



**Inauguration Ceremony of the 2024-2025 Academic Year
Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the University of Foggia**

**Address by the Rector
Lorenzo Lo Muzio**

Distinguished Minister, Father Paolo Benanti, Authorities, Esteemed Rectors, Deputy Rectors and their Delegates, Esteemed Faculty, Technical and Administrative Staff, Library Staff, and Foreign Language Instructors, Dear Alumni and Students, Honored Guests,

With profound emotion and sincere gratitude, I welcome you to the inauguration ceremony of the 2024/2025 academic year, which marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of our University on August 5, 1999.

I would like to begin my speech by thanking the Rectors and all those attending this ceremony, whose participation reflects the strong bonds of friendship, esteem, and collaboration that unite our institutions. Your presence is a source of pride and recognition of the development of the University of Foggia over these first twenty-five years, establishing itself as a dynamic and vital presence in the national academic sphere.

I would like to express my gratitude to those who, over time, have contributed to the building and consolidation of our university: institutions, organizations, political, economic, and social forces, the regional community, as well as the media and the press, whose role has been fundamental in making our activities known in the area, highlighting the achievements and commitment of our academic community.

Let me also extend my gratitude to the distinguished guests who honour us with their presence today: the Minister of Healthcare, Professor Orazio Schillaci, and Father Paolo Benanti, whose participation enriches this day of reflection and celebration, strengthening the dialogue between the University, institutions, and our society.

Finally, on this significant day, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have contributed to the history of our University, beginning with those who preceded me in this prestigious role: Professor Antonio Muscio, the first Rector and one of the key figures in the founding of the University of Foggia, as well as Professors Giuliano Volpe, Maurizio Ricci, and Pierpaolo Limone, who have led the University during crucial moments of its growth, each offering their unique contribution with passion, strategic vision, and determination.

Sincere thanks go to the Deputy Rectors, the Deans of the Faculties both before and after the reform, the Heads of Department, the members of the governing bodies, the Rector's delegates, the Administrative Directors and Directors General, and the Executives.

Allow me to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Sandro Spataro, the new Director General of our University, along with my sincerest wishes for success in his work. We are confident that he will build on the excellent work done in the past by Dr. Teresa Romei, the outgoing Director General, and by the Administrative Directors Giorgio De Santis, Antonella Bianconi, Guido Croci, and Costantino Quartucci. Thanks to their efforts, our University can look with pride at the achievements we have reached and with renewed confidence toward the challenges ahead.

The core of our University is, and will always remain, the people who, every day, with expertise and unwavering dedication, invigorate both the academic and administrative spheres. I extend my deepest and most sincere gratitude to the 785 members of our academic community: 428 faculty members and 357 technical, administrative, and library staff, whose contributions have consistently ensured the excellence of our teaching and research activities.

I also express my thanks to the students who have selected our University as the foundation for their personal growth, academic development, and future aspirations. Today, we are proud to have surpassed 14,000 enrolled students, alongside our Ph.d candidates, specialists, and 35,000 graduates, who carry the name of the University of Foggia with pride across the globe, representing our greatest accomplishment.

With the collective effort of all, I am confident that our University will continue to serve as a beacon of culture, justice, education, and innovation - an indispensable model for the local community and well beyond its borders.

While twenty-five years may seem like a brief period in comparison to the history of many other Italian and European universities, the path undertaken by the University of Foggia demonstrates that, even in a relatively short time, significant achievements can be reached.

Over these years, we have contributed to the education of thousands of young people, the production of innovative research serving society, the development of this region, as well as the strengthening of productive relationships within both national and international contexts.

The context in which we live has undergone profound changes compared to the context in which our University was founded. In recent decades, society has experienced epoch-making transformations that have altered our ways of living, working, learning, and communicating.

Conflicts, technological innovations, new economic dynamics, geopolitical and climate changes, population aging, and social inequalities are just some of the challenges we face. In this complex scenario, the University is called upon to redefine its role and mission. We can no longer limit ourselves to being a place solely dedicated to the transmission of knowledge and scientific research.

Today, more than ever, universities must play an active role in building a fair, inclusive, and sustainable society. We must promote the respect for human dignity, the centrality of the individual, solidarity and inclusion, responsible innovation, and collective well-being.

In this context, “care” - the theme chosen to accompany the celebrations of this significant anniversary - assumes a pivotal role as one of the guiding values to consider in order to restart and design a new phase of renewal.

Care is not a unidirectional process, but rather a circular and systemic action that begins with the individual and returns to them, traversing communities, institutions, and, inevitably, also moments of crisis.

These first two years of my rectorship have been particularly demanding, marked by challenges that have forced us to look beyond the surface, uncovering contradictions and vulnerabilities that, in times of political stability, often remain unseen. It is precisely during moments of institutional crisis that care reveals itself as a mirror

capable of reflecting the need for change, and through listening, sharing, and action, it becomes a valuable opportunity for regeneration.

Today, I am particularly pleased with the renewed harmony attained in collaboration with the Heads of Department, to whom I express my sincere gratitude for their capacity for constructive dialogue, their unwavering commitment, and the deep sense of responsibility they have consistently demonstrated toward our academic community.

Care is, therefore, not merely an action or a symbolic gesture, but an invitation to reflect on how our University can and must engage with society - specifically, from a more human and inclusive perspective. Care forms the very foundation of human existence, preceding every behaviour and every relationship we cultivate with others and with the world around us.

Drawing on the words of Pope Francis, "If we wish to rebuild hope, we must abandon the languages, gestures, and choices inspired by selfishness and learn the language of love, which is care. Caring is a new language, one that stands in opposition to the languages of selfishness. This is our commitment: to care for our lives, our time, our souls; to care for creation and the environment in which we live".

In this regard, care must become the fundamental force that sustains our educational and social mission toward future generations, ensuring that they inherit not only a cultural and scientific legacy, but also the core values and competencies necessary to confront the challenges ahead. By cultivating care for individuals, relationships, and the environment, we aim to foster in young people the capacity for critical thinking, to nurture their intellectual curiosity and creativity, to promote independent judgment and open-mindedness, and to encourage them to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of the contemporary world with courage and resilience. In this process, they must not only seek answers, but also pose new questions that foster dialogue, the exchange of ideas, and contribute to scientific and cultural advancement.

This is the task we intend to undertake today, fully aware of the responsibilities arising from our history and identity, which define us as a free, open, and pluralistic institution at the service of the region and our country.

The achievements attained across various fields, from teaching to research and extending to collaboration with local businesses, companies and organizations, are truly numerous. It would be impossible to list them comprehensively on this occasion.

Therefore, I invite you to consult the monograph and the University's website for further details.

However, today is also a moment for responsible reflection on what remains unaccomplished and on which we must focus to embark on a new path of growth. Understanding and analysing the evolution of our University over these 25 years of history is an essential key to addressing the challenges of the present and shaping the direction of the future.

Through the analysis of our path, we can better understand the needs of society, identify priorities, and develop solutions that effectively address today's challenges, while remaining mindful of future solutions.

It is an exercise in memory and vision, a balance between grounding in the present and projecting toward the future, which should guide every strategic decision within the framework of collegial and shared planning, inspired by the principles of responsibility, coherence, and sustainability.

The University of Foggia serves as a strategic beacon for the region, thanks to a well-established network of relationships and initiatives that have enabled it to achieve recognition in major international rankings.

The University is committed to continuous growth, with an increasing focus on innovation and ongoing improvement, aiming to effectively respond to ever-evolving socio-economic dynamics.

The programmatic guidelines outlined in the University's strategic development documents emphasize, first and foremost, the inseparability of teaching, research, internationalization, and collaboration with local businesses, companies and organizations, owing to their strong interconnection.

Our degree courses must, in the future, enhance their attractiveness and flexibility in order to nurture local talent and promote the development of advanced and cross-disciplinary skills in emerging sectors that align with labour market demands.

The definition of development objectives should not be confined solely to the academic dimension, but should actively and constructively engage the region, local institutions, and key stakeholders. This synergy, which has recently driven significant cultural, social, and economic transformations, must identify its driving force in advanced scientific research. It must also seek opportunities to strengthen our role as a catalyst for change through national and European funding programs.

If we were to succinctly summarize our future development strategy, three fundamental concepts would distinctly characterize it: identity, excellence, and innovation. Identity serves as the foundation for affirming, through our core values and historical legacy, the connection between what we are and what we aspire to become, both as individuals and as a community. Excellence denotes our steadfast commitment to achieving and maintaining high standards of quality in education, research, and collaboration with local businesses, companies, and organizations. Innovation primarily entails a process of attentive listening and openness to the global context, anticipating changes, and demonstrating the courage to embrace change.

Together, these elements embody our ambition to be a distinctive institution - a university with both the ability and determination to make a meaningful difference not only in the academic sphere, but also in the society and region we serve. We strive to be a community of thought and action, committed to creating a tangible impact that leaves a lasting legacy for future generations.

With this hope, and with immense joy and boundless pride, I hereby officially declare the 2024/2025 academic year open.