

# Puglia Regione Universitaria Project as Action Research

PEER REVIEWED

**Marco Cataldo**

**A.Di.S.U. Puglia**

*catamarco@gmail.com*

**Cristina Danisi<sup>1</sup>**

**Polytechnic University of Bari**

*cristina.danisi@poliba.it*

**Giovanna Mangialardi**

**Polytechnic University of Bari**

*giovanna.mangialardi@poliba.it*

**Alessandra Maroccia**

**Puglia Region**

*a.maroccia@regione.puglia.it*

## 1. Universities and Urban Transformation.

The current historical phase, characterized by economic and social difficulties, is triggering a “knowledge challenge”<sup>2</sup>, testing the role of the Italian university.

Student housing, for example, is a particularly contentious issue of local policy in university towns, in relation to both the conversion of existing housing to student rentals and the development of private purpose-built student housing.<sup>3</sup>

The growth of private student housing across cities globally has been linked the lack of universities to keep up with the supply of student

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author.

<sup>2</sup> Maurizio Novelli and Giuseppe Talamo, *La Terza Missione per l'Università Italiana. Una nuova occasione per crescere?* (Roma: Università di Roma Tor Vergata, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Nick Revington and Alexander James David Wray, "Land-Use Planning Approaches to Near-Campus Neighborhoods and Student Housing Development Patterns in Ontario, Canada," *Housing Policy Debate*, 2022: 1-27.

housing.<sup>4</sup> However, few researches consider the possibility that municipalities in an urban system can approach the problems of student housing through land-use planning and their consequent influence on development patterns. Municipalities' approaches in this regard reflect the local context, in particular their relationship to the city's own regional growth management plans.

During the pandemic period, the education system shifted to distance learning. Most of the student population started or continued their university studies using the various e-learning platforms provided by the universities. As a result, university towns have "emptied" out of the student community. Immediately after the pandemic phase, unlike in the business world, the university system resumed almost entirely with face-to-face teaching. The "off-campus" student flocked to university towns in search of accommodation. This phenomenon has generated an increase in demand for accommodation compared to pre-pandemic data, developing and intensifying the problem of "student residency" and causing a real "housing emergency". In Apulia, there was an increase of 4023 applications for accommodation places, compared to 2019, which recorded 3742 applications. In the various Apulian university cities, this "increase" in the university population was assessed as a "wake-up call" for municipal administrations, stimulating knowledge of the distribution of the student population in their cities, which had hitherto been little investigated.

Although the various stakeholders are represented in the decision-making bodies, the construction of the processes that implement the right-to-university study policies is often limited to single institutional actors.

Alongside the traditional university missions of education and research, promoting the "Third Mission" could be necessary for accompanying the transition toward a more inclusive city-university system. The Third Mission is defined as the «set of activities with which universities activate processes of direct interaction with civil society and the entrepreneurial fabric to promote the growth of a territory so that knowledge becomes instrumental in obtaining productive output».<sup>5</sup> Universities must open up to the external world and try to achieve new value for the projects within them. In fact, "Third Mission" also means interaction with the social tissue of their urban context and territory in a fruitful dialogue between the parties and the network<sup>6</sup> of actors that interact and take action in research projects.

These projects, today more than ever, cannot be limited to academic boundaries or a merely theoretical vision of reality; instead, they must be as adherent as possible to contemporary necessities and emergencies.

---

<sup>4</sup> James J. Gregory and Jayne M Rogerson, "Studentification and Commodification of Student Lifestyle in Braamfontein, Johannesburg", *Urbani Izziv* 30 (2019): 178-193.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 182.

<sup>6</sup> Rupert F. Chisholm, "Action Research to Develop an Interorganizational Network," in *Handbook of Action Research*, (Londra: SAGE, 2001), 324-332.

Hence the importance and scientific value of the applied part of the research and the territorial effects.

The relationship between the academic reality and the external world, represented by the network of stakeholders, institutions, and actors of the territory, is an added value because it generates processes capable of bringing together common and complex interests and outputs. The “action” part of the research includes experimentation and involvement of researchers in the social field and the realization of the objectives of a project, going far beyond mere “knowledge problems”.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, the "*PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA. Studiare e vivere in città accoglienti e sostenibili*" project, the object of this contribution, represents an interesting example for analysis. The project results from an Agreement Protocol between the Apulia Region<sup>8</sup>, the Regional Agency for the Right to Study (A.Di.S.U. Puglia), the university cities<sup>9</sup>, and the Apulian universities<sup>10</sup> and is coordinated by urban@it, the National Centre for Urban Policy Studies<sup>11</sup>. *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* was conceived as a strongly applicative and multi-actor research project involving the entire regional territory in innovating the relationship between the urban and university systems. Indeed, the project's vision is based on the conviction that constant dialogue and direct collaboration between the university institution and the administration, together with interaction with local stakeholders and students, can give new life to the needs of the student community and the way it relates to the city and its policies, concerning the Right to Study.<sup>12</sup> The active involvement of students, who are the primary users of “knowledge spaces”,<sup>13</sup> and the establishment of a dense network of relations and interchanges of knowledge, points of view, and initiatives, represent challenges and, at the same time, medium-long term opportunities for the territory. Following a survey and data processing phase, the project provided a third “operational” phase, currently underway, dedicated to the flagship projects experimentation on the regional territory, transversal to the project themes<sup>14</sup>, which are tangible operations of the research.

---

<sup>7</sup> Jean Dubost and André Lévy, "Ricerca-azione e intervento," in *Dizionario di psicologia*, (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2005), 377-402.

<sup>8</sup> Department of training and labour, labour policies, right to study, school, university, professional training.

<sup>9</sup> Apulian university cities: Bari, Lecce, Foggia, Brindisi, Taranto.

<sup>10</sup> The five universities are: Polytechnic University of Bari, University of Bari, University of Salento, University of Foggia, LUM University.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.urbanit.it/>

<sup>12</sup> Nicola Martinelli, "Diritto allo studio e diritto di cittadinanza nel rapporto università-città," *Territorio* 73 (2015): 94-99.

<sup>13</sup> Nicola Martinelli, *Spazi della conoscenza. Università, città e territori* (Bari: ADDA, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> The five in-depth themes are:

Theme 1: University facilities of the Right to Study, as an opportunity for urban regeneration, Scientific referee Prof. M. Montemurro, Polytechnic University of Bari;

Theme 2: The role of the university system in urban cultural and youth policies, Scientific referee Prof. G. Volpe, University of Bari;

Theme 3: Urban University Sustainability Agendas on mobility and energy efficiency, Scientific referee Prof. M.A. Aiello, University of Salento;

Starting from these premises, the contribution aims to explore the operational and experimental phase of the Apulian regional project “PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA. Studiare e vivere in città accoglienti e sostenibili”<sup>15</sup> (*Apulia as a university region. Studying and living in welcoming and sustainable cities*), to verify its impacts on the territory (processes, actors, policies, etc.). In detail, the goal is to qualitatively check if and how all the flagship projects, and consequently the entire PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA project, can be defined as action-research.

Action research is «characterized by the immediate application of the produced knowledge to deal with a certain problem and includes the evaluation of the effects».<sup>16</sup> For this reason, it is based on the direct relationship between the researcher and external actors and between the researcher and analysis of the territory, addressing complex issues, which deal with, for example, the different scales of action and multiple knowledge necessary for the formulation of policies adherent to the needs of contemporary societies in transformation.

To achieve the goals mentioned above, the article intends to map and analyze all the flagship projects to extrapolate reflections and preliminary assessments. Furthermore, this systematic regional exploration may be helpful to evaluate the project’s ability to bring real transformations on the territory and orient new territorial policies and innovative choices regarding the right to study at university. The contribution is organized as follows. After this introduction and a brief overview of the impacts of some action research projects, the PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA project is illustrated, describing the research method, mapping flagship projects and reporting on the first evaluations of the project's operative phase. Finally, after a discussion that provides an overview of the issues that emerged concerning the action research themes, the study's limitations and conclusions are outlined.

## 2. Action Research. Some Examples.

In the scientific literature, the expression “action research”<sup>17</sup> is associated with Professor Kurt Lewin, who was the first to theorize the concept in the 1940s<sup>18</sup>, qualifying it as a «research activity conducted outside a

---

Theme 4: Services Innovation for the Right to Study, Scientific referee Prof. F. Fanizza, University of Foggia;

Theme 5: Disability and accessibility of university facilities and urban spaces, Scientific referee Prof. A. Tarzia, LUM University.

<sup>15</sup> <https://regioneuniversitaria.puglia.it/>

<sup>16</sup> Laura Saija, *La ricerca-azione in pianificazione territoriale e urbanistica* (Milano: Franco-Angeli, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Kurt Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," *Journal of social issues* 2.4 (1946): 34-46.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Foster, "An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Action Research in Work Organizations," *Human Relations* 25 (1972): 529-556.

university laboratory, in a life context, linked to problems of action and therefore value-driven».<sup>19</sup>

Action research, intended as an evolution of the classical concept of scientific work because it implies a collective intervention,<sup>20</sup> is a method capable of producing and verifying a project's real effects and tangible impacts in any field application. It describes a cognitive activity that aims to make changes in reality,<sup>21</sup> which take the form of new behaviors and practices, new attitudes, or new approaches to phenomena. Action research, therefore, proves to be an essential tool for the group of disciplines that deals with the production of projects, plans, and policies for management, conservation, and urban and territorial development, interacting, in this sense, with the concept of planning, intended as a field of technical knowledge that reflects on how society could/should relate to its living environment<sup>22</sup>.

The complexity of this multi-scalar topic has always led planners to combine their specific knowledge with that of other technical and non-technical disciplines. Today, more than ever, researchers claim a new research approach closely related to the territory. Despite this, compared to other fields, it is still uncommon in disciplines dealing with cities and territories in Italy.

The capacity of action research is to positively affect the territorial contexts in which it is applied, as a concrete transformation of it, going beyond the walls within which the study, traditionally intended, is developed.

As an example, at the European level, mention is made of the "Store4HUC" project<sup>23</sup> within the framework of the European program "INTERREG Central Europe", whose pilot case in 2019 was the city of Cuneo. The experimentation, helpful in assessing the impacts of the project on the territory involved and the potential effects in transforming behavior and triggering good practices (action research), envisages the new, totally renewable energy supply system of the city's panoramic lift. The energy storage will have an immediate impact on the territory. In addition to upgrading a significant infrastructure of the city, an overall improvement in energy efficiency from renewable sources is expected, with a consequent decrease in overall costs.<sup>24</sup> The long-term objective of the "Store4HUC" project is to propose virtuous examples, adaptable to

---

<sup>19</sup> Jean Dubost, and André Lévy, "Ricerca-azione e intervento," in *Dizionario di psicologia*, (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2005), 377-402.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Peters and Vivienne Robinson, "The Origins and Status of Action Research," *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 20 (1984): 113-124.

<sup>21</sup> Laura Saija, *La ricerca-azione in pianificazione territoriale e urbanistica* (Milano: Franco-Angeli, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> The Store4HUC project involves a partnership made up of 10 European cities representing Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Croatia and Italy with a total budget of around 1.8 million euros, of which more than 300,000 are earmarked for Environment Park and the Municipality of Cuneo.

<sup>24</sup> Marilisa Romagno, "Sostenibilità urbana: a Cuneo un progetto pilota per l'efficienza energetica dei centri storici," *www.alternativasostenibile.it*. (Marzo 22, 2019).

other contexts and able to contribute to improving and enriching urban planning strategies from a greener perspective, seeking the right compromise between constraints and environmental sustainability requirements. Therefore, preliminary investigation through pilot cases proves to be fundamental for the proper development of experimental research, representing support, in the course of the work, to the verification of the validity of objectives and results and, if necessary, to their redefinition.

### **3. Puglia Regione Universitaria Project.**

#### **3.1 The Research.**

The multi-actor process “*PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA. Studiare e vivere in città accoglienti e sostenibili*”, approved with the Regional Council Resolution n°2383/2019, aims to renew the relationship between the university and the urban system, capable of guaranteeing those who choose to study in Puglia a full Right of Citizenship, as an essential aspect of the Right to Study.<sup>25</sup> It is a two-year institutional and research project, started on 16 February 2021. The overall objective is to promote sustainable and integrated regional urban development policies in synergy with university action. The exchange of experience and knowledge between cities promoting an inedited connection between them, through the collective and constant involvement in the project and its activities (focus groups, itinerant meetings, multi-thematic workshops, project exhibitions, conferences on the topics covered involving technicians and professionals), helps to accelerate the process of policy innovation: to this end, the involvement of various stakeholders is essential. The goal is to ease the exchange of experience and learning between urban policy, decision-makers, and practitioners, helping them to define and implement Action Plans for sustainable urban development and acting on the major emergencies concerning the university. The research focuses on the well-being of university students as citizens, intersecting different actors in their specific areas, generating a complex network where individual skills and contributions join those of the rest of the group. In particular, with the signing of the Protocol of Agreement, due to the work of a research group of assignees and scholarship holders led by a scientific referee, each university has committed itself to delve into a topic (Housing, Culture, Sustainability, Right to Study and Accessibility) concerning the entire regional territory and to assist the other universities, through the identification of a topic referee for each of the other four project assets. The research activity was mainly conducted by five Apulian universities (Polytechnic University of Bari, University of Bari, University of Salento, University of Foggia, LUM University) and five

---

<sup>25</sup> Giovanna Mangialardi, Nicola Martinelli and Angelica Triggiano, "Rigenerazione urbana nelle città universitarie tra Student e Social Housing. Il caso dell'Ex Ospedale Sanatoriale 'A. Galateo' a Lecce," *Regional Studies and Urban Development* 3(3) (2022): 43-64.

university cities (Bari, Foggia, Lecce, Brindisi, and Taranto), constantly involved territorial actors and students for a continuous survey of ideas and needs. At the same time, the municipalities, as the main territorial institutional actors, have committed themselves to define policies and supporting the research activities carried out in the university by including five scholarship holders in their staff. In addition, four further trainees are working within the Regional Agency for the Right to Study (A.di.S.U. Puglia), two experts in urban planning and construction and one in law, who can provide the required technical-scientific support. Further project details can be found in the article *Nuove forme di progettualità condivise. Il progetto Puglia Regione Universitaria*,<sup>26</sup> a contribution for the XXVI Scientific Conference SIU (Italian Society of the Urbanists), held in June 2022 in Brescia.

The application part of the research project took moves from the analysis phase conducted upstream by the five Apulian universities, and it is on this stage that this contribution focuses. Starting from the theoretical framework realized by the universities on the various topics, it focused on the concepts and issues that have emerged in the knowledge “transfer” process. This allows the administrations and the executive subjects to act on the most urgent matters highlighted by research activities. Therefore, the operation aims to develop the collective learning of the entire multi-actor ecosystem represented by *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA*.

### 3.2 The Method.

The two-year project is specifically divided into three phases: the analysis of the assigned topic, declined in each of the different contexts of the five university cities involved, followed by the elaboration of the results obtained useful for the drafting of a detailed thematic knowledge framework with the relative identification of strengths and weaknesses and the subsequent definition of targeted intervention tools and actions. The research, initially set up according to a linear process, evolved spontaneously into a continuous “spiral” process.<sup>27</sup> As this was an innovative and experimental project, the workgroup conducted constant reflections on the progress and partial outcomes of the project, rethinking the initially planned courses of action several times, led by the partial outcomes of each step, in line with the dynamics of action research that operates through a cyclical process of planning, action, and evaluation of the action leading to further planning, and so on.<sup>28 29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Cristina Danisi, Giovanna Mangialardi, Alessandra Maroccia and Angelica Triggiano, "Nuove forme di progettualità condivise. Il progetto Puglia Regione Universitaria," *"Dare valore ai valori in urbanistica" XXVI Conferenza Scientifica SIU Brescia 2022* (2023).

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart and Rhonda Nixon, *The Action Research Planner. Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*, (Singapore: Springer, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> David Coghlan and Teresa Brannik, *Doing action research in your own organization*, (Londra: SAGE, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> David Coghlan and N S Rashford, *The Dynamics of Organizational Levels: A Change Framework for Managers and Consultants*, (Boston: Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994).

During the research project, the theoretical framework was transformed into action, using specific operational experiences conducted, for example, through international design competitions, participatory processes, and the recovery of disused buildings to increase student housing. The circularity of research has generated formalized “scientific” products but also clear influences on reality<sup>30</sup> and different forms of collective learning. The integration of knowledge attained and shared between institutions, universities, cities, territorial stakeholders, the student community, and the community of citizens was suitable to enable principles of socio-organizational change, valid for the definition of new public policies between cities and universities. This approach has led to an increase in the number of actors and territories involved and to the evolution of the expected results and impacts, both in quantity and complexity [Figure 1], as will be better explained in the following paragraphs.

To better qualify the process of the PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA project and associate it with an action research, the description of all the projects considered “flagship” is given below. The flagship projects of PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA allowed for immediate application and punctual feedback on the project's research themes, identified as the third applicative phase of the process. They could be defined the “action” part of the project.

The reconstruction was made on the basis of the knowledge of the authors, who represent some of the main institutions involved in the project (Regione Puglia, ADISU, urban@it), trying to reconstruct as faithfully as possible what happened in all areas during the two years of the project.

---

<sup>30</sup> Hilary Bradbury and Peter Reason. *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice*. 2, (Londra: SAGE, 2008).



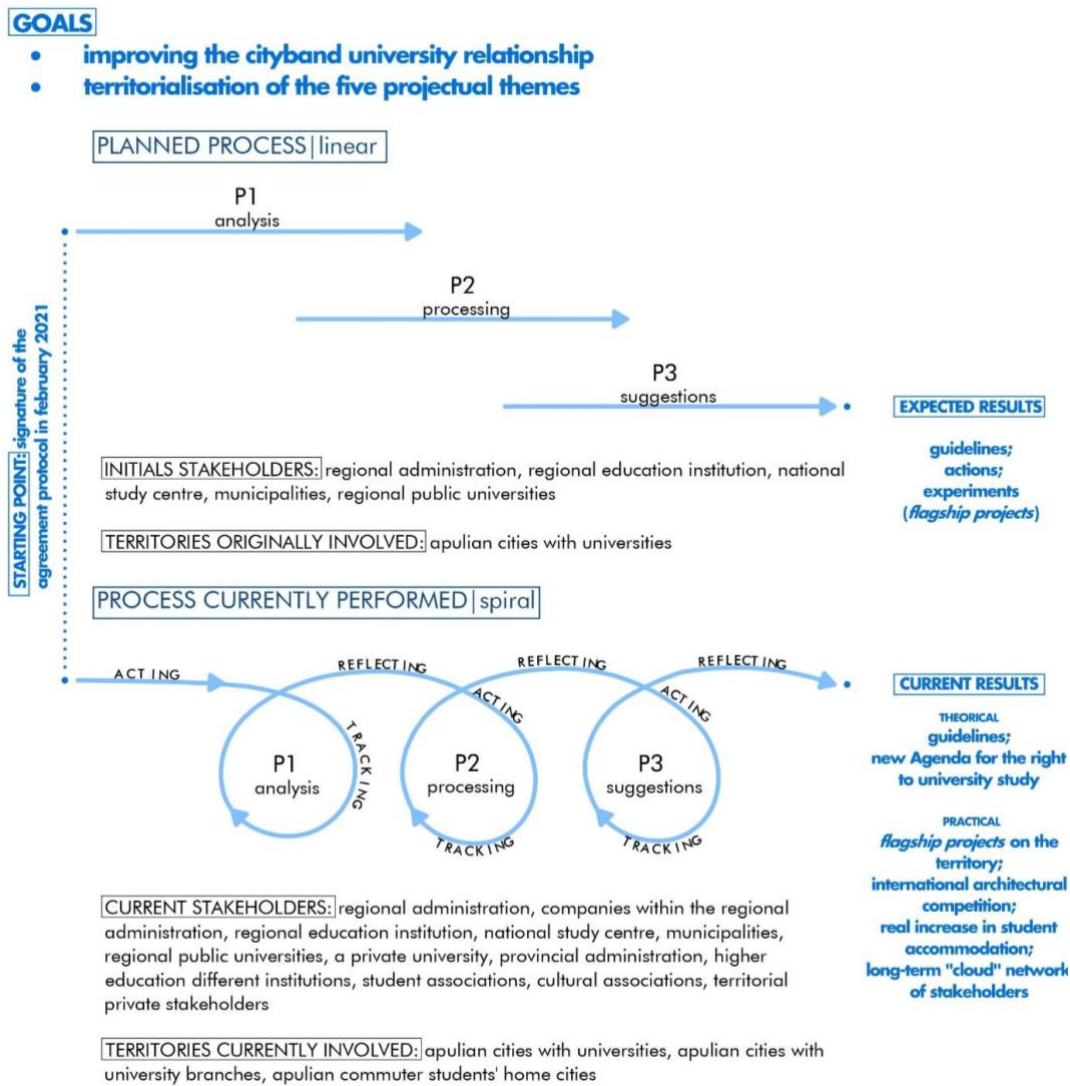


Figure 1| Diagram comparing the planned method and the one actually carried out for *PUGLIA UNIVERSITY REGION*.

Credits: Cristina Danisi, Giovanna Mangialardi.

### 3.3 The Action.

The housing emergency was one of the themes that certainly conditioned research developments in the flagship projects.

First and foremost, an incidental characteristic of the Apulian university system is the presence of commuters and out-of-town students from all over Apulia, in contrast to the very low percentage of out-of-region students and the high percentage of students who enroll in universities outside the region. This problem is particularly acute for municipal administrations. This data intersects with the dynamics of out-of-residence students in Apulia, who have to deal with the housing emergency in the various university cities, which cannot guarantee adequate accommodation for this category of users. Along these lines, the objective of the flagship project “*FUORI SEDE - Design Workshop for the temporary housing of university citizens*”

[Figure 2], which took place in September 2021, was to imagine new spaces and uses for the “E. De Giorgi” University Residence in Lecce, together with the community of students living there and the citizens and neighborhood associations, listening to their ideas and proposals. The protagonists of the initiative were the students and citizens who, through the tools of participatory planning, were involved in a workshop preparatory to planning the extension of the residence. The area outside the residence represents an “urban void” on which there have always been different views on the part of the various stakeholders: the Sud-Est cultural association based in the adjacent Knos Factories, appointed as a workshop leader, conceived of it as a space to be naturalized, giving it new life; the Province of Lecce, which before A.di.S.U. Puglia owned the concession for its use and envisaged a new outdoor sports field; finally, A.di.S.U. showed a willingness to exploit the space to create new student residences. The workshop was an opportunity to dialogue between the various actors and find a meeting point between ideas, needs, and desires. Starting with presenting case studies to explore issues ranging from the design of flexible architectures for temporary use to new sustainable construction methods, the design phase was followed by a discussion with university students, recent graduate designers, and residents of the Salesiani neighborhood in Lecce. The issue of student residences in university towns has produced more immediate results due to the publication of the 5th Ministerial Announcement of L.338/2000<sup>31</sup>, which finances new projects for university student accommodation and residences, to be implemented primarily through the conversion of existing buildings. Following a participatory process of territorial concertation, the municipalities, provinces, and universities formalized their interest in submitting disused public buildings to the 5th Call for Proposals of L. n°338/2000 for the construction of student halls of residence, colleges, and other forms of university housing, as well as facilities and equipment open to citizens, which foster the relationship between university facilities and urban functions. Three of the five design competitions were presented for the construction of student residences in university towns in Apulia on abandoned buildings: the former Carmelite Convent in Lecce [Figure 3], the “Palazzo Frisini” in Taranto and the former “Cassa Mutua Artigiani” in Brindisi. In this case, the action research of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* represented a way to accelerate the procedures regarding one of the most significant territorial emergencies, university housing: this resulted in the decision to carry out the first three of the five planned competitions, which will therefore follow different timetables. The flagship projects on the social housing theme were paved the way by

---

<sup>31</sup> Law of 14.11.2000, n° 338: Provisions on accommodation and residences for university students.

the National Innovative Program for Housing Quality (PINQuA)<sup>32</sup> urban regeneration projects in Lecce, Taranto, and Brindisi. In Lecce, the project envisaged the renovation of the former “Galateo” building [Figure 4] to be used as a social housing complex offering accommodation for families, students, and the elderly through a housing re-functionalization and the creation of multifunctional spaces with aggregative functions for commercial, sports, recreational and cultural activities. In the north wing of the complex, a student dormitory for 20 students is planned, which A.di.S.U. Puglia is willing to manage, intending to experiment with mixed management forms as part of a renewed relationship between the university system and the city, which sees students fully integrated into the city community. The plan for the city of Taranto is to design and implement strategic urban regeneration actions for life quality improvement in large portions of the problematic districts of Paolo VI and “Città Vecchia”. In particular, the project on the “Città Vecchia” [Figure 5] envisages reopening to the public the use of the area surrounding the “Scaletta Calò”, which is now walled up, at the same time as the renovation of an old aristocratic palace to be used as accommodation for university students and the redevelopment of the external areas of the council houses in Via Garibaldi. A.di.S.U. Puglia, through an agreement, will manage the housing service.

A new “University of Brindisi building complex” [Figure 6] has been planned in Brindisi. This will form a social, cultural-historical, and service fabric continuum. In particular, the former building “Marconi” will be used in the project as a residence for off-site university students and visiting professors, and the interior will be rearranged to accommodate rooms for the disabled, single rooms with bathrooms, an administrative area, study rooms, hall-reception, a breakfast room, etc. In addition, the branch of the former “Marconi” Technical Commercial Institute, in Maglie Street, will be used as a university canteen with 150 seats.

The flagship project in the city of Foggia is the digital hub involving the “Miale Barracks” [Figure 7]. It takes the form of a radical regeneration and re-functionalization of the entire urban area. For years, it has been disconnected from most other urban areas and the educational and training activities in the surrounding and neighboring buildings. The “Miale Barracks” is set to become a hub of excellence for innovation, technology transfer, research, and higher education. In this place, a virtuous relationship will be formed between research, cultural growth, innovation, economic development, and social welfare. There, the university, together with its partners, will make available to the territory human resources and knowledge dedicated to a plurality of activities in support of companies operating in the territory, contributing to

---

<sup>32</sup> National Innovative Programme for Housing Quality: financed by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan with EUR 2.8 billion, it aims to reduce suburban decay, make public housing more energy efficient and carry out urban regeneration to improve people's quality of life.

technology transfer and digitalization of young people to support and stimulate them in the creation of start-ups and spin-offs, and of higher education for the benefit of trainers, companies and stakeholders in the territory.

The experimental and innovative services for students with disabilities covered the entire Apulian regional territory. The project started from the document “A two-level accompanying service for students with physical disabilities and SLD in the university pathway”, which analyzes the Disability and SLD Services in the five universities and was drafted by the Scientific Coordinator of the topic “Disability and material and immaterial accessibility of university structures and urban spaces” within *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA*, with the support of the Disability Delegates from the five Apulian universities. It is envisaged to finance innovative projects to foster the socialization and integration of the students mentioned above with the school and local community, facilitating their participation in cultural and sporting and providing artistic opportunities, forms of autonomy, and inclusion. One more action is the increase of social entrepreneurship to ensure personal services, addressing one or more public notices to non-profit private law entities who can offer them.



Figure 2| Working group of the 'Fuori Sede' workshop in Lecce, 2021.  
Credits: PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA w.g.





Figure 3| Render of the winning project of the design competition for a new student residence in the former “Convent of the Carmelitani Scalzi” in Lecce.  
Credits: <https://concorsiawn.it/residenzauniversitaria-lecce/home>.



Figure 4| Render of the winning project of the design competition for the renovation of the “ex Galateo” building, as part of PINQUA.  
Credits: <https://www.leccesocialhousing.it/#risultati>.



Figure 5| The strategies of the project “Re-inhabiting the Old City of Taranto”, within the framework of PINQUA.

Credits: [https://www.mit.gov.it/nfsmitgov/files/media/notizia/2022-04/Rapporto\\_Pinqua\\_web.pdf](https://www.mit.gov.it/nfsmitgov/files/media/notizia/2022-04/Rapporto_Pinqua_web.pdf)



Figure 6| The design of the new “Brindisi University Headquarters” building complex, as part of PINQUA.

Credits: [https://www.mit.gov.it/nfsmitgov/files/media/notizia/2022-04/Rapporto\\_Pinqua\\_web.pdf](https://www.mit.gov.it/nfsmitgov/files/media/notizia/2022-04/Rapporto_Pinqua_web.pdf)





Figure 7| The “Miale Barracks” that will host Foggia's new digital hub.

Credits: <https://www.bonculture.it/urban-politics/investigazioni-e-lezioni-lunifg-rivitalizza-la-caserma-miale-e-il-centro-di-foggia/>

### 3.4 Flagship Project Evaluations.

Sharing the research themes of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* and its flagship projects between the various institutional actors is considered a success factor for the research. To date, municipal administrations have “governed” their city policies, such as mobility, trade, housing, or urban development, without fully considering the presence on their territory of a university student community studying and living in the city. In addition to generating economic flows, this community also conditions urban services and mobility distribution. Using technical tables for each of the five themes of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* allowed all the involved subjects to follow a very clear direction “together”. In this sense, the project has also represented a “wake-up call”, which, until then, had not been “deemed interesting” on issues that would have probably not emerged otherwise; at least, it would have taken longer to explore them. *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA*, therefore, allowed administrations to understand which actions to prioritize, channeling funds and resources to them.

Further strengths were also highlighted: the flagship projects’ innovativeness and methodology are remarkable. Participatory planning, which is one of the key concepts of action research, produced a dialogue between urban and university on a regional scale, also involving student organizations, economic and social forces, managers of urban services,

and cultural associations in the reflection: this is a transversal research approach, which focuses on the welfare of students as citizens. Participatory planning implies a different communication strategy: from the defense of autonomy between universities and the city to an awareness of desirable interdependence. Combining the right to study and the right to the city has led a group of municipalities to reshape proposals currently being drawn up, testing the opportunities that a synergic relationship between residents and students can generate.

Undoubtedly, the housing emergency has played a decisive role in most projects.

One of the most important intentions, which involved the majority of the stakeholders, in addition to ensuring an increase in the number and quality of student housing in Apulia, was to guarantee equal treatment for all students in the region, independent of individual economic possibilities. Student housing, in fact, is a key-vector through which social inequalities can articulate and manifest themselves, reflecting a broader global trend.<sup>33</sup>

Through the flagship projects on housing developed in cooperation with A.di.S.U. Puglia, the aim is to generate an equal condition of well-being and to avoid classism based on economic conditions. This contrasts with the international growth of the commercialisation of the higher education sector and the privatisation of student accommodation, which has led to the emergence of a new type of “purpose-built student accommodation” (PBSA).<sup>34</sup> These are all-inclusive, high-quality student accommodations that have raised the standard and also the price of student housing, managed by private or commercial companies that create and maintain exclusive student communities. Housing for off-campus scholarship holders in Apulia still covers a small part of the demand. Against 1908 beds available in 2019/20, 4274 applications were received. This shortage becomes particularly acute in Bari and Lecce, with more than 50% of those eligible remaining without a bed. Combining the urgency of creating new accommodation places with the sharing policies and expansion of university towns is crucial. There was also often a lack of strategic alignment between the cities and universities before the project started.

Concerning the workshop “*FUORI SEDE*”—off-site—, it must be pointed out that until then, many residents of the Salesian neighborhood were unaware of the intended use of the space of the Student House. Thanks to the collective discussion, this space will now be able to open up to the city and build its evolution together. The participatory planning process applied in defining the new vision of the “E. De Giorgi” student house also

---

<sup>33</sup> Alice Reynolds, "Geographies of Purpose Built Student Accommodation: Exclusivity, Precarity And (Im)Mobility," *Geography Compass* 14, no. 11 (2020): e12543.

<sup>34</sup> Therese Kenna and Ailish Murphy, "Constructing exclusive student communities: The rise of “superior” student accommodation and new geographies of exclusion," *The Geographical Journal* 187 (2021): 138 - 154.



highlighted some limitations that were not apparent until then. In fact, on the one hand, the institutional actors perceived participation in the process as an “institutional duty”. On the other hand, the world of associations and the city's non-institutional actors perceived participatory planning as a top-down process. Subjects who had not been involved in the university city's issues up to that point showed a critical attitude in the initial phase of the process. The expansion and rethinking of a university residence or the conversion of an existing building into a university residence is a process subject to long timescales dictated by bureaucracy and the identification of resources. Added to this is the time required for participatory planning. Time is critical, as financial resources are often tied to very tight deadlines. This is why some university towns in Apulia have been flagship projects, and others have not.

The Lecce context has been a particularly active landscape for *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* pilots: in addition to the workshop “*FUORI SEDE*”, the former “Convent of the Carmelitani Scalzi” being nominated for the 5th Ministerial Announcement of L. n°338/2000 through the design competition. Moreover, with the recovery of the former “Galateo building”, part of the residence will offer student accommodation.

Following the two decrees issued in a few months by the MUR<sup>35</sup> on NRRP<sup>36</sup> resources, a new student residence, “Ex Hotel Zenit” was activated directly by A.di.S.U. Puglia, and through the action of two private individuals, three residences were activated in the hinterland of the Ecotekne University campus, specifically in Arnesano (LE) and Monteroni (LE), and one in the city of Lecce.

#### 4. Discussion.

Action research is a form of self-reflexive investigation,<sup>37</sup> which aims at producing knowledge about a system while trying to change it, implying transformation interventions through a cyclic process of research, action, and evaluation in which those involved are at the same time participants in the research.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, the flagship projects of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* mark the triggering of fundamental transformations in the regional territory at different levels: individual, social, and organizational.<sup>39</sup>

Participatory design processes, national and international calls for

---

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of University and Research.

<sup>36</sup> NRRP - National Recovery and Resilience Plan is the program with which the government manages the funds of the Next Generation Eu. It is the economic recovery and revitalization tool introduced by the European Union to restore pandemic-related losses.

<sup>37</sup> Robin McTaggart, "Participatory Action Research: issues in theory and Practice," *Educational Action Research 2* (1994): 313-337.

<sup>38</sup> Meg Bond and Elizabeth Hart, *Action Research for Health and Social Care* (Open University Press, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> Francesca Falcone, *Lavorare con la ricerca azione* (Rimini: Maggioli, 2016).

tenders for the reconversion of the building stock, and a qualitative/quantitative increase in the number of university accommodation places in Apulia are direct feedback triggered by the project, the development of which was built within the academic boundaries, and then turned to the entire local university and urban community – a university-territory relationship, now, authentically and mutually transformative.<sup>40</sup>

The objectives, clear from the outset, in the desire to create an actual network of relations between the university and urban communities in Apulia, solid over time, sedimentary even after the project itself, and in the declination in the territorial sphere of the five in-depth themes, have guided the entire dynamics of the process, ever since the signing of the memorandum of understanding in 2021. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the spontaneous evolution of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* led the research team never to be satisfied with the obtained results or to slavishly follow the project's expected course but start from the initial planning. Each action was followed by an evaluative reflection, affecting the subsequent course of the various phases. In this way, the initially conceived theoretical and somehow rigid approach has adapted over the project itself. At the same time, the project itself has been “modeled” and updated according to the real impacts of each step. In the transition from the linear process to the spiral one, two years after the start of the project, the group of stakeholders initially involved has largely increased, involving additional agencies such as A.S.S.E.T.<sup>41</sup> and “Puglia Valore Immobiliare”<sup>42</sup>, and new territorial authorities such as some Provinces. This happened because the project spontaneously expanded from its initial prospects, also thanks to the wide dissemination promoted by the institutional partners. By moving from city to city and activating conferences and meetings open to the city, an increasing number of stakeholders became interested and curious about the topics treated, believing that they could make a contribution to the research themselves as well as gain important suggestions. At the same time, the network expanded thanks to the work of the researchers involved, who dealt with the topics in a concrete and direct manner, not just theoretically, interfacing in the first person with the stakeholders and partners they considered most suitable, involving them in the activities. The external stakeholders, both private and public, always showed interest and participation in the project, even launching several experiments in the area as part of the third operational phase (as an example, mention is made of the collaboration with the Cercoalloggio.it digital platform for the “diffuse housing” project in the city of Taranto, conceived in the winter of 2023).

---

<sup>40</sup> Laura Saija, *La ricerca-azione in pianificazione territoriale e urbanistica* (Milano: Franco-Angeli, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> A.S.S.E.T. Regional Strategic Agency for Sustainable Land Development. <http://asset.regione.puglia.it/>.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.pugliavalore.it/>.

As far as the involvement of the territories is concerned, while the initial idea envisaged the participation of the individual cities where a university is located in Apulia, other realities were subsequently voluntarily included in the project, such as Brindisi, which is a branch of the University of Salento and the University of Bari, and some territories that do not directly host university campuses, but are cities of residence of commuting students who, at the regional level, strongly express the need for study venues not only in the cities where they attend the various courses but also in those to which they return at the end of the day or on weekends.

Similarly, the group of university institutions has been enriched and complexified through interaction with several regional A.F.A.M.<sup>43</sup> institutes.

Consequently, even the results initially envisaged, referred in a generic way to guidelines, actions, and experimentations, were later better specified and, at present, refer to a more “theoretical” part—formalized in a new “Agenda for the Right to University Studies”—which delves into the specific objectives of each topic, the macro-areas of intervention and, above all, some hypotheses of action to be taken by subjects such as institutions for the right to study, regional and municipal authorities and universities can carry out on the subject of the university-city relationship, proposed in the light of the results of the analyses carried out—setting up an observatory on university residences, mapping disused urban areas potentially suitable for redevelopment, transforming university buildings into environmentally and energy sustainable buildings, entering into agreements with subsidized rates to encourage the use of public transport, etc. —. The “practical” section, on the other hand, includes all the flagship projects described and the actions useful to sediment in the long term that important “cloud” of relations created between institutions and territories through the project—as an example, setting up permanent consultation tables on the main issues addressed through the project—.

## 5. Concluding Reflections.

The term “action”, in the context of research, marks a specific step of the experimental sequence, specifically referring to the phase of involvement of the workgroup in solving concrete problems and not only “knowledge problems”, making the notions acquired during the analysis applicable, and returning practices aimed at real changes on societies and territories.<sup>44</sup> The PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA project, therefore, could be considered a research action project because it determined changes in realities through an objective and rigorous knowledge of the

---

<sup>43</sup> Higher education in art, music and dance.

<sup>44</sup> Kate Louise Mc Ardle and Peter Reason, "Action research and organization development," in *Handbook of organization development* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2008).

territorial context of the investigation and direct actions on relative territories.<sup>45</sup>

From the reconnaissance presented, aiming to assess the contribution of the flagship projects as an action research phase of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA*, the value that field experimentation has provided to the project can be seen. Indeed, the flagship projects aimed to stimulate dialog and interaction between complementary systems, which usually have difficulty coming into contact: academic institutions and administrations, the student and urban communities, economic and social forces, urban service managers, and cultural associations. The multi-actor approach experienced during the project and the relationships built will hopefully remain a legacy of the project. Sharing these intentions strengthened the common idea and the will to succeed in bridging the gaps present in the area and begin to overcome the major problems detected—for example, the shortage of student accommodation—by looking at the right to study as a right to the city, as a tangible result of the research.

However, not all the workgroups on the five research topics have imagined and implemented concrete projects: the examples described in the previous paragraph represent only a part of the flagship projects that the *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* workgroup has proposed. As an example, the initiatives planned by the workgroup on the topic of culture—like the Festival of Culture—have not been tested yet due to a lack of funds, while the workgroups on the topics of sustainability—mobility and/or energy efficiency— and the right to university study are currently lacking flagship projects, even though topics are greatly relevant and urgent at a world level. The misaligned timing of the research groups has been a limitation of the project, and in some cases, this has been reflected in the actions on the ground.

The resources allocated by the NRRP<sup>46</sup> for the co-financing of actions aimed at acquiring the availability of beds for university students allowed university cities to activate new accommodation places, but without having the necessary time for a participatory planning process, as in the case of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA*.

Administrations still have some limits in sharing strategic choices, such as conditioning university development from an urban and educational point of view. A case is represented by the degree courses that require frequent attendance in university laboratories and facilities—an example, Nursing Sciences—, which are not covered by essential student residence services.

The intention of the third phase of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA* is to strengthen the involvement of local administrations and territories in

---

<sup>45</sup> Laura Saija, *La ricerca-azione in pianificazione territoriale e urbanistica* (Milano: Franco-Angeli, 2016).

<sup>46</sup> NRRP - National Recovery and Resilience Plan is the program with which the government manages the funds of the Next Generation Eu. It is the economic recovery and revitalization tool introduced by the European Union to restore pandemic-related losses.

research, which would otherwise be limited to academic boundaries. This is not only about five universities collaborating in scientific research and knowledge exchange but also interacting and confronting the five university cities to give concrete feedback to the developed reflections. Similarly, involving administrations and other territorial stakeholders, the aim is to provide guidelines on the right to study to channel resources and funds in the best possible way, pursuing the mission of increasing Apulia's attractiveness as a university region. The data obtained from the outcomes of the flagship projects of *PUGLIA REGIONE UNIVERSITARIA*<sup>47</sup> were collected and analyzed only qualitatively and are accessible from the website dedicated to the project. Future research will allow clustering of the contents, highlighting the actors involved, places, areas, and themes, and the state of progress of the research, also attempting to monitor the impacts in the medium to long term.

### Attributions

The contribution is the result of a joint reflection by the authors. In particular it is attributed to: G. Mangialardi the “UNIVERSITIES AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION” chapter; to C. Danisi the “ACTION RESEARCH. SOME EXAMPLES” chapter; to A. Maroccia the “a. The research” paragraph; to G. Mangialardi the “b. The method” paragraph; to M. Cataldo the “c. The action” paragraph; to M. Cataldo and C. Danisi the “d. Flagship Project evaluations” paragraph; to C. Danisi the “DISCUSSION” chapter; to G. Mangialardi the “CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS” chapter.

### References

Bond, Meg, and Elizabeth Hart. *Action Research for Health and Social Care*. Open University Press, 1995.

Bradbury, Hilary, and Peter Reason. *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice*. 2. Londra: SAGE, 2008.

Ceracchi, Mattia. "APRE - Agenzia per la promozione della ricerca europea." *www.apre.it*. 2021.  
<https://apre.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/guida-Horizon-Europe.pdf>.

Chisholm, Rupert F. "Action research to develop an interorganizational network." In *Handbook of Action Research*, by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, 324–332. Londra: SAGE, 2001.

---

<sup>47</sup> <https://regioneuniversitaria.puglia.it/progetti-bandiera/>.

Coghlan, David, and N S Rashford. *The Dynamics of Organizational Levels: A Change Framework for Managers and Consultants*. Boston: Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994.

Coghlan, David, and Teresa Brannik. *Doing action research in your own organization*. Londra: SAGE, 2005.

Danisi, Cristina, Giovanna Mangialardi, Alessandra Maroccia, and Angelica Triggiano. "Nuove forme di progettualità condivise. Il progetto Puglia Regione Universitaria." *"Dare valore ai valori in urbanistica" XXVI Conferenza Scientifica SIU Brescia 2022*. Roma-Milano: Planum Publisher e SIU, 2023.

Dubost, Jean, and André Lévy. "Ricerca-azione e intervento." In *Dizionario di psicologia*, by Jacqueline Barus-Michel, Eugène Enriquez and André Lévy, 377-402. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2005.

Falcone, Francesca. *Lavorare con la ricerca azione*. Rimini: Maggioli, 2016.

Foster, Michael. "An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Action Research in Work Organizations." *Human Relations* (SAGE) 25 (1972): 529-556.

Gregory, James J, and Jayne M Rogerson. "Studentification and commodification of student lifestyle in Braamfontein, Johannesburg." *Urbani Izziv* (Urbanistični inštitut Republike Slovenije) 30 (2019): 178-193.

Kemmis, Stephen, Robin McTaggart, and Rhonda Nixon. *The Action Research Planner. Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*. Singapore: Springer, 2014.

Kenna, Therese, and Ailish Murphy. "Constructing exclusive student communities: The rise of "superior" student accommodation and new geographies of exclusion." *The Geographical Journal* 187 (2021): 138 - 154.

Lewin, Kurt. "Action research and minority problems." *Journal of social issues* (Omaha: University of Nebraska) 2.4 (1946): 34-46.

Mangialardi, Giovanna, Nicola Martinelli, and Angelica Triggiano. "Rigenerazione urbana nelle città universitarie tra Student e Social Housing. Il caso dell'Ex Ospedale Sanatoriale 'A. Galateo' a Lecce." Edited by Michelangelo Savino and Patrizia Messina. *Regional Studies and Urban Development* (Padova University Press), 2022: 43-64.

Martinelli, Nicola. "Diritto allo studio e diritto di cittadinanza nel rapporto università-città." *Territorio* 73 (2015): 94-99.

- . *Spazi della conoscenza. Università, città e territori*. Bari: ADDA, 2012.
- McArdle, Kate Louise, and Peter Reason. "Action research and organization development." In *Handbook of organization development*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2008.
- McTaggart, Robin. "Participatory Action Research: issues in theory and Practice." *Educational Action Research* 2 (1994): 313-337.
- Novelli, Maurizio, and Giuseppe Talamo. *La Terza Missione per l'Università Italiana. Una nuova occasione per crescere?* Roma: Università di Roma Tor Vergata, 2014.
- Peters, Michael, and Vivienne Robinson. "The Origins and Status of Action Research." *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 20 (1984): 113-124.
- Revington, Nick, and Alexander James David Wray. "Land-Use Planning Approaches to Near-Campus Neighborhoods and Student Housing Development Patterns in Ontario, Canada." *Housing Policy Debate* (Routledge), 2022: 1-27.
- Reynolds, Alice. "Geographies of purpose built student accommodation: Exclusivity, precarity and (im)mobility." *Geography Compass* 14, no. 11 (2020): e12543.
- Romagno, Marilisa. "Sostenibilità urbana: a Cuneo un progetto pilota per l'efficienza energetica dei centri storici." *www.alternativasostenibile.it*. Marzo 22, 2019.  
<https://www.alternativasostenibile.it/articolo/sostenibilit%C3%A0-urbana-cuneo-un-progetto-pilota-lefficienza-energetica-dei-centri-storici>.
- Saija, Laura. *La ricerca-azione in pianificazione territoriale e urbanistica*. Milano: Franco-Angeli, 2016.