



WILCO

Welfare innovations
at the local level
in favour of cohesion

Work package 4

**URBAN POLICY INNOVATIONS IN LOCAL WELFARE : THE CASE OF
CHILDCARE POLICY AND SERVICES IN NANTES, FRANCE**

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INTRODUCTION

Analysis of local childcare policy orientations and values

This report aims to understand local childcare policy orientations and values, as produced by the various public and private actors. As mentioned in WP4 guidelines, we will base our analysis on a combination of two approaches: identifying existing coalitions of values and power relationships between these coalitions, and analysing value orientations or referentials of action and potential controversies between coalitions of actors.

The Nantes municipal area is not characterized by an atypical system of local childcare governance. Main components of the policies are similar to the orientations of national policies and other local policies. Nevertheless, Nantes has developed local specificities that we intend to analyse and put in perspective. Indeed, the City of Nantes has been pioneering childcare service policies for the past twenty years, in order not only to increase the number of places at collective facilities but also to meet societal objectives, such as social cohesion, reconciliation between work and family life, better access to work for low income families and vulnerable single parents. These political orientations have enabled it to recently introduce major modifications to the local childcare system: prioritizing the most vulnerable groups, choosing not to finance private enterprises but to keep on reinforcing municipal and non-profit organizations, better integrated local childcare governance.

Firstly, we will analyse the multi-level governance dispute between national government childcare priorities and municipal commitments. Changes in the national childcare policy and the constant drive for efficiency in public spending have been in tension with the local policy orientations. Nevertheless, the City of Nantes intends to develop a local childcare “public service” and has been able until now to mobilise the necessary resources to move toward this objective.

Secondly, the priority given by the City of Nantes to the most vulnerable groups (single mothers in particular) has led to modifications to the system of collective childcare facilities and to an innovative institutional coalition with the departmental Family Allowance Fund (CAF) and the Department Council. Major efforts have been made to promote more integrated local childcare governance, introducing a global approach to supply and demand and requiring changes in orientations and values, in particular for professionals.

Last, but not least, we will analyse how the associative sector had to adapt itself to the new orientations of reduced public spending and new management rules. Whilst in past decades they were viewed as promoting innovative approaches, non-profit organizations face difficulties in defending their orientations and values in a local context where municipalities have launched new priorities and initiatives. Nevertheless, parallel spaces for associative innovation still exist and enable autonomous referentials of action to develop.

Multi-level governance dispute between national government childcare priorities and municipal commitments

The main controversy is less of an internal controversy within the local welfare system than a multi-level governance dispute between national government childcare priorities and municipal commitments.

1.1. Tensions on financial resources more than on political objectives

Reconciliation between work and family: a consensual objective of the childcare policies

On the basis of the materials gathered, this analysis has not identified important controversies on political priorities and needs assessment. Globally, the different local actors and institutions of the childcare system agree on main general values and objectives.

In WP2 we underlined that local childcare governance is fragmented between a multiplicity of actors and a multiplicity of objectives.¹ In recent years, the following tendency has been observed: French national and local childcare policies put their priorities on reconciling work and family.

This is the case in the City of Nantes. Local childcare policies focus on social cohesion and equal access to the workplace for men and women. “Economic dynamism and fight against precariousness mostly depend on the possibility for women to access the job market. Promoting equality between men and women is crucial in a context of persistent sexual division of roles, forcing a certain number of women to leave the job market.”²

The needs that these policies intend to meet are the following: “the evolution of women’s work patterns, the degradation of working conditions (precariousness, increase in part-time jobs and atypical hours), the transformation of family models and the spread of knowledge on the development of children have changed the context of childcare services. Today, the main issues of childcare policies are linked to social cohesion and equality between men and women. In Nantes, as in most of thriving cities, parents are facing serious constraints and have demands in terms of reconciliation of family life and professional commitments.”³

Though there is a multiplicity of actors, providers and institutions in the field of childcare, reconciling work and family is subject to a relative consensus among the majority of the local childcare stakeholders. In the municipal council, the opposition has not formulated any serious objections to the main orientations. The main criticisms expressed concern more the instrumental aspects (commitment to numbers and pace of place creation) rather than the normative dimension of the action. The main local childcare institutions, the Departmental Family Allowance Fund (CAF) and the Department Council have also found common ground with the City of Nantes on the childcare policy priority of single parents’ access to on labour market. Though civil society actors involved in the childcare field continue to develop projects focused on more diverse priorities (well-being of the children, parenting support, etc.), they recognize reconciliation of work and family as a main issue and have initiated projects.⁴

¹ See WP2 Report.

² *Contribution to Public Policies - internal document of the City of Nantes: conclusions of the working sessions held in 2008-2009 between policy makers, civil servants, and experts on future prospects in ten fields including early childhood.*

³ *Contribution to Public Policies - internal document of the City of Nantes: see above.*

⁴ See chapter 4.

Tensions on financial resources: reduction of national contribution

A reduction in the national financial contribution to childcare in early childhood has been observed in recent years. It has impacted the development of new places in municipal and non-profit care facilities at the local level.

Changes in the amount and the conditions of funding from National Family Allowance Fund Until 2007, the relationship between the departmental CAF and the City of Nantes in the field of childcare was governed by a “Childhood Contract.” The specificity of this contract was that in the vent of additional spending by the City in comparison to the activities planned in the contract, the CAF would support the overspend, which could reach up to 30% of the initial budget⁵, and enabled the creation of new places in collective care services (“crèches”).

Starting from 2007, the National CAF family allowance fund changed its methods of financing youth activities, offering instead a unified contract called the “Childhood-Youth Contract.” There were two main changes in comparison with the previous contract. First, the CAF will only pay for activities (such as the creation of new places in childcare facilities) previously mentioned in the contract. Second, the CAF cut its financing for collective childcare services from 70% to 55%, meaning that municipalities have to cover the difference in order to keep the structures alive. The rule is the following: for newly financed activities, the CAF will finance only 55% of maintenance costs; for those activities previously co-funded by the CAF and the City, the reduction will be progressive over a period of ten to fifteen years.

As a consequence, the reduced funding from the national CAF has “impacted on the local policies and complicated relationships between local partners.”⁶ The minutes of the 21st December 2007 council meeting record the City’s dissatisfaction with the orientations of the Childhood-Youth Contract: “We note that this new contract is less favourable to the City of Nantes than the previous ones. It imposes unprecedented financial constraints on our youth and childcare policies. The orientation of the national CAF is primarily financial. (...) It gives priority to quantitative actions (creation of equipment, higher number of collective care services), and excludes qualitative actions (training, animation, events), and as such does not enable funding to adapt to local policy priorities.”

During the 12th December 2011 council meeting, the Nantes councillor in charge of childcare policies presented the newly adopted Childhood-Youth Contract for the period 2011-2014. There are two trends. On the one hand, the Contract is described as much more favourable to City: “a joint needs assessment has been established by the CAF and the City.”⁷ The 2011-2014 Childhood-Youth Contract emphasizes CAF’s support for local policies: “the CAF has approved co-financing of 296 new places in collective centres, of which 243 are in associative structures and 53 in municipal services. (...). Whilst the previous Contract did not finance any municipal structures, this new contract helps the City to pursue the development of social services to complement associative services and to offer more places in deprived urban areas.”⁸

On the other hand, despite the cooperation between the City and the CAF, the Nantes councillor in charge of childcare policies stresses the fact that “each year the CAF gives less money and the City has to spend more money. This impacts on the pace of creating

⁵ Interview with a representative of the CAF Loire Atlantique.

⁶ Interview with a representative of the CAF Loire Atlantique.

⁷ Municipal Council, 12th December 2011.

⁸ Decision of the Municipal Council, 12th December 2011.

<http://www.nantes.fr/Sgid/DataSgid/themes/conmun/cm12122011/cm12122011-18.pdf>

new places.”⁹ The Director of the Childcare service, interviewed in July 2012, agrees, stating that: “for time being, the City of Nantes is still able to compensate for decreased CAF funding. Nevertheless, if the decrease continues, Nantes will have to cut some of its new projects.”

Limiting access to the national pre-school education

The national educational policy is progressively limiting access to *écoles maternelles* (national pre-school system) for children under 3 years old, which means that the municipalities will have to offer solutions for two-year-old children who do not have access to school. The majority block on the Nantes council is critical of the State’s withdrawal, which means that the municipality has to compensate for this reduction. “The City keeps on creating new places but has to compensate for the increase in the number of children aged 2-3 not attending school. As a consequence, the pressure of families’ demands remains as high as before.”¹⁰

“In 2006, around 800 children aged 2-3 years old were going to school. In 2010, less than 500 children of the same age group attend school. Among those who cannot go to school, around one hundred children stay in collective childcare services and the same number of children are unable to benefit from these services.”¹¹

The decrease in the National CAF’s contribution has been combined with the introduction of new management rules for collective facilities, contributing to heightened tensions between the demands for greater efficiency in public spending and the quality of the service offered.

1.2. A constant drive for efficiency in public spending and its consequences on local childcare policies

Since 2000, in the context of implementation of new public management rules, a trend towards resource rationalization has been observed in the childcare field. Public and associative actors interviewed¹² agree on the fact that the “prosperous period of the eighties and the nineties is gone.” As a consequence, they notice a decrease in funding, including for innovative actions. Nowadays, although the public institutions “have the means and opportunities to act and innovate”, the priority is to “guarantee the efficiency of the actions.”¹³

Impact of the National CAF’s new management rules on families, associations and professionals

In 2000¹⁴, the National CAF introduced a new rule for management of collective childcare facilities, called the “unique service allowance” (*prestation de service unique*). The stated objective was to better address the needs of parents (training, search for employment, part-time job) by making childcare facilities more flexible and by optimizing use of facilities.¹⁵

⁹ Municipal Council, 12th December 2011.

¹⁰ Interview with the director of the Childcare Department.

¹¹ Municipal Council, 4th February 2012.

¹² Director of the Childcare Department of the City of Nantes, representative of the CAF, representative of the department council, Director of an associative collective care facility.

¹³ See above.

¹⁴ 1st August 2000 government decree

¹⁵ www.caf.fr

The new unique service allowance rules have not been without consequences on the management of childcare facilities. Although all actors, public and associative, agree that it gives parents greater flexibility, they also note that it has increased their administrative workload and impacted their financial sustainability. Insofar as the financing of facilities is calculated as a function of the number of children per hour, so the structures have to optimize their operation to enable them to balance families' and the CAF's demands for flexibility with the need for sufficient stability in their funding. This creates major difficulties in terms of management and financial viability for all childcare facilities, and in particular for associative structures, which are dependent on public funds.¹⁶ For instance, it is in practice difficult for many parents, especially those in difficult social and economic situations, to plan ahead for when their children will use the services (atypical hours, modifications to their working hours caused by jobs that are precarious or part-time, and so on).¹⁷

Local actors are sceptical about the effectiveness of the CAF's new management rules and of its positive impact on structures and families. Associations and networks¹⁸ committed in the childcare field consider the well-being of the child to be the priority and consider that a rationalization of financial resources is harmful from this point of view, putting children's interests in danger. If families have to pay more, or face greater bureaucratic impediments to the care of their children in collective facilities, they may cease to use such care. The CAF's objectives aim to promote enhanced adaptation of the structures to meet families' needs, but the impact of its management rules imposes less flexibility in the running of collective care centres.

It is interesting to note that, although the application of the new rules was a national obligation that applied to all local CAF entities, a relatively autonomous local welfare system had temporarily emerged. Indeed, until 2011, the rules cited above were not fully applied, as some local CAFs had approved adjustments made by the structures running childcare facilities.¹⁹ This is the case in Nantes: "the Loire-Atlantique CAF does not agree with the measures of the National CAF."²⁰ In 2011, the National CAF sent all local CAFs a memorandum²¹ concerning application of the unique service allowance, reminding all actors that the new regulations must be fully respected. As a consequence, municipal and associative structures in Nantes running childcare facilities expressed their concern: "we do not know how the local CAF will implement this memorandum; it will transfer more expenses from CAF funding to municipal structures."²² "Following withdrawal of the CAF, associations or the families will have to pay for nappies and lunches, which will further increase the budget deficit."²³

With the emphasis on budget constraints and optimisation of places, there are fewer resources for qualitative actions, and therefore less interest in bottom-up social innovations.

¹⁶ Interview with the director of a non-profit organization running two multi-care centres, October 2012.

¹⁷ www.uniopss.asso.fr: Letter to the National CAF, 26th June 2012.

¹⁸ See above, ACEPP and UNIOPSS.

¹⁹ <http://www.acepp.asso.fr>: *The unique service allowance enters a new phase, the ACEPP expresses its concerns.*

²⁰ Interview with the director of a non-profit organization running a multi-care centre.

²¹ http://www.uniopss.asso.fr/resources/trco/pdfs/2011/G_juillet_2011//62267_LC_PSU_Cnaf_juin2011.pdf

http://www.uniopss.asso.fr/resources/trco/pdfs/2011/G_juillet_2011//62267_texteCirc_Cnaf_juin2011.pdf

²² Interview with the director of the Childcare Department, City of Nantes.

²³ Interview with the director of a non-profit organization running a multi-care centre.

Criticisms of government decree regulating childcare facilities

A decree adopted by the government on 7 June 2010, and its consequences, were discussed during different sessions of the council during 2010 and 2011. The aim of this decree was to make the regulations on early childhood services more flexible, in order to provide services to more children and meet the families' demands. Measures included the creation of 200,000 new places in collective childcare centres, a lowering of the professional qualification threshold, permitting child-minders to look after more children, the creation of new types of services such as *jardins d'éveil* (early childcare centres) as an alternative to school for 2-3 year-old children, etc.

This decree was criticised by the Nantes council majority.²⁴ It is viewed as a way of prioritizing a quantitative approach to the detriment of a more personalised approach to caring for children. It is worth mentioning here that the fact that Jean-Marc Ayrault, Nantes City Mayor (1989-2012) and head of the parliamentary socialist group, had a national stature contributed to an exacerbation of multi-level governance disputes. Opposition to national childcare policies may be more rhetorical than actually reflecting the reality of local policies.

For instance, while the council majority opposed the decree, the discourse of council staff is much more tolerant towards resource rationalization, considering it a necessity in the context of pressure on the public purse. The childcare service defended the decree and criticized the negative reaction from professionals, including strikes, to the reforms: "the childcare assistants do not want to change their professional practices. The childcare assistants have a very corporatist mind-set. The childcare sector has still to integrate any financial reductions and would view any change as negative for the quality of the service rendered to families and children."²⁵

Nevertheless, amongst professionals there is a real fear that this government decree encourages a decrease of the quality of childcare services and working conditions. Their opposition concerns two main aspects. They refuse any watering down of the qualifications required before being allowed work with young children and do not approve the method used to calculate the ratio of children to adults: the decree takes into account not only the number of childcare professionals, as previously, but all the number of paid staff at the facility (cook, house-keeper, etc.). This measure is seen as a way to decrease the number of professionals per children and thus the quality of the care.

1.3. A local childcare system: how much autonomy?

Faced with these multi-governance tensions, two evolutions can be interpreted as an increase in autonomy for local childcare systems: the financial compensation offered in the form of the CAF's contribution to Nantes municipality, despite local budget constraints and the political commitment to avoid using or funding for-profit providers. Nantes city's childcare policies are presented as an "obligation" incumbent on territorial entities as part of a "public service."²⁶

In the context of an economic crisis and the state's withdrawal from early childhood services, Nantes council has taken on greater responsibilities in this field: "for the past twenty years, the City of Nantes has led proactive policies which enabled us to create,

²⁴ Minutes of the Municipal Council, 2nd July 2010.

²⁵ Interview with the director of the Childcare Department of the City of Nantes.

²⁶ *Contribution to Public Policies - internal document of the City of Nantes.*

diversify and adapt childcare services: development of multi-care centres²⁷, support for associative crèches and creation of *Relais assistants maternelles*.²⁸

Childcare policies are presented as a main priority for Nantes council: “it is the city’s fourth largest budget item.”²⁹ The City has committed itself to the creation of new places in collective childcare services. Between 1989 and 2011, one thousand new places were created³⁰, and 436 places were created between 2001 and 2007.³¹ The council opposition supports these policies and the increase in the number of places in collective care (“crèches”), which corresponds to the demands of families.³² In fact, all elected representatives are mindful that most families prefer collective care over individual care.³³

Another indicator of the relative autonomy of the local childcare system, the City of Nantes has decided not to finance childcare services run by for-profit providers. This decision is a political choice of the City of Nantes as it affirms an “obligation of public service”,³⁴ unlike other French cities which have in recent years increased public procurement for delivery of childcare facilities and are happy to finance private companies. The council minutes do not report any criticism from the opposition on this issue. Indeed, the opposition appear to support the public service logic embraced by the City of Nantes, raising questions that do not address the normative dimension and relevance of the action, but the policies’ instrumental dimensions (efficiency of the childcare system, difference between the objectives announced by the majority and the results achieved in terms of creation of new places).³⁵

2. THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS: A NEW PRIORITY?

Within the framework of the City of Nantes’s priorities for its childcare policies, the emphasis is put on the most vulnerable groups, such as parents returning to work or completing vocational training and experiencing difficult social situations, especially difficulties for the care of their young children. This priority is closely interwoven with the global objectives and values of the childcare policies. As mentioned above, social cohesion, social diversity, solidarity and “equal access to the labour market”³⁶ for men and women are the normative axioms underlying the local childcare system. Reconciliation of work and family life is legitimized as a policy priority aimed at combating precarity for families and “promoting the return to work for women, especially those with economic

²⁷ Enabling different types of care (occasional, regular, emergency) to be combined in the same collective centre, and to the municipal offer to be adapted to suit the needs of the families.

²⁸ *Contribution to Public Policies - internal document of the City of Nantes*: see above.

²⁹ City of Nantes, local CAF, department council, *Evaluation of public policies, Minutes of the Seminar “Sustainable professional integration: what are the appropriate Childcare Departments for single-parent families?”*, 13th May 2012, p.6.

³⁰ Decision of the Municipal Council, 12th December 2011, Approval of the Childhood-Youth Contract 2011-2014.

³¹ Decision of the Municipal Council, 21st December 2007, Approval of the Childhood-Youth Contract 2004-2007.

³² Minutes of the Municipal Council, 4th February 2011, p.54.

³³ For more details on childcare demand, see WP2 national report.

³⁴ *Contribution to Public Policies - internal document of the City of Nantes*, see above.

³⁵ Minutes of the Municipal Council, 12th December 2011, p.48.

³⁶ Assessment report on “Childcare actions able to promote access to the labour market and employability.”

difficulties, by creating services adapted to their needs.”³⁷ The local childcare system has been modified since 2003: flexible opening hours and admission rules have been put in place in order to adapt these structures to the pressures of the working world (atypical schedules, etc.).

2.1. New services created to facilitate mothers’ return to employment

Creation of multi-care centres

The City of Nantes’ priority has led to major modifications in collective childcare facilities. According to the Director of Childcare Service of the City of Nantes, a major change was the decision to create multi-care centres. This decision was mentioned in the Childhood Contract between the CAF and the City for the period 2003-2006 and was implemented as of 2004: “the city of Nantes has committed itself to generalize multi-care centres by grouping regular-care centres (*crèches*) and occasional-care centres (*haltes-garderies*) in a few facilities for each district. In September 2004, the city adopted a new method for setting prices, based on a contract signed with the family, which enables them to schedule a child’s presence according to the needs of the family, and without any conditions relating to professional activity or minimum number of hours per week. The contracts are very diverse in order to be closer to the families’ needs.”³⁸

The introduction of more flexibility in the functioning of multi-care centres gives parents the ability to switch from occasional care to regular or emergency care, and vice-versa.

Modification of the emergency care service

In order to adapt the childcare system to the priorities in terms of social cohesion and equal access to the job market, the City of Nantes has adapted emergency care rules. Previously this addressed a wide spectrum of vulnerable families in the city, such as new arrivals, hospitalization or any emergency situation faced by the family. The duration was one month, renewable twice. Since 2011, the priority is on social needs and getting mothers back into work. The duration is altered to meet the mother’s needs (up to 3 or 6 months).

The introduction of new objectives for the childcare policies has modified the rules for allocation of the emergency places in collective facilities. As a consequence, they elicit both satisfaction and disapproval depending on the actor concerned. On the one hand, they provoked criticism by families who could not access to emergency care because they no longer met the criteria.³⁹ Furthermore, childcare professionals expressed concern about the ability to guarantee a balance between the turnover of the families, viewed as an indicator of success of the mechanism, and the need to support parents until they have completed their professional integration - which implies that fewer families can benefit from the mechanism.

On the other hand, the evaluation has confirmed the important role of occasional care for mothers in search of job: it gives flexibility to families and is appropriate for single mothers who have part-time jobs. During the evaluation, families explained that

³⁷ Decision of the Municipal Council, 12th December 2011, Approval of the Childhood-Youth Contract 2011-2014.

³⁸ Daniel Audrey, *Early Age Child Care: a territorial approach to assessing needs provision*, *Revue Française des Affaires Sociales*, 2011/4 no.4, p.30-55.

³⁹ Interview with the director of a municipal multi-care centre.

occasional care was the secure element around which they were organizing their lives.⁴⁰ The employment office as well as local employability assistance structures have assessed the emergency care solution very positively; it is suitable because of its reactivity to the constraints of the labour market.⁴¹

Furthermore, we observe a modification in professional practices. Early childhood professionals have adapted their methods of work. For instance, the adaptation period for a child in a day-care facility, which generally lasts two weeks and is based on the well-being of the child, has been reduced in order to enable parents to be available on time for their professional commitments. Another aspect mentioned by professionals concerns the increasing number of families with social and economic difficulties. “For the time being, in our facility, 50% of families face difficulties, it involves more time and support from the professionals, for instance when people don’t speak French fluently or we need to be in contact with their employers or training providers.”⁴²

2.2. An institutional coalition: an original approach to needs assessment for single mothers

The main innovation of the last five years in Nantes has been a strong partnership between national and local institutions responsible for childcare (Nantes municipality, Nantes metropolis, local CAF, and the department council), in order to elaborate a joint assessment of family needs and changes in childcare supply. This joint assessment was initiated by the City of Nantes, which had expressed the political will to put the priority on the most vulnerable groups, and modified its local childcare system accordingly. As a consequence, specific actions are being developed jointly in order to help single mothers returning to the job market by improving access to a wide raft of services.

It is worth mentioning that the City of Nantes, the local CAF and the department council have been cooperating fruitfully in recent years on different issues. “A cooperation charter has been signed by the CAF and the department council, and the adoption of the Earned Income Top-Up (RSA) has led to various forms of cooperation; another charter will be soon signed between the CAF and the City.”⁴³ In their discourses and official documents,⁴⁴ the three institutions clearly insist on the fact that childcare policies cannot be led by one institution alone, and that an institutional coalition is needed, with mutual support and co-financing, especially in the context of public spending cuts.

One of the outcomes of the joint assessment⁴⁵ of childcare demand and supply in Nantes has been to show the lack of suitable childcare provision for single-parent families, in terms of information, places, opening hours and cost. This has without any doubt contributed to strengthening the idea that the interrelation between parents’ professional integration and the accessibility of childcare services must be increased.

⁴⁰ Evaluation Notebook, *Children care: how to facilitate the access of parents to work?*, City of Nantes, May 2011.

⁴¹ Internal Note of the Childcare Department, *Barriers to access to work: an operational plan of action*, City of Nantes, February 2012.

⁴² Internal Note of the Childcare Department, *Barriers to access to work: an operational plan of action*, City of Nantes, February 2012.

⁴³ Interview with the representative of the local CAF

⁴⁴ See interviews above. *Contribution to Public Policies - internal document of the City of Nantes*, see above.

⁴⁵ Evaluation Notebook, *Children care: how to facilitate the access of parents to work?*, City of Nantes, May 2011.

Nevertheless, the fact that the CAF and the department council have committed themselves to a process of joint assessment and common actions towards single parent beneficiaries of the Earned Income Top-Up (RSA) is also explained by a modification to the mechanism for social benefits for single parents, and thus new obligations that the institutions face. The main change for single mothers is the merger, in 2009, of the Single Parent Allowance (Allocation Parent Isolé) – that targeted single parents – into the RSA program.

As a consequence, the department council in charge of the implementation of the RSA began working with single-parent families. They are now obliged to commit themselves to a process of social and professional integration, and the department council has to find concrete solutions for facilitating a return to work. Indeed, a financial incentive such as the RSA is of limited effectiveness unless the lack of suitable childcare services is taken seriously as being one of the main obstacles to employment for single mothers.⁴⁶

For the national and local CAFs, single-parent families have been a public priority since 2005, coming first in financial payouts by the local CAFs (€2.3 billion, around two-thirds of the budget). As for professionals at the department council, since the introduction of the RSA in 2009 the CAF has reinforced its work with single parents. Social workers have an obligation to offer a meeting to single parents in order to explain their rights and duties to them in relation to the RSA and social benefits from the CAF.

In 2012, the joint assessment (2009-2010) made by the City of Nantes, the local CAF and the department council led to the implementation of a local experiment in a deprived urban area, seeking to help single mothers return to the job market by improving access to the whole range of childcare services, including individual childcare. A precondition for such a social experiment to succeed is innovation in local urban governance. First, improved coordination between childcare services is needed, including the reservation of places within the local network of child-minders and the building of bridges between collective and individual day-care services. Second, the project needs to be co-funded by the local CAF and the department council in order to make access to child-minders affordable for low-income families – and to guarantee payment. Finally, local employment offices, social centres and childcare services must cooperate to ensure that single mothers obtain access to the workplace. After a two-year trial, this innovation could be applied to all deprived urban areas. This innovation is presented in detail in the WP5 report.

3. TOWARDS MORE INTEGRATED LOCAL CHILDCARE GOVERNANCE

The City of Nantes is leading proactive policies in the field of childcare, which assumes the construction of an autonomous local childcare system. In this respect, the main concern is to overcome fragmented governance by implementing a global approach to supply and demand, providing common information to all parents and clarifying the responsibilities of different local childcare institutions.

3.1. A global approach to supply and demand

As mentioned in the WILCO national report, mixed and fragmented childcare governance is locally dominant in France. The main consequence is the difficulty in setting a transversal local childcare policy. Without multilateral and negotiated governance, it is very difficult to deal with major social cohesion issues such as the absence of a shared approach to parents' needs and demands, social polarization between collective and individual care, lack of coordination between municipal, non-profit and for-profit supply, unequal quality

⁴⁶ Interview with the representative of the department council.

of services, and the fragmentation of professional status and staff qualification. In this context, the new global approach to supply and demand implemented by the City of Nantes since 2011 intends to address the above mentioned difficulties and reinforce social cohesion in its territory.

New methods for allocating places in collective facilities to foster a better social mix

A first important measure concerns the methods for allocating places in collective facilities (“crèches”, “multi-care centres”). The lack of transparency in the allocation of places was until then a major concern raised by families seeking collective care places. Discussions on this topic can be read in the minutes of the council,⁴⁷ the opposition criticizing the way that the City of Nantes manages this question.

In 2010, the City of Nantes created a Childcare Admission Commission. This measure aimed at increasing transparency of the decision-making process used to allocate places and at reinforcing coordination between municipal childcare actors. First of all, the Commission is supervised by the councillor in charge of childcare policies, which is presented as a guarantee that the general interest and equality of access to collective facilities for all families will be respected. The commission is required to give an answer - positive or negative - to families, which did not happen previously: in general, families received no notifications from the municipality.⁴⁸

Secondly, the Commission has reinforced coordination between directors of collective facilities (crèches and multi-care facilities). Before the twice-yearly Commission meetings, the directors contact each other to share information and seek the best solutions for families. Their propositions are then presented to the Commission.⁴⁹ The creation of an official Commission has contributed to identifying priority criteria and led to a modification in professional practices. Whilst previously the priority had been families where both parents worked, the new arrangement focuses particular attention on low-income families, parents willing to take a job or training, single parents, handicapped children or parents, and situations where a brother or sister already attends a collective facility.⁵⁰ Each municipal day-care centre is required to set aside at least 20% places for “families with criteria”, that is to say single parents, parents in an employability programme and low-income families. When making a first selection of families (prior to the Commission), the facility directors contact families directly in order to check if the parents are really working or in the process of professional integration (if they have found courses, etc.).⁵¹

As a consequence, the introduction of these new criteria, which reflect the importance the City of Nantes accords to the most vulnerable groups, has made it possible to “recreate real social diversity in each facility and a better balance between the town centre facilities that did not have “families with criteria,” and facilities in outlying districts that were accommodating over 50% of these families. In our facility, located in a deprived urban area, our effort focused on re-opening the facility to higher socio-economic groups (engineers, teachers, professors, etc.), in order to readjust the balance.”⁵²

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Municipal Council.

⁴⁸ Interview with the director of the Childcare Department of the City of Nantes.

⁴⁹ Interview with the director of a municipal multi-care centre.

⁵⁰ This list of criteria is mentioned on City of Nantes website: http://www.nantes.fr/webdav/site/nantesfr/shared/fileadmin/telechargements/Vie_quotidienne/Parents/petite-enfance/T-PlaqAccueilMunicipal594x210BD-F.pdf

⁵¹ Interview with the director of the Santos Dumont municipal multi-care centre.

⁵² Interview with the director of the Santos Dumont municipal multi-care centre.

Promoting better coordination of supply and adaptation to family demands

In order to reduce fragmentation of the local childcare system, in October 2011 the City of Nantes set up an one-stop council office in charge of informing and accompanying families in their search for early childhood services and coordinating childcare services with other public institutions (such as those working in the employment sector).⁵³

Concerning the six child-minder centres (*Relais Assistantes Maternelles*) that already existed, the decision was taken to transform these into four childhood coordination centres (*Relais Accueil Petite Enfance*). Three out of four are located in deprived urban areas in order to improve geographical distribution of supply. The objective is to better compensate for geographical inequalities. This has helped professionals to make contact with families with social and economic difficulties who they did not meet before, and to create links with them.

These new childhood coordination centres aim at simplifying family access to services in an approach based on continuity of childcare services.⁵⁴ Three main types of service are provided: information, support and coordination of the decision-making process for the allocation of places. The information provided concerns all types of collective and individual care, municipal, associative and for-profit structures within the city.

The coordinators at the childhood coordination centres play a primary role mediating and supporting the families by listening to their demands, proposing different solutions adapted to their needs and contacting the relevant structures with them.⁵⁵ The following categories of public are prioritized: families without a place in collective day-care, those looking for childcare outside the admission period and those in an emergency situation.

Firstly, the childhood coordination centres aim at simplifying the decision-making process for the allocation of places in collective and individual care. Parents only have to fill in one form, and they can express a choice between four facilities. Families can also fill in this form on the council website. From 2013, this one-stop system of family registration will also include associative structures.

Secondly, the childhood coordination centres centralize all information concerning supply and demand of emergency places in collective municipal facilities. For instance, should a family contact a childhood coordination centre to ask for emergency care, the coordinator checks if there is a vacant place and contacts the corresponding facility.

Lastly, childhood coordination centres play a role of intermediary between childcare services and local employment offices. This component is fundamental in the support to single mothers willing to access jobs or training courses. Employment professionals' lack of knowledge of childcare services was assessed as a real barrier to employability pathways for single parents.⁵⁶

3.2. Limits to the new local childcare governance

⁵³ Internal Note of the Childcare Department, *Barriers to access to work: an operational plan of action*, City of Nantes, February 2012.

⁵⁴ City of Nantes, departmental CAF, department council, *Evaluation of public policies, Minutes of the Seminar: "Sustainable professional integration: what are the appropriate childcare services for single-parent families?"*, p.67.

⁵⁵ This aspect will be detailed in the WP5 presentation of the innovation "*Childhood care and access to the job market for single mothers*", this aspect will be detailed.

⁵⁶ This aspect will be detailed in the WP5 presentation of the innovation "*Childhood care and access to the job market for single mothers*".

A cultural change for the professionals?

For the time being, childcare professionals express overall satisfaction with these new decision-making processes. Nevertheless, these new coordination mechanisms take more time and energy and increase the workload. The childcare service intends to evaluate the coordinator position at the end of 2012, as it has been newly created and there is a need to evaluate coordinators' workload and missions. The transformation of child-minder centres into childhood coordination centres implies cultural and professional changes for the staff. The tasks and approaches to work are different; the public is now much more heterogeneous in comparison with child-minder centres. While these used to be contacted mostly by families from higher socio-economic groups, today the work with vulnerable families seen as being more demanding for the professionals, who are obliged to spend more time and energy on mediation and accompaniment in their search for a care. It raises questions concerning the limits of coordinators roles and responsibilities compared to social workers or professionals at the local employment office.

Has it modified social polarization between collective and individual care?

As explained the WP2 national report, child-minder provision is less regulated than collective care. Governance of individual childcare options is much more market-oriented, with direct and public financial support for parental demand through specific allowances or tax exemptions for home care services. Prices and arrangements may vary locally according to the supply of child-minders, the demands of parents and the quantity of other formal childcare solutions. In situations of monopoly and shortage of places, in some localities, child-minders are in a position to choose the profile of the parents (with a high preference for traditional working times) and impose their prices.

Researchers have underlined the social polarization between collective and individual care,⁵⁷ as low-income families cannot afford individual care and are wary of becoming employers. Like the childminder centres, childhood coordination centres are in charge of coordinating individual care. The City of Nantes is committed to developing individual care for low income single mothers returning to work.⁵⁸ For the time being, the results are inconclusive. Child-minders have resisted the proposals made by the city. Indeed, most of them refuse to work for families in unstable social and economic situations, fearing difficulties with payments or in relationships with the parents. Coordinators at the childhood coordination centres do not have any hierarchical link with child-minders and have little influence over them.

Furthermore, child-minders criticise the new childhood coordination centres because their role is less emphasized than it was previously and they have noted a lack of support from the coordinators, for instance in terms of sharing practices and experiences among child-minders.

Relevance of extending atypical hours in collective care facilities

The joint assessment has underlined the need to extend the opening hours of some day-care services, especially for parents in precarious working situations. Indeed, unusual working hours (which particularly affect jobs for mothers with few or no qualifications) are often incompatible with the opening hours of the majority of establishments. However, the first experiments, mainly carried out by the local CAF with one municipal service and a

⁵⁷ Eme Bernard, Fraise Laurent, *Local governance and the diversification of childcare provision: a new challenge to social cohesion*, Recherches et Prévisions, Childhood special issue, no.80, June 2005, p.11-27.

⁵⁸ This aspect will be detailed in the WP5 presentation of the innovation "*Childhood care and access to the job market for single mothers*".

few associative structures, have failed to provide conclusive results. As soon as families find care solutions other than day-care places during atypical hours (very early or very late in the day), they stop using them. As a consequence, demand seems to be less than supply and the collective care facilities are not to be able to finance their running costs during atypical hours.⁵⁹

4. ARE ASSOCIATIONS STILL CONSIDERED AS INNOVATIVE ACTORS IN LOCAL WELFARE?

4.1. Associations are considered to be service providers and not real partners with public childcare institutions

During the 1970s, 80s and 90s, the third sector was particularly creative in the emergence of new services: parental initiatives, childcare and support for immigrant families (multi-cultural crèches), childcare for children whose parents are undergoing reintegration into employment, flexible and occasional childcare, childcare with atypical opening hours and multi-services structures, out-of-school childcare, rural services. Social innovations in childcare services are promoted by some third sector umbrella groups such as UNIOPSS. However, new public management rules, the constant drive for efficiency in public spending and the emergence of public procurement for delivering childcare facilities have created an unfavourable environment for innovative bottom-up initiatives. The possibilities for innovation have become far more reduced than previously.

Whilst ten to fifteen years ago the associative actor was still perceived as innovative, nowadays associations are considered by childcare institutions as having a hard time adapting to a context of reforms, financial constraints and rationalization. Though non-profit associations run a majority of day-care centres, their role is viewed by the city as instrumental, i.e. participating in implementation of municipal policies and not influencing these policies. Non-profit organisations are not considered as real partners by the City of Nantes and do not participate in the elaboration of the childcare policy objectives: “as long as associations are not signatories to the Childhood-Youth Contract, the partnership with the public institutions is distorted.”⁶⁰

One example is the fact that the City of Nantes has in recent years been negotiating with associations to make them agree to join the one-stop registration mechanism initially trialled firstly by the municipality (see part 3). Though it can be seen as a very positive result in terms of coordinating the municipal and associative supply, the City of Nantes appeared unwilling to grant associations any option to refuse. As the municipality finances the structures, the public institution considers itself to be within rights. Conversely, the associations were divided between those that agreed and those that remained sceptical, fearing a loss of their autonomy.⁶¹

The root of the difficulties that non-profit organizations have in being recognized as actors in local childcare policies, and not only as service providers, seems to lie in recent history. In the period 1995-2000 there was social polarization between associative and municipal childcare services.⁶² Associative facilities were located in more wealthy residential districts while municipal ones were focusing on low-income families living in deprived

⁵⁹ Interviews with the representative of the CAF and with the director of the Childcare Department.

⁶⁰ Interview with the director of the associative multi-care centre La Toupie Magique.

⁶¹ Interview with the director of the associative multi-care centre La Toupie Magique.

⁶² Interview with the childcare projects coordinator at Ecosolies, the main local network grouping actors from the Social and Solidarity Economy.

urban areas. It is worth noting that prior to the CAF's new unique service allowance rules, prices at municipal facilities were affordable for low-income families but much higher for middle and upper-class families. These families had a greater incentive to send their children to associative facilities, which set their own price scales. Following the introduction of the CAF's unique service allowance in 2000, price rules were standardized across all structures, leading to modifications in the distribution of family social profiles. Indeed, social polarization has now decreased in both municipal and associative structures. For instance, the *La Toupie Magique* associative collective centre receives families from all social categories and one of its priorities is to promote social diversity.⁶³ Nevertheless, a negative representation of associative structures continues to be felt: "the municipal sector costs more than the associative one but it does not provide the same service."⁶⁴

As an example, a minor controversy broke out in July 2012 between the City of Nantes and associations providing home care for children. The municipality had supported the organization of a forum on home care services by the French Private Employers Federation (*Fédération des Particuliers Employeurs de France*) without inviting the non-profit organizations working in the same sector. These bodies (ADAR, ADT, AAFP, AREF, ANAF) set up a collective to defend their members' interests and asked to meet with the City councillor in charge of childcare policies. In September 2012 they organized their own forum on home care services.⁶⁵ Though it seems to have proceeded more from an oversight by the City than any intention to cause harm, this minor incident reveals how the City does not view associations as real partners and intends to keep childcare policies under its control.⁶⁶

The innovative childhood care and access to the job market for single mothers experiment developed by the City⁶⁷ was also conceived with the idea of the predominance of the municipality as actor. As shown in the presentation of the WP5 report, new actions concern mainly public institutions and do not include non-profit providers. Nevertheless, regarding individual care, this experiment did include home care organizations as potential partners providing solutions for single mothers with atypical hours. It is worth mentioning that these home care organizations are not aware of being part of this mechanism.⁶⁸

As a conclusion, we note that pressure on the associative sector to integrate municipal priorities, such as rationalization of resources and new management rules have simply created internal tensions rather than significant public controversies within the local welfare system.

4.2. The economic model for associations as defined by the City of Nantes

The City of Nantes has defined a very clear position on which economic model associations should follow, which impacts on the capacity of associations to innovate or not. Indeed, as the priority is now put on the necessity to run a sustainable structure in a context of lower public funding and new management rules, the City of Nantes considers that all day-care facilities should have at least 40 places in order to be viable.⁶⁹ The childcare department

⁶³ Interview with the director of the associative multi-care centre La Toupie Magique.

⁶⁴ Interview with the director of the Childcare Department, City of Nantes.

⁶⁵ Interview with the director of the Nantes Family Care Association (*Association Nantaise d'Aide Familiale*).

⁶⁶ Interview with the childcare projects coordinator at Ecosolies, the main local network grouping actors from the Social and Solidarity Economy.

⁶⁷ See the presentation in WP5.

⁶⁸ Interview with the director of the Nantes Family Care Association.

⁶⁹ Decision of the Municipal Council, 12th December 2011.

has appointed a private consultancy to accompany non-profit organizations to grow their size up to this critical size.⁷⁰

The issue of rationalizing resources has been discussed in the council by the majority and opposition.⁷¹ An opposition councillor criticizes the decision to move the location of associative providers, considering that the needs of the families are not taken into account. The councillor from the majority group in charge of childcare policies answers by defending the necessity to group several associative multi-care facilities together in the same neighbourhood. This is an example of the tension, mentioned in the first chapter, between economic objectives (decreased public funding) and the quality of the services delivered to families. Indeed, the new unique service allowance rules and the priority the City of Nantes puts on resource rationalization have impacted the operation of associations. As explained above,⁷² local associative actors are sceptical of the effectiveness of the new management rules and their positive impact, considering that it imposes more constraints on the structures and families and that children's interests are not always the main priorities.

Furthermore, the abilities of associative structures to innovate are impacted by the City of Nantes' priorities. A 2007 government decree authorized the creation of micro childcare facilities ("micro-crèche") and gave the associative sector opportunities for innovative and flexible projects addressing the needs of families at a local level. As an example, after having assessed the child care needs of low-income families who could afford individual care, the Nantes Family Care Association put forward a micro-crèche project as a flexible solution meeting local needs in deprived urban areas.⁷³ Although the City of Nantes was interested in the project, the 2008 elections provoked a change in orientations and municipal teams, leading to the decision that micro-crèches were no longer a municipal priority. In order to bring its project into being, the association had to look for support from another neighbouring city.

4.3. Are there still channels for social innovation?

Despite financial and management constraints, associations running childcare projects still have the capacity to innovate. Nevertheless, these capacities are limited insofar as innovations in childcare are not financed by the City of Nantes via its childcare budget but through other channels, such as social and solidarity economy or social urban cohesion policy budgets, both controlled by Nantes Metropolis.

Social and solidarity economy and social urban cohesion policies give a framework of action that encourages transversal links between sector policies, such as between childcare, employment and housing, thus fostering support for the emergence of innovative grassroots actions. This transversal approach is new for local institutions and civil servants, whose habit was to classify actions according to their areas of competency rather than the reality of the newly emerged action.⁷⁴

As an example, Ecosolies has supported the creation of community services and the networking of local women entrepreneurs who develop local initiatives based on their

<http://www.nantes.fr/Sgid/DataSgid/themes/conmun/cm12122011/cm12122011-18.pdf>

⁷⁰ Interview with the director of the Childcare Department, City of Nantes.

⁷¹ Minutes of the Municipal Council, 4th February 2011.

⁷² See paragraph 1.2.1.

⁷³ Interview with the director of the Nantes Family Care Association (*Association Nantaise d'Aide Familiale*).

⁷⁴ Interview with the childcare projects coordinator at Ecosolies, the main local network grouping for Social and Solidarity Economy actors.

know-how of domestic and daily life. These 6 local initiatives provide different kinds of services including childcare, parental support, restaurants and catering, sewing, community laundry, and family bicycle rentals, etc. The innovative aspects of this network are that it provides neighbourhood meeting points that combine professional and convivial activities together with entrepreneurship, job and training opportunities for mothers with young children, and the reinforcement of social bonds between inhabitants. Another interesting aspect is the networking of neighbourhood initiatives at metropolitan level. It brings together both French-born women and migrants from African countries, who live in very different kinds of towns and neighbourhoods within the wider metropolitan area.

This network receives finance from the social and solidarity economy budget of Nantes Metropolis, not from the City of Nantes. The municipal childcare department is aware of the existence of this network but no cooperation has been established between them as yet, though part of the network's local initiatives concern childcare and parental support.⁷⁵ *La Toupie Magique*, an associative multi-care centre, has in recent years also developed innovative projects on parental support without financial support from the City of Nantes, promoting conviviality and exchanges between parents, providing library services especially for low-income and/or immigrant families.

As a consequence, childcare innovations are coexisting in spaces that are parallel to well-established childcare policies controlled by the City of Nantes. The referential of these innovations focuses on values such as citizenship, participation of users in the project design, parental support through creation of social bonds and exchange of experiences between parents. The representation of parents conveyed in these innovations puts the emphasis on involvement and family commitment, quite unlike the referential of action developed by the City of Nantes covering the need to encourage single mothers to return to work, wherein they are seen only as categories of public to be mobilized.

CONCLUSION

The materials gathered (documents, interviews) do not show strong controversies or ideological conflicts between childcare local actors. Nevertheless, we have tried to highlight tensions surrounding the normative, cognitive and instrumental dimensions of the action (political orientations and values, definition of problems to be solved and principles of action).

The first main opposition concerns allocation of resources in a context of multi-level governance and disputes between state financial contributions and municipal commitments. A second major element of controversy between key childcare actors concerns the introduction of values such as the necessity for greater efficiency in public policies. This has led to new orientations in childcare policies, such as resource rationalization, grouping small collective facilities into bigger ones and optimization in the use of equipment. Local actors, such professionals and associations, in particular parents associations, disapprove of these orientations insofar as they generate conflicts with other values of the childcare system, such as the quality of service, guaranteeing the well-being of the children and early learning and education processes.

A third point of tension is linked to the introduction of orientations to encourage single parents to return to work. This welfare-to-work orientation is criticised by professionals and associations. In normative terms, it raises the question of whether contributing to the employability of low-income families should, or should not, be a priority of the childcare system, as it leads to lesser importance being given to the wellbeing of the child.

⁷⁵ Interview with the childcare projects coordinator at Ecosolies.

Regarding the cognitive dimension, associations consider that mobilization of vulnerable groups should come from the people themselves through a process of citizen participation and not through public injunction. On the instrumental dimension, childcare professionals face difficulties in terms of modification of their professional identity and new functions they are required to fill.

The fourth element of tension opposes the municipality and the associative sector. The associations are little acknowledged as innovative actors and reduced funding has led to major restructuring. Local childcare governance is characterized by the predominance of public institutions and the difficulty that the associative sector has in being recognized as a partner in the definition of the orientations and values for the childcare policy. Besides, these elements combined have led to a decrease in the associative sector's capacity to innovate. Possibilities for innovation still exist but are limited to autonomous spaces, thus jeopardizing their capacity to irrigate mainstream policies.

ANNEX

List of persons interviewed

- Mauricette Chapalain, Director of Childcare Department, City of Nantes
- Isabelle Voisin-de Marguerie, Head of the North Sector, Childcare Department, City of Nantes
- Valérie Bubreil, Coordinator of Childhood Coordination Centres, north sector of Nantes
- Claude Frotte, Director of the Santos-Dumont municipal multi-care centre, north sector of Nantes
- Guy Thomas, Director of the Social Work and Financial Allowance Service, CAF Loire-Atlantique
- Marcel Sorin, Vice-Director of the Social Integration Service, Loire-Atlantique department council
- Patrick Moreels, Director of the Nantes Family Care Association (ANAF)
- Stéphane Delalande, Director of an associative multi-care centre, Nantes town centre
- Sandrine Richardeau, Coordinator of Childcare Projects at Ecosolies, the main local network grouping actors from the Social and Solidarity Economy.

Documents collected

Official public administration documents

- Minutes of the discussions of the Nantes Municipal Council (from 2005 to 2012).
- Decisions of the Metropolitan Council (from 2008 to 2012).
- Monthly magazine of the Municipality “Nantes Passion” (from 2008 to 2012).
- Quarterly magazine of the Nantes Metropolis “Nantes Métropole” (from 2006 to 2012).
- Specific official documents from local institutions in the WILCO field:
 - Childhood - Youth Contract 2007-2010 between the departmental CAF and the municipality of Nantes.
 - Childhood - Youth Contract 2011-2014 between the departmental CAF and the municipality of Nantes.
 - Evaluation Notebook, Children care: how to facilitate the access of parents to work ?, City of Nantes, May 2011.
 - Internal Note of the Childcare Service, Barriers to access to work: an operational plan of action, City of Nantes, February 2012.
 - City of Nantes, Departmental CAF, Department Council, Evaluation of public policies, Minutes of the Seminar “Sustainable professional integration: what are the appropriate childcare services for single-parent families?”, 13th May 2012.
 - Social Urban Cohesion Policy of Nantes Metropolis, 2007-2009.
 - Minutes of the Metropolitan conference on Social Urban Cohesion Policy, 15th April 2011.
 - Contribution to Public Policies - internal document of the City of Nantes: conclusions of the working sessions held in 2008-2009 between policy makers, civil servants, and experts on future prospects in ten fields (housing, early childhood, youth, the elderly, citizenship - integration of immigrants, solidarity - social action, etc.).
 - Evaluation of the Call for Proposals “Social and solidarity Economy”, working document of Nantes Metropolis, 2011.
 - Website of the Nantes municipality: www.nantes.fr
 - Website of the Nantes metropolis: www.nantesmetropole.fr
 - Information on innovation in public policies: www.atlanpole.fr; www.mavilledemain.fr; www.nantes.fr/ext/rapports_annuels/rapan_2010/pdf/Rapport_CCAS_2010.pdf

The local media

The main local daily newspaper is Ouest-France. Very few articles mention controversies between different coalitions (generally between different political parties). Another local web newspaper is called Le Canard Social, specializing in social issues and childcare in particular.

On around 10 articles have been selected that deal with early childhood. A main issue is the partnership between the CAF and the cities of the Nantes agglomeration, aiming at developing childcare services. Some articles focus on local initiatives taken by municipalities or NGOs: opening of collective childcare centres, new types of services for families, etc.

Political party programmes

The three main political parties/coalitions represented on the municipal council are:

- The socialist party (PS), the green party (EELV), and the communist party (PC), which formed a coalition for the second round of the 2008 elections and won the elections.
- The United for Nantes coalition representing a union of former President Sarkozy's party (UMP) is the second political force on the council, where it represents the main opposition party. Until 6 May 2012, the French president and government were both from the UMP.
- The third party is the democratic movement (MoDem), also in the opposition.

The programmes of these three parties were used in our analysis. The two opposition parties (UMP and MoDem) present their positions on their websites. All the parties mentioned express their points of view in the magazines published by the municipality and the metropolis.

Civil society documents

- Nantes Family Care Association (ANAF), Intermediary Report on the Micro-crèche in Rezé, September 2012.
- Internal documents on the creation of a network of local initiatives, supported by Ecosolies.
- The ACEPP network (Association of the Collectives Children Parents Professionals) provides documentation on its website: www.acepp.asso.fr
Article: The unique service allowance enters a new phase, the ACEPP expresses its concerns.
- UNIOPSS (National Inter-federative Union of sanitary and social private non-profit organizations) provides documentation on its website: www.uniopss.asso.fr