

# The Apulian University System and Urban and Youth Cultural Policies: Mapping of Resources and First Proposals for an Agenda

PEER REVIEWED

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## 1. Introduction.

The current Italian scenario, amid economic, social and political transformations, calls for a rethinking of the relationship between universities, cities and communities, not only in terms of reassessing the role that universities can assume in the development of territorial and human resources, but also in reorienting the use and production of cultural resources. In fact, culture is a key player not only in orienting strategies to steer the complex, rapid and controversial changes in progress but also in defining the structural points around which to hinge the actions to change the role of the university system as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A process of analysis and rethinking on the role of the university in the development of the territory and society has been underway in recent years in the country. By way of example see: Nicola Martinelli, Michelangelo Savino, "Università/Città. Condizioni in evoluzione", *Territorio 73* (2015): 58-59; Michelangelo Savino, "Il ruolo dell'università nel processo di trasformazione sociale dopo la crisi", *Territorio 73* (2015): 60-66; Stefano Boffo, Francesco Gagliardi, "Un nuovo contenitore per i rapporti tra università e territorio", *Territorio 73* (2015): 67-72; Valeria Fedeli, "Università-città-territorio in Italia: una relazione in trasformazione", *Territorio 73* (2015): 79-85; Mariavaleria Mininni, Cristina Dicillo, "Politiche urbane e politiche culturali per Matera verso il 2019", *Territorio 73* (2015): 86-93; Nicola Martinelli, "Diritto allo studio e diritto di cittadinanza nel rapporto università-città", *Territorio 73* (2015): 94-99. Michelangelo Savino, "Università, città, studenti: aspetti complessi di interdipendenze non sempre note", *Archivio di studi urbani e regionali* 60-61 (1997): 13-84.

## **2. The Project and the Theme.**

Starting from this premise, which animated the entire structure of the “Puglia Regione Universitaria” project, the survey carried out under the theme “The Role of the University System in Urban and Youth Cultural Policies” aimed at developing an initial framework of knowledge of cultural resources at Apulian universities.

To date, there are no comprehensive studies that provide a mapping of the cultural resources available in Apulia for the university and urban communities. Therefore, assessing the accessibility to these resources, their quality and effectiveness becomes essential to understanding the extent to which university and urban educational and cultural offerings are in dialogue with each other.

## **3. The Survey.**

The investigation focused on the direct and active role that the academic institutions play in generating and promoting resources in various cultural compartments in order to estimate their ability to involve students in the processes of organization, management and creation, and their impact on the urban cultural scene and their permeability to citizenship.

The survey covered the facilities for both use and production of culture in each of the five Apulian universities (University of Bari, Bari Polytechnic, University of Foggia, University of Salento with its related sites in Brindisi and Taranto, Free Mediterranean University "Giuseppe Degennaro"-LUM). The survey has led to build a list of the academic resources and facilities for use and production of culture (museums, libraries, archives) and for cultural events (cinema, theater, music and audiovisuals, art and creativity, journalism and scientific popularization), and a questionnaire was delivered to the managers and other contact people involved in academic systems.

The survey aimed to outline the profile of the facilities, their rootedness in the university life and their organization and functioning in terms of funds, attendance, opening hours, activities and staff; it attempted to better identify the public that use and attend them, the degree of involvement of students in the activities, and the very nature of their efforts, whether educational, professionalizing or aimed at fostering youth entrepreneurship. Along these lines communication strategies and tools, their intensity and effectiveness were explored as well as the readiness to hold events aimed at building a community around the facility, whether made up of university students whether external.

Finally, the survey was directed to acquire elements describing the openness towards urban reality in terms of collaborations established by the facilities with other urban structures—museums, libraries, archives, publishing houses, bookstores, associations, etc.—and with events engaged in the dissemination and promotion of culture like exhibitions

and festivals—“Notte bianca dei Musei”, “Notte dei ricercatori”, “Il libro possibile”, “*Lector in fabula*”, “Bifest”, “Festival del cinema Europeo” etc. Other data were collected in terms of patronage offered to external events and of relations with schools and other educational institutions in the city and in terms of students discounts for museums, bookstores or major cultural events held by the city. The final section of the questionnaire was devoted to acquiring data on past activities carried out by the facilities, to assess their performance compared to the past and to acquire data on successful events whose memory has been lost. The preliminary survey revealed that cultural facilities are mainly departmental libraries, university museums, archives and some other multi-institutional/extra-institutional entities rooted in the academic world (study centers, academies, excellence centers, etc.). The following pages summarize the common trends that have emerged in Apulia for an overall assessment of the university-city system<sup>3</sup>. G.V.

### 3.1 Libraries.

University libraries are facilities for preservation, cataloguing and use for research, teaching and cultural and scientific education.

Existent at all Apulian universities, they are the mostly stable and entrenched institutions (many are over 20 years old: Figure 1); in the larger and more structured universities, they are organized as library hubs, divided into departmental macro-areas, and managed by an Athenaeum Library System (SiBA or SBA, present at the Bari Polytechnic and the Universities of Bari, Foggia and Salento) for the coordination and management of the activities of institutional cultural facilities with similar functions and purposes.

Most of these facilities work essentially for the academic community; absent or occasional is the component related to schools and very sporadic is that related to the urban community [Figure 2]. Libraries are mostly open for 15 to 30 hours a week, a rather reduced range as pointed out extensively by students in the survey [Figure 3]. It is no coincidence that the libraries with the liveliest attendance<sup>4</sup> and a growth in terms of attendance of more than 50 percent are those that have renewed themselves in terms of available space and organization and that offer extended opening hours.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the digitization of repositories in the late 1990s -the most significant event for these facilities in the past 25 years- has enabled a more immediate access to bibliographic resources as well as the activation of new nationwide network library services.

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<sup>3</sup> A more analytical view of the results obtained that returns the specific relationship established by each university with its city is deferred to another discussion.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the Library of Economics, Management and Business Law - Corporate Area of the Economic Pole, in University of Bari, where over 10,000 visitors are registered in a year, compared to other structures in the same area which register a maximum of 300.

In terms of functioning, the most observed phenomenon over the past 10 years is the steady reduction in structured staffing which, along with the lack of space, is listed as one of the primary causes of malfunction<sup>5</sup> that blocks the possibility of extending and better characterizing the functions of libraries towards wider communities. It is in relation to this fragility that the data on the almost total absence of communication strategies should probably be read (Figure 4: only few facilities use digital means, often scarcely effective such as mailing lists and old-fashioned web pages) and so the lack of broader content or events aimed at schools or at the city<sup>6</sup>. When staffed, university students are largely framed as civil service volunteers and as trainees, rarely are they found framed with grants or part-time contracts<sup>7</sup>. What seems to emerge from the survey is how they are mostly used as additional staff supporting existing staff, without performing specific assignments or tasks. The deployment of spin-off companies does not occur.

### 3.2 Museums.

University museums are facilities and services destined for the collection, protection, enrichment, classification, enhancement, study and public display of the historical, artistic, archaeological, scientific and naturalistic heritage. Together with libraries, therefore, they are designated for the research and dissemination of culture in the university environment, but also open to the general public.

The university museums are organized in a coordinated system: the Athenaeum Museum System (SIMA or SMA), is an institution that exists at the universities of Bari and Salento that brings together eleven and respectively eight museums by regulating collections, botanical gardens and aquariums through special rules.

University museums look very different in terms of openness to the community. They range from institutions well-established for more than 20 years to very young facilities founded in the last 5 years [Figure 5]. The museums of the University of Bari are mainly historical-scientific and naturalistic, linked to the Interdepartmental Service Center for Scientific Museology (CISMUS), connected with the science laboratories and dedicated to gathering and protecting collections. The origin and nature of a part of the museums of the university of Bari is not such as to welcome the external community but to preserve specialized materials or

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<sup>5</sup> At Bari Polytechnic there is a sharp reduction in libraries. The libraries of six departments have been merged due to lack of personnel and of space.

<sup>6</sup> The survey shows that as opposed to the common trend described above, the only exceptions are some libraries (in Bari, Foggia and Salento), which are organized as places that are open to the community, interacting with schools, museums, festivals, city associations and other cultural venues in the area, and participating in or organizing cultural initiatives. Of particular interest is the activity of the University of Salento's 3D SIBA Theater.

<sup>7</sup> The Bari Polytechnic Library System, on the other hand, tends to place students on part-time contracts and uses internships much less. The audience is also more mixed and the general public is more present.

instrumentation and to help the historical-scientific education of university students in specific subjects.<sup>8</sup>

Some museums, however, have developed a didactic-disseminative competence to relate to the urban community and other audiences, particularly schools. The targeted and functional use of social networks, the presence of an entrance fee, a more intense organization of events, exhibitions, festivals and affiliations with schools, departments or external entities, and the collaboration established with other structures of the city's cultural scene seem to demonstrate, in some cases, more advanced management [Figure 5].<sup>9</sup>

The Salento University museums, which are more balanced between the humanities and the sciences than those in Bari, are generally more open to the urban community, and endowed with a greater educational vocation, particularly toward the world of education<sup>10</sup>. The public, on average more numerous, is mostly made up of students, schoolteachers and outsiders, as a result of greater attention to communication strategies and a more intense collaboration network with other SMA and city museums and with events and festivals of the cultural scene in Lecce. For all the museums, the survey clearly highlighted the problems associated with the temporary closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of weakening and rarefaction of collaborative relationships with the city's various cultural institutions, which slowed down and affected their normal functioning.

As for libraries, the survey reveals a poor integration of university students in staff, who are employed in the structures as interns, but are rarely hired with scholarships or collaboration contracts [Figure 6].

### 3.3 Archives.

University archives in the universities of Bari and Foggia<sup>11</sup> are facilities dedicated to the preservation and consultation for study purposes of the documentary heritage of historical, administrative, iconographic, cartographic, epigraphic and ethnographic nature, but they do not see themselves as places frequented and open to the community, if not on rare occasions, such as extraordinary events.

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<sup>8</sup> These aspects exist, for example, in the Museum of Psychology and Psychotechnology, the Museum of Commodities, the Museum of Entomology and the Computer Science Department Collection.

<sup>9</sup> These aspects exist, for example, in the Museum of Earth Sciences and the Botanical Garden Museum.

<sup>10</sup> These aspects exist, for example, in the "Pietro Parenzan" Marine Biology Museum, the Historical-Archaeological Museum (MUSA), the Widespread Museum of Cavallino which is the only case in which recourse is made to a university spin-off company (ARVA, "Archeologia Ricerca e Valorizzazione").

<sup>11</sup> In addition there are the Multimedia Archive "Itinerari Bizantini Puglia-Albania" and the Electronic Archive Photo Library of Rock Iconography - Apulia Region of the University of Salento, which as electronic archives are accessible telematically for consultation of multimedia resources but have no physical locations.

### 3.4 Other Facilities.

In order to complete the picture of universities' cultural facilities there are other cultural entities, such as study centers, centers of excellence and academies, which originated within the University of Bari but are marked by a sharper transversality between university and city. They offer a much more distinct and systematic openness to the citizenry and experiment with innovative approaches to cultural resources that involve significant input from creative entrepreneurship.

Although they present very different characteristics, they have some significant aspects in common: they rely on multiple funds (public and private); they develop a structured communication strategy based on a specific investment of resources and on regular content publishing; they interact in a systematic way with urban cultural institutions that are not related to the cities; they participate, organize or host events, exhibitions, festivals and initiatives aimed at schools or citizens that cross-culturally include multiple cultural sectors. The field of science popularization dominates and is complemented by literary, cinematographic, theatrical and artistic initiatives.

This aspect can be related to some recurring observations made by the contact persons of the universities' various cultural facilities, even those less open to the public, such as some departmental libraries and university archives: the organization of or sponsorship to festivals and "notti bianche", the extraordinary collective openings and the planning of systematic relationships with school communities are to be considered among the most valuable activities because they constitute the only opportunities to give visibility to the facilities and to open them to the general public.

In summary, the questionnaires administered to the facilities' contact persons clearly reveal the weaknesses of the universities' cultural facilities: occasionally underrepresented are the external public and students who are not university students; the majority does not have a social profile, nor a specific contact person for the publication of social content, does not offer specific content for different audiences and groups and are not in close contact with the city's institutions and resources for a common strategy of promoting culture. Cultural facilities of universities are frequented by university students, but rarely involve them with active and continuative roles.

### 3.5 Events.

The survey has also led to the identification of the few but active facilities in each university that promote cultural events—cinema, theater, music and audiovisuals, art and creativity, journalism and scientific popularization—. In general, these are not linked to specific university institutions, but rather to spontaneous cultural activities of specific courses and departments. In some cases, the activities are promoted by



centers—the CUTAMC at the university of Bari, the CUT at the university of Foggia and Salento—, film clubs affiliated with private city foundations or by cultural associations or university spin-off.

Data from the questionnaire administered to the respective contact persons further articulate the picture of cultural resources of Apulian universities. The survey aimed to focus, in qualitative and quantitative terms, on the nature of cultural activities—popularization of science, theater, film or audiovisual sector, art, music, radio—, the type of events—meetings or reviews, festivals, productions—, the existence of associations or companies established within the university context, the audience, the role of students in the events, be it simple participation/adhesion or active organization, production, communication or artistic direction, the employment relationship—simple students, trainees, scholarship holders, contract workers—and the possible activation of start-ups or university spin-offs.

The survey also aimed to acquire elements describing the relationships established between universities and cities in terms of the activation of affiliations and collaborations for cultural activities with facilities, associations, festivals and so on.

The acquired data show a similar scenario in the universities of Salento, Foggia and, partially, Bari, characterized by a few but very active institutions, capable of triggering a virtuous circle of cultural initiatives across different cultural fields—with a predominance of initiatives in popularization and in the film sector—, and of involving universities, schools and citizenries in the framework of festivals, meetings and special events. The percentage of students in the audience is constant, and in several cases within the organization, less often in the management, but almost never in the production. The organization of events has very good feedback on the urban population because very often they arise from a network of collaborative relationships with local authorities and other urban cultural entities, such as city associations, which strongly connote the cultural life of Apulian university towns, foundations, theaters, festivals and creative companies.

Few but effective institutions have encouraged the birth of university spin-offs and cultural associations such as film clubs that offer the citizenry a cultural resource run by university students entirely free of charge<sup>12</sup>, in particular established between universities and small cities as in the cases of the universities of Foggia and Salento.

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<sup>12</sup> Of note at the University of Salento, in addition to the many cultural activities that revolve around the Laboratory and the SIBA 3D Theater, is the activity of ESE Salento University Publishing, an Open Access service of the University of Salento that publishes journals, series and proceedings which allows wide dissemination of the results of the University of Salento's scientific research both in the national and international academic community and free access even by ordinary scholars and enthusiasts. ESE also publishes an Open Access Teaching Series that makes the teaching texts adopted by faculty members available to students.

### 3.6 Students.

In line with the principles of the Faro Convention that emphasizes the perception of communities towards cultural resources, the core of the study was based on the involvement of students in the issues of participation and cultural animation in university life. By administering a questionnaire to a selected sample of students, conducting several interviews and organizing functional meetings for comparison, a qualitative survey was carried out involving all the student associations, centers and representatives in Apulia that are sensitive to the issue of culture and the impact that universities have in youth cultural policies and in offering and facilitating university and city cultural life in general. The view offered by students is quite critical. Museums and university archives are very little known and frequented, libraries are more so but exclusively used for study purposes [Figure 7].

This occurs in the context of a sample of students who frequent the cultural venues offered by their urban context in very high percentages: first and foremost, cinemas, bookstores, music clubs, theaters, museums, libraries, art galleries, cultural associations and archives, and who also frequent these places in other Italian cities and abroad, with a very clear prevalence, in this case, of museums and exhibitions. To cultural venues of Apulian universities, students first and foremost impute limited access hours and ineffective communication strategies [Figure 8], to which they add inadequate facilities, failure to update content, and insufficient and not fully qualified staff. Even simple attendance in events such as meetings or festivals organized at universities in any cultural sector—with a partial exception regarding the organization of cultural debates and popularization meetings—is very low. The involvement of students in cultural events and facilities rarely occurs through internships, traineeships or part-time contracts, an aspect that is also reflected in the university's lack of ability to entrust students with an active role in organizing and animating cultural life with the exception of a small but encouraged percentage of students are directly involved in organizing cultural events, particularly at the University of Salento. A small percentage of active students also continue to get involved in cultural associations of cities (that deal with particularly heartfelt issues such as social, political and current affairs: gender issues, environmental sustainability, promotion of the territory, but also music and cinema. A grassroot movement experienced in total autonomy: in fact, universities rarely collaborate with cultural associations. The free content fields provided in the questionnaire were extensively used by students to give their views and make suggestions. Together with some face-to-face discussions, the answers served as an essential basis for the construction of the proposals presented below.

### 3.7 Notes and Proposals for an Agenda.



The critical points that have emerged from the survey of university facilities and events, as seen from the perspective of contact persons and students who are active and sensitive to university cultural life, tend to converge on some recurring elements.

Beginning with the goal of enhancing cultural resources of universities for the community and to facilitate a process of integration, the essential aspects identified (see Figure 9 as a summary), on which action needs to be taken are:

- the strengthening and broadening of the audience reached by cultural initiatives of universities, both in terms of the 'internal' community - that is, the ability of the university population itself to recognize itself as a community-, and in terms of the 'external' community -the ability to attract citizenship to itself through three lines (technology transfer, lifelong learning, social education) that connote the third mission of the universities. Here the improvement of communication strategies plays an essential role.
- The strengthening of university coordination. Closely related to the previous point, with reference to building a community 'within' the university, the need to coordinate initiatives and to optimize the management of cultural venues and events around which the community could gather emerges. This strategy aims to implement participation, pushes for the initiation of working methods that overcome the fragmented, competitive and individualistic dimension prevalent in the academy and encourages networking, projects and sharing ideas and the integration of cultural experiences with out-of-town or Erasmus students.
- Improving the effectiveness of the collaborative network between different urban actors—universities, local authorities, cultural venues and/or city associations—to extend and coordinate cultural initiatives by integrating university and city resources, creating exchange and coherence between urban and university offerings. The creation of 'hybrid' facilities and experiences can trigger important opportunities for encounters.
- A direct consequence of the previous points is the commitment to foster youth employment and entrepreneurship in the urban cultural and creative industry. The agreement between institutions and urban cultural actors must encourage the increase of the participation of students in the processes of organization and management of cultural initiatives of universities and cities and foster the creation of employment opportunities of cultural workers trained at Apulian universities.

Several concrete proposals for actions to improve existing resources were then developed around these macro-areas of intervention:

- the extension of the opening hours of university facilities, to improve and broaden their use as places for studying but also for meeting and sharing.

- the activation of audience monitoring systems in cultural venues of universities—ticketing/online booking systems/etc.—for audience profiling and enhancing participation strategies;
- the organization of training seminars to upskill staff in terms of communication;
- the intensification of agreements between university and cultural venues of cities.

Similarly, some concrete proposals for innovation actions could be envisioned:

- the recruitment of competent and dedicated individuals specifically to improve communication strategies that enhance the university's many cultural resources;
- the creation of student-run multi-purpose spaces to foster gathering, discussion and sharing of creative energies;
- agreements with one or more of the city's venues like cinema-theaters to encourage the gathering of the university community in the broadest sense of the term, to stimulate the systematic planning and organization of events with the direct involvement of students, but also to gather the vibrant but parcelled out cultural activities of universities in one physical place for the benefit of the urban community;
- the establishment of a Cultural Steering Committee with mixed faculty and student members within the university entities to foster the planning of cultural events from a shared perspective;
- the organization of an annual regional festival aggregating cultural components of universities and cities.

#### **4. Beautiful minds. A Regional Festival as a First Action for Change?**

In particular, the proposal for a regional festival, which has attracted the specific interest of the scientific leaders of the Puglia Regione Universitaria project, could be an excellent factory to initiate some of the points described in the agenda that would act as a trigger for the desired changes.

Why a Festival? A festival is a central element in Italian cultural life, an image of cheerful but demanding participation of communities. It fills the public spaces of the city, it is a collective ritual of sharing an in-depth experience, built around a theme. It is a practice of active citizenship, capable, because of its immediacy, of quickly building a community. A festival facilitates the contamination between culture and creativity, in an experimental and multidisciplinary dimension that is more difficult in more connoted cultural contexts. In addition, festivals are an important tool for economic-entrepreneurial growth: among curators, artistic directors, and restaurateurs, Confcommercio declares that in 2018 the festival and cultural events sector employed 99,000 people. Ultimately, a

festival is an event capable of determining a very significant socio-cultural impact<sup>13</sup>.

The essential idea behind *Beautiful minds- University Festival of Communities and Participation* is that universities and territorial entities act as a hinge between academic research and the world of cultural entrepreneurship (museums and exhibitions, communication for cultural heritage, publishing, journalism, theater, cinema, music, performing arts), starting with the resources of the territory (associations, foundations, companies, other festivals) but with external 'guests' who would be invited from year to year (universities of excellence in the university-city-business relationship; entrepreneurs who nationally invest in the cultural sector). Each year the festival could revolve around a theme, an inspiration of general and cross-cultural interest that spans multiple cultural fields, linking humanities and sciences.

Students would be placed at the center of the planning and management of all events. Student activities would be included in the calculation of credits, and the initiation of forms of remuneration for coordination, greater commitment and responsibility, based on funding and agreement between the university, institutions and businesses would be essential.

In the occasion of the festival, opportunities for internships, part-time and fixed-term contracts at cultural venues in the city and the territory should be initiated.

The events would be consistent with the chosen in-depth theme, open to the whole citizenry, at an affordable entrance fee, season tickets, the possibility of payment by faculty card, etc.

Basically, the idea is to combine the single experience of entertainment and cultural dissemination with in-depth study through open lectures and discussions among different urban players.

Festival venues would be diverse, with some crossroads: selected university spaces, new or old city premises. City theater-cinemas would serve as crossroads for selected events. The basic idea is the hybridization of places, that is, bringing unusual recreational moments to traditional university facilities or bringing lectures, meetings and discussions to theaters. Finally, it should be emphasized that the success of the event will depend above all on the ability to shape, integrate and coordinate cultural events and initiatives that already exist for the most part, but are 'atomized' and unable to coagulate. The unity of purpose among different urban players will contribute to enhancing the existing network, giving it new meaning to offer to the Apulian community as a whole.

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<sup>13</sup> Giulia Alonzo, Oliviero Ponte di Pino, *In giro per festival. Guida nomade agli eventi culturali. Festival di pensiero, letteratura, musica, teatro, cinema e arte in Italia* (Milan: ed. Altreconomia, 2022), 9-15.

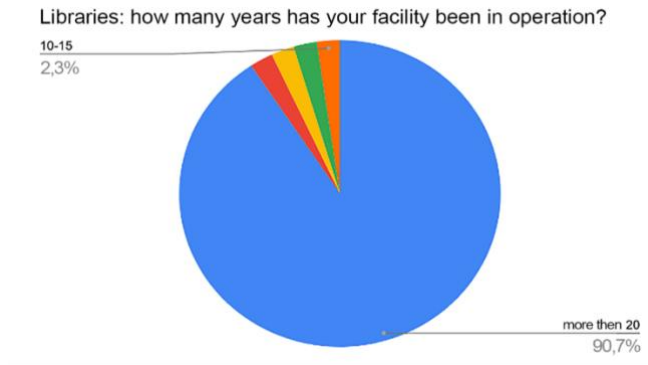


Figure 1| Survey of years of libraries in Apulian universities (graph from Google Forms).  
Credits: Velia Polito.

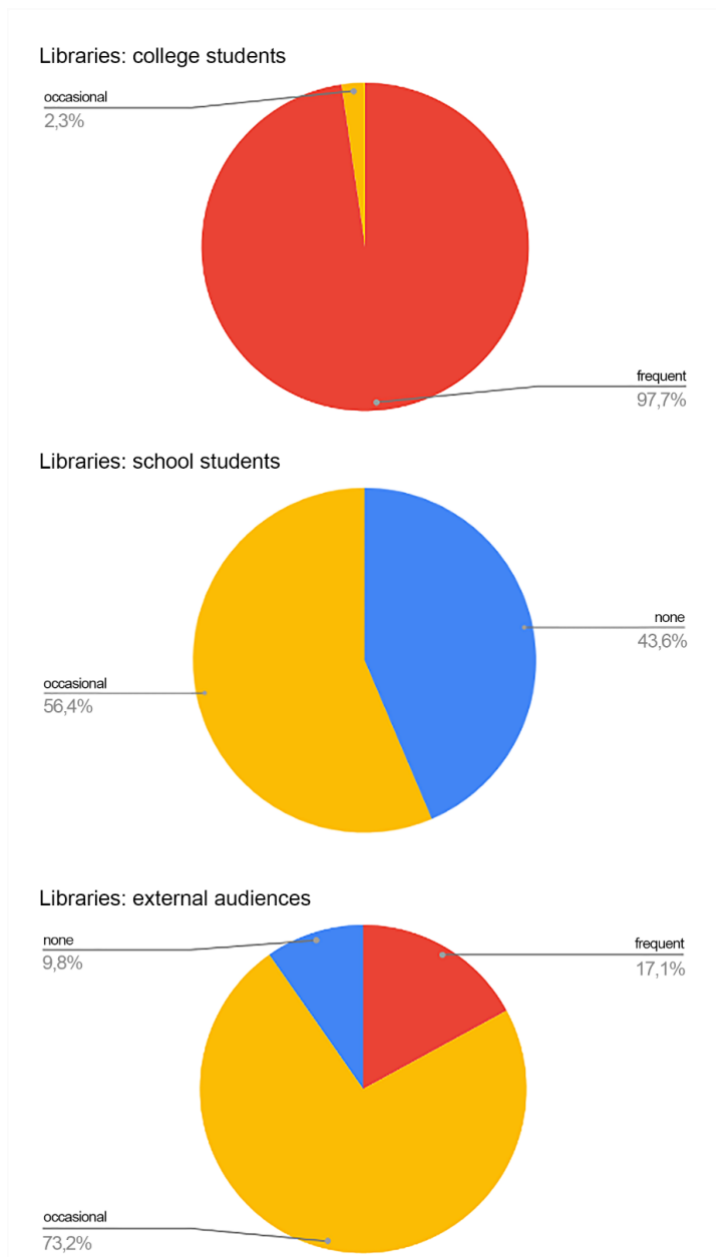


Figure 2| Summary on the characterization of library patrons in Apulian universities (graph from Google Forms).  
Credits: Velia Polito.

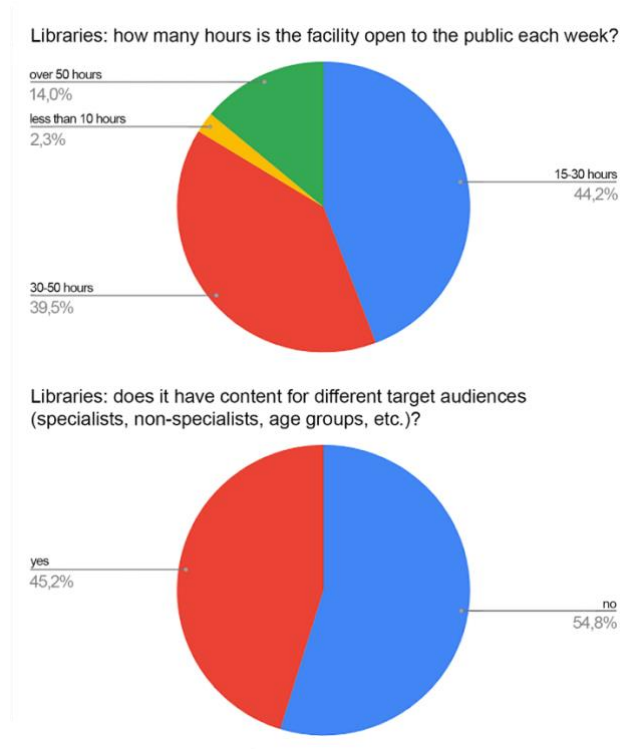


Figure 3| Graphic summary regarding the opening hours of Apulian universities (from Google Forms).  
Credits: Velia Polito.

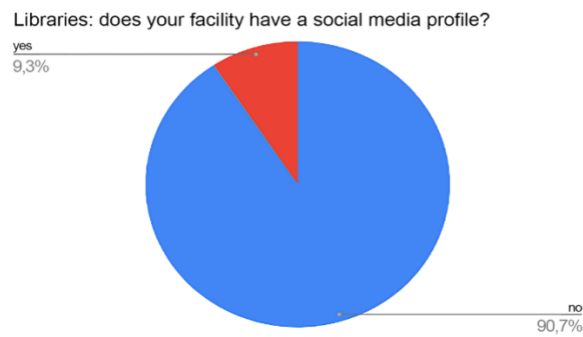


Figure 4| Survey of social use in libraries of Apulian universities (from Google Forms).  
Credits: Velia Polito.

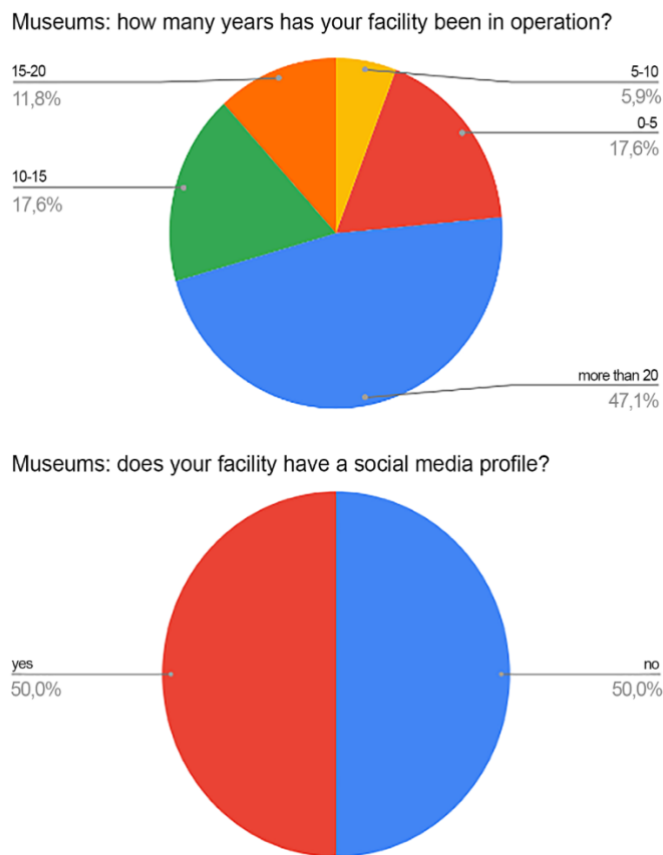


Figure 5| Survey of years of life and social use in Apulian university museums (from Google Forms).  
Credits: Velia Polito.



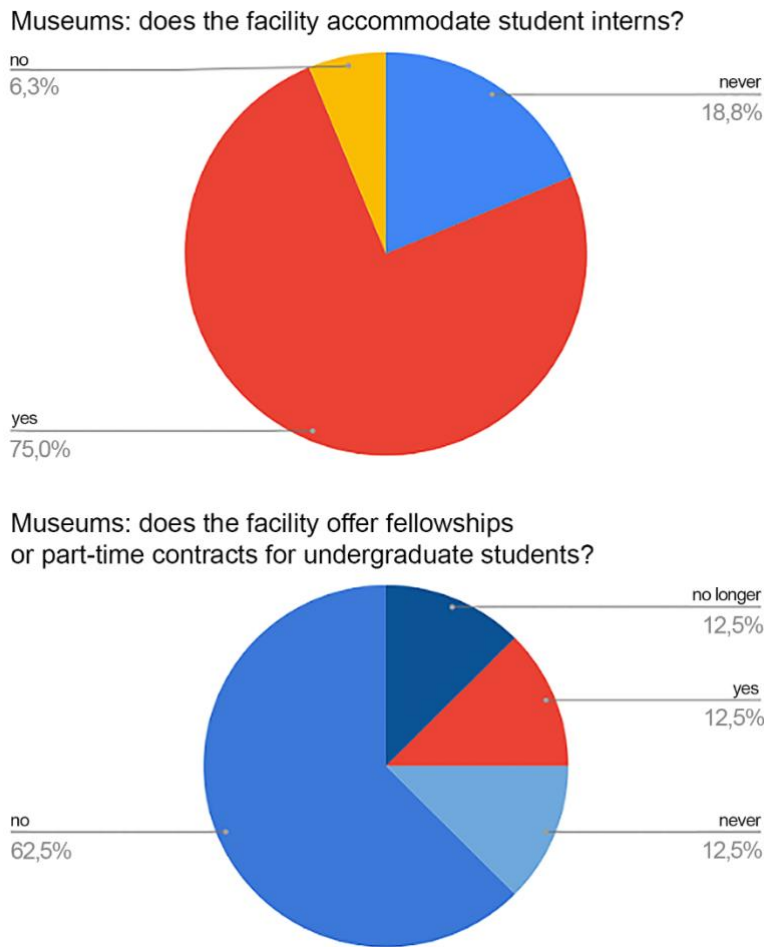
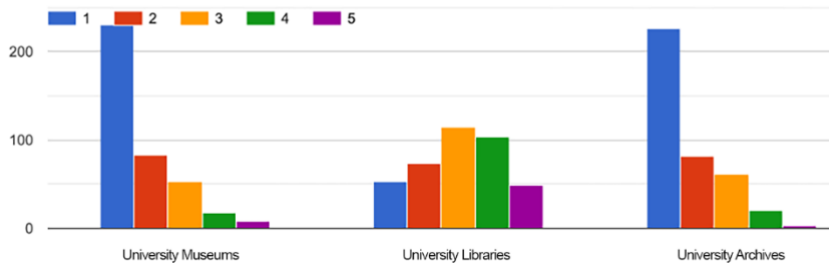


Figure 6| Survey of student framing in Apulian university museums (from Google Forms).  
Credits: Velia Polito.

On a scale of 1 to 5, could you indicate how familiar you are with the cultural venues at your university?



On a scale of 1 to 5 could you indicate how much you attend them?

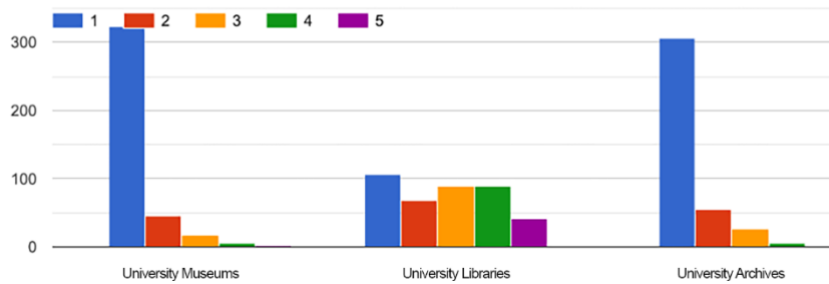


Figure 7| Survey on students' knowledge and attendance of university cultural venues (from Google Forms).  
Credits: Velia Polito.

On a scale of 1 to 5, university cultural venues would need ... (more than one answer allowed)

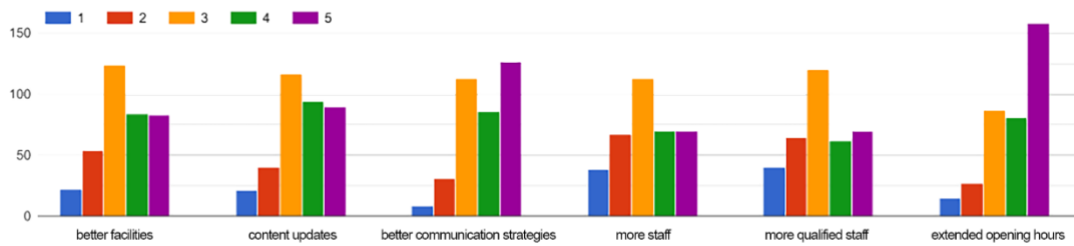


Figure 8| Survey on students' knowledge and attendance of university cultural venues (from Google Forms).  
Credits: Velia Polito.



Figure 9| Graphic summary comparing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (elaboration by Velia Polito).

Credits: Velia Polito.

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