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<AI4YE>
<<AI for Young Entrepreneurships>>

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

AI for Young Entrepreneurship in Reggio Calabria / Italy

Project Overview

Project Title: AI for Young Entrepreneurship in Italy
Program: Erasmus+
Action Type: KA210-YOU - Small-scale partnerships in youth (KA210-YOU)
Field: Youth
Project Acronym: AI4YE

Current Situation Field Research

Research Duration: 6 months

General Introduction to Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the greatest technological revolutions of the 21st century. It is not just a branch of computer science, but a convergence of advanced technologies capable of replicating—and in some cases exceeding—human cognitive abilities: recognizing images, understanding natural language, solving complex problems, and making autonomous decisions.

AI is already being applied in a wide range of sectors, including healthcare, mobility, manufacturing, marketing, agriculture, and education. In recent years, the integration of AI into business processes and innovation models has become a strategic factor, particularly for young entrepreneurs seeking innovative, sustainable, and digitally advanced solutions.

The European project **AI4YE – Artificial Intelligence for Young Entrepreneurship**, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, fits within this framework. Its goal is to promote access to technological innovation, strengthen digital skills, and stimulate entrepreneurial creativity among young Europeans. This field research, conducted in Italy with a focus on the Calabria region, explores the current state of AI adoption among young entrepreneurs, aiming to identify challenges, good practices, and strategic levers for sustainable and ethical integration of Artificial Intelligence.

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Current Context in Italy and Calabria

Italy ranks among the European countries with good potential in the field of Artificial Intelligence adoption, but significant territorial disparities persist. Northern regions such as Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, and Lazio are home to more mature innovation ecosystems supported by universities, public and private investment, and well-developed startup infrastructures.

In Southern Italy, the spread of AI is advancing more slowly. Specifically, the **Calabria Region**—despite having a high youth potential—faces several challenges, including limited digital

infrastructure, a lack of structured support networks for innovation, and insufficient advanced technical training. However, this very context offers strategic opportunities: AI can become a powerful lever to revitalize local entrepreneurship, especially in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, culture, healthcare, and craftsmanship.

The growing availability of accessible AI tools (e.g., chatbots, smart CRMs, predictive analytics software) can help young Calabrian entrepreneurs to digitally transform their businesses. However, this technological advancement must be accompanied by targeted and inclusive education policies to ensure real impact.

Research Objectives

This research, carried out within the framework of the **AI4YE – Artificial Intelligence for Young Entrepreneurship** project, aims to:

- Analyze the level of awareness, use, and perception of AI among young entrepreneurs in Calabria (aged 18–30);
- Identify the main **barriers** to integrating AI into youth entrepreneurial activities;
- Explore the **training needs** related to AI skills, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas;
- Collect concrete **good practices** in the application of AI in both local and national entrepreneurial contexts;
- Investigate the degree of **ethical and environmental awareness** associated with AI use;
- Provide **practical recommendations** to promote sustainable and ethical adoption of AI through training programs, mentoring, and supportive public policies.

Methodology

The research adopted a **mixed-methods approach**, combining **quantitative** and **qualitative** tools over a 6-month period (January–June 2025). The investigation focused on the Calabria Region and involved **young entrepreneurs, startups, trainers, business incubators**, and **AI experts**.

The research activities were structured in the following phases:

- **Distribution of digital questionnaires**, both structured and semi-structured;

- **Individual interviews** with entrepreneurs, AI specialists, and local institutional representatives;
- **Focus groups** held at two business incubators (Reggio Calabria and Cosenza);
- **Participant observation** during training events and digital innovation workshops;
- **Case study analysis** on Italian startups actively using AI solutions;

Data Collection Tools

To gather reliable and diverse data, the research employed **multiple tools**, designed to provide both a quantitative and qualitative overview of the phenomenon. Specifically, the following were used:

- **Digital questionnaires** distributed to 60 young entrepreneurs in Calabria, covering: demographic information, AI usage, training needs, ethical perspectives, and environmental impact;
- **Semi-structured interviews** (7 in total) with local entrepreneurs working in agriculture, tourism, technology, culture, and education;
- **Focus groups** held in two business incubators (Reggio Calabria and Cosenza), involving 12 participants including startup founders, trainers, and consultants;
- **Case studies** on 6 Calabrian startups and 4 Italian startups using AI in innovative and replicable ways;
- **Participant observation** during thematic events and workshops on AI, sustainability, and digital entrepreneurship;
- **Document analysis** of Italian and regional public policies supporting youth innovation and entrepreneurship.

Interview Questions

During the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked the following key questions to explore the role of Artificial Intelligence in the local entrepreneurial ecosystem:

1. **How has Artificial Intelligence influenced your business operations?**
2. **What are the main obstacles to adopting AI in your sector?**
3. **What types of support could help young entrepreneurs integrate AI more effectively?**

The responses provided valuable insights into AI usage in micro-enterprises and highlighted the priority skills needed by young Calabrian entrepreneurs.

1. Demographic Data and Background

This section of the questionnaire helped outline the sociographic profile of participants. The questions included:

- Age
- Gender
- Level of education
- Do you have entrepreneurial experience?
- In which sector do you work?

2. Use of AI

These questions aimed to assess the level of AI adoption and the tools in use:

- Do you use Artificial Intelligence in your business?
- What AI-based tools or technologies do you use?
- What kind of training or support do you need regarding AI?
- In which areas of your business do you use AI?

3. Challenges in AI Integration

This section explored perceived barriers and ethical and environmental considerations:

- How much do you trust AI?
- Do you think AI could replace your job?
- What is the biggest challenge you face in integrating AI?
- Have you regularly considered the environmental implications of using AI in your business?
- How do you think AI can contribute to sustainable practices in your business?
- Do you believe your use of AI raises ethical concerns?
- What ethical considerations do you think are most important when integrating AI into your business?

4. Opportunities and Future Expectations

The final questions aimed to understand young entrepreneurs' views on the future of AI:

- What is your opinion on AI-driven entrepreneurship in your country?
- Is AI an advantage or a disadvantage for young entrepreneurs? Why?
- How do you think AI technologies will contribute to the growth of your business?
- How should the public/private sector support AI-related youth entrepreneurship?
-
- **Ethical concerns**: participants expressed interest in algorithm transparency, personal data protection, and the risk of technological dependence on large international platforms;

- **Skills and training opportunities**: there was a strong demand for short, practical, and localized courses to learn how to use concrete AI tools (e.g., content generation, predictive CRMs, chatbots);
- **Environmental awareness**: some participants highlighted the need to assess the environmental impact of AI, especially the energy consumption associated with servers and machine learning models;
- **AI education starting in schools**: the introduction of AI into secondary education and vocational training was proposed to foster an ethical and inclusive digital culture.

Focus Group Themes

During the focus groups held in Reggio Calabria and Cosenza, several key themes emerged regarding the adoption of AI among young entrepreneurs in the region. The main discussion points included:

- **Trends in AI adoption among local micro and small enterprises**: participants showed increasing interest in **simple, applicable AI tools**, particularly for **digital management, marketing, and process automation**;
- **Ethical concerns**: participants raised issues related to **algorithm transparency**, **data protection**, and the **risk of dependence on large international tech platforms**;
- **Training needs and learning opportunities**: there was a clear demand for **short, practical, and localized training programs** focused on real-world AI applications (e.g., content generation, predictive CRMs, chatbots);
- **Environmental awareness**: some participants stressed the importance of assessing the **environmental impact of AI**, especially regarding **energy consumption** by servers and machine learning systems;
- **Introducing AI in schools**: the suggestion was made to include **AI education in secondary and vocational schools** to foster an **ethical and inclusive digital culture**;
- **Role of incubators and territorial networks**: local incubators were seen as **key environments for hands-on experimentation with AI**, provided they are supported by **expert mentoring and inclusive policies**.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted on two levels:

- **Quantitative analysis**: data collected through digital questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistics (mean, mode, percentages);

- **Qualitative analysis**: open responses, interviews, and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns.

Key findings include:

- **65%** of respondents already use AI solutions or plan to do so within the year;
- **55%** report a lack of technical training and tools adapted to their local context;
- **70%** believe AI can support environmental sustainability through optimized resource management;
- **85%** support tailored training and AI mentoring programs;
- Only **20%** received formal training on AI ethics and its social impact.

Grafici / Charts

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Participants

- 18–22 years: 25%
- 23–26 years: 40%
- 27–30 years: 35%

Figura 2: Utilizzo dell'IA nelle attività imprenditoriali

- Utilizzo attivo: 65%
- Pianificato: 25%
- Nessun utilizzo previsto: 10%

Figure 2: Use of AI in Entrepreneurial Activities

- Active use: 65%
- Planned use: 25%
- No use planned: 10%
- Regolamentazione incerta: 30%

Figure 3: Main Obstacles to AI Integration

- High costs: 60%
- Lack of technical skills: 55%
- Lack of institutional support: 45%
- Uncertain regulations: 30%
- **Figure 4: AI Application Areas Among Young Entrepreneurs**
- Digital marketing: 70%
- Chatbots and customer support: 60%
- Data analysis and forecasting: 50%

- Automated customer service: 30%
- Production and logistics: 20%

Figure 5: Environmental Impact Considerations of AI

- 70% do not know how to measure impact
- Only 30% regularly consider it

🇮🇹 **Figura 6: Partecipazione a percorsi formativi etici sull'IA**

- Sì: 20%
- No: 80%

Figure 6: Participation in AI Ethics Training

- Yes: 20%
- No: 80%

Figure 7: Overall Evaluation of AI Potential

- 100% believe AI provides a competitive advantage

Analysis of the Current Situation in Italy

The landscape of youth entrepreneurship related to Artificial Intelligence in Italy is **rapidly evolving**, but significant territorial gaps remain. **Northern regions** lead in terms of investments, initiatives, and AI startups, thanks to a favorable ecosystem involving universities, tech hubs, incubators, and venture capital. Regions such as **Lombardy, Lazio, Emilia-Romagna**, and **Piedmont** stand out in sectors like:

- **Fintech and banking**
- **Digital health and predictive assistance**
- **Automated manufacturing industries**
- **Agri-tech and environmental sustainability**
- **Digital education and edtech**

In **Southern Italy**, the situation is more fragmented. **Calabria**, despite having youth with high entrepreneurial potential, faces:

- infrastructure gaps (broadband, local cloud services);
- limited access to funding and incentives;
- weak mentoring networks and technology transfer systems;
- poor integration between schools, universities, and businesses.

However, **positive signals are emerging**: local incubators, new startups, Erasmus+ initiatives, and European networks are helping bridge the digital divide. AI adoption in Calabria is mostly seen in **agriculture, tourism, crafts, and education**, through experimental yet promising projects.

Interview Results

The **semi-structured interviews** conducted with entrepreneurs, trainers, and stakeholders in Calabria provided a deeper understanding of AI integration within the local production ecosystem. The main findings include:

- **AI is mainly used to automate repetitive tasks**, such as social media management, report writing, and smart CRM usage;
- Entrepreneurs reported a **lack of AI tools localized in Italian** and user-friendly interfaces suited to their technical level;
- There is a strong demand for **practical mentoring on real-life cases**, preferably led by local experts or former entrepreneurs;
- The **most desired AI applications** are in the fields of:
    - **Agriculture** (optimized seeding, intelligent irrigation management);
    - **Tourism** (multilingual AI chatbots);
    - **Healthcare and personal services** (predictive screening, automation);
    - **Education and training** (adaptive learning platforms);
- Interviewees also emphasized the need for **short, practical, and free training opportunities**, along with **stable public policies** that support innovation in non-urban areas.

Questionnaire Results

The responses from 60 young Calabrian entrepreneurs to the digital questionnaire confirmed many of the trends highlighted in the interviews and focus groups. Key findings include:

- **AI is seen as especially useful for optimizing time and resources**, increasing operational efficiency and improving customer relations;
- **100% of respondents acknowledge AI as a competitive advantage** in today's business environment;
- The **main areas where AI is already being used** include:
    - Digital marketing (70%);
    - Chatbots and customer assistance (60%);
    - Data analysis and forecasting (50%);
    - Automated customer service (30%);

    - Production and logistics (20%);
- The main **barriers to adopting AI** are:
    - High initial costs (60%);
    - Lack of specific skills (55%);
    - Absence of institutional support (45%);
    - Regulatory uncertainty (30%);
- Only **20% received training related to AI ethics**, yet **85% expressed interest in tailored training and mentoring**;
- **70% are interested in using AI for environmental purposes**, although most are unaware of metrics to assess its impact.

Main Findings

From the overall analysis of questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, several **key findings** emerge about the state of AI adoption among young entrepreneurs in Calabria:

- **AI is perceived as a strategic ally**, useful for reducing costs, improving processes, and enhancing competitiveness in micro-enterprises;
- The most **commonly used applications** involve digital marketing, customer management automation, chatbots, predictive analytics, and logistics support;
- The **main barriers** to adoption include:
    - high implementation costs;
    - lack of practical skills and user-friendly tools;
    - absence of accessible mentoring and funding;
- **Ethical considerations** are still marginal, but participants are open to addressing them through specific training programs;
- **Women are still underrepresented** among young AI-using entrepreneurs, highlighting a digital gender gap;
- There is strong demand for **practical, localized, and personalized training**;
- The **environmental impact of AI** is not well understood, but over 70% of respondents consider it important.

Good Practices

The research identified several **positive examples** of AI use by young entrepreneurs in Calabria and across Italy. These cases show how AI can foster **sustainable, inclusive, and locally adapted innovation**. Some of the most relevant include:

- **SmartAgriCalabria**
  AI-powered irrigation systems, weather forecasting, and crop optimization in farms in the Locride area.
- **CalabriaInTour**
  Multilingual tourist chatbot with generative AI, promoting local events and hiking trails.
- **EduFuture**
  Educational platform offering "AI for Business" online courses for NEETs, students, and young entrepreneurs in Southern Italy.
- **AI4Farming**
  Predictive systems for crop cycles and optimized seeding in rural areas of Calabria and Basilicata.
- **Lhub AI**
  Tailored support for small artisanal enterprises introducing AI in production processes.
- **Elaisian**
  Precision farming technologies using AI to improve olive and grape cultivation, including in Calabria.
- **NeosVoc**
  Smart voice assistants for local businesses and artisans.
- **OpenAiMed**
  Predictive tools for regional health screening and personalized medicine.
- **InnoLegalAI**
  Legal document automation for freelancers and micro law firms.
- **EcoDataLab**
  AI-based solutions for environmental monitoring in areas at hydrogeological and seismic risk.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although Calabria starts from an infrastructural disadvantage compared to other Italian regions, it shows **strong potential in developing AI-driven youth entrepreneurship**. The research highlights that young entrepreneurs in the region:

- Recognize AI as a **tool for competitiveness and sustainability**;
- Are interested and open to using AI but need **practical training**, accessible tools, and **mentoring**;

- Are aware of AI's ethical and environmental implications, although these aspects are still underexplored.

To foster effective, equitable, and sustainable AI adoption in Calabria and similar contexts, we recommend:

1. **Developing a regional AI strategy**, with structural funds dedicated to remote and underserved areas;
2. **Integrating AI and digital ethics education into school and university curricula**, especially in technical and vocational programs;
3. **Promoting access to incubators, fablabs, and living labs** for young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds;
4. **Supporting mentoring programs and entrepreneurial coaching** focused on real-life AI applications;
5. **Fostering stable partnerships between schools, universities, businesses, and public administrations** to strengthen the local innovation ecosystem;
6. **Monitoring and transparently reporting the environmental and social impact of AI**, using open data and accessible metrics.

Summary of Questionnaire Results *(60 participants – aged 18–30)*

The following charts visually summarize the responses collected during the research and serve as a valuable tool for public presentations, reporting, and project dissemination.

Charts

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Participants

- 18–22 years: 25%
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- 27–30 years: 35%

Figure 2: Use of AI in Business

- Active use: 65%
- Planned use: 25%
- No use planned: 10%

Figure 3: Main Barriers to AI Adoption

- High costs: 60%
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- Lack of institutional support: 45%

- Regulatory uncertainty: 30%

Figure 4: AI Application Areas

- Digital marketing: 70%
- Chatbots and customer support: 60%
- Data analysis and forecasting: 50%
- Automated customer service: 30%
- Production and logistics: 20%

Figure 5: Environmental Impact Awareness

- Don’t know metrics: 70%
- Regularly considered: 30%

Figure 6: Ethics Training Received

- Yes: 20%
- No: 80%

Figure 7: AI as a Competitive Advantage

- 100% believe AI provides a competitive advantage

📊 AI4YE – Visual Summary of Questionnaire Results

Data collected from 60 young entrepreneurs in Calabria (Italy), aged 18–30

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Participants

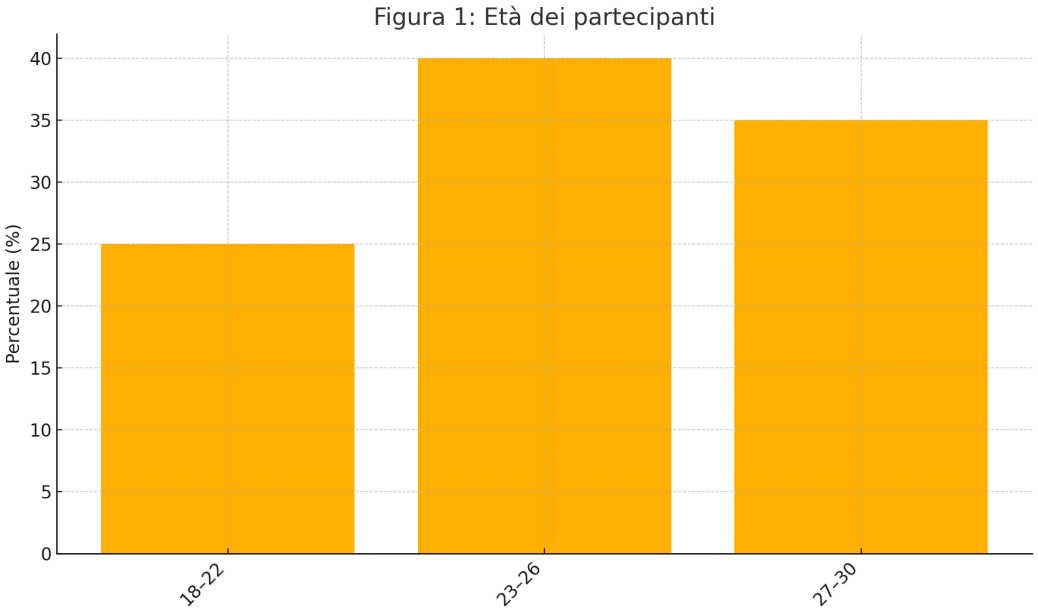

Figure 2: Use of AI in Business

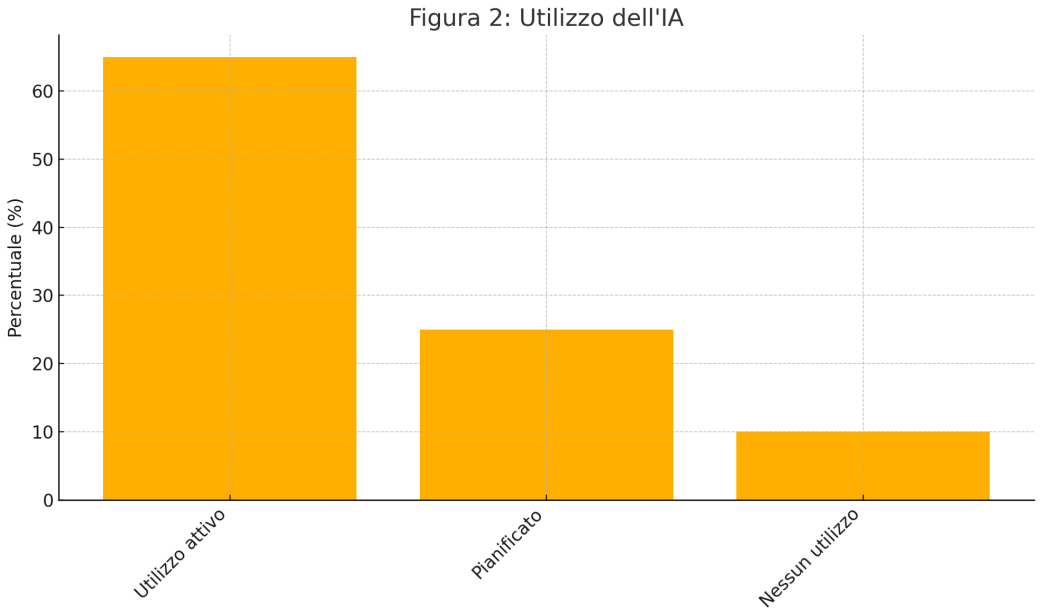

Figure 3: Main Barriers to AI Adoption

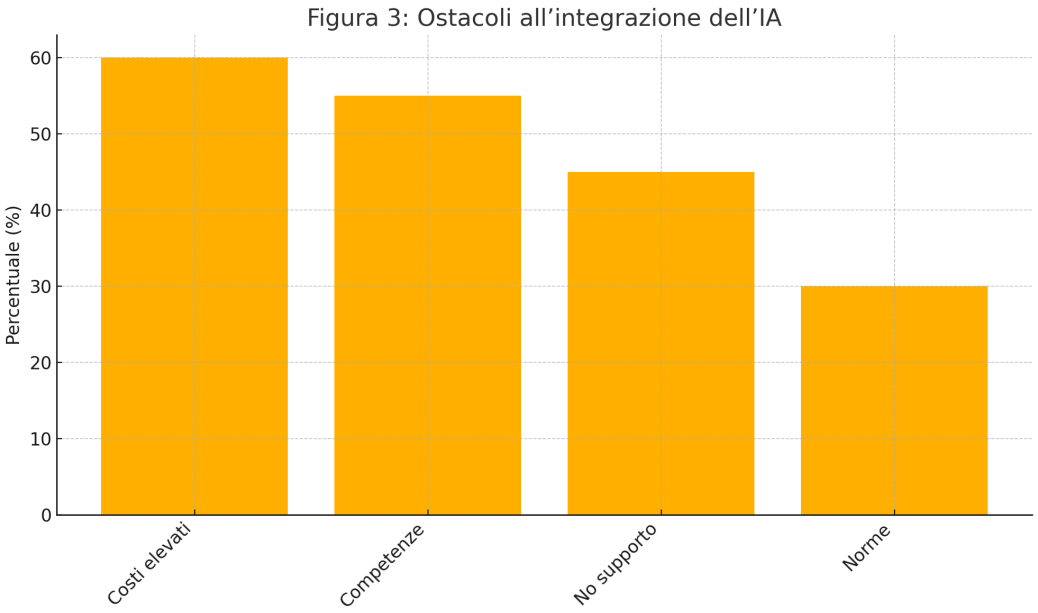

Figure 4: AI Application Areas

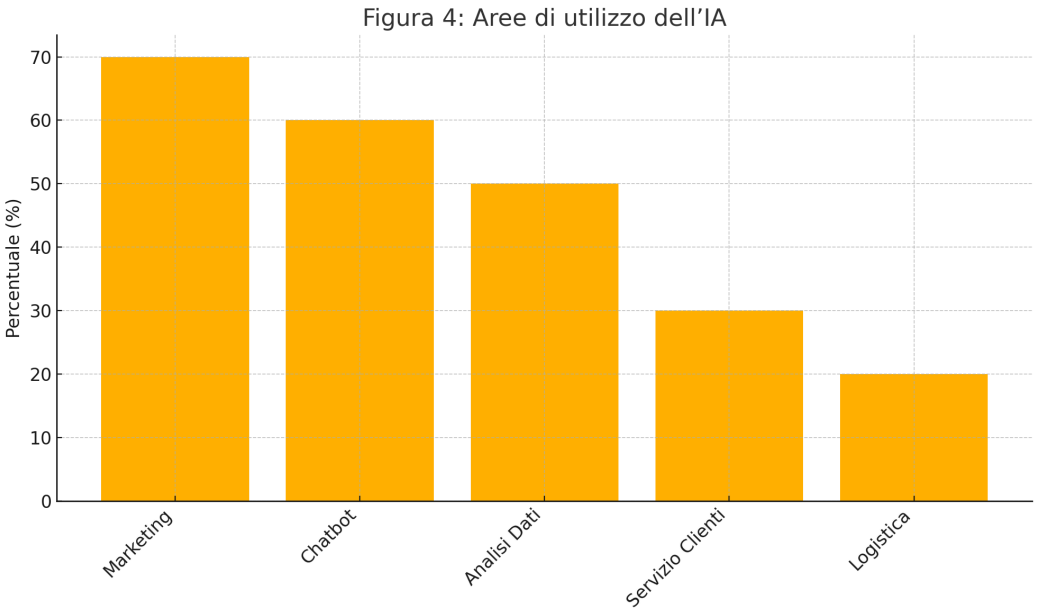

Figure 5: Environmental Impact Awareness

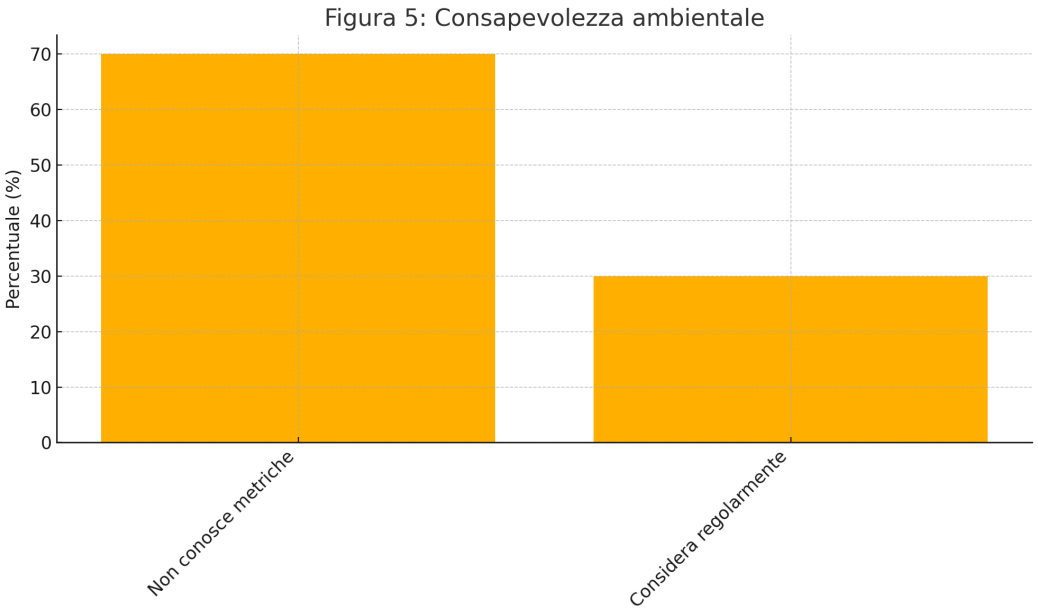

Figure 6: Ethics Training Received

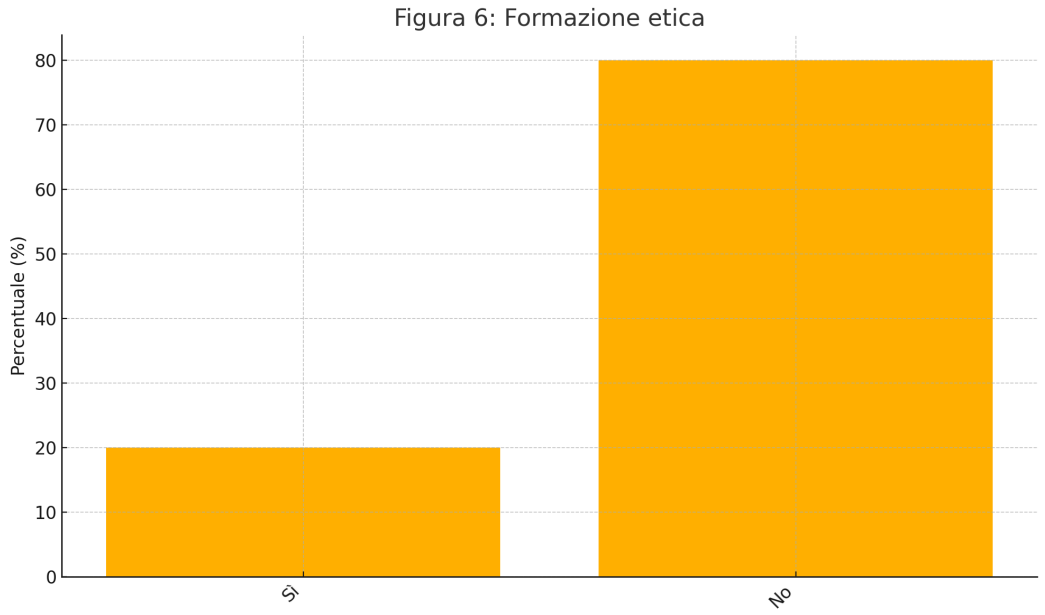

Figure 7: AI as Competitive Advantage

COMPANY VISIT TO EURONICS IN GIOIA TAURO

As part of the Erasmus+ AI4YE project, a company visit was organized at the Euronics store in Gioia Tauro, with the aim of exploring the concrete applications of artificial intelligence (AI) to innovate and improve business management.

During the meeting, it was possible to observe how AI is already used in various areas of business management, demonstrating its versatility and ability to support multiple business functions. From resource planning and optimization, to logistics and warehouse management, to marketing and sales data analysis, artificial intelligence allows for faster decisions based on precise information, thus improving operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. This integrated approach also promotes a greater ability to adapt to market changes and specific consumer needs.

In particular, the following aspects were explored in depth:

- **Intelligent warehouse management**, with systems capable of monitoring stocks in real time and forecasting demand, optimizing reorders and reducing waste;
- **Advanced analysis of sales data**, thanks to software capable of identifying consumer trends, customer behavior and product performance;
- **Personalization of offers,** through algorithms that suggest targeted promotions based on the preferences and purchasing history of each customer;
- **Customer loyalty**, through more engaging purchasing experiences, proactive assistance and predictive marketing tools.

During the visit, it was possible to see how artificial intelligence is integrated into the technological products sold by Euronics. In particular, the effectiveness of smart appliances was shown — such as refrigerators and washing machines — which adapt their operation to the user's habits to save energy and optimize performance. Furthermore, the technology present in televisions with integrated voice assistants, capable of responding to voice commands and personalizing the viewing experience, and in PCs that use artificial intelligence systems to improve security and processing speed, was presented.

This visit highlighted how artificial intelligence is revolutionizing business management in major companies such as Euronics, significantly improving key processes and increasing competitiveness. Furthermore, the fundamental role of AI in the technology sector has emerged, both in optimizing

business activities and in the development of intelligent products that improve the daily experience of consumers.


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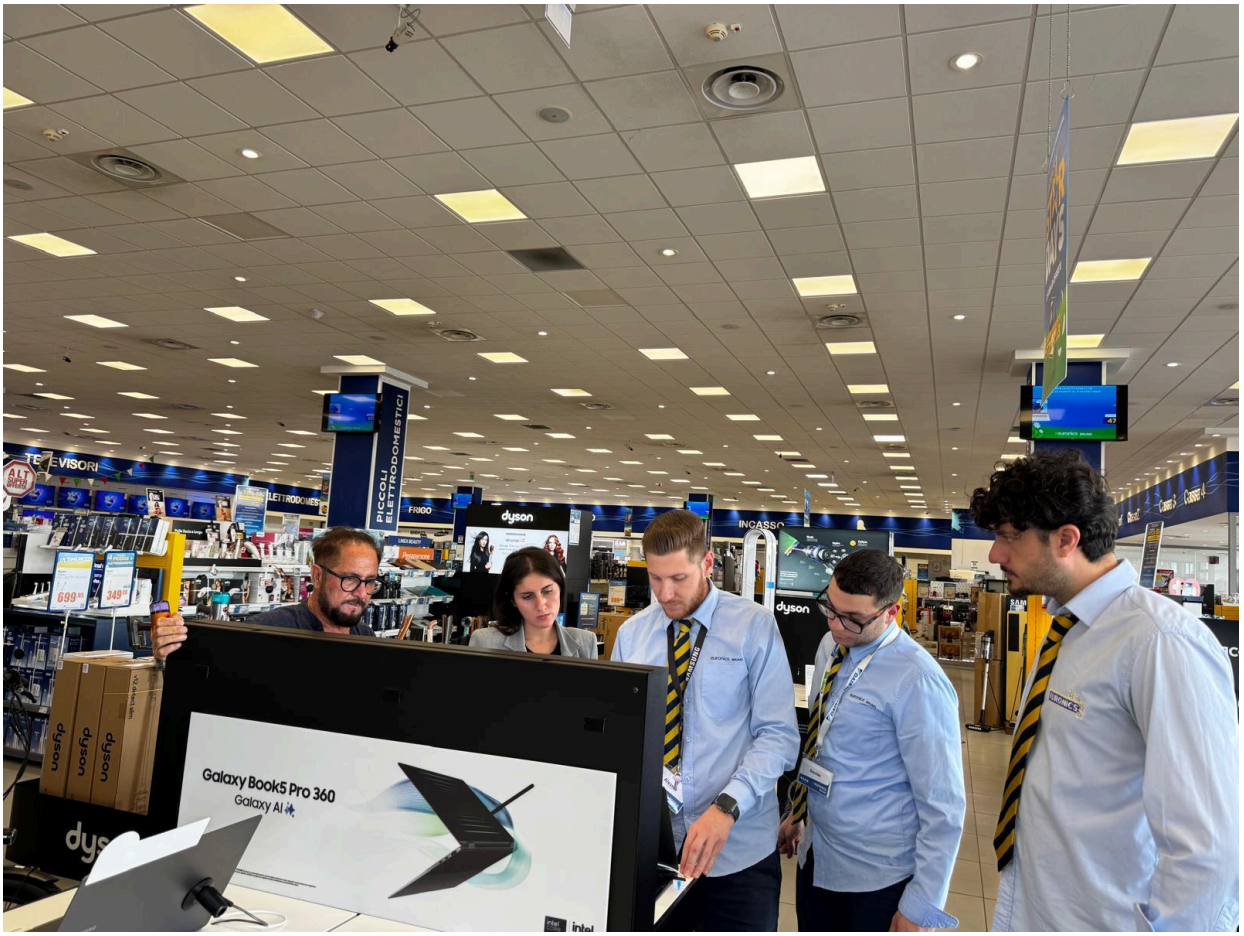
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TELEFONIA

Company Visit to Eurotransit Group Srl – Young People, AI, and Innovation in the Logistics of the Future

As part of the Erasmus+ AI4YE (Artificial Intelligence for Young Entrepreneurs) project, a company visit was organized at Eurotransit Group Srl, a national and international container shipping company based in San Ferdinando, near the port of Gioia Tauro, one of the main logistics hubs in the Mediterranean.

The visit provided an important opportunity to learn more about intelligent logistics and the practical application of artificial intelligence in freight transport and management. Eurotransit collaborates with major operators in the sector, including Ocean Network Express (ONE), the seventh-largest shipping company in the world, which has initiated the large-scale adoption of smart containers equipped with IoT and AI technologies, real-time tracking systems, and advanced sensors developed in partnership with Sony Network Communications Europe.

Eurotransit Group is integrated into this technologically advanced supply chain, operating nationally and internationally with tracking and management systems that leverage data generated by these technologies. This approach enables more transparent, efficient, and sustainable logistics, where artificial intelligence is central to predictive analytics, route optimization, and proactive shipment management.

Another key aspect of the visit was the interaction with young entrepreneurs and professionals who actively contribute to the company's growth, demonstrating how innovation is not only technological but also cultural and generational.

This experience strengthened the connection between technology and youth entrepreneurship, offering a concrete example of how artificial intelligence can create new economic and professional opportunities through the integration of intelligent systems in key sectors such as logistics, in line with global digital transformations, becoming role models for a modern, competitive, and forward-looking economy.


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