

Coordination inside the European Commission? Cooperative strategies and sectoral realities within the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC)

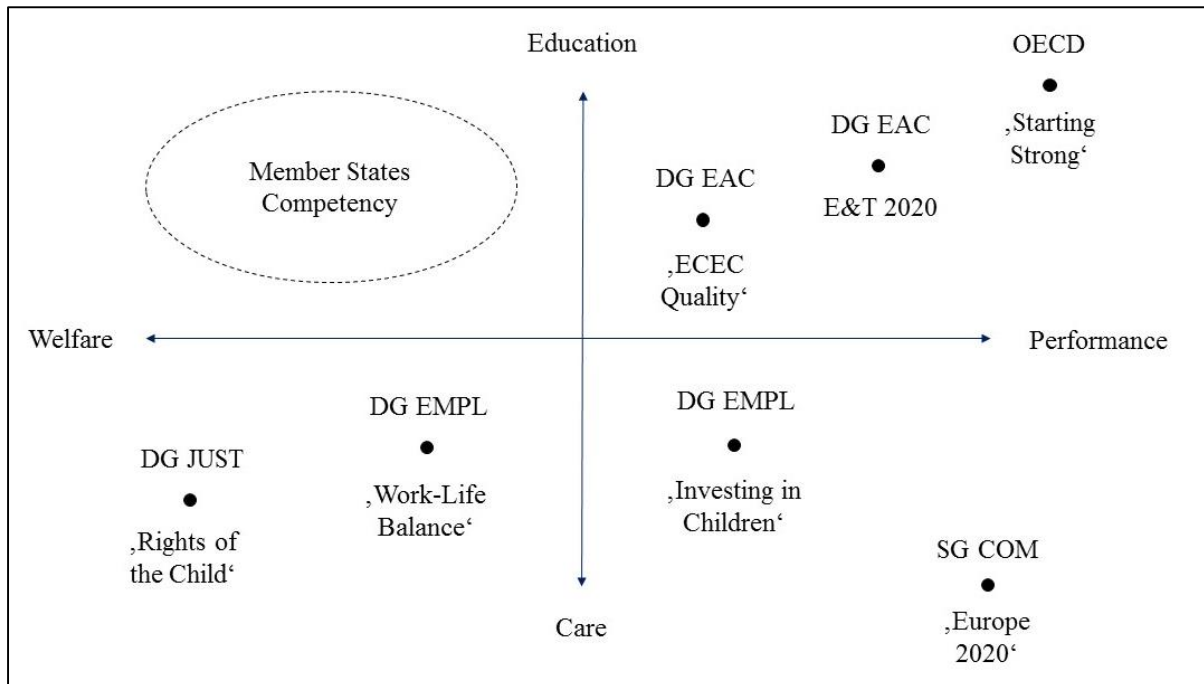
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Within the European Commission, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has been settled within the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) while cooperation between policy fields and integration of ECEC systems within at domestic level is explicitly required. However, fragmentation of policy areas within the commission do not always follow a cooperative pathway (Cohen and Korintus 2017). Quite the contrary, the ECEC competency is actually divided into several DGs promoting each a specific view on childcare and preschool according to their values, preferences and strategies. While the Secretariat General steers overall coordination of the European Union including Europe 2020 strategy, the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) is responsible for the strategic direction of work-life balance policies linking ECEC with 'social investment' (Naumann 2012). DG Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) is accountable for the Barcelona Strategy affecting the quantitative extension of ECEC settings while implementing the EU Agenda on the Rights of the Child. In this context, DG EAC, while weaker in terms of instruments and financial capacities, follows a *cooperative* strategy by linking together the fragmented orientations within the European Commission towards a child-centered view.

Following the path of Hartlapp et al. (2014), this paper provides an analysis of internal dynamics within the European Commission linking interactions between actors to their coordination within a multi-level governance approach (Kooiman and Jentoft 2009; Piattoni 2010). At European level, the orientation of the ECEC field is depicted through a two-axis coordinate system where the *x* axis represents a continuum between welfare and performance and the *y* axis a second continuum between education and care. While the *welfare* orientation foster values of equality and reciprocity, *performance* emphasizes efficiency and effectiveness. On the *y* axis, education is emphasized by DG EAC within the Education & Training 2020 strategy and promoting preschool *education* over childcare. Each orientation is tightly linked with policy preferences and values. For instance, strategies of DG EMPL and DG JUST strengthen *childcare* over preschool education within ECEC. Within this framework, we ask how did the orientation of the ECEC field evolved and more generally ask if its pattern of governance evolved throughout time and why.

The analytical framework suggested by Hartlapp et al. (2014) to explain the position formation will be simplified to depict the internal coordination of main actors within the European Commission in terms of hierarchy, market and network. For instance, *hierarchical* strategy is organizational restructuring and *network* strategy the involvement of experts and interest associations into the formulation new initiatives in this field; *market* strategies include diverse funding programs linked with specific financial incentives. At last, the governance of the ECEC field at the European level is analyzed both in terms of coordination and orientation. The research methodology follows an explorative design based on three interviews with policy officers at the European Commission. Policy documents are used to identify the instruments and official interactions between actors; expert interviews provide a deeper insight into informal interactions between actors. The understanding of internal dynamics within member states in terms of coordination and orientation provides a key for the elaboration of implementation strategies at the European level.

EU Orientation Framework



Source: Author; DG JUST (Justice and Consumers); DG EMPL (Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion); SG COM (Secretariat General of European Commission); DG EAC (Education and Culture); OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development)

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