

# Margherita Zoebeli from Zurich to Rimini. A life devoted to childhood

Edited by

Dorena Caroli, Tiziana Pironi, Ilaria Bellucci,  
Monica Maioli, Mara Sorrentino



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# Transnational History of Education and Civilizations

directed by Dorena Caroli

Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna

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This series of volumes aims to publish monographs or collective volumes, both in Italian and other languages, concerning the history of pedagogy as widely understood within the Italian university field M-Ped/02. The studies will address issues that include the history of pedagogical ideas, education and educational institutions in general, and, in particular, preschool institutions and children's literature. Particular attention will be devoted to transnational and comparative dimensions of the educational problems and to pedagogical transfers of the past, which allows us to grasp the circulation of educational models and reciprocal influences at an institutional and cultural level. The multiple approaches of cultural history will also be adopted for the interpretation of the educational reforms and institutions of the different historical periods.

*The volumes are subjected to double-blind review.*

*Responsible for the review process is the publisher's redaction.*

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This volume has been financed by the contribution of the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli, Rimini - Italy.

This volume is the translation of *Margherita Zoebeli, una vita per l'infanzia*, a cura di Dorena Caroli, Tiziana Pironi, Ilaria Bellucci, Monica Maioli, Mara Sorrentino, Bologna, Clueb, 2024, pp. 343.  
Some revisions have been introduced into the texts.

On the cover: Margherita Zoebeli with children from the Italian-Swiss Educational Centre – CEIS (1954), Photopress Zürich (AMZ, CEI-0253\_025), previously published in the Swiss weekly Cooperation, n. 26 (1954).

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>AFP</b>	Archivio Fotografico dei Positivi della Raccolta storica della Biblioteca civica Gambalunga di Rimini (Photographic Archive of the Positive of the Historical Collection of the Gambalunga Public Library of Rimini)
<b>AMG</b>	Allied Military Government
<b>AMZ</b>	Archivio Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive)
<b>BGR</b>	Biblioteca civica Gambalunga, Rimini (Gambalunga Public Library)
<b>CEIS</b>	Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre)
<b>CEMB</b>	Centro Educazione Musicale di Base, Rimini (Basic Music Education Centre)
<b>CEMEA</b>	Centri di Esercitazione ai Metodi dell'Educazione Attiva (Active Education Methods Training Centres)
<b>CEPAS</b>	Centro di Educazione Professionale per Assistenti Sociali (Centre for Professional Education for Social Workers)
<b>CIDEF</b>	Centro di Innovazione, di Documentazione Educativa e di Formazione (Centre for Innovation, Educational Documentation and Training)
<b>CIRSE</b>	Centro Italiano per la Ricerca Storico-Educativa (Italian Centre for Historical Research in Education)
<b>CLN</b>	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (National Liberation Committee)
<b>CTS</b>	Cooperativa della Tipografia a Scuola (Typography at School Cooperative)
<b>DSS</b>	Dizionario Storico della Svizzera (Historical Dictionary of Switzerland)
<b>ECA</b>	Ente Comunale di Assistenza (Municipal Assistance Agency)
<b>ENAOLI</b>	Ente Nazionale Assistenza Orfani dei Lavoratori Italiani (National Board of Orphan Assistance for Italian Workers)
<b>ETH</b>	Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology)
<b>FICE</b>	Fédération Internationale des Communautés d'Enfants (International Federation of Children's Communities)
<b>FIER</b>	Fédération Internationale des Enseignants de Rythmique (International Federation of Eurhythmics Teachers)
<b>ICEM</b>	Institut Coopératif de l'École Moderne (Cooperative Institute of the Modern School)

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<b>IRPA</b>	Istituto Regionale per l’Apprendimento (Regional Institute for Learning)
<b>IRRSAE</b>	Istituto Regionale di Ricerca e Sperimentazione e Aggiornamento Educativi (Regional Institute for Educational Research and Experimentation and Update)
<b>ISF</b>	Internationale Socialiste des Femmes (Socialist International Women)
<b>ISME</b>	International Society for Music Education
<b>JLR</b>	Jeunesse Laïque Républicaine (Republican Lay Youth)
<b>MCE</b>	Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (Movement of Cooperative Education)
<b>MZ</b>	Margherita Zoebeli
<b>ONAIR</b>	Opera Nazionale di Assistenza all’Italia Redenta (National Work of Assistance to Redeemed Italy)
<b>ONMI</b>	Opera Nazionale per la protezione della Maternità e dell’Infanzia (National Maternity and Child Protection Organisation)
<b>OSEO</b>	Oeuvre Suisse d’Entraide Ouvrière (Swiss Workers’ Mutual Aid Society)
<b>SAH/SOS</b>	Schweizerisches Arbeiterhilfswerk / Soccorso Operaio Svizzero (Swiss Worker’s Relief Organisation)
<b>SCI</b>	Servizio Civile Internazionale (International Civil Service)
<b>SEPEG</b>	Semaines Internationales d’Études pour l’enfance victime de la Guerre (International Weeks of Study for Children Victims of War)
<b>SIA</b>	Solidarité Internationale Antifasciste (International Anti-Fascist Solidarity)
<b>SIEM</b>	Società Italiana per l’Educazione Musicale (Italian Society for Music Education)
<b>SIFF</b>	Switzerland International Film Festival
<b>SOS/SAH</b>	Soccorso Operaio Svizzero / Schweizerisches Arbeiterhilfswerk (Swiss Worker’s Relief Organisation)
<b>SSK</b>	Schweizer Spende an die Kriegsgeschädigten (Swiss Donation for the Victims of War)
<b>UDI</b>	Unione Donne in Italia (Italian Women’s Union)
<b>UIPE</b>	Union Internationale de Protection de l’Enfance (International Union for Child Protection)
<b>UISE</b>	Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants (International Union for Child Relief)
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNRRA</b>	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
<b>USPD</b>	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)

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## We renew our greetings... a few months later

Maurizio Fabbri and Ira Vannini

With the Conference *Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996). One hundred and ten years after her birth. A life for active pedagogy at the service of childhood*, a new season of collaboration opened between the Department of Educational Sciences “Giovanni Maria Bertin” of the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, CEIS – Italian-Swiss Educational Centre and the Zoebeli Foundation of Rimini.

We are pleased to bring our greetings to the Conference, on the Rimini Campus, and we again thank the promoters Dorena Caroli and Tiziana Pirroni, who masterfully organized the days of study dedicated to the figure of Margherita Zoebeli, a very significant Italian pedagogist in the history of post-World War II Italian pedagogy, who can also be considered one of the main female figures of twentieth-century pedagogy.

Already in the past, thanks to various professors of our Department of Educational Sciences – deeply committed and involved in the CEIS and Foundation project – and thanks to the intense activity of Andrea Canevaro, the collaboration with the Italian-Swiss Educational Centre had been significant and fruitful. We are convinced that such collaboration can still find energies for shared planning today, in the dual perspective of contributing to the educational quality of the territory and to the quality of the training of future educators and designers of Rimini curricula. In this direction, it is worth mentioning the start of a new phase, with the establishment of a working group, composed of faculty members from the Department of Educational Sciences “Giovanni Maria Bertin” and teachers and educators from CEIS, aimed at revitalizing the traditional relationships of dialogue, collaboration and planning: relationships formalized by the renewal of the agreement between CEIS and the Department.

The special institutional attention with which the conference was surrounded fills us with confidence for the development of our Department within the Rimini Campus. Again, we want to thank the Mayor of Rimini Jamil Sadegholvaad, the Magnificent Rector Giovanni Molari, and the Vice

Rector for Teaching and Education Roberto Vecchi for the words they dedicated during the Conference to a common project within the educational system and services of the Romagna territory. A heartfelt thank you to Alessia Mariotti, President of the Rimini Campus Board, for supporting this conference with particular organizational efficiency and care in relationships. We are still grateful to our colleagues Roberta Biolcati and Dario Tuorto, directors, respectively, of the Second Cycle Degree in *Planning and managing of educational intervention in social distress* and of the First Cycle Degree in *Expert in Social and Cultural Education*, for their commitment in this part of Romagna, distant only geographically from the Bologna Department. The active participation and interest of the students made all of us confident of the development and professional potential they themselves will benefit from within the vibrant and supportive territory of Romagna.

Margherita Zoebeli's ideas and pedagogical practices can, even more so today, be considered an important source of inspiration for all those who work in the field of education: educators and planners, trainers, teachers, territorial actors, policy makers and the civil community, who are facing the challenges of a complex and problematic present for children and young people, especially where there are conditions of inequality and social hardship. We have a very strong responsibility to guide educational policies and practices in our territories, in order to accompany all young people towards balanced paths of growth, development of critical awareness, and experiences oriented towards respect for others, democratic citizenship and active participation.

Just as Marguerite Zoebeli was able to deal with the problems of children affected by the traumas of war, educators today unfortunately also face dramatic problems that primarily affect the younger generation. Educational poverty, migration of minors, flight from wars, domestic and gender-based violence are huge issues that afflict us and urge us to deploy all our planning energies and pedagogical skills to identify some, small but invaluable, way out, even more so by looking to the example of the great women of our history, their strength, courage and political and social commitment.

We hope that, thanks to this Conference, the work of Margherita Zoebeli, who arrived in Rimini on December 17, 1945, and founded a Children's Village that was and still is a model of educational commitment, will be increasingly analyzed, studied, and deepened with critical awareness and historical intelligence, so as to offer a reference model for the educational professions. Our best wishes go to the Students who have chosen this difficult and beautiful profession, both challenging and generous, which is constantly confronted with a reality that changes abruptly and tends to get ahead of the times with the commitment gathered in projects of transformation and growth.

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# Margherita Zoebeli, creating a community in a plural world

Giovanna Guerzoni

Reflecting on the life of Margherita Zoebeli, one hundred and ten years after her birth, is important not only as a contribution to the history of socio-educational services in Italy, but also as a “political act”. Margherita Zoebeli’s life and ideas create a space where academic reflection meets the ability of communities to take local action – in Rimini, in this case. As a politically engaged educator and pedagogue, her life was directly and indirectly linked to the history and educational policies of Rimini from the post-Second World War years onwards.

Perhaps it is only now, after enough time has passed, that we can piece together not only her biography and pedagogical thought, which influenced the reconstruction of post-war Rimini, but also consider the numerous possible changes, whether by analogy or difference, with the present day. This allows us to recognise the importance of Margherita not only for those involved in education, but also for anyone living, studying or playing an active role in present-day Rimini<sup>1</sup>.

Through the overview of her life, thoughts and choices of Margherita Zoebeli – who, as the conference organised by Dorena Caroli and Tiziana Pironi has underlined, we might today, perhaps inappropriately, define as “activist”. Nevertheless, we can delve into a historical period whose everyday life we have perhaps partly forgotten. During the Second World War, buildings and infrastructure in Rimini were completely destroyed, and the entire area was in a state of extreme poverty. A young woman with a long-standing political commitment to childhood and an international network of contacts in the field of pedagogy, aimed to create an unprecedented educational experience. For Margherita Zobeli, the future of a community lay with

<sup>1</sup> See C. De Maria, *Lavoro di comunità e ricostruzione civile in Italia*, Roma, Viella, 2015; Id., *Utopia e concretezza. Ricordiamo Margherita Zoebeli a 110 anni dalla nascita*, in «Clionet», n. 6 (2022); see also G. Fofi, *Margherita Zoebeli e il lavoro di comunità*, in «Quaderni Cisl. Scuola e formazione» (2016), pp. 54-55.

the boys and girls who had emerged from the trauma of war. However, she also believed that it was closely linked to the reconstruction of urban contexts as “pedagogically conceived spaces”. Experimenting with new values of community development, education, growth and attention to inequalities shapes a concrete yet utopian path of community development based on education for active citizenship and, therefore, inclusion for all.

It is the youngest and most marginalised who can rebuild a community torn apart by war. Through dialogue between the past and the current situation, with education driven by politically and socially engaged pedagogy and supported by exchange with innovative international figures such as Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, Ernesto Codignola, Francesco De Bartolomeis, Lamberto Borghi, Aldo Capitini and Célestin Freinet, we can rediscover Margherita Zoebeli’s contributions to pedagogy, educational practices and community life, as well as her forward-thinking approach<sup>2</sup>. However, delving into her life and work can also lead to a sense of disorientation. On the one hand, we observe social interactions, family life and childhood experiences that differ greatly from those of today. On the other hand, Margherita Zoebeli’s actions seem to resonate with our present situation, in which we are once again confronted with the deafening and unjust reality of war in Europe and the Mediterranean. These aspects reveal the true face of violence: disruption to family life and education, and the violation of children’s rights. They urge us to reflect on issues that seem impossible to solve by supporting pacifism alone, and to ask ourselves what kind of solidarity can guarantee the future of communities torn apart by war.

Of the many aspects of Margherita Zoebeli’s life and work, I would like to focus on three issues that I feel are particularly relevant today. The concept of “community development” that emerges from the experience of the Italian-Swiss Educational Center (CEIS) is based on the decision to start again from childhood. This reveals Margherita Zoebeli’s awareness that the effects of war are not only destruction and death, but can also be passed down through the generations. This hinders cultural transmission and the idea of “creating/making a community” over time. This is epitomised by the “trivial” aspects of daily social life that constitute the glue of a community. These aspects nourish social relations, such as friendship, respect, mutual aid and love. Their absence can lead to uncertainty about the future. This is particularly damaging for those who find themselves at this juncture with “their whole life ahead of them”.

<sup>2</sup> T. Pironi, *Da Maria Montessori a Margherita Zoebeli: l’impegno educativo nei confronti dell’infanzia traumatizzata dalla guerra*, in «Annali online della Didattica e della Formazione Docente», 8/12 (2016), pp. 115-128.

For Margherita Zoebeli and CEIS, “developing a community” involved establishing an educational community that can experiment with innovative teaching methods and help to overcome the initial emergency phase. It also concerned raising awareness on the strategic importance of educational policies in a rapidly changing social and cultural landscape.

While it may seem far-fetched, the story of Margherita Zoebeli and CEIS in Rimini embodies the qualities of a community organiser<sup>3</sup>. This involves addressing issues related to education, training, and inclusion through committed activism that considers the impact of educational interventions on social contexts. The story of the small CEIS community and its relationship with the city highlights the importance of avoiding any form of educational instrumentalism in order to affirm that “other worlds” are possible: worlds without war, where marginalised people have a voice, and where education for inclusion begins with a “community of practice”<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the life of Margherita and the history of CEIS, spanning the 20<sup>th</sup> century, remind us that education is a political act in itself, it means promoting inclusion and fighting social inequalities, while recognising the value of differences.

On closer inspection, the international scope of Margherita Zoebeli’s life and work is highly relevant: her commitment to childhood – or rather, to children – reveals a strong criticism of border politics, which seem to deny humanity, both then and now, and which often affect childhood itself. It is no coincidence that the CEIS experience has, in recent years, led to the international cooperation project, Educaid. Educaid, of which CEIS is a founding member alongside local social cooperatives and the University of Bologna, has gained valuable experience working in various countries, from Palestine to South America. The organisation is driven by the belief that active and inclusive educational practices must be promoted both nationally and internationally in order to trigger processes of educational and social renewal, thereby overcoming the exclusion and marginalisation of children and adults (EducAid<sup>5</sup> Statute, 10 May 2004). Therefore, we must take this opportunity to learn more about Margherita Zoebeli’s life, her pedagogical thinking, her ideas about community and her work on behalf of children. In a world that seems to be in a constant state of emergency, leaving us with

<sup>3</sup> B. Hooks, *Insegnare a trasgredire. L’educazione come pratica della libertà*, Roma, Meltemi, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> E. Wenger, *Comunità di pratica. Apprendimento, significato e identità*, Milano, Raffaele Cortina, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> EducAid is an NGO based in Rimini (Italy) which has been operating in the field of international cooperation for over 20 years in the sectors of education, psycho-social support and promotion of rights of the most vulnerable groups in various countries of the Global South.

little time for the in-depth reflection necessary to consider our responsibilities, especially with regard to childhood, the story of Margherita Zoebeli and CEIS demonstrate how we can create a new future by supporting young people.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

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## Introductory remarks

Emma Petitti

The Asilo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss kindergarten), founded after the Second World War in a torn and destroyed city, has over time become a real point of reference not only for Rimini, but also for the region and the country. This innovative pedagogical model has been able *to put the child at the centre* of its activities and has also used the internal and external spaces as part of the project.

Reflecting on the early days of CEIS, our thoughts go to the current situation, to the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, after which the kindergarten, once again, immediately promoted recreational activities for young refugees and their families.

Over the years, thanks to the initiative of *Margherita Zoebeli*, the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) has become a reference point for state-of-the-art education, bringing together doctors, psychologists and pedagogists from all over the world.

The basic idea has always been an *active pedagogical model*, with the child at the centre of all activities, *an innovative model also from a cultural point of view*, with the city of Rimini as a backdrop, and the Centre becoming a piece of the city's history.

The Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna Region, which I represent, has strongly supported the documentary film *Lo spazio che vive* (The space that lives), produced by Gruppo Icaro, CEIS and Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation): the story of an institution that has left an indelible and significant mark on the city of Rimini and on all those who have come into contact with it.

Talking about this work also allows me to remember two great people who recently passed away: the Rimini director Teo De Luigi, who directed the film, and Andrea Canevaro, the father of special education, who worked for years with Margherita Zoebeli and the CEIS teachers and who gave a valuable interview in the documentary.

CEIS has been the driving force behind the kindergarten experience throughout the region, and its experience has had a very important influence on Italian pedagogy and beyond.

The Emilia-Romagna Region has always been very supportive of schools that improve pedagogy, taking into account all the aspects of it, including the *importance of space* for children.

We also believe that *focusing on children is the most important investment* to lay the foundations for the present and future of our society.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

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# Address by the President of CEIS (Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero, Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) in Rimini<sup>1</sup>

Romano Filanti

First of all, I would like to thank the President of the City Council, Giulia Corazzi, for her invitation, which I gladly accepted.

I first entered the CEIS building as a parent. In April 1995 I joined the Board of Statutory Auditors, in April 2014 I joined the Board of Directors as Director and Vice-President, and since October 2021 I have been President of CEIS, which I have the honour and pleasure to represent tonight.

The 28 years that I have spent at CEIS are, of course, nothing compared to the 77-year history of the institution, which was established first as a community centre, then as a kindergarten and is now the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre). And tonight, we are here to talk about our history.

My speech will be inspired by the book *Memoria come futuro* published on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CEIS<sup>2</sup> by Teo De Luigi, a filmmaker from Rimini who died in October 2022, about whom I will speak later, and by Stefano Pivato, Professor of Contemporary History, Councillor for Culture of the Municipality of Rimini from 1999 to 2009, and Professor at the University of Urbino, of which he was Rector from 2009 to 2014.

I am sorry to return to the past and to those terrible post-war years, but it is useful in order to put today's situation in context, because it was during those years that the foundations of today's CEIS were laid.

As Oreste Delucca wrote, «after the Second World War (1945-1946), the situation in Rimini was truly tragic: 396 bombings suffered in 11 months,

<sup>1</sup> This address was taken and adapted from a speech delivered at the Conference, and given in full during the Rimini City Council meeting on 21 February 2023: See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko2KPpJRR8U> (last accessed 06/05/2024).

<sup>2</sup> T. De Luigi & S. Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro. Cinquant'anni di vita del CEIS*, presentation by R.L. Montalcini, Rimini, Maggioli Editore, 1996.

607 civilian victims, 4,189 buildings razed to the ground, 3,155 severely damaged, 1997 damaged, with a destruction coefficient of more than 82%»<sup>3</sup>.

The devastated city of Rimini sent out a call for help, which was immediately answered by the Swiss Worker's Relief Organisation, as a sign of solidarity with those most hit by the war.

In August 1945, after an initial inspection in Rimini by the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation, it was decided to build a community centre and a kindergarten for the city's orphaned children.

The then Deputy Mayor, Gomberto Bordoni, together with Margherita Zoebeli (who later became the Director of the centre), personally oversaw the construction of the Community Centre and Kindergarten.

In December 1945, Margherita arrived in Rimini with a project drawn up by the architect Felice Schwarz and herself to coordinate the works that would lead to the construction of the centre and a kindergarten made up of 13 wooden huts that could accommodate up to 200 children.

The site chosen was the one next to the Roman amphitheatre – and therefore approval of the Archaeological Heritage Office was to be obtained – because it was owned by the municipality of Rimini but also because, although it had been hit by bombs, it was free of rubble, far from neighbouring houses and close to the city centre<sup>4</sup>.

The City Council adopted the following 4 resolutions, which gave life to the project of architect Schwarz:

Resolution of 04/01/1946 “*Programme for the construction of a kindergarten made of barracks*” appointing Councillor Bordoni to represent the town council in its relations with the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation;

Resolution of 01/02/1946 “*Approval of the estimate for the construction of the kindergarten made of barracks donated by the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation*” replacing the Asilo Baldini (Baldini kindergarten), which had been destroyed during the war and therefore had to be financed with public funds. Estimated cost £2,980,000.

Resolution of 12/04/1946 “*Approval of the Statute of the Giardino d'Infanzia italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss Kindergarten)*” with the name “Giardino d'Infanzia Italo-Svizzero” (Italian-Swiss Kindergarten) Remo Bordoni. The resolution and the statute approved by the City Council recognised that the project for the construction of the kindergarten had been approved by the Ministry of Public Education, as the area chosen was subject to archaeological constraints due to its proximity to a Roman amphitheatre.

<sup>3</sup> O. Delucca, *Nasce il centro italo-svizzero*, in T. De Luigi & S. Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ivi*, p. 16.

Resolution of 23/04/1946 “*Appointment of a provisional commission*” for the management of the Asilo italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss kindergarten). Therefore, in accordance with article 30 of the statutes («in the first days, the kindergarten was managed by a provisional commission appointed by the City Council, under the supervision of the Council itself»), the administration appointed the “Provisional Administrative Commission”, chaired by deputy mayor Bordoni Gomberto and made up of ten members, mostly representatives of the municipality and public institutions. It would remain in office until March 1950<sup>5</sup>.

The land on which the centre and the kindergarten were built was divided into two plots because of their double function:

– The southern part of the site was for children to play and work, and included the five classrooms of the kindergarten, the orphanage, the washhouse and the refectory;

– The northern part of the site was designed for adults. Here were installed offices, workshops (shoes, clothes, furniture), showers and the cultural room.

The Asilo italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss kindergarten) was officially opened on 1 May 1946.

The people of Rimini welcomed the opening of the Centre and the barracks, built among the rubble of a destroyed city, which were both a boost to reconstruction and a strong sign of solidarity.

The centre immediately took in 150 children (aged 3 to 6) and 20 war orphans.

In 1947, it also opened a primary school for economically and psycho-physically disadvantaged children<sup>6</sup>.

The school adopted a new way of teaching, one that focused on the children and their needs. This pedagogical method is still the mainstay of CEIS today.

From the beginning to the present day, thousands of Rimini’s inhabitants have attended CEIS, and several books have been written about Margherita Zoebeli and the CEIS barracks, the only ones left in Europe.

If the amphitheatre is an undeniable part of Rimini’s history, so is CEIS: a “unique” school that, under Margherita’s guidance, has become and continues to be a national and international reference point, a destination for scholars and the recipient of numerous awards. CEIS is not only at the service of its own community, but also participates, through EducAid, in several

<sup>5</sup> Resolutions of the Rimini City Council, *Ivi*, p. 16. See also the municipal archive of Rimini, Town council resolution series.

<sup>6</sup> O. Delucca, *Nasce il centro italo-svizzero*, in De Luigi & Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro*, cit., pp. 21-24.

international cooperation projects around the world (Armenia, El Salvador, Palestine, Kenya, Tunisia).

CEIS is a centre of excellence, not only in Rimini, but worldwide.

Today CEIS is a nursery, a kindergarten and a primary school attended by 320 boys and girls, of whom 9% have severe disabilities and are co-integrated in the classrooms.

The semi-residential community “La Betulla” is designed for minors (from secondary school and junior high school) in situations of social and family hardship, who are looked after by our educators.

The Press Centre is located in the CEIS Village and accommodates adults with mental health problems and developmental disabilities.

The Dyslexia Laboratory was established in 1976 to help children with reading and writing difficulties.

Today CEIS has 260 employees and about 60 members, including the Municipality of Rimini.

It is a charitable and non-profit organisation.

The famous filmmaker from Rimini, Teo de Luigi, portrayed and narrated it excellently in his film *Lo spazio che vive* (The space that lives). A documentary film on the 75 years of CEIS history, whose national premiere was held in Rimini, at the Fulgor and Tiberio cinemas, with 4 screenings, on 9 May 2022. About 650 people attended the 4 screenings.

Further screenings followed in 2022 and the film was seen by a total of about 1400 people.

This sometimes very moving documentary has touched people's hearts. I myself was moved when I saw it for the first time, as soon as it was cut.

Today we are showing the documentary film free of charge to the Town Council and all our citizens.

Unfortunately, our beloved Teo died in October 2022, but he left us his love for this *temple of Italian and international pedagogy*. He left us *Lo spazio che vive* and when you enter the gates of CEIS, you feel that you are breathing a different kind of air. A place to spend time in, filled with a sense of belonging and pride.

Yes, we are proud of our CEIS.

I would like to remember another great friend of CEIS, Andrea Canevaro, who also died in May 2022, Professor Emeritus of the University of Bologna, a great pedagogue and the father of special needs education.

I would like to end this speech by quoting a passage from Rita Levi Montalcini's preface to the volume *Memoria come futuro*: «This is what is important when we talk to children and young people: the future [...]. Today, however, I think it is much more important to talk to children between the ages of 3 and 9. This is the age when young people absorb poisons and prejudices, this is the age we have to deal with. The age of childhood is a 'kin-

dergarten' of primary importance, because it when the young person is formed by what we tell them and show them [...]. All this stems from the fact that children, even at a very young age, can be branded with hatred for life. That is why I believe that CEIS should be seen as a value to be developed, not only to remain as it has been for 50 years, but to become a symbol of human relations, of what I would call solidarity rather than friendship, to give young people correct information and never, NEVER to talk about racial hatred. This is what I admire and what I hope CEIS will continue to do in the years to come... and I would like to see, not only local and regional authorities, but everyone contribute to achieve this aim. Such a valuable experience should have a real future here in Rimini»<sup>7</sup>.

I would like to thank the Mayor, the President of the City Council, the Councillors and the Executive Councillors for giving me the opportunity to speak and for listening to me.

I will leave you with a quote from Margherita Zoebeli: «I am convinced that only education can change the world».

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

<sup>7</sup> R.L. Montalcini, *Presentazione*, in De Luigi & Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro*, cit., p. 7.



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# Address by the Director of the CEIS (Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero, Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) in Rimini

Ilaria Bellucci

To have the opportunity to speak about the educational experience of CEIS, Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre), in front of an audience of students who are training to become future educators is a great opportunity for which I would like to thank, personally and on behalf of CEIS, Professors Tiziana Pironi and Dorena Caroli for their strong desire and practical support in organising this conference, all those who made these two days of study possible, the entire Department of Education Studies “Giovanni Maria Bertin” of the University of Bologna and the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation).

In addition to being an opportunity for discussion and professional growth, the specific nature of the audience to which the conference is addressed represents a great responsibility for those who, like us, strive to be a welcoming place, from a human and working point of view, and, above all, an educational environment where what has been learned during the university years can become daily practice, to be built together, integrating the history – or rather the identity – of CEIS with the fresh perspectives and ideas of new teachers and educators.

In my opinion, these are the main characteristics – the core values and the innovation (even, and perhaps especially, in the seventy-seven years since its foundation) – that CEIS has been able to preserve and constantly promote. It has always emphasised the importance of never remaining the same, of not succumbing to the strong and understandable temptation to fall back on pre-established schemes and models, but of spending time – a lot of time! – to get to know the children, as a group and as individuals, and what each of them has to give. This is what makes this experience unique in the Italian educational scene. And the credit for this goes to Margherita Zoebeli (Zurich, 7 June 1912 - Rimini, 25 February 1996) who, as Tiziana Pironi wrote in the Treccani *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, «was always somewhat reluctant to turn the operational pedagogy of CEIS into a specific

method... She did not write a didactic manual, but rather preferred to focus on the constantly evolving nature of her work, which was based on finding concrete responses to different situations, without ever crystallising into a single methodology»<sup>1</sup>.

Margherita's choice, like all her choices, was a conscious one. Her extensive work with children, especially the most vulnerable, led her to believe that what is needed in education is a sincere interest in the other, expressed through listening, acceptance, lack of judgement, responsibility and essential and appropriate training. At the operational level, this approach, which is rooted in active pedagogy, translates into very precise structural, organisational and didactic choices: the educational project must be known and shared by all the actors involved. While respecting their different roles and competences, they develop, modify and question it in order to always find the most appropriate strategies, means and tools for *that child or those children*, in that particular situation. Not a method, not a manual, but a daily and constant willingness to rethink one's role and interventions, and to take the necessary action from time to time. A living educational context that takes the form of an educational and training community in which everyone – teachers, educators, clerks, maintenance workers, cooks, caretakers, children, parents – is asked to do their best, not in competition or for the satisfaction of others, but because they are aware that for things to work, everyone must play their part, according to their possibilities.

To work in the village is to accept this challenge, it is to believe that one's contribution is of value and to be ready to prove it. Not having a precise method to refer to may at first seem destabilising for those working in the inherently difficult and delicate world of education, but it is actually a condition of freedom and autonomy, a guarantee of democracy and quality.

I wish that students who are training to become educators may directly experience the enormous power of self-determination, so that it becomes a drive and a goal to be achieved in working with children, and a tool for professional growth.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

<sup>1</sup> T. Pironi, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 100, 2020, see Zoebeli, Margherita, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/margherita-zoebeli\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/margherita-zoebeli_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/), (last accessed 28 August 2023).

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# Address by the Director of the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in Rimini

Nadia Bizzocchi

Good morning,

I am very pleased to bring you the greetings of the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) and its librarians. I would like to thank the organisers of the conference for allowing me to present the Library's role as custodian and guardian of the Archivio Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive).

The Biblioteca civica Gambalunga is the public library of Rimini. Its mission is to promote reading, knowledge of contemporary culture and access to information resources for the entire community. Thanks to its centuries-old history, the library is also the guardian of the city's historical memory, of its collective history, recorded in the documents of the archives of institutions and organisations, and in the archives of ordinary and distinguished citizens who have contributed to the development and success of the community.

This is the case of Margherita Zoebeli and her archives, which are kept in our library. The archive is made up of personal, professional and study documents and photographs relating to the activities of the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) (1946-1992), which she collected herself. After her death, these documents became part of the archives of the Foundation that bears her name. The archives were transferred to the library in 2015, following an agreement between the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation), the CEIS Association and the Municipality of Rimini. An agreement that came about under special circumstances.

2014 marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Rimini from Nazi fascist occupation, and to celebrate the occasion the Library organised a photographic and documentary exhibition. Oriana Maroni, then in charge of the Library's modern collections and curator of the exhibition, while searching for photographs of Rimini in the early post-war period, had the opportunity

to access the materials held by the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation) at CEIS and immediately recognised their important historical and documentary value.

In order to make them known and accessible to everyone, she suggested to the then President of the Foundation that they be deposited in the library, catalogued, digitised and promoted. The opportunity offered by the digital catalogue to communicate and share information has made it possible to activate interesting international collaborations. We have received several requests for digital copies, particularly from Swiss research centres<sup>1</sup>. This has led to collaborations and exchanges of knowledge that have made it possible, for example, to gather more information on photographers and their archives or on important people in the life of Margherita Zoebeli<sup>2</sup>.

The Archivio Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Archive) can therefore be considered a good example of the importance of collaboration between conservation institutions and research centres such as universities (today's conference is a case in point). The Library considers this collaboration to be vital and strategic in order to make its documents and materials available for discovery and study. And precisely because I am speaking to an audience of students and future (and current) researchers in the field of educational studies, I would like to draw your attention to some collections of archival documents held by the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library), which you could study in the future. I am thinking of the collection of Vincenzo Mascia, primary and secondary school teacher, Councillor for Public Education of the Municipality of Rimini from 1965 to 1970, and University Professor in Urbino in the 1970s<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Among them was the “Kulturhaus Helferei”, the Italian Cultural Institute in Zurich, which organised the conference *Una scuola svizzera per una città distrutta: Margrit Zöbeli e il Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (CEIS)* (*A Swiss School for a Destroyed City: Margrit Zöbeli and the Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS*) on 21 April 2022, with lectures by the contemporary historian Carlo De Maria and Verena Flubacher, Margherita's collaborator.

<sup>2</sup> Among the archives that hold photographs useful for the research into CEIS and its origins are the Swiss National Library, which holds the archives of the Swiss Donation Organisation (<https://www.helveticarchives.ch>, last accessed 06/05/2024), and the Swiss Social Archive in Zurich (<https://www.sozialarchiv.ch>, last accessed 06/05/2024), which holds the archives of the SAH and the OSEO, as well as the archives of SOS, the Swiss Workers' Relief Organisation, which in 1945, through Margherita Zoebeli, came to the aid of the people of Rimini, who had been severely affected by the war.

<sup>3</sup> The Vincenzo Mascia Fund contains more than 8.000 bibliographical references, including monographs, journals, brochures, and dissertations, which can be searched in the *Scoprirete* online catalogue (<https://scoprirete.bibliotecheromagna.it>, last accessed 06/05/2024).

Vincenzo Mascia's pedagogical and research activity coincides with a decade in which a network of kindergartens was established in Rimini and, more generally, with a period of investment in the development of educational services and school buildings. In the public documentation (local newspapers, municipal brochures, photographs from the press office) we can find traces of this activity and of that of Enea Bernardi, head of the public education sector of the Municipality of Rimini, who, in close contact with Margherita Zoebeli, was behind that innovative period of public education policy mentioned above<sup>4</sup>.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the Biblioteca civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) is ready and willing to work closely with you, the University, its students and researchers, by offering its services, its premises and its collections, in the firm belief that this exchange can be beneficial for both institutions and for research. I would like to thank you for your attention and wish you all the best for today's meeting.

Translated by Eleonora Bernardi

<sup>4</sup> The working papers of Enea Bernardi (1922-1998) were acquired by the Biblioteca Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in 2022 as a donation from his heirs.



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# Introduction

Dorena Caroli, Tiziana Pironi, Ilaria Bellucci,  
Monica Maioli, Mara Sorrentino

This volume collects the proceedings of the conference dedicated to Margherita Zoebeli entitled *Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996). A centodieci anni dalla nascita. Una vita per la pedagogia attiva al servizio dell'infanzia (Margherita Zoebeli (1912-1996). One hundred and ten years after her birth. A life for active pedagogy at the service of childhood)*. The conference was held on 18 and 19 November 2022 at the University Campus of Rimini, Italy. It was organised by the Department of Education Studies “Giovanni Maria Bertin” of the University of Bologna, in collaboration with the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation, the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS) and the Biblioteca civica Gamba lunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in Rimini<sup>1</sup>.

The main objective of this two-day conference was to reflect, on the basis of archival documents, on the valuable work carried out by the Swiss educator and pedagogist who moved to Rimini at the end of the Second World War. Thanks to Margherita Zoebeli and her national and international contacts, the Villaggio italo-svizzero (Italian-Swiss Village), which she founded and which later became the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss

<sup>1</sup> The conference was organised by Dorena Caroli and Tiziana Pironi, Full Professors of History of Education at the Department of Education Studies “Giovanni Maria Bertin”, in collaboration with Monica Maioli, President of the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation), Ilaria Bellucci from the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre - CEIS), Mara Sorrentino (archivist-librarian of the Biblioteca Civica Gambalunga (Gambalunga Public Library) in Rimini) and with the help of ICARO group, showcasing the documentary film *Lo spazio che vive (The space that lives)* (2022), a work by Rimini director Teo De Luigi, who died a few weeks before the conference. The event was sponsored by the Department of Education Studies “Giovanni Maria Bertin” and the University Campus of Rimini under the auspices of the Centro Italiano per la Ricerca Storico-Educativa (Italian Centre for Educational Research - CIRSE), the “Gina Fasoli” Active Teaching Research Centre and by the Festa internazionale della Storia (International History Festival) of the University of Bologna.

Educational Centre - CEIS), became a true workshop of active pedagogy in the post-war years. The aim of the conference was thus to focus on the pedagogical and educational value of the choices made, certainly influenced by the situation of the time, while underlining their relevance for today's training of educators and teachers, a training that is becoming increasingly important in view of the new challenges and emergencies that education is facing today<sup>2</sup>.

The conference strived to investigate the pedagogical and documentary heritage of CEIS for the students of the following Degree programmes: Primary Teacher Education, Expert in Social and Cultural Education, Educator in Childhood Social Services, and Planning and Managing Educational Interventions in Social Distress.

Professional development has always been a flagship of CEIS, which has always been a point of reference for the training of teachers and educational professionals and a research ground for renowned pedagogues from various Italian universities. Moreover, the different activity enabled CEIS to launch courses for social and educational workers in the 1980s in cooperation with the Department of Education Studies of the University of Bologna – the Centro di Innovazione, di Documentazione Educativa e di Formazione (Centre for Innovation, Educational Documentation and Training - CIDEF).

It is also worth mentioning that on 23 January 1989, Margherita Zoebeli, Paulo Freire and Mario Lodi were awarded honorary Degrees by the University of Bologna, on the proposal of the Department of Education Studies and the Degree Course in Pedagogy. On that occasion, Andrea Canevaro, the then director of the Department, stated that the decision to award this distinction was motivated by the need to «search in the present for that part of history to which we can give value»<sup>3</sup>. He considered that what they all had in common was their commitment to the field of education, which had led them to work «in reality, with institutions, risking every day to be trapped and trying every day to 'reinvent the world'»<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> It is precisely because of the importance of CEIS' activities over the years that an interdisciplinary research group was set up at the Department of Education Studies "Giovanni Maria Bertin" on 19 July 2023. The group was established thanks to the collaboration between CEIS and the Department and brings together scholars and researchers from different fields.

<sup>3</sup> A. Canevaro, *Fra l'imprudenza e il coraggio*, in «L'Educatore», 24 (July 1989), p. 6. In this issue, the magazine devoted special attention to the event entitled "Le Lauree Honoris Causa alla scuola e agli educatori di tutti" (Honorary Degrees for everyone's school and educators), and published in full the lectures delivered by Zoebli, Freire and Lodi during the award ceremony in the Aula Absidale di Santa Lucia.

<sup>4</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 5-6.

In her speech to a packed conference hall, whose title “*Il progetto-sogno educativo*” (*The educational dream-project*) said it all, Margherita Zoebeli reflected on her more than 50 years of experience, guided by the idea that «a different kind of education can change the world», a conviction that led her to conclude her speech with these words: «Faith in humanity has never failed me, despite the exaggerated individualism of our society, the many wars across the planet, the social injustices in every part of the world»<sup>5</sup>.

Over the years, an intense scientific activity has sought to promote the educational legacy of CEIS, recognising its innovative nature<sup>6</sup>. Margherita Zoebeli and her activities have been the subject of historical studies and research projects, starting with the collection published after her death, edited by Teo De Luigi and Stefano Pivato, *Memoria come futuro. Cinquant'anni di vita del CEIS*, which presents a series of essays, accounts and photographs<sup>7</sup>, with a preface by Rita Levi Montalcini. Having visited CEIS and met Margherita Zoebeli, Rita Levi Montalcini recognised the extraordinary value of her work. She stated: «I think that CEIS should be seen as a value to be developed, not only to remain as it has been for 50 years, but to become a symbol of human relations, of what I would call solidarity rather than friendship, to give young people correct information and never, NEVER to talk about racial hatred»<sup>8</sup>.

In 2011, on the initiative of Carlo De Maria, a conference was organised by the Fondazione Margherita Zoebeli (Margherita Zoebeli Foundation) and CEIS, which was the starting point for a series of historiographically significant studies, reconstructing in particular the network of relationships that Zoebeli had woven while creating her educational experiment<sup>9</sup>. These in-

<sup>5</sup> M. Zoebeli, *Il progetto-sogno educativo*, in «L'Educatore», (24 July 1989), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> See for example the history of CEIS as seen by children: L. Biondelli, R. Calieri, A. Fabbri, N. Gallazzi, G. Sapucci & G. Zannuccoli (eds.), *A scuola nel Villaggio. Parole chiave ed esperienze del CEIS di Rimini. Rilettura e aggiornamento delle parole chiave del Centro Educativo italo svizzero di Rimini, a sessant'anni dalla sua nascita. Un contributo all'impegno educativo della città e al rinnovamento della scuola italiana*, Gardolo (TN), Erickson, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> T. De Luigi & S. Pivato (eds.), *Memoria come futuro. Cinquant'anni di vita del CEIS*, presentation by R.L. Montalcini, Rimini, Maggioli Editore, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> R.L. Montalcini, *Introduzione*, *Ivi*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> C. De Maria (eds.), *Intervento sociale e azione educativa. Margherita Zoebeli nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra*. Proceedings of the conference held at the Centro Educativo Italo-Svizzero (Italian-Swiss Educational Centre) (Rimini, 7 May 2011), Bologna, Clueb, 2012; Id., *Lavoro di comunità e ricostruzione civile in Italia. Margherita Zoebeli e il Centro educativo italo-svizzero di Rimini*, Roma, Viella, 2015. See also the recent collection *Utopia e concretezza: ricordiamo Margherita Zoebeli a 110 anni dalla nascita/Utopia and pragmatism: remembering Margherita Zoebeli 110 years after her*