competences, conditions for childcare, etc. and the fact that a process of professionalisation in France has relied on policy progress, i.e. the intervention of public authorities is required:

“[...] il y a bientôt trente ans, la puissance publique et plusieurs institutions engageaient une action en ce sens, créant un marché et constituant un espace de qualification par l’attribution d’un statut et la revalorisation de l’image et de l’identité de ce métier.¹⁴” (Aballéa, 2005: 55)

Although in 1844 the first *crèches* were established, it takes until 1874 for any kind of child protection legislation to reinvigorate the job of the *nourrices* to that of *les gardiennes* (Champlong, 2011). The main objective was, inter alia, to educate the masses, i.e. the children and their mothers, sustaining public intrusion into private family life. It takes until the aftermath of World War II, for the organisation PMI to arise that puts in place control and organisation of these family day care providers (Alberola, 2009).

Also, over time a maternal model ideal was installed, where the mother is the person *par excellence* to raise her children (Alberola, 2009; Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). Moreover, in terms of policy, the split-system braised any political will to further develop childcare services, which enhanced the enormous growth of informal family day carers as mother-substitutes (Mozère, 2003).

The act of 1977 gave family day care providers a greater professional statute and their new title as *assistantes maternelles* (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011); however, this change only increased childminders’ costs and curbed the proportion of childminders (Champlong, 2011). Despite such unwanted effects, policy did try to carry out the fact that minding children is no longer sufficient and that active participation towards children’s care and education is crucial (Alberola, 2009).

¹⁴ Own translation: “[...] it will soon be thirty years that the public force and several institutions initiated this kind of action, creating a market and composing a qualification environment by attributing a statute and by revaluating the profession’s image and identity.”

Next, it takes until 1992 for the instalment of an obligatory training requirement of 60 hours. However, it appears that this policy intervention did not have the desired repercussions in society: in reality, unemployment for *les assistentes maternelles agréées* is high because of their competition with illegal, unregistered childminders, the childminders' statute is still uncertain, training is not rewarded with a degree and recognition levels remain low. These registered childminders are designated as “corvéables à merci¹⁵” (Aballéa, 2005: 60) and there is a clear lack of guidance by the local community, which comes across as overall indifference towards the childminding sector (Aballéa, 2005).

In 2004, the policy's primary objective is the development of a structural framework that allows parents freedom of choice when it comes to childcare: the provision of childcare services appears, social contracts between childminders and parents are obligated and financial loss due to illness is covered. Also, from then on professional training is required and childminders have to show willingness to initiate a vocational training adapted to the early years business and its specific contexts (Champlong, 2011).

In line with this evolution, the act of 2005 further emphasises the importance and value of training and thus the requirement of an enhanced training of 120 hours was installed: 60 hours between the registration and the start of the profession and 60 hours within the next two years (Bouve & Sellenet, 2011). This act provides a framework (RAM) for childminders to share their professional practices and tries to valorise the childminding profession through the construction of a professional identity and statutory recognition (Champlong, 2011). Also, the importance of training is highlighted and valorised through the introduction of the exam *Unité 1 du CAP* with the objective of further professionalisation that tries to install the perception of the childminding job as “une profession comme les autres¹⁶” (Alberola, 2009: 3).

Finally in 2010, the decree Morano secures the childminders' decision to regroup in *les maisons d'assistantes maternelles* (Champlong, 2011), which highlights the political will to create more job opportunities and to deal with shortages in childcare, to make the profession more attractive and to increase the quality of services through the injunction of professionalisation (Cresson, Delforge & Lemaire, 2012).

¹⁵ Own translation: “servants for any kind of work”

¹⁶ Own translation: “a profession like any other”

Although there has been an evolution from the childminding job as a casual convenience to a profession that delivers personal and professional satisfaction where training is not a barrier, in reality, heterogeneity is still key and policy interventions remain insufficient. There is still a great amount of childminders working less and less: depending on their social position in society, childminders find it difficult to recruit children, voluntarily choose a diminution in hours or are dealing with early contract breaches (Cartier, d'Halluin, Lechien & Rousseau, 2012).

As a way of further professionalisation, following determinants are signalled to the policy: candidate childminders should receive information about the profession before registration as a function of efficient recruiting and to decrease high turnover rates, the time laps between registration and effective training should disappear and accompanying childminders should be a continuous process in terms of recognition and the creation of a professional identity rather than in terms of risk management (Alberola, 2009).

CHAPTER VI GERMANY

1. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

1.1. What is the current profile?

In Germany, over the last years, there has been an increased interest in family day care provisions where according to Heitkötter et al., in 2009, 14,6% of all childcare initiatives comprised of family day care. Moreover, in the East German *Länder*, over 60% of childminders are taking care for more than four children, making it possible to pursue this job as a real career path (Heitkötter, Brüll, Kerl-Wienecke & Schoyerer, 2010). Concerning the profile of the *Tagesmütter*, on average, childminders are mostly between 35 and 50 years old, which is significantly older in comparison to early years professionals in other day care facilities (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

Nowadays, Oberhuemer et al. (2010) appoint several types of family day care: childminders can work within the privacy of their own home (1); they can operate within a childminding service located in third-party rooms (decided by the government) (2); or a family day care network is established where several family day carers cooperate (3) (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Parents' views on childminding are divergent, i.e. appreciating the private family-like character of the home versus looking for a flexible temporal arrangement or using family day care for a lack of other alternatives (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012).

Family day care in Germany is a very heterogeneous line of work for there are regional and *Länder*-specific differences in terms of professional practices, organisation and expertise: there are clear differences in dissemination and use of this type of childcare (DJI, 2014), the maximum amount of children cared for, the status, required qualifications, background and respective motivation (Heitkötter et al., 2010). The family day care profession is neither federally controlled, neither standardised across the country but largely functions on the dominant principle of subsidiarity (DJI, 2014; Oberhuemer et al., 2010). However, the profession is overall characterised by a low remuneration, no assurance of benefits and low levels of social recognition (Heitkötter et al., 2010). As childminders are mostly self-employed (individual contract with parents), they carry a lot of personal responsibility and a high level of job insecurity (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012). Besides that, childminders today, are still at the interface of professional versus private family life (Gelder, 2003), weighing the costs (quantity) versus the quality of care (Jaich, 2002).

Within the childminding profession there is also significant discord. On the one hand a large part of childminders enter the childminding job with the eye on establishing a long-term career and address this work as a real profession (Weiß et al., 2002; Wiemert & Heeg, 2012). On the other hand, childminders interpret the family day care profession as a stopgap. These childminders in transition are active as *Tagesmütter* whilst their own children are young or view this occupation as a temporary escape out of unemployment, earning an extra income (Gelder, 2003): in this case, childminding is not a conscious decision but rather a convenient casualty (Heitkötter et al., 2010).

Today, continuous recruitment of early years professionals (Sell & Kukula, 2012), making the profession more attractive and enhancing the level of social recognition are several challenges that Germany is facing in light of the growing need for childcare (Heitkötter et al., 2010; Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Although a large part of childminders pleads for a process of further professionalisation and a clear system of regulation (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012) other German *Tagesmütter* are concerned that:

“Professionalisierung der Tagespflege befürchten manche Tagesmütter auch, dass sie durch eine stärkere Reglementierung der Tagespflege eine Teil ihrer Gestaltungsfreiheit und Selbstbestimmung verlieren könnten¹⁷.” (Weiß et al., 2002: 5)

Furthermore, the established concepts of *Tagesmütter* and/or *Tagespflege* still provoke the suggestion that family day care is merely a mother-like profession where love and care is provided in the private character of the home (Weiß et al., 2002) or where childminding is confined as a simple job that anyone can provide (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012). It appears that moving away from childminding as an individualised, neighbourly and casual form of charity towards a reliable and qualified profession remains key (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

Heitkötter et al. (2010) assert following prerequisites for professionalising the childminding sector: quality development and assurance (1); activities that accompany existing training i.e. skills as well as knowledge and mandatory training (2); practical possibilities for job mobility (3); systematic education and modular integration of family day care skills into the initial training of *Erzieherin* (state-registered educator) (4); and establishing a network with professional consulting services (cf. *Jugendamt*) as well as with other colleagues (5) (Heitkötter et al., 2010).

¹⁷ Own translation: “Because of the professionalisation of childcare and the more strict regulation, they will lose a part of their freedom and self-determination.”

1.2. What is the required level of qualification? Which competences are needed?

According to Oberhuemer et al. (2010), a pedagogical qualification is only required when childminders care for more than five children (Oberhuemer et al., 2010) and although there is a positive trend towards more qualification, the qualification level of family day care providers varies largely ranging from educational qualifications to childminders without any formal education (Kerl-Wienecke, 2013; Heitkötter et al., 2010). In recent years, raising the qualification level was more and more appointed as a key adjustment (Heitkötter et al., 2010) and nowadays a minimum standard of 160 hours training is promoted (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Unfortunately, Wiemert & Heeg (2012) assert that 67% of the current family day care providers are still not sufficiently qualified and 47% has not obtained the minimum standard of 160 hours of training (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012).

Practically, the training consists out of two phases: phase one is an introduction/practical preparation of 30 hours comprising information about family day care from the perspective of the childminder, the children and their parents. Besides that, the preparation for in-service training is guaranteed. Phase two entails an in-depth, in-service training of 130 hours where children's support, cooperation and communication with parents and working conditions of the childminder are key elements (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012). However, it depends on *Länder*-specific regulations whether or not these courses are obligated for the childminder. For example, some municipalities introduced a course that far exceeds 160 hours of training, whereas other municipalities operate far beneath the minimal standard (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013). As a way of promoting these courses, from 2009, funding was implemented, which is in line with the main priority of addressing the qualification level and educational situation of family day care providers (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

For the heterogeneous group of childminders the introduction of 160 hours of training was welcomed differently: some family day care providers missed a certain depth and felt insufficiently prepared for the job versus those who believed that 80-100 hours of training is adequate and others who are convinced that maternal skills and experiences still suffice (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012). Furthermore, this implementation of 160 hours of training is in stark contrast with several different discourses of professional studies that have been recognised in an official manner.

To increase social recognition for family day care providers and to promote further vertical as well as horizontal job mobility, there is a high need for reform in the trajectories towards professionalisation as a modular system: the current system lacks transparency and existing qualification structures are too variegated between as well as within the different *Länder* (Oberhuemer et al., 2010): it appears that the introduction of adequate structures of qualification is long overdue (Slotke, 2012).

In reality, when applying for a job as a family day care provider, the local authority i.e. the *Jugendamt* inspects the home, assesses the needed competences on the basis of an aptitude test and delivers the license (renewable every five years) (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Noteworthy is that the way in which this aptitude test needs to be conducted is not legally determined (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012) and is specified by the local authorities.

Besides a protective and controlling function, the *Jugendamt* consists of both a service-function for parents as well as for family day care providers and helps out with administrative tasks of childminders/childminding groups in a local and regional context (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012): it has a key function for the development of a qualitative education and organisation (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013). For practical reasons, the *Jugendamt* can choose to provide these functions or can delegate its mandate to a capable non-profit organisation, welfare organisation, church, etc. Technically, the advice given by the *Jugendamt* (and/or others) can range from personal contact with the childminding staff to providing training in collaboration with the German family day care association (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013; Gelder, 2003).

Paradoxically, the *Jugendamt* is the actor for control and care permission as well as for further guidance. On the one hand childminders are thus self-employed and rely on parents for their income, whereas on the other hand childminders also depend on the *Jugendamt* and/or other professional services for care permission and (the eligibility for) funding (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013), which (can) create(s) a conflict of interest and questions values such as neutrality and objectivity.

In order to tackle a low level of qualification and professional educational training and in line with the existence of educational plans (2003) for state-registered educators as well as family day care providers, the latest *Kompetenzprofil Kindertagespflege* (competence profile family day care) was developed as a directory for further integration of family day care in the general system of education and care (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013): the profile provides empirical evidence on family day care as well as advice for its practical implementation and is recommended to be used by facilitators, service managers, etc.

This *Kompetenzprofil* integrates the wide range of information relevant to the childminding profession that has already been developed and guarantees appropriate expertise through the combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013): in this way, previous experience is acknowledged and the 160 hours of training is not used as the sole factor for determining the competences of the childminder and thus the quality of care. The *Kompetenzprofil* was established in close cooperation with the competence profile that was developed as part of the *Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte* (Further Education of Early Years Professionals, WiFF), the curriculum of the *Deutsches Jugendinstitut* as well as the *Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen* (German Qualification Framework, DQR) (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

As a result, the overall required competences are clustered as follows: training/improving, judgment development, quality development (1); developmental and educational processes (2); relationships and interaction (3); and everyday pedagogical training (4). The specific competences are, basic education, self-employment and governance (1); pedagogical work and cooperation with guiding services (2); exchange, cooperation and networking (3); childminding in the private home and reconciliation with private family life (4); and continuous professional companionship as well as continuous education (5) (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013). Besides, all competences are formulated in that way so they can be included in the curricula of professional vocational educations: an important step towards integration and the recognition of the profession of *Tagesmütter* (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

2. INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

2.1. Which ECEC-initiatives have developed?

Besides the fact that ECEC-initiatives have developed differently between as well as within the several *Länder*, general tendencies can be remarked. One of these tendencies entails the existence of the *Großtagespflege* (family day care network). Although perceived as a way of trying to find a balance between private family life and professional life and largely welcomed by parents for its similarity with institutional childcare, the idea of childminders working with (a) colleague(s) was difficult to envision. Many *Jugendamt* officers viewed these initiatives as *mini-nurseries* that merely challenged the dominant ethos of family day care (Gelder, 2003) and they were only occasionally permitted in the *Länder* (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012).

Over time, however, childminders favoured grouping together in these *Großtagespflegen* and today legislation prescribes that a maximum of five childminders with each a maximum of five children can jointly pursue the childminding profession in their own or in rented rooms.

Although the *Jugendamt* (or other organisations) believes that this type of childcare is good and suitable for the children and strengthens cooperation and exchange, it criticises the lack of a multidisciplinary team or the presence of a more qualified professional that could bring technical knowledge as well as professional experience to the fore (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012). However, in light of the new decree that allows individual childminders to take up five children as well, the question arises whether this type of childcare will remain desirable and attractive (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012).

Another initiative, i.e. the *Kindertagespflegestelle* (day care network) is difficult to describe, for there are no clear definitions or common general characteristics. Overall, this initiative pedestals a pedagogical relationship where the child is centralised and fosters pedagogical processes. In the *Kindertagespflegestelle*, the child interacts with peers in a new environment with new materials. The childminder is helped in terms of structured planning, educational and pedagogical objectives are examined and the needed documentation/information is provided. The *Kindertagespflegestelle* also have an important advice and counseling function and can offer supervision, reflection, further acquisition of knowledge, etc. (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the initiative has a double entry: on the one hand it helps parents to reconcile work and family life and tries to meet their needs in terms of mobility and flexibility, on the other hand it takes over several administrative tasks that childminders are coping with and establishes a network with others (colleagues, day care facilities, etc.) through cooperation. Within as well as between the different *Länder*, the *Kindertagespflegestelle* are variegated in form and function: they can offer technical exchanges, material exchanges, further educational possibilities, joint actions, individual consultations and visits, etc. (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

2.2. Are there training institutes?

In Germany, beginning qualifying courses were offered by the local authority (according to the subsidiarity principle). Later on, adult education centres as well as family education institutions took over this task and provided required training.

Nowadays, if these established courses are in line with the provided curricular guidelines set by the DJI, they are jointly funded by the Federal Ministry of family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth, and by the local employment agency (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Noteworthy is the fact that family day care providers were not required to attend these qualifying courses, so in 2009 funding was established as a way of promoting further qualification (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). However, Sell & Kukula (2012) argue that in most cases this funding remains widely insufficient.

3. INTERINSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

3.1. Is there collaboration with other types of provision?

Whilst in 2004 initiatives for cooperation were still moratorium, “die bisherigen Erfahrungen mit konkreten Kooperationsbezügen sind ermutigend, aber immer noch dünn gesät¹⁸” (Stempinski, 2006: 5). Nowadays, there has been a shift where networking is brought to the fore as a function of more flexible childcare. For childminders who plead for further professionalisation, cooperation with childcare centres is welcomed: professional development through cooperation, further education, social contact, recognition and reflecting on educational issues are all benefits. For children, the transition towards different types of care is softened through cooperation and the continuity of care is guaranteed. For parents, more flexible childcare options are available through the combination of childcare types. (Stempinski, 2006). On the downside, the *Erzieherinnen* in the day care centres often question the quality of care that childminders are giving: 160 hours of training versus a three-year education. Besides that, there are still high levels of competition between several childcare types and the additional costs that cooperation brings along cannot be ignored (Stempinski, 2006). Moreover, the question remains whether these family day care providers are willing to offer flexible care (at night, early mornings, etc.) and whether this fits into their own family life (Stempinski, 2006).

In her research, Stempinski (2006) appoints several requirements for cooperation and collaboration, i.e. it should be a win-win situation for both parties (1), consensus needs to be reached about the standards for quality (2), handling a perspective in the child’s best interest is a condition sine qua non (3) and overall, cooperation takes time (4) (Stempinski, 2006).

¹⁸ Own translation: “the experiences with concrete co-operation (actions) are encouraging, but still sporadic.”

In their recommendations for policy, Wiemert & Heeg (2012) describe a prototype example where the manager of a non-profit family day care service inserted the family day care providers in the vicinity of a *Kindergarten* (nursery school) to establish cooperation and collaboration. Space, materials and equipment were shared, the exchange between the teachers and the family day carers was facilitated and competition was decreased through joint advancement training. Overall, a common pedagogical understanding was developed that increased the visibility of the family day care service and opened up possibilities for dialogue (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012). However, in her research, Slottko (2012) adduces that the connection/crosslinking of family day care and childcare centres is perceived differently: it is partly described as little profitable and redundant, partly as desirable, necessary and most feasible (Slottko, 2012).

As a way of example, in Germany, several municipalities are experimenting with forms of blended-learning denominated as the *Teleakademie* or *virtueller Kampus Kindertagespflege*. Both initiatives supplement further qualification. The *Teleakademie* includes lectures on specific topics and conversations with experienced childminders by telephone, as a way of discussion and feedback. The virtual campus of family day care is an online portal where important information and specific legal advice as well as online exchange forums for childminders can be found (Slottko, 2012).

4. GOVERNANCE LEVEL

4.1. Are there quality-requirements?

During recent years, there is growing awareness that the quality of care needs to be raised. In Germany, several procedures for quality improvement i.e. strategies, monitoring quality, etc. have been researched and much discussed (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Today, there is still no required framework for evaluation although many organisations (on a municipal level) have developed their own manuals or guidelines (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

According to Kerl-Wienecke et al. (2013), the quality of early childhood education and care services variegates largely and relies, inter alia, on several contextual conditions. In practice, the *Kompetenzprofil Kindertagespflege* is designed as a manual for qualitative childcare (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

4.2. Which policy changes and/or developments are implemented?

The current situation of *Tagesmütter* in the several *Länder* is not evident for they all operate under different frameworks and local differences in their social, cultural and economic context. The municipalities act according to the principle of subsidiarity and therefore the federal government only takes measures if absolutely necessary: a specific framework concerning family day care is mainly set out by local authorities such as municipalities or by the family day carers themselves for they are mostly self-employed (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

In 1993, the federal government implemented the project Qualification of *Tagesmütter* in rural areas: this project ensured women to continue their line of work after unification, however, as a side-effect particularly unemployed women started to work as family day care providers (Gelder, 2003). It is not until 2005, as a function of poor outcomes in the PISA¹⁹-study that the German government decided to invest in family day care (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

The act of 2005 (TAG) equalised the different types of childcare to ensure a reliable and consistent quality level of care as well as to put family day care providers/services on the map as an independent professional field (Heitkötter et al., 2010): the requirement of qualification for family day carers -without defining the scope- was legislated and social security was improved as a function of greater continuity of care and decreasing high turnover of skilled employees. Also, the decree required skilled employees to cooperate with institutions, organisations, schools, etc. (Stempinski, 2006). In practice, however, regional differences and implementations remained key and everyday reality was characterised by a high demand for further qualitative and quantitative development (Stempinski, 2006).

Next, the act of 2008 (KIFöG), documented the will for the further conscious expansion of family day care for the under-threes in times where the need for childcare rises steadily. In this act, the *Kindertagespflege* is presented as an equally important pillar in the system of early childhood education and care (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

¹⁹ Programme for International Student Assessment

Also, in 2008, the Federal Ministry of family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth invested in the pilot project *Aktionsprogramm Kindertagespflege* (2008-2011): the target of the action program was to ensure quality as well as to provide several enhancements in the field of family day care. In practice, the goal entailed the nationwide minimum qualification of 160 training hours (Heitkötter et al., 2010). As a part of this *Aktionsprogramm Kindertagespflege*, family day care providers or family day care services that obtained this minimum qualification received the opportunity to get certified with a national recognised seal of approval.

Finally, in 2011, in line with the high demand for an extension and intensification of the qualification level (Slotke, 2012), the Federal Ministry of family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth (2011-2014) invested in a follow-up project *kompetenzorientierten Qualifizierungshandbuch Kindertagespflege* to revise the basic qualification for family day carers according to new requirements and to include this minimum qualification into the curricula of professional vocational educations (Slotke, 2012). Aforementioned *Kompetenzprofil Kindertagespflege* served as a fundament for the further development of the *Qualifizierungshandbuch* (Kerl-Wienecke et al., 2013).

As a way of further professionalisation, following determinants are presented: there is a high need for more professional accompaniment (Slotke, 2012) i.e. support through continuous education and training, supervision, advice and networking before the start of a qualification process as well as throughout (Wiemert & Heeg, 2012).

CHAPTER VII CONCLUSION

The literature study demonstrates that the origin of the childminding occupation is characterised by a historical development where women were victimised to the labour market in times of crisis as a way of justifying economic cuts and under the guise of a free-choice rhetoric. The insertion of low-skilled, non-qualified women into private family day care predominated under a veil of maternal love, substitute mothering and all too often considered as “what women naturally do”. In Flanders, France as well as Germany, childcare was substantiated at a low cost and pleas for further professionalisation were merely appeased. With its origin as an informal service of substitute mothering, a necessary evil or a temporary fix; the need for a national policy about the status of childminders has long been ignored and due to existing split-systems, any political will to further develop professionalised childcare services was stifled.

Today, childminders’ working conditions still remain insufficient: a low remuneration, low levels of recognition and social isolation are the rule rather than the exception for these *Cinderella’s of childcare*. Furthermore, outflow levels of the childminding workforce far exceed current inflow; the attractiveness of the job requires an indispensable upgrade and the quest for further professionalisation remains essential in a society where the need for childcare workers vastly increases. Remarkably, the literature study points out that the way in which this quest for professionalisation is actualised, variegates largely between Flanders, France and Germany and has revealed several inspiring practices with the overall objective of improving childminders’ social, economic and political situation.

In this literature review, the childminding profession functions as a textbook example of the construction of a social arena where boundaries between public and private spheres are blurred (Vandenbroeck et al., 2010): childminding practices are rife with attempts to reconcile professional life versus private family life. For some childminders this entails, clinging on to a *mother ersatz model* where maternal ideologies are sufficient and where childminding is a temporary fix or stopgap, whilst for others the quest for further professionalisation and childminding as a true career path is key. The undervalued early years workforce is depicted as a heterogeneous, divided workforce where professionalisation appears to be continuously hampered by lack of a joint professional identity.

As a result of international consensus that the qualification level of the early years professionals -and thus the quality- needed to be upgraded and with the eye on an increasing need for childcarers in the future, policy took refuge in training and qualification. Nowadays Flanders, France and Germany have all installed minimal training requirements and especially in Germany, the upgrade of the qualification level is prioritised with the *Kompetenzprofil Kindertagespflege* as a perfect example. Although customised and modular training is a key factor in addressing the quality of care, the literature study evinces that these training requirements are not easy to effectuate in practice due to restrictions in availability, accessibility and affordability: factors that impede further professionalisation and endanger “having achieved only a transition from the worker as substitute mother to the worker as lower or higher grade technician.” (Moss, 2012: viii)

Although training and qualification function as important components to tackle dominant ideologies of maternal spontaneity and appraise the childminding occupation as a real profession, professionalising the early years workforce should not be confined to such measures. Professionalisation also entails the accommodation of an expressed need for continuous support and guidance. Here, the *Relais Assistantes Maternelles* or the *Kindertagespflegestelle* serve as inspiring examples. These support services contribute to the childminders’ pedagogical investment and enhance the childminders’ capacity and abilities: as liaisons officers between parents and childminders, they offer advice, support, reflection and supervision. Although these services are very similar to organised family day care services in Flanders, they do not function as a means of control and childminders receive support on a neutral territory, whilst family day care services in Flanders exercise support as well as control during so-called home visits. The *Relais Assistantes Maternelles* eviscerate the childminders out of their invisible, isolated private homes and install exchange as *partners in care*: a balanced position and relationship on the continuum of autonomy versus control.

Throughout the literature study, another important measure for improving the social position of childminders is demonstrated by the *microcrèches* in France or the *Großtagespflege* in Germany. These initiatives present alternatives that serve as a middle ground between individual care versus group care where cooperation between childminders is successfully established: social isolation is tackled and reconciliation between the professional life and private family life is facilitated. Furthermore, these demand-sided initiatives are inserted into local existing childcare networks, improving accessibility and creating a balance between supply and demand. These examples evince that cooperation is an effective, important and necessary way for the further professionalisation of childminders.

As an inspiring practice for advancing professionalisation in an effective way and presented as a flexible childcare initiative, the *crèche satellite* is appointed. On the one hand childminders are part of a team professionals and are offered advice, feedback, educational practices, etc. On the other hand, these childminders can maintain a certain level of autonomy and self-determination in their private homes.

In these *crèches satellites*, cooperation is particularly important but not always without difficulty: it appears that competition between group care and individual care is harsh and cooperation emphasises the clear gap in qualification level and status; tendencies that paradoxically might endanger the quality of care. In order to establish an entryway between individual family day care and group care, competition can be softened through joint training and the creation of shared understandings. In that way, the conjunction of group care and individual care can challenge existing *mother ersatz models* and invigorates continuous professional development that is not characterised by a patchwork of childcare possibilities but through the co-construction of skills and knowledge (Urban, 2008).

For Flanders, it is important to rethink the existing artificial dichotomy between group care and individual family day care for new understandings as well as crosslinked forms of childcare to find entry. In Flanders, such hybrid forms of childcare are not yet developed but they might function as a surplus value in our current society where the demand for flexibility, diversification and a high level of quality is crucial.

Also, in order to portray ECEC -childminding included- as a public good with a free choice for families, further policy investments are essential. Cooperation, effectiveness and efficiency depend on a continuous and long-term financial investment in order to validate and perpetuate qualitative early childhood education and care initiatives rather than muffling requests for help and further expansion under the guise of a free-choice rhetoric. Furthermore, the need for a full status with sufficient financial security is still extant to disconnect ancient associations between childcare and forms of substitute mothering and to envision the childminding profession as “une profession comme les autres” (Alberola, 2009: 3).

The literature study has brought to the fore that a holistic understanding of professionalisation in terms of training, qualification and cooperation (i.e. via hybrid forms of childcare) has to go hand in hand with an increased remuneration, a better statute, possibilities for job mobility as well as adequate social recognition to increase the amenity of the profession and to recruit skilled and reflective practitioners into the early years workforce.

CHAPTER VIII LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Limitations

The researched literature was obtained with the help of organisations such as the VBJK for Flanders, the CNAF for France and the DJI for Germany. These organisations all have their own political agendas, operational goals and authentic mission and vision for they each interact with different stakeholders, professionals and actors in their original, complex policy contexts. This *subjectivity* as well as a reliance on previously published research may influence the representativeness and the correct generalisability of the data.

Moreover, in translating the research findings, the possibility of misinterpretations and/or errors in translation must not be ignored. Also, another limitation entails the fact that the resources were selected and analysed with the research question in mind, which increases the possibility of overstepping relevant information.

2. Recommendations

For the future, research about the professionalisation and changing profile of childminders in other non-English speaking countries is desirable: widening the scope of this research contributes to the limited international literature on childminding, offers resistance to the predominance of English language research and installs debate on contemporary ECEC-questions.

Moreover, additional research should be carried out in order to reveal the (long-term) effects of the installation of the new decree in Flanders for the heterogeneous group of childminders.

The literature study also gives an impetus to researching several push- and pullfactors, preconditions as well as practical implementations of hybrid forms of childcare that might install new understandings towards the early years professional.

Finally, the question that continuously arises as a function of professional development is whether or not high levels of professionalisation are feasible and sustainable in Flanders' current split-system or perhaps a mentality shift towards an integrated system of ECEC will be essential and unavoidable in the future.

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