

# *Universities in the fight against mafias*

*Research, teaching and training*

Edited by Stefano D'Alfonso and Gaetano Manfredi

Federico II University Press



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Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

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*Universities in the fight against mafias. Research, teaching and training*, translation of the book, S. D'Alfonso e G. Manfredi (edited by), *L'università nella lotta alle mafie. La ricerca e la formazione*, Donzelli Publisher, 2021, Collection «Mafie e corruzione», directed by Stefano D'Alfonso and Rocco Sciarrone

This book has been published in partnership with



*Scientific committee*

Antonio Acconcia, Giuseppe Amarelli, Luciano Brancaccio, Paolo Canonico, Vincenzo Caputo, Carolina Castellano, Stefano Consiglio, Daniela De Leo, Ernesto De Nito, Serena Forlati, Gabriella Gribaudi, Gaetano Manfredi, Gianluigi Mangia, Vittorio Mete, Giuseppe Muti, Michelangelo Pascali, Ferdinando Pinto, Maura Ranieri, Attilio Scaglione, Pasquale Sabbatino, Giovanni Starace, Andrea Tomo, Alberto Vannucci, Anna Maria Zaccaria

This publication is part of the research project co-funded by the Parliamentary committee of inquiry into mafia-related and other criminal organisations, including foreign ones, and the University of Naples Federico II as an implementation step of the memorandum of understanding signed by the Committee and the CRUI.

As indicated in the forthcoming pages, this research was conducted in partnership with the CRUI, the anti-mafia parliamentary committee and the ministry of University and Research when this was led by ministry and Professor Gaetano Manfredi.

The person in charge of this research project is Professor Stefano D'Alfonso and the activity has been developed within the operations of the interdisciplinary research lab on mafias and corruption (Lirmac) of the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Naples Federico II in partnership with numerous professors of other Italian universities.

The book cover shows a section of the fresco of the Federico II University Board Room from the early 1900s. The artist is Gaetano D'Agostino. The subject depicted is the great historical ride of 1615, with the University's move from the convent of San Domenico Maggiore to the Palace of Studies. The city enters the Academy.

The photograph on the cover is by Professor Isabella Valente, published in the cultural heritage portal (porbec.it), in the Federico II section – Università dell'arte.

This English edition has been translated from the Italian by Daniele Lombardi and Alessio Mirarchi.

Universities in the fight against mafias : Research, teaching and training /  
Edited by Stefano D'Alfonso and Gaetano Manfredi. – Napoli : FedOAPress,  
2022. – 223 p. ; 24 cm.

Accesso alla versione elettronica: <http://www.fedoabooks.unina.it>

ISBN: 978-88-6887-145-1

DOI: 10.6093/978-88-6887-145-1

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Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II  
Centro di Ateneo per le Biblioteche “Roberto Pettorino”  
Piazza Bellini 59-60  
80138 Napoli, Italy  
<http://www.fedoapress.unina.it/>  
Published in Italy  
Prima edizione: ottobre 2022

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A second point to consider is the apparent territorial concentration of the initiatives hereby taken into account which shows a certain importance of bigger cities. The presence of research groups where research and studies have long been linked to the subjects of mafias and corruption represents a strength and their link to mega and large universities located in bigger cities certainly entails some advantages in terms of infrastructure endowment, services available, visibility and centrality in the academic world. However, anywhere they operate, these groups represent a valuable social capital which would probably need to be acknowledged and fuelled to a greater extent. It seems, in fact, that the potential of research and study networks is underused, at least in terms of a more granular penetration in territories and academic disciplines. This angle necessarily needs to take into consideration the resistance shown in terms of structures, economic and disciplinary aspects. Nevertheless, this objective would need to be pursued with the aim of pulling down barriers and build synergies while also maintaining the specific features of each methodological and theoretical vision in the approach to the subject of mafias. This is a field where Italian universities have often demonstrated complete mastery. This kind of approach is even more necessary if we consider the pervasiveness of mafias in territories, economies and social structures.

*5. Limits and potential of the university system in the field of organised crime\**

The data we have just presented allow us to measure the contribution of Italian universities in the fight against mafias and corruption in terms of education, research activities and commitment. To sum up, as for teaching activities, it seems clear that the offer of courses is mainly concentrated in certain academic disciplines and in postgraduate degree courses. Multidisciplinary approaches are more frequent in the field of law, social and political disciplines. It is the mega universities of northern Italy that present the most significant teaching offer. In addition, the so-called hard sciences do not present any teaching programmes dedicated to the mafia and corruption phenomena, despite a considerable sectoral scientific production.

\* This paper has been written by Anna Maria Zaccaria and Stefano D'Alfonso.



## II. Teaching programmes and higher education in the field of organised crime

With regards to postgraduate training, alongside the presence of a well-established PhD, a substantially fluctuating figure indicates a significant degree of mortality of master's degrees. More generally, the offer of higher education showed some recovery in the two-year period 2018-2020, especially in the Centre and in the South, but was concentrated in a few universities. As for laboratories and research centres, most of the facilities are located in mega, large and small universities. In some cases, there is more than one laboratory, regardless of the size of the university. What should be emphasised is the leading role played by lecturers and researchers, who often involve new recruits: PhDs, postdocs and doctoral students. Interdisciplinarity and the tendency to develop inter-university collaborative networks emerge as distinctive features of these facilities.

In light of the above it is possible to elaborate a few thoughts of a general nature. Firstly, it seems clear that there is a mismatch between the intense research activity on the subject of mafias and corruption and the low presence of specific teaching programmes within degree courses. This can be explained by looking at what were previously called «endogenous factors» which are dependent on structural components of the university system such as regulatory aspects, the organisation of teaching, the organisational choices of each university. However, only a more detailed analysis considering other aspects could explain more convincingly this sort of divergence which seems to suggest that universities are focused on their role as containers of activities performed by their lecturers rather than on their function as organisations that could deploy instruments and strategies for the fight against mafias and corruption.

A second point to consider concerns the low degree of territorial distribution of universities that gear their teaching offer towards the subjects hereby considered. On the one hand, these activities are concentrated in mega and large universities while on the other, this concentration is clearly more considerable in the universities of the North. Also in this case, several components come into play alongside endogenous factors intertwined with exogenous and agency-type ones. In particular, it seems important to consider the peculiarities of each local context and the issue of the visibility of universities. Assuming that the presence, in a certain university, of teams of scholars linking their research and studies to the subjects of mafia and corruption undoubtedly represents a strength, the data collected tell us that these teams are connected to mega and large universities located in big cities. This is a position of relative advantage, at least in terms of infrastructure endowment, services available and centrality of collaboration networks at the crossroads between different disciplines and research strands. All of

the above generates a virtuous cycle which, on the one hand, increases visibility for these universities and research groups and on the other facilitates the growth of the networks of research. This is what Merton defined as the Matthew effect<sup>31</sup>, namely a cumulative advantage implying that the various opportunities for scientific research tend to accumulate in certain scholars or scientific organisations. The reputation of universities, and probably also the reliability of their lecturers in terms of exchange of knowledge represents leverage for further development of study and research activities<sup>32</sup>. This also concerns the identity of a university which may define itself as more or less local, national or international, with a subsequent fallout on its visibility and external perception by the outer world. Local contexts, as previously mentioned, therefore have a certain weight not only in terms of socio-cultural features but also with regards to the demand for knowledge produced by universities and potentially expressed by social or public organisations who may use it as a tool for the fight against illegality.

Therefore, a reflection on the results of this research cannot be exempt from considering the combined effects of a series of factors. Reputation and visibility, dynamicity of the context, features of the university, quality of research and of the teaching offer all interact not so much in the formation of a hierarchy of universities committed to the fight against mafias and corruption, but rather in outlining different interaction modes between the university and the local context<sup>33</sup>, which may be defined as hybrid engagement. In the specific case of interest here, despite the limits imposed by the chosen methods and the fragmentation of data, the results of this research highlight well the various forms of commitment on the part of our universities in the fight against mafias and corruption. This seems to suggest the need for simultaneously specific and universal policies, tailored to the characteristics of each university and able to stimulate more widespread commitment in territories. This is also true when looked at in terms of the considerable capital of knowledge that Italian universities possess, a

<sup>31</sup> R. K. Merton, *The Matthew effect in science, II. Cumulative advantage and the symbolism of intellectual property*, in «History of Science Society», LXXIX, 1988, 4, pp. 606-23

<sup>32</sup> A. Gherardini, *Produzione scientifica e valorizzazione economica*, in Regini - Trigilia, (edited by), *Università e innovazione. Il contributo degli atenei italiani allo sviluppo regionale* cit., pp. 61-92: 89

<sup>33</sup> F. Kitagawa, M. Sanchez Barrioluengo, E. Uyarra, *Third mission as institutional strategies: Between isomorphic forces and heterogeneous pathways*, in «Science and Public Policy», XLIII, 2016, 6, pp. 736-50

## II. Teaching programmes and higher education in the field of organised crime

sort of «hidden treasure»<sup>34</sup> which is often underused especially in contexts with varying valorisation abilities.

It is in this context that we can place a recent experience, developed in the university context, with which we would like to conclude these comments. The aim of this experience is to ‘systemise’ the university’s scientific, educational and third-mission commitment on the subject of mafias, within the framework of the transmission of knowledge between soft-skills and lifelong learning. It is an initiative developed within the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into mafia-related and other criminal organisations, including foreign ones, which deals with the relationship between professionals and mafia organisations<sup>35</sup>. An ad hoc analysis has shown not only the dynamics characterising the phenomena of compromise between some professional categories and mafia groups, but also various critical points in terms of the deontological references and values of professionals, in particular those in the self-employed sector. In the light of this, specific fields of action were identified in which the university could make its contribution, starting, first and foremost, from the awareness of its role in the training of young students as future professionals, and of the potential cognitive support for the professionals themselves, within the deontological training courses planned by the professional orders and colleges, particularly those most interested in the phenomenon.

In terms of the university mission, therefore, the action straddled the gap between the first and third mission. These aims have found a specific location in an online freely accessible Mooc (Massive Open Online Course)<sup>36</sup>. In view of the special nature of the course content and its objectives, two teaching models were chosen that can be described in terms of soft-skills and lifelong learning. The transversal dimension of the topics dealt with in the online course justified the choice of not framing it in a specific discipline or teaching field. This choice was also supported by the aforementioned survey carried out by the Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Committee, which showed that compromise (or collusion), ascertained for example through convictions of mafia crimes in the courts or in

<sup>34</sup> C. Trigilia, *La terza missione e le risorse latenti degli atenei italiani* cit.

<sup>35</sup> See D’Alfonso, De Chiara, Manfredi, *Mafie e libere professioni. Come riconoscere e contrastare l’area grigia* cit.

<sup>36</sup> The course is called *Mafie e professioni: quale contrasto?* Designed and delivered by S. D’Alfonso, A. De Chiara and G. Manfredi, in the Mooc platform Federica Web Learning owned by the university Federico II, website: federica.eu

disciplinary proceedings by professional bodies, affects various professional categories: accountants, lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects and notaries<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, the soft-skills approach can meet the potential interest of several degree courses, possibly chosen by universities that are located in territories where mafias operate and where a higher 'job risk' has been detected. The lifelong learning perspective can respond to a demand for information and in-depth study for the entire span of (professional) life, offering a complementary dimension to the strictly technical-specialist one, rather deontological – if looked at in terms of university credits (Cfu/ECTS) –, which includes respect for the regulations of the professions such as, for example, honour, dignity, reputation of individuals and categories or, more specifically, of the professional orders in which one is registered.

This is obviously an experiment that tests a 'base' on which to imagine a dynamic contribution that the academy could offer to students, the world of the professions and society as a whole, enhancing its role in transmitting the values of legality, with a competent and specialised focus on professional activities.

<sup>37</sup> Obviously, it is not in our interest to quantify and analyse here the phenomenon looking at the overall number of professionals, which is quite low. Nevertheless, this marginal phenomenon is highly critical if we look at it in terms of the contribution it makes to the establishment and development of Mafia organisations.

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The commitment of Italian universities to education in the field of legality and to research on the subject of mafias is the main focus of this investigation edited by Stefano D'Alfonso and Gaetano Manfredi. For the first time, data is shown about the overall framework of teaching and research activities dedicated to this topic, with twenty-nine scholars from different academic disciplines and several universities who come together to reflect on the current situation and on the commitment of universities in the fight against mafias, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses of the system. The reflections illustrated here bring to light the dynamic nature of the local and cultural context where universities operate as well as the type of interaction that these institutions maintain with the national and local context. At the same time, it seems clear that great expectations are held at various levels in terms of what universities could do, especially with regards to the demand for knowledge about the best ways to fight mafias. This research reveals that Italian universities possess a considerable capital of knowledge which represents a 'hidden treasure' to be valued and used with the aim of promoting widespread awareness of their role in the anti-mafia field.

This book is the result of cooperation between many university professors and researchers, the Parliamentary anti-mafia Committee, the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) and former minister of University and Research Gaetano Manfredi, under the supervision and coordination of the interdisciplinary research laboratory on mafias and corruption (Lirmac) of the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Naples Federico II. This network of professionals and institutions enabled the construction of a significant database where teaching and research activities carried out by scholars from different universities can be identified, across about one hundred academic disciplines spanning from Sociology to Law, from History to Economics.

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ISBN 978-88-6887-145-1  
DOI 10.6093/978-88-6887-145-1

