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From Panels to Shelves: The Evolving Intersection of Comics And Italian Libraries. History, Issues, Perspectives

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Cover Page Footnote

I want to thank Vitantonio Troiani, with whom I originally conceived this article.

INTRODUCTION: THE HOW AND WHY OF COMICS IN THE LIBRARY

> Public reading libraries are called upon to offer a service that responds to the needs of their community and must, therefore, be able to adapt to a constantly changing society.
>
> (Raimondi 2019, 38)[1]

Although a few decades old, the relationship between comics and libraries must be better investigated, especially in Italy. This gap in research is surprising given the popularity and cultural significance of comics in Italy and their role in shaping national culture and identity.

To bridge this gap, one must recognize how this medium has been perceived, told, and communicated, particularly regarding what has often been referred to as its audience of choice: children and adolescents. Long considered 'children's stuff,' comics have, consequently, borne this label's ideological and pedagogical weight, and this kind of perception influenced and, to some extent, hindered their integration into libraries.

Comics, as a mass phenomenon and a hybrid medium blending text and images, have been perceived differently over time. It has been labeled as a negative influence on younger people, considered junk literature, seen as a gateway to more traditional and 'serious' forms of literature, and even regarded as an impediment to developing reading and writing skills. Throughout this process, parallel to their intellectual and commercial reevaluation, comics have struggled to secure a place in traditional, text-focused libraries.

The association with a children's audience and a preference for more traditional knowledge conveyance persist even today, despite comics increasingly populating the collections of Italian public libraries. Furthermore, librarians confront challenges in comics' storytelling and marketing, exacerbated by a general lack of visual education. Difficulties arise from story arcs spread across issues, varied formats, and classification ambiguity of comics as books or illustrations, all lacking standardized criteria for acquisition, cataloging, and preservation.

While international academic interest in the relationship between comics and libraries is slowly growing, even if unevenly, the same cannot be said for Italy, where an underfunded and understaffed library system has prioritized other issues. However, comics can be a crucial resource for Italian libraries. Comics have the potential to serve a dual role. They can help libraries fulfill one of their primary functions: to reflect the society they engage with (Solimine and Faggiolani 2015). Additionally, comics have the power to attract, diversify, and expand the user base of libraries.

Furthermore, Italy boasts a rich and relevant comics tradition that deserves valorization, primarily through a more conscious presence on library shelves.

In conjunction with this, the contemporary educational landscape emphasizes the importance of visual literacy, and that brings comics into play as well. The very concept of literacy needs to be rethought because, as Sinatra (1986, 10) notes, "culture's predominant mode of literacy depends on the technology and mass media it embraces." Lewis (2001, 60) adds, "Competence with images is now a prerequisite of competence in life." Furthermore, regarding the perception of comics as child stuff, visual literacy should not be confined to higher education but should begin in the early years of critical development (Zanin-Yost 2014, 314).

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[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

By understanding and addressing the challenges surrounding the integration of comics into libraries, Italy can harness the potential of this medium to enhance its cultural and educational landscape, providing a more inclusive and diverse reading experience for library users. This integration aligns with international standards, such as the ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (2011), highlighting the global significance of visual literacy education. As Italy stands at the crossroads of acknowledging the wealth of its visual culture, this article aims to contribute to the discourse on integrating comics and visual literacy into the fabric of Italian libraries, ultimately enriching the educational experience for a diverse and dynamic audience (MacDonald 2013).

Furthermore, increasing the presence of comics in libraries could bring some unexplored economic benefits. This is because the dissemination of comics in libraries can be considered by comics publishers as an effective marketing tool (Schneider 2014, 77) since "libraries, bookstores, and online channels mutually reinforce each other, leading to engagement and sales" (Noorda and Berens 2021, 237).

The relationship between comics, libraries, and their target audiences will be explored, as well as the role of the librarians – who are often the main driver and support of this integration – examining how comics collections are managed and the benefits they can bring to libraries' cultural and recreational offerings.

COMICS, LIBRARIES, AND LIBRARIANS: AN OVERVIEW

Institutional interest in comics is a relatively recent development, particularly evident in the United States, where reflections on the comics-library relationship emerged in the 1980s (Dorrell and Carroll 1981). Despite this, as noted by Williams and Peterson in 2009, "Two decades ago, graphic novels were virtually unknown to librarians and educators" (166), a situation that persisted for decades (Lavin 1998). The turning point came around 1990 when the first article about comics appeared in a U.S. library journal (Nyberg 2010, 32), and "by 2005, graphic novels were being regularly reviewed in journals frequently used by public and school librarians" (Williams and Peterson 2009, 177). While acknowledging the historical skepticism towards comics, highlighted by R. Weiner and Syma in 2014 with the observation that "since comics first became big business in the 1930s, comics or graphic novels have had a sordid history and relationship with librarians" (R. Weiner and Syma 2014), and it is evident that the situation has only partially evolved, with some notable progress. Despite enduring reservations, often rooted in misconceptions like the perception of comics as solely pornographic (Bergin 2005, 23), librarians have increasingly recognized the positive impact of including comics in their collections. Such inclusions have been associated with heightened circulation of non-comics texts, increased patronage, and enhanced user interaction with the library (Dorrell and Carroll 1981; Bergin 2005; Heaney 2007; Lo et al. 2019; MacDonald 2013), also extending to adult readers, particularly in Canada (Charbonneau 2005). Furthermore, comics serve as both an incentive for reading and a crucial support for visual literacy (Vitella 2020).

While the U.S. example may feel distant, a closer comparison can be drawn with France, a country not only geographically and culturally closer to Italy but also deeply entwined in shared comic interests. In France, where this medium's cultural and economic value surpasses that of many European counterparts,[2] comics have been integrated into school curricula since the post-World War II period (Berthou 2011). Notably, a strong correlation between comics and traditional reading has been observed in French libraries. While 28% of the French population over the age of 11 is enrolled in a public library, this figure rises to 48% when focusing on comics readers alone

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[2] The French comics market ranks first in Europe, followed by Italy (Curcio 2016, 391). Furthermore, better economic conditions and prospects led to a `migration' of Italian comics makers to France, beginning in the 1970s (Comberiati 2018).

(Guilbert 2015, 6). This trend persists despite a 50% decline in comics readership from 1988 to 2018 (Lombardo and Wolff 2020).

Contextualizing these observations, 7.9 million French people, constituting 14% of the population aged 15 and over, purchase comics, contributing to 13% of total bookstore sales (Oury 2020). In contrast, the comics market slice in Italy ranges between 2% and 6% (Eudicom 2021), though this may be an underestimate (Fumettologica 2021). Despite a decline in the Italian publishing market in 2022 compared to its outstanding 2021 performance, the market share for comics surged by 245.4% (from 13.7% to 47.3%) in the first six months of 2022 compared to the same pre-pandemic period in 2019 (AIE 2022b).

Understanding the evolution of the comics market is crucial to contextualizing the relationship between comics, libraries, and audiences. Beyond national differences, the whole world comics market is growing. According to *Business Fortune Insight*, the global size of this segment was estimated at USD 14.69 billion in 2021, with a forecast of growth to USD 21.37 billion by 2029 (Business Fortune Insight 2022). The comics market in North America alone is worth a billion dollars (Reid 2021), sustained mainly by manga (Greenall 2021; Griepp 2021) and the so-called graphic novels distributed by the book channels.[3] Consequently, the presence of comics in schools and libraries is also increasing, forming an economically attractive market for publishers, as already pointed out for years, for example, by Hudson (2009) and Pyles (2013). It can be reasonably assumed that libraries are or can be equally attractive to Italian comics publishers.

Against this backdrop, the pivotal role of librarians comes to the forefront. Aligned with Solimine and Faggiolani's (2015) model of a library attuned to the needs of its user community, there has been a notable uptick in library comics acquisition in recent decades. As highlighted by Shapel, events coordinator at the Boise Public Library in Idaho, U.S., "For a library to stay relevant, we have to keep up on what people are doing currently […] to make people aware that we're right there with you, and we're going to change and evolve as the community changes" (quoted in Baume 2017).

This shift places specific demands on librarians dealing with comics, requiring specific skills, including a good level of visual literacy. While librarians are recognized for their potential leadership in information literacy programs (Chen and Lin 2011, 405), questions linger about their readiness to manage comics collections consciously. The prevailing sentiment suggests that the field lacks codification, relying heavily on the initiative and passion of individuals, often spurred by the interest of younger readers.

The quote "comics and libraries are, hopefully, destined to be bedfellows and will need to support each other" (Phoenix 2020, 213) encapsulates the envisioned collaboration between comics and libraries. Such collaboration, however, still needs to be improved in many aspects. Comics force librarians to reconsider all aspects of the profession, regarding "the capacity of the staff to take the measure of the variety of the audiences of comics" (Berthou 2015, 5) but also cataloging, display, and mediation (Guilbert 2015; Berthou 2015; 2011; Vitella 2020).

In short, do librarians possess the necessary skills to handle comics effectively? Does the field's perceived lack of codification leave much of the work to the initiative and passion of individuals? These questions highlight the ongoing challenges and opportunities for librarians in managing and integrating comics into their collections.

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[3] The predominance of manga and graphic novels can also be seen in Italy (AIE 2022a; 2023).

AIM AND PURPOSES OF THE RESEARCH

This article provides an initial and exploratory investigation into the state of managing comics collections in Italian public libraries.

Comics are essential in both commercial and cultural domains within Italian cultural production. However, their connection with libraries and their role within these vital institutions remain underexplored or insufficiently investigated.

An attempt will then be made to answer several questions:

1. **Historical and contemporary relationship between comics and Italian libraries:**
- What has historically defined the relationship between comics and Italian libraries, and how does this dynamic manifest in the present?
2. **Perception of comics as 'children's stuff' and its impact on library collections:**
- How does the lingering perception of comics as primarily for children affect their acquisition within library collections?
3. **Challenges in the acquisition, cataloging, preservation, communication, and lending of comics in Italian libraries:**
- What specific obstacles are associated with acquiring, cataloging, preserving, communicating, and lending comics in the context of Italian libraries?
4. **Role of librarians:**
- What role do librarians play in the collaboration between comics and libraries?
5. **Role of comics:**
- What benefits could a broader, more informed, structured collaboration between comics and libraries bring?

Additionally, this article also aims to lay the groundwork for closer cooperation among libraries, comics publishers, and institutions, with the long-term goal of fostering the creation of a network of comics libraries in Italy.

METHODOLOGY, CONTEXT, AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE SURVEY METHOD

My deep engagement with comics, both as an enthusiast and a scholar, has given me firsthand insight into the challenges surrounding their relationship with libraries, especially in Italy. Additionally, my ongoing PhD research at Lancaster University (U.K.), focusing on the interplay between comics and data visualization in higher education, has enriched my understanding of this medium's pedagogical and educational aspects. Therefore, this article is rooted in my personal experiences and academic pursuits.

Having said that, this study employs a comprehensive approach, analyzing available sources within a broad historical framework. Among other resources used, informal conversations, e-mails, and an anonymous survey targeting librarians and other professionals in the field served the purpose of gathering unpublished and firsthand information and opinions.

The research approach related to the survey has been developed as follows:

1. **Survey Development**
   The initial phase involved crafting a survey instrument in alignment with the research objectives. Through informal discussions with industry professionals and librarians and an analysis of available literature, questions relevant to the context of comic collections in Italian libraries were formulated. These questions, encompassing multiple-choice and open-ended formats, were organized into a questionnaire hosted on the online tool Google Forms [see Appendix].
2. **Subject selection for the survey**

   To identify and contact respondents, I adopted several strategies:

- As a longtime enthusiast and professional in the field, some of the libraries were already known to me.
- E-mail exchanges and chats with librarians I already knew enabled me to identify other libraries.
- Online searches related to initiatives and courses on comics awareness added other possible respondents.
- I also consulted the OPAC-SBN[4] database to identify libraries with noteworthy comics collections. Specifically, I used as a search key the code 741.5, which identifies comics in the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system. The search system automatically provided a list of libraries with substantial comics collections.[5]
- To broaden the selection, social media platforms, particularly Facebook, were utilized to share information about the research, drawing the attention of comics enthusiasts and professionals.

3. **Design and Unfolding of the Survey**

A targeted list of libraries was compiled, and a survey was created using Google Forms. The survey is linked to an explanatory e-mail explaining the purpose and methodology of the research. The survey covered various aspects, including the creation and cataloging of comics collections, the representation of different types or genres of comics, display and promotional strategies, and the impact of comics on library lending and public involvement. The Google form was made available for two months, then the ability to respond was terminated.

In particular, the following themes were explored:

o How the collections were created, and following which criteria, and with what funds;
o How comics were cataloged.
o What types or 'genres' are most represented in collections (with a focus on the role of nonfiction comics).
o How comics have been exhibited and promoted, and how comics have impacted the library in terms of lending and audiences.
o

Finally, librarians were asked for suggestions for improving the accessibility, usability, and circulation of comics in their library.

Nine libraries responded to the survey, two exclusively dedicated to comics. After verifying the identity of the participants, the survey was anonymized. The anonymization, which was already planned and announced, was explicitly requested by some participants when compiling responses. Respondents are here identified by progressive letters, from **A** to **I**. Not all survey participants answered all questions.

Furthermore, the information gathered during the survey formed the basis for organizing a recent conference – *Ti leggerei ovunque: fumetti, biblioteche e istituzioni[6]* – held during the 2023 edition of the *Treviso Comic Book Festival* (Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023). It allowed different actors to discuss the topics analyzed here, providing additional data to enrich the larger picture. Seventeen, including librarians, comics makers, publishers, and trade association representatives, attended the conference. The conference was organized following three different macro-topics:

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[4] The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) of the *Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale* (SBN, 'National Library Service') allows bibliographic searches in the collective catalog of Italian libraries.
[5] It must be said that, as it will be seen, using the 741.5 code returns a very partial view of the comics collections within Italian libraries, as also noted by Rota (2022). Therefore, in evaluating this search, a certain degree of approximation must be taken into account.
[6] Trad, 'I would read you anywhere: comics, libraries and institutions.' Conference held on September 30, 2023.

- Libraries and institutions.

- Libraries and publishers.

- Libraries and comics makers.

The information, opinions, and testimonies gathered through the survey and conference were then contextualized in the context of the national and international literature on the topic.

LIMITATIONS

The limited number of respondents to the survey (9) does not necessarily provide a detailed picture of the articulated presence of comics in the 7,425 public and private, state and non-state Italian open-access libraries (excluding school and university libraries) (Istat 2021).

In addition, almost all of the libraries participating in the survey are located in the center-north, with only one being in the south, which reflects the uneven distribution of libraries across the country (Istat 2021). However, their geographical distribution is more consistent with that of Italian comics shops (AIE 2022c), suggesting a connection that should be further investigated.

Some subject areas have been excluded for time and space reasons (e.g., comics digitization and digital lending management). Digital comics, in particular, is an underdeveloped market sector in Italy and Europe (AIE 2021; Eudicom 2021), although it can be assumed that its role may become more central in the years to come.

COMICS AND ITALIAN LIBRARIES: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A MEDIUM FOR CHILDREN.

> I attest to the power of graphics and specifically comic graphics [sic] to illustrate and reinforce the meaning of the written and spoken word.
>
> (Smith 2013, xi)

Due to the occasionally overstated associations between comics and children or young adults, it is crucial to explore the pedagogical perspective linked to this medium to understand its relationship with libraries in Italy.[7]

Comics have a long tradition as an educational tool, originating in Japan at the end of the 1800s (Inoue 2012; Murakami and Bryce 2009) and in the Western world – the U.S. especially – since the 1930s (Tilley, Weiner, and Robert G. 2016). Comics as pedagogical tools were originally and primarily used to support literacy and encourage traditional reading, a role often associated with them even today. Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, respectively, comics began to peep into school and public reading libraries in the two countries but encountered resistance and faced attempts at purging (Graham 2016; Nyberg 2010; Hopkins 2010), which, at least in the U.S. case, continue to this day.[8] Similar anti-comics crusades also occurred in Europe. This is the case of the *British*

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[7] It should be said that the comics-young readers pairing reflects the demographic profile of the users of Italian libraries and that of the comics reader. Regarding libraries, "the largest share of readers is observed among young people up to age 24, with the highest peaks among 11- to 14-year-olds (57.1%)" (Istat 2023), similar to what happens with comics readers tout court (AIE 2021).

[8] Particularly in the U.S. context, comics continue to be banned from libraries. In addition to problems of acceptance related to certain sensitive topics (LGBT+ rights, racial issues, depiction of sexual abuse, etc.), this often happens because comics designed for adults are lent to children, as the whole comic book production is still considered to be aimed at them. For more details and a list of cases, see the *Comic Book Legal Defense Fund* website (https://cbldf.org/).

Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act of 1955[9] and the French law of 1949[10] apt to regulate publications intended for children. In Italy, bipartisan parliamentary questions and proposed regulations aimed at controlling the periodical and comics press for children culminated in 1962 publishers' adoption of a self-censorship code (De Salvia 2004). The tones of newspaper articles from those decades,[11] as well as the rants of some parliamentarians, especially progressives, who linked corruption, decadence, and juvenile delinquency to comics (Stancanelli 2011a; 2011b; Minelli 2016; Barberis 2021), resonate with those that led to the adoption of the well-known Comics Code in the U.S. (Wertham 1954; Hajdu 2009).

Indeed, as comics were supposed to be linked to a young readership, they were inevitably branded as childish. As della Corte notes,

the Italian has a great fear of infantilism and fears ridicule in a particular way. On streetcars, on boulevard benches, it is far easier to glimpse an adult leafing through a photo story than an adult grappling with comics. These are considered degrading because their key is blatantly that of *divertissement* (1961, 9).

Viewing comics as a means of escapism and entertainment also suited publishers, who felt that their inclusion in the school environment would undermine their appeal (Pellitteri 2008, 92).

Thus, while comics were seen as only and sometimes dangerous entertainment – primarily for children – their pedagogical function seemed to be only preparatory to reading, influencing their placement in the library context. At worst, comics were perceived not as an aid but as an obstacle to reading. Within the field literature on libraries, Camerani (1960, 81) pointed to comics as one of the causes that did not lead children to appreciate children's literature, especially Italian. Balsamo, reviewing a handbook dedicated to children's librarians (Centro didattico nazionale di studi e documentazione 1965), noted that, throughout the text,

the problem of comics in their various educational and even methodological implications is pointed out, with a conditional acquittal to a limited and supervised use, granted only a role as a brief parenthesis of entertainment (Balsamo 1966, 334).[12]

However, it was not a homogeneous point of view. Although an intellectual reappraisal of comics began in Italy as early as the early post-World War II period (Borelli 2011; Stancanelli 2015; 2008), it was starting in the 1960s that comics were widely investigated and discussed as worthy cultural objects and introduced into the ranks of the 'adult' press. Around the same time, in Italy (Pellitteri 2008) as in the U.S. (Hatfield 2005), there has been a renewed interest in comics among educators, teachers, and librarians.

Speaking specifically about public reading libraries,[13] it was always from the 1960s onward that something began to change. For example, libraries in Bologna started introducing comics for adults and children in their collections in the 1960s. (Isitituzione Biblioteche 2015). Also in

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[9] https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/3-4/28.

[10] Loi n° 49-956 du 16 juillet 1949 sur les publications destinées à la jeunesse (https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000878175).

[11] When comics read by younger people were mentioned in the Italian press of those years, these were often associated with decadence, low literacy, and crime. If the theme was adult readers and comics, the latter were frequently related to pornographic magazines. Headlines such as "Misery, films and American comics motives of delinquency among youth" (G. Q. 1950, 4), "[comics] glorify hatred, violence, sensuality" (D. M. 1951, 3), "The school of delinquency for the boys of our time," (Crifoni 1948, 3), "'Crime comics' and horrific juvenile crime," (Vargas 1953, 5), "The death of the book" (Monelli 1952, 3) and similar ones connecting comics to degradation and juvenile crime were widespread in Italian newspapers between the 1940s and 1960s. However, there was no shortage of dissenting or at least more moderate voices (cf., Rusconi 1946, 3; Origlia 1953, 3; Bo 1961). It is interesting to note that the quoted article by Monelli was published next to an advertisement in the form of comic strips on the same page.

[12] Attitude this one not entirely changed if still, in 1998, pedagogue, comics enthusiast, and children's literature expert Ermanno Detti (1998) placed comics among the "enemies" of reading (quoting the term, however), that is, media that promote loss of literacy.

[13] No substantial data could be found on school libraries, which, in any case, will be ignored in this article.

Bologna, in 1964, the *Fiera del Libro per Ragazzi* ('Bologna Children's Book Fair') was inaugurated, which would prove to be fundamental for better knowledge and widespread use of the medium, although always linked to a juvenile context (T. L. 1978). Furthermore, although cautious but with less apocalyptic tones, the relationships between comics, pedagogy, and libraries started to be discussed in the generalist press, almost exclusively about children and young adults. In addition, monographs and scholarly publications on the relationship between pedagogy and comics were beginning to be published (Istituto di Pedagogia dell'Università di Roma 1967; Dallari and Farnè 1977; Aida 1978; Genovesi 1977) – and their numbers will grow significantly from the 1980s onward –, although the topic of the relationship between libraries and comics remains largely unexplored.

Only from the late 1970s onward will the latter issue begin to be discussed. This phenomenon was also aided by the expansion of the textbook concept and the school library market, which started to grow and became more attractive to publishers (T. L. 1977a; 1977b; Genta 1977). Consequently, comics started to be described in non-demonic terms, connecting the medium to then-recent pedagogical concepts such as interdisciplinarity (Genta 1977). Furthermore, the inclusion of comics in public libraries began to be hypothesized (T. L. 1978), and children's libraries were described as, for example, a possible "bridge between comics and audiovisuals" (Michelini 1979). Moreover, debate, in a fairly unprecedented way, thanks to the changed cultural context, would occasionally involve comics artists (L. R. 1981). Experiments were also emerging, such as the school library run by the pupils of Florence's Pestalozzi School, where comics were an established and well-received presence (Golzio 1977).

On the other hand, literature and handbooks for librarians to orient themselves in comics remained scarce, if not nonexistent. Aside from a bibliographic guide to comics and comics-related publications (Fossati 1980), one would have to wait until the 2000s for Italian texts explicitly devoted to comics-related topics regarding libraries, such as acquisitions, cataloging, preservation, and lending (Goria 2004; Ambu and Mander 2020).[14] The same applies to specialized scientific articles and dissertations (Sferruzza 2023; Zanin-Yost 2014; Tomaino 2010).

However, what can be said about public reading libraries? Apart from a few isolated realities, mostly related to school and classroom libraries, one can start talking about 'comics libraries' properly beginning in the 1980s. As will be seen, even though, starting in the 2010s, also through the adoption of the label 'graphic novel,' some cultural distrust of comics has been overcome, 'adulting' their enjoyment (Curcio 2016, 390), the comics-children pairing will not be easily or immediately broken.

THE BIRTH AND THE HISTORY OF THE ITALIAN COMICS LIBRARIES

> In the past, there has been bad blood between the library and comics. Because the library has always, and rightly so, considered itself the custodian of knowledge, the preserver of culture, and comics, until not so long ago, has not been considered a cultural product and, even today, struggles to be equated with books.
>
> (Cuccolini 1994, 12)

In a 1988 newspaper article entitled *Tutto è fumetto* ('Everything is Comics'), the foundation of the *Centro Fumetto Andrea Pazienza* (CFPAZ) in Cremona was announced by one of its creators,

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[14] In the English-speaking context, especially the U.S., related literature and manuals, while not vast, are beginning to be substantial. See, for example, (Graham 2016; R. G. Weiner 2010; Schneider 2014; Scott 1990)

Michele Ginevra (Ginevra 1988, 13). CFPAZ was and is still an institute for comics study, preservation, cataloging, dissemination, and creation, including a comics library with a loan service. The latter can be considered the first free-access comics library in Italy (Ginevra in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 14:55). In the aforementioned article, Ginevra highlighted certain specificities or challenges that continue to impact comics libraries even today. These include the reliance on volunteer efforts from fans, self-funding initiatives, challenges in securing financial support, and the ongoing necessity for donations of comics.

Some years before, between 1983 and 1985, the association from which CFPAZ was later born was asked to organize an itinerant comics exhibition by the local municipal library (Ginevra in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 11:22), which had a meager collection of senescent comics (Ginevra 1994). Subsequently highlighting the long-lasting distrust of libraries toward comics, Ginevra described how the library director censored some of the selected comics for the exhibition due to the presence of nudity and "inappropriate content." In his opinion, that was the sign of a mindset that associated comics only with children and teenage readers (Ginevra in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 12:00).

As Cuccolini stated, around the mid-1990s, things started to change regarding the relationship between comics and libraries, although the author does not fail to replicate the binomials comics and children, and comics and popular culture (1994). Specifically, in the 1990s,

> there has been a rapprochement between library and comics to the point that in many libraries, mainly municipal and neighborhood libraries, there is often no lack of a section dedicated to comics and, for the most part, reserved for young readers. This is a very valid initiative because it serves to draw young people into the orbit of the library system and, thus, to bring them closer to the book, showing them that culture is a great integrated system that, like the spool of the loom, moves incessantly between the high and the low, the academic and the popular thus weaving complex and, often, inextricable plots and warps (Ibid, 12).

Cuccolini emphasized the persistent subordinate role of comics to the book, within a low-high opposition in which the comics serve primarily as an introduction to reading. Following Ginevra and Cuccolini, the infantilization of the medium continued through the decades, as does its alleged role as a viaticum for serious reading. This is in keeping with what Maini said in an article titled *One Hundred Years of Comics Still Not Enough: The Difficult Relationship between Libraries and a Genre Discriminated Against by "High Culture"*[15] (1995). The author pointed out how comics play an instrumental role in municipal public reading libraries,

> attracting young readers in the hope that sooner or later, they will shift their attention to the 'real' book. These are mostly episodic collections, with no coherence, few titles, and no supporting tools in the belief that they are easy, whereas it is a complex phenomenon whose reading and understanding require different knowledge (Ibid, 9).

Going back to the evolution of the comics-libraries relationship, a pivotal moment, particularly concerning children's literature, occurred with the establishment of the Hamelin Cultural Association in Bologna. This association, engaged in reading education since 1996, has actively embraced various forms of storytelling, including books, comics, and illustrations, often fostering collaborations with entities such as libraries.

Emphasizing the continual rise in library enthusiasm for comics and the enduring notion of the medium predominantly catering to children, one can observe the development of specialized courses designed specifically for librarians and educators. The website of the *Associazione Italiana Biblioteche* (AIB, 'Italian Library Association') features numerous offerings, including courses, seminars, and conferences dedicated to comics. However, these initiatives predominantly center around a young audience, encompassing children and young adults, with a frequent emphasis on

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[15] Original title: *Cent'anni di fumetti non bastano ancora. Il difficile rapporto tra le biblioteche e un genere discriminato dalla "cultura alta"*

school libraries. Examples include courses such as "Reading Children's Books. Training Course for Librarians and Educators" (2020)[16] or "Growing up by Reading" (2015),[17] where the subject of comics is regularly incorporated. It is worth noting that many of these courses demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the medium, its specific characteristics, and the associated challenges, particularly in addressing common perceptions and misconceptions. For example, the scarce knowledge of the medium is highlighted, and changes in the publishing market and exhibition and administrative problems[18] and not-so-new trends, such as manga, are explored.[19] It should also be said that, on the other hand, there is no lack of courses with a broader and more adult-oriented approach (Tosti 2016, 643), even though the risk of infantilization or, at least of a nostalgic approach seems to be always in the background.

Coming back to Cuccolini's paper (1994) – now almost thirty years old – which offers some inspiring insights that are a valid agenda today:

- The need to equip libraries not only with good comics but also with specialized and multidisciplinary books on comics.
- The need to train librarians on this specific type of product.
- The need to organize presentations, exhibitions, and initiatives, also in collaboration with the comics artists themselves, in order to "raise the reader's awareness and make him more critically aware" (Ibid, 12).
- The need to establish, alongside libraries open to the public and available for lending, centers for documenting, preserving, and studying this medium. These centers would also house the related critical apparatus, right down to more volatile products such as fanzines, which "reveal orientations of taste and offer data otherwise not readily available" (Ibid, 13).

The author also proposed a national investment plan for comics library collections, involving the state, local authorities, and publishers and encouraging collaboration through donations. This approach is deemed more appropriate due to the high costs involved – comics are expensive – and the need for efficient collection management.

Although comics collections already existed in Italian libraries – as in the Bologna mentioned above case – the creation of the CFPAZ library sets a precedent, followed, for example, by such entities as the *Biblioteca delle Nuvole* (Perugia), which opened in 2002, and *BIFF – Biblio Farandola*, which opened in Rome in 2006. However, it must be said that making a list of proper comics libraries and distinguishing them from generalist ones with substantial comics collections is not easy. Searching in the library section of the OPAC-SBN[20] using 'fumetto' and 'fumetti' as keywords yielded 14 results, distributed between northern – mainly – and central Italy. Only one of these – the *BIFF – Biblio Farandola* library in Rome, is a library explicitly devoted to comics, while, among the others, two are libraries for children. Not all Italian comics libraries are archived in the OPAC-SBN or identifiable through these search keys. For example, CFPAZ's albeit substantial collections are searchable on the OPAC-SBN of Cremona and Brescia Library Network.

In short, even stating that "comics are no small part of the publishing universe and library collections" (Sferruzza 2023, 297), navigating this world is complex. Indeed, "Although prejudices about the dignity of comics publications have been overcome, the place of comics in libraries is still uncertain and enjoyment hindered, not least by the quality of their cataloging" (Ibid, 298).

At least as early as the mid-1990s, the problem of cataloging comics had been highlighted in the Italian context (Cuccolini 1994, 13; Dumontet 1995). Notably, "comics present considerable

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[16] https://www.aib.it/corsi/leggiamo-i-libri-per-ragazzi-corso-di-formazione-per-bibliotecari-ed-educatori/.

[17] https://www.aib.it/corsi/leggi-cresci-4-giornata-regionale-di-formazione.

[18] https://www.aib.it/corsi/leggiamo-i-libri-per-ragazzi-corso-di-formazione-per-bibliotecari-ed-educatori/.

[19] https://www.aib.it/corsi/manga-in-biblioteca-2-0/.

[20] The online public access catalog of the Italian national library service system.

problems [of cataloging] because they constitute a very fluid material, subject to frequent changes that can make their cataloging rather problematic" (Dumontet 1995, 12). As will be seen, the problem concerning comics cataloging is also reflected in identifying 'comics' libraries.

CATALOGING CRITERIA AND COMICS COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

The difficulty above regarding the acquisition, cataloging, and managing of comics (Graham 2016, 402–3) has been a much-discussed issue internationally in the past decades, at least since pioneer Randall W. Scott attested in 1978 that "the Library of Congress, which catalogs 'everything,' has cataloged only one comic book in the 45 or so years of comic books" (1978, 4).

For example, it has been said that "Comics can be very tricky for librarians" (Phoenix 2020, 213) because of their 'subversive' and anarchic nature, involving both aspects of the genre, publishing formats, and papercraft particularities, not least because "traditionally, the work of comics is associated with its physical medium" (Guilbert 2015, 2). Consequently, rather than 'comics,' it would be better to speak, as Berthou did, of "all the books that make up this whole that we call comics" (2015, 3). It is also necessary to consider how the way comics are named and labeled affects their perception and, consequently, the practices related to their cataloging (Goldsmith 2010). In fact, comics, by the multitude of their publishing formats (Couch 2000; Lefèvre 2000), dependent also on their geographic origin, present specific cataloging and display problems (Heaney 2007; Falk and Hunker 2010). This is a particularly noticeable problem considering comics series spread over several volumes.[21]

Some typical comics stories include complex multiverses, open and interwoven narratives, often in the context of serial publications.[22] Publishing a story or story arc can take years, if not decades, involving a main title and others (spin-offs, tie-ins, etc.). Consequently, various problems arise regarding acquisition, cataloging, storage, and lending, especially if the quality is poor or volumes or albums are not adequately preserved (Degener 2022). In addition, the tight budgets of libraries and the still high costs of comics represent a further difficulty related to collection management (Lo et al. 2019; Culbertson and Jackson 2016).

Moreover, comics typically bear the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) identifier, according to the Grand Comics Database,[23] which "is used to identify some series but does not identify specific issues (generally the ISSN is used in conjunction with a publication date)" (GCD n.d.). In contrast, graphic novels are distinguished by the International Standard Book Number (ISBN), typically reserved for books and intended for a " monographic publication: text that stands on its own as a product, whether printed, audio or electronic" (ALA 2022).

Therefore, it is not surprising that the book format, often marketed as a 'graphic novel,' provides a practical solution to various issues, offering a more standardized 'container' akin to those commonly used by libraries. Additionally, it proves to be a physically more robust and, above all, space-efficient option, bringing benefits to classification and loan management compared, for example, to the more fragile comic book format. Graphic novels have become so prominent in library collections (Goldsmith 2005). However,

the term 'graphic novel' is unversally [sic] applied in public libraries, even if the term is not necessarily always used correctly […] A library comics collection that only includes what are culturally deemed as acceptable and

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[21] Think that the 104 volumes (more than 20,000 pages) that compose *One Piece*, one of the most popular manga series of all time – still ongoing – reach almost two meters when placed side by side. To give another example, *Tex*, one of the most famous and long-standing Italian comics, has gone 2200 issues.

[22] In this regard, see Réveillac (2011, 24–25). Specifically concerning series, they specify that "a significant portion of budgets is [...] spent on following the series: most libraries try to conclude a series that has already begun systematically. This ends up creating problems because, for many series, the number of volumes is not determined" (Ibid, 24).

[23] It is "a nonprofit, Internet-based organization of international volunteers dedicated to building a database covering all printed comics throughout the world" (GCD n.d.).

serious graphic novels is limiting in terms of readership and access, excluding readers who engage with other comics formats (Vitella 2020, 72–73).

While the 'graphic novel' format, often compiling previously serialized narratives in volumes (like 'omnibus editions'), offers straightforward cataloging, display, and preservation advantages, it is crucial to recognize that a library's purpose extends beyond preserving and providing access to 'stories.' It encompasses safeguarding historical, cultural, and editorial memory, including publishing formats, printing specifics, and paratextual elements (such as advertisements, editorials, and letter columns, typically purged in volume collections).

The hybrid nature of comics and the – albeit attenuated today – perception of 'children's stuff' also entail other problematic issues. As Hartman notes, librarians must ask themselves constant questions related to "Where do we park graphic novels? In the teen collection? Children's Library? Adult non-fiction graphic arts? Adult fiction?" (2010, 52). Specifically concerning cataloging, it is essential to note that, for example, many studies on literacy and comics often do not clearly distinguish between comics and any other visual-narrative medium or genre, such as comic strips, cartoons, or illustrations. The DDC system is the most widely used library classification system internationally – and in Italy – and its categories and classes reflect the above terminological and methodological confusion. Following the DDC's rules, comics have been included,

- In class 700 (Arts and recreation),
- In the section 740 (Graphic arts and decorative arts),
- In the subsection 741 (Drawing and drawings),
- In the sub-subsection 741.5 (Comic books, graphic novels, fotonovelas, cartoons, caricatures, comic strips).

In addition, there are other subdivisions (e.g., 741.59) concerning the country of origin of the work following the origin of the primary author (Beall 2005), although many comics (e.g., superhero comics) are created by artists coming from different countries.

DDC has been challenged (Sterling 2010; Goldsmith 2005, 52; Tarulli 2010) as problematic for librarians to use and, among other things because it identifies the graphic novel as a genre, not a format (Goldsmith 2010, 187). Furthermore, it lumps very different objects, such as fotonovelas and comic strips, under the same division, ignoring the extensive discussion on comics-related terminology (e.g., Labio 2011). It also makes it difficult to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction works. "It matters little whether it is a book containing a comics story or the text of an essay or the alphabetical entries of an encyclopedia on comics: it all ends up in the great cauldron of (sub)class 741.5" (Rota 2022). Particularly:

> The DDC is typically used in public libraries, and yet **public librarians often find the DDC hard to maintain for graphic novels**. Librarians might use the 741.59xx number but then further catalog in several different ways. Some put them in **the comic strip section** as DDC directs, some create **a separate section similar to audio or video collections**, some **integrate the books** into fiction or appropriate non-fiction sections, and some **cross-catalog** (Sterling 2010).

In short, even in terms of library classification, the 'Comic-book conundrum' seems far from being 'Cracked,' as was too emphatically announced on *The Dewey Blog* (2006). Furthermore, very often, the classification and, consequently, the display on the shelves of comics is a matter for the initiative of individual libraries or librarians (Hartman 2010). In fact, in this case, there does not seem to be a magic wand, as the problems mentioned above are not only specific to DDC but also extend to the rigidities typical of other cataloging systems. Commenting on the eccentric cataloging work done by the San Diego State University Library, Culbertson and Jackson conclude that by "perhaps, in the breaking of the rules that we enable users to fully realize the potential of our collections" (Culbertson and Jackson 2016, 169). It must be said that eccentricity is not an exceptionality when it comes to cataloging comics. Turner notes that "the literature and study

reveals a myriad of possibilities for how to classify and organize a graphic novel collection" (2014, 47) and that "every library covered used a slightly different classification system because every library is slightly different" (Ibid., p. 48). As will be seen throughout this article, the Italian situation does not seem very different and appears to suffer from the same difficulties noted by Ciment (2007). When speaking of the French situation, they affirmed that "municipal libraries treat comics like no other document or genre: loose, unclassified, with very little critical literature."

THE ITALIAN CASE

This part collects mixed data regarding Italian cataloging specificities and issues from different sources. In particular, data from official guidelines for Italian libraries and *Anagrafe delle biblioteche italiane*[24] ('Italian Library Registry') and data from e-mail interviews with Dr. Laura Borsi (Head of Data Entry and Control for the Register of Italian Libraries), Dr. Egidio Incelli, (a library official at *Ministero della Cultura* ('Ministry of Culture')), Elisabetta Castro (librarian at the Ministry of Culture) have been taken into account.

Before going into detail, it is helpful to offer a brief overview of the comics market in Italy. While not reaching the production and sales volumes of the 'golden years' – the 1960s and 1970s – (Curcio 2016, 389), the Italian comics market has shown significant growth in recent years. It is challenging to get precise information about the comics market in Italy. Also, due to the sharp drop in comics sales over the past 20 years, publishers seldom provide sales data, and data about sales in comics shops, online, and at festivals are virtually nonexistent (Dallavalle 2020; Fondazione Symbola 2022, 208; Curcio 2016, 390). Likewise, data on the circulation of comics in libraries, excluding sporadic reports, are almost totally lacking. Nevertheless, it is possible to refer to some estimates.

Following the *Associazione Italiana Editori* ('Italian Publishers Association', AIE), in 2021, 33,078 comics were published in Italy, of which 3,272 were new, with a respective increase of +19.1% and +5.8% compared to 2020 and +3.9% and +9.8% compared to 2019. Compared to fiction, which grew by +45.5% between 2000 and 2021, comics grew by +976.3%. This growth, especially in recent years, was led by manga (1521 titles in 2021) and graphic novels (604 titles in 2021), generating a purchase expenditure of EUR 24.8 million in 2021, corresponding to a market share of 5.4% (AIE 2022a). Comics readers in Italy are almost 9 million, i.e., 18% of the national population and 35% of book readers (AIE 2021). Although as far as the general book market is concerned, the first 11 months of 2022 showed a decline compared to the previous year (-2% in copies sold and -2.3% in value), comics sales increased by 15.9% in value sales (AIE 2022d).

In addition, comics frequently top the best-selling book charts, and some works and authors – such as Gipi, Zerocalcacare, Fumettibrutti, etc. – have firmly entered the national cultural debate. Within this albeit comforting background, the continuing trend of cuts in funding and support plagues the whole library sector (Rainews 2015; Favasuli 2013; Stella 2020; Meloni 2013; ANSA 2023; Libraio 2023; Frigimelica and Parise, 2012).

In short, although comics are increasingly culturally and commercially relevant, the precarious economic situation of the library system and the systematic lack of staff[25] make it difficult for them to have a more relevant presence in libraries. Moreover, figuring out how many comics there are in Italian libraries is not easy, and this difficulty is linked to the specific problems related to their cataloging.

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[24] https://anagrafe.iccu.sbn.it/it/
[25] According to Istat's 2019 survey, 39.7% of total libraries are staffed entirely by volunteer and unpaid staff, and four out of 10 library staff (39.2%) work part-time (Istat 2021).

Summarizing a document outlining the cataloging rules for Italian libraries (*Regole Italiane di Catalogazione*, commonly known as REICAT)[26] reads, in section 18.5.1 (p. 546) and others, that comics or, instead, their visual component cannot be considered for all intents and purposes on par with an illustration because the latter is a constituent part of the work being cataloged.[27]

However, in the case of several authors, their contributions must be indicated separately but always within the framework of cataloging that considers them creators of a work exclusively to the graphic arts. A collaboration that results in a unitary work for which the choice of the term 'illustration' is particularly jarring. However, these classification criteria, as well as others, are debated. For example, in a document promoted by the libraries of the municipality of Modena and compiled by, among others, two librarians, it is stated that,

> "Comics is not a genre! It is a language!" the experts keep repeating to the librarians […] used to reasoning in genres and classes. [DDC considers comics] an artistic category […], thus wholly neglecting the other aspect, the literary one. Hence, the starting misunderstanding that makes it so challenging to place comics in libraries: when we say that it is a genre, we actually mean that [...] it should be classified among literature [...]. While it is true that considering it a narrative genre is limiting [...], it is also true that considering it merely a drawing, albeit an artistic one, loses its function of literary expression (Furini, Rimondini, and Spiritelli 2012).

As much as even placing prominence on the 'literariness' of comics betrays the nature and history of the medium, it is clear that even a classification that reduces them to just one form of graphic art, among others, does not serve to frame it usefully. In such a context, where comics, at least in traditional libraries, are considered a secondary 'genre,' it is unsurprising that there are still very few libraries and institutions with a substantial comics section.
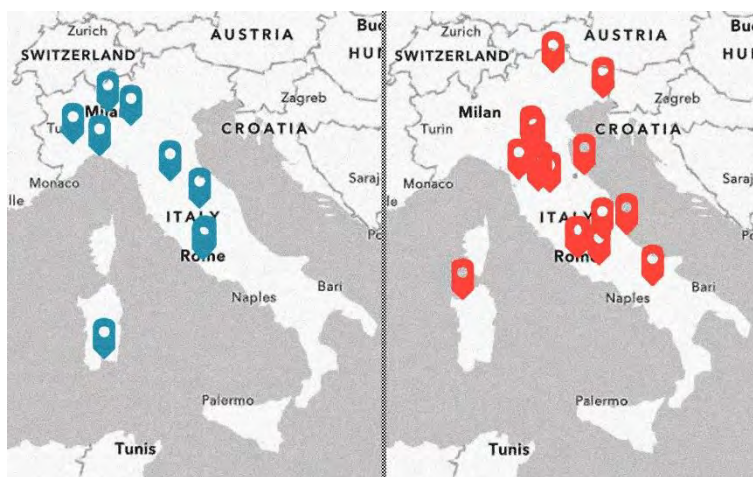

FIG. 1

Geographical distribution of libraries identified through the Italian Library Registry. On the left (blue) are those identified through the query '741.5'. On the right (red), are those identified through the query 'fumetti.'

Searching the *Anagrafe delle Biblioteche Italiane* ('Italian Library Registry') website[28] and using the code 741.5, it turns out that only eight libraries are 'specialized' in comics (out of 12963 libraries surveyed), of which seven are located in central and northern Italy.

By redoing the search using the keyword 'fumetti' ('comics'), the libraries – without distinction between public libraries, university libraries, etc. – become nineteen (of which one no longer exists). Of these, 1 is the library of a fine arts academy, 1 is a regional library, and 15 are public municipal libraries (2 of which are children's libraries). The only

proper comics library – the *BIFF – Biblio Farandola Fumetto* (Rome) –is run by a cultural association. To find other comics libraries, one must refer again to the query with search key 741.5.

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[26] The REICAT is in line with the rules provided by the ISBD (International Standard Bibliographic Description), even departing from them on points not deemed in line with the Italian bibliographic tradition.

[27] (Commissione permanente per la revisione delle regole italiane di catalogazione 2009), The document is drawn up by the *Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico* ('Central Institute for the Unique Catalogue'), https://www.iccu.sbn.it/export/sites/iccu/documenti/2015/REICAT-giugno2009.pdf.

[28] https://anagrafe.iccu.sbn.it/it/.

Of the 9 libraries found, 8 are administered by private entities or associations, except for the *Biblioteca delle Nuvole*, pertaining to the municipality of Perugia [Fig. 1].

Most of the libraries identified are located in central and northern Italy, partially reflecting the most overall uneven distribution of libraries across the country [Fig. 2].[29] Furthermore, the distribution of libraries in Italy is erratic between large and peripheral cities, as seen in the following map [Fig.2 (Giunti 2022)].

FIG. 2

"Every red dot on the map is an Italian library. The color of the territories, on the other hand, identifies the classification according to inland areas."

"When considering all the libraries in the national register, 10% (1,883 out of over 18,000 total) are located in peripheral and outermost municipalities. The figure rises to 17.1% if only libraries classified as public and non-specialized are considered."

Source: elaboration by openpolis – *Con i Bambini* on data from the *Agenzia per la coesione territoriale* and Iccu-Abi.

(https://www.openpolis.it/numeri/meno-del-20-delle-biblioteche-si-trovano-nei-comuni-periferici-e-ultraperiferici/)

Both Dr. Laura Borsi, Head of Data Entry and Control for the Italian Library Registry, and Dr. Egidio Incelli, a library official at the Ministry of Culture, confirmed by e-mail that it is complicated, if not impossible, to trace libraries that deal specifically with comics as well as comics lending statistics on a national level.[30]

Not even the Network for Inter-Library Document Exchange ('NILDE'), the other major national ILL/DD (Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery) system besides OPAC-SBN allows such data. Regarding the presence of comics in the national library catalog, the OPAC-SBN has been consulted through restricted searches. The first narrowed the field to the DDC classification, entering 741.5 as the search key. This search resulted in 6,342 physical and 22 digital documents (plus or minus 0.3% of all materials classified on OPAC-SBN), some of which are located in foreign libraries (e.g., Paris, Brussels, and others), while others were found to be cataloged as 'resource to be projected or video.' In addition to being inaccurate, the search through the 741.5 returned a limited number of results. For example, the *Biblioteca delle Nuvole* in Perugia, which does not use this classification system and declares to have a comics collection of about 60,000 titles, of which 5,000 are cataloged (Biblioteca delle Nuvole n.d.), turns out to have only 560

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[29] "More than half of the libraries are in the North (58.3%), 24.2% in the South, and 17.5% in Central Italy" (Istat 2021).

[30] This is not a problem related only to comics. As Galluzzi stated in 2014, data on public libraries, for example, regarding membership, lending, and performance, are scarce, and, even, "it is hard to even know for sure the number and location of existing public libraries."(2014, 287).
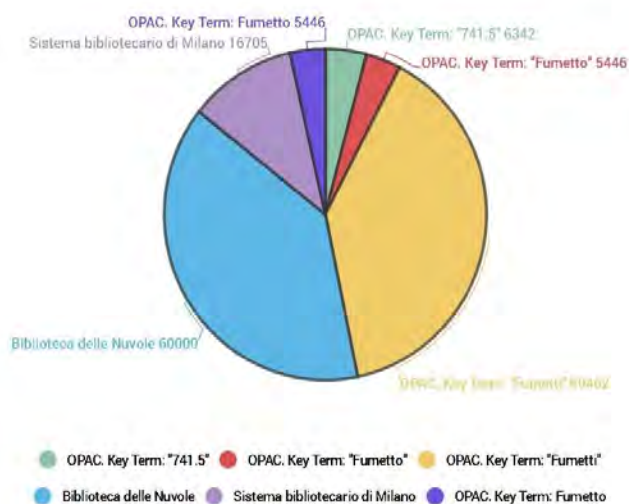
available through OPAC-SBN. The search was then repeated using simple text keywords. For 'fumetto,' the results were 5,446 physical and 33 digital documents. Using the plural ('fumetti'), the results were 60,462 physical and 250 digital documents. The latter is a more realistic result, considering that the Milan Library System, on OPAC-SBN, turns out to have 11,123 physical comics, while those directly declared by the same system are 16,705[31] (Sistema Bibliotecario di Milano 2022) [see Fig.3].

FIG. 3

In this somewhat confusing and certainly unstructured context, the establishment of a technical committee on Italian comics by the Ministry of Culture in 2020 (Lo Spazio Bianco 2020) has been perceived as an important signal. Its purpose is, among others, to create a national library hub for comics with its cataloging system. The work of the ministerial committee was divided into two groups. The first group, which is responsible for drafting guidelines on the cataloging of comics, focuses in particular on the following problems:

- The order of preference of sources: based on which criteria to obtain information from the covers and title pages of comics.

- Responsibility: i.e., which authorial and professional figures can be indicated as authors of publications, especially in the presence of works with numerous artistic contributions.

- Level: it is not always possible to determine whether a document can be categorized as a monograph or serial. Many serials, classified as such as periodicals, are actually monograph series.

The second group discusses the criteria to be followed for census funds and collections dedicated to comics in Italian libraries. Attention is also being paid to those collections, mainly due to private initiatives that have led to the establishment or creation of museums and specialized centers.[32] In addition, the *Promozione fumetto 2021* ('Comics promotion 2021'), the first ministerial announcement to promote comics, which is also open to public institutions – thus also libraries – dates back to 2021. The technical table has not yet produced results, and *Promozione Fumetto* has not been renewed.

Beyond that, data is needed on how the presence of comics in Italian libraries affects lending and users' demographic profiles. An exception is a recent report produced by the municipality of Milan, *Big Bang! Fumetti in Biblioteca,* which profiles this phenomenon within the Milan Library System. Considering what has been said about the perception of comics as 'child's stuff,' it might be surprising that most (11,976) of the previously mentioned 16,705 comics are classified as 'for

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[31] 16,705 comics are available for loan, plus 170 for consultation, for a total of 16,875 comics. They are about 1.2 percent of the 1,400,000 volumes hosted by the system.

[32] Information on the two working groups related to the Ministry's technical committee was provided by Dr. Elisabetta Castro, also head of the first group mentioned here.

adults.' Regarding age, the groups most interested in borrowing comics fall into the 18-70 age range – on a scale ranging from 0 to +70 years old – with peaks between 35 and 55. From 2017 to 2022, the majority of borrowers were women. Since 2019, the circulation of comics has increased:

> In 2019, comics constituted 2.63% of the non-fiction collection and 7.40% of loans, with a circulation index of 1.7 (equal to fiction, slightly higher than guidebooks). In 2021, comics constituted 5.16% of the non-fiction collection and 9.86% of loans, with a circulation index of 1.1, much higher than any other non-fiction class (Sistema Bibliotecario di Milano 2022).

Beyond the partial picture provided by the Milan Library System, encouraging as it is, an overall one at the national level is still lacking.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In this part, the data listed so far will be supplemented with those inferred from the above surveys and the Treviso conference.
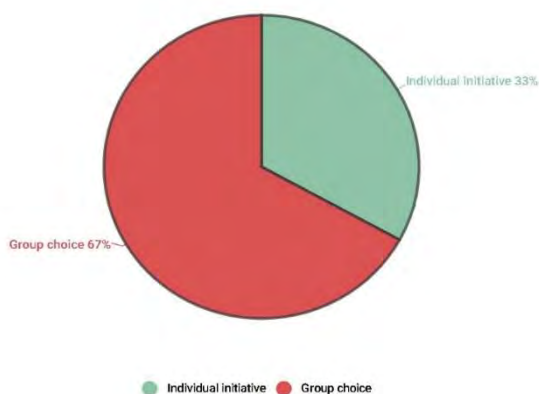
NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COLLECTION

FIG. 4

Was your collection created due to an individual's initiative, or was it the result of a group's choices?

The first section of the survey focused on the creation of the collection. As can be seen from the graph in Fig. 4, creating a library comics collection is most often the result of the initiative of more people (9 responses from nine participants).

Less than half of the respondents (44%) also said they had consulted other libraries or institutions involved in comics dissemination before starting their collection. Regarding the percentage devoted to comics purchases relative to the overall budget, comics libraries must be excluded among the participants. The remaining participants indicated percentages ranging from 2% to 40%. One of the respondents (**C**), who indicates a percentage of 20%, specified that this was an exceptionality related to ministerial funds. Compared with books, the higher costs of comics affect acquisition policies not at all or only moderately. The channels through which comics are acquired are eclectic: traditional bookstores, comics shops, newsstands, book distributors, and direct purchases from publishers. **H** specifies that comics are acquired through "a general distributor for the entire [book] estate and a preferred channel with a specialized distributor in a small part."

One of the two comics libraries (**D**) specifies that it had taken advantage of the *Decreto Franceschini* in the past two years.[33] Regarding the mode of supply, it stated that.

- The library receives comics due to *diritto di stampa* ('right to print')[34] from a large comics book publisher based in the same municipality.

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[33] The so-called *Decreto Franceschini* is a fund promoted by former Culture Minister Dario Franceschini, which allocated 30 million euros to libraries open to the public to purchase books (including comics). Funding was renewed from 2020 to 2023 (MIC 2021).

[34] https://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/04106l.htm. The *diritto di stampa* or, later, *deposito legale* ('legal deposit') is a legal obligation to deposit products of cultural and public interest (books, other printed texts, and other media) in libraries, archives, and other institutions for preservation and dissemination. This obligation is not always fulfilled and leads to conflicts concerning copyright enforcement. (De Robbio 2007).

- Librarians, members of a local comics association, and library users themselves donate their comics after reading them.
- The library's founder and director purchases comics monthly using personal funds.

Donations from private citizens or associations are an additional and relevant source of supply for all respondents, 56.6% of whom said that (also) the publishers themselves are donors. Regarding how the librarians select which comics to buy, all answered through websites, excluding other proposed possibilities (associations, book clubs, institutional sites).[35] The other options may, therefore, be missing or unknown to librarians.

However, there are also different strategies. Silleni – manager of the library Zara – explains that the Milan Library System has librarians independently choosing what to buy but coordinating through a working group on comics, consisting of at least one representative from each of the 26 libraries of the network. Initially started by librarians who were passionate about comics, through the years, the value of the medium within the library system has been recognized, so much so that, as of 2022, a portion of the budget of each library (5% to 20%) has been dedicated exclusively to the purchase of comics. Furthermore, through public calls, the Milan Library System collaborates with external entities that can handle special projects. For example, the acquisition of self-publishing or fanzines – which are not included in the catalogs of book distributors through which libraries usually obtain their supplies – is handled by an external association (Silleni in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 43:50). As for the choice of comics, again in the Milan libraries, the adult comics present in the most copies but also the most lent correspond to great international (such as *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi or *Maus* by Art Spiegelman) or national successes (e.g., Zerocalcare's comics). On the other hand, children's comics featured in multiple copies do not necessarily correspond to bestsellers, while the ranking of the most lent and best-selling children's comics turn out to be more closely matched (Sistema Bibliotecario di Milano 2022).

For example, in the ranking of the most borrowed children's comics in 2019, the world-renowned author Raina Telgemeier's books occupy first and third place but only seventh in that of comics featured in multiple copies (25 copies): this can be linked to the promotional efforts made by librarians and, in particular, to a scholar reading incentive contest such as *OssiBOOki* (Silleni in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 55:20).

Striking a balance between one idea of a library that meets the general public's tastes and another that allows or encourages the discovery of new things (in other words, bestsellers vs. niche works) is not easy. In particular, the latter involves mediation on the part of librarians, stemming from an accurate knowledge of the medium, which is not always possible to take for granted. Furthermore, buying the most popular comics risks running out of budget, and – although detailed data on circulation and lending are lacking – so is shelf space (Réveillac 2011, 26–28). However, the – relative – independence of librarians from the market can mean that libraries can be both an exciting business sector for smaller publishers to explore and an effective professional and retention channel for readers, especially younger ones. In short, increasing donations to libraries could be a good investment for the comics publishers' present and future.

CATALOGING: CRITERIA AND CRITICALITIES

Before delving into this section, it should be specified that comics collections also include author's magazines, periodicals, correspondences, press review folders, postcards, brochures, etc., maybe partly due to inaccurate cataloging systems. This amount of often non-inventoried material should be cataloged because the history of Italian comics could be reconstructed there (Ginevra in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 24:00). Indeed, the world of comics is diverse. The

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[35] One of the librarians (**F**) autonomously specified that the selection is conducted due to a personal and direct awareness of the sector.

activities of libraries should reflect this, also dealing with the promotion, preservation, and ensuring availability of comics for study and research functions as well as reading and entertainment.

As seen, cataloging represents one of the most critical aspects of managing comics in a library. Following the survey participants, there are several guidelines adopted. For example, **A** adopts cataloging that distinguishes between children's, adult, and manga comics; **B** and **G** adhere to ISBD and REICAT. **D** states that,

> Comics volumes and periods are sorted by series and publishing houses; essays and monographs are sorted by themes, creating sections (ARTISTS section, ESSAYS section in turn divided into subsections such as COMICS / ILLUSTRATION / CINEMA / EDUCATION / MISCELLANY).

C, **E**, and **H** use the Dewey code, although this seems problematic. When asked, "Do you think the DDC is suitable for the medium's specificities?" 6 out of nine participants said no. The participants' individual opinions [table below] reflect the international concerns about DDC previously reported.

A	"The children's and adult division is not precise (all manga, for example, is cataloged for adults), which does not facilitate libraries where librarians are unfamiliar with this medium. Also, no subsection is based on nationalities or genres, creating confusion for users and shelf order."
D	"With the DEWEY code, comics would only have one section because, in the DEWEY code, comics is considered a genre (on the same level as science fiction)."
E	"For Dewey, comics volumes, biographies, essays, and encyclopedias have the same classification."
F	"The code reflects the Western culture of a century ago, and many categories need to be revised."
H	"A classification by genre might be more appropriate."

However, **C** stated that "the DDC is adequate, but to meet the readers, it is better also to use additional signage to help them find their way around" and that "unlike other libraries, we try to be more specific: not only the generic 741.5, but we indicate the nationality [through sub-categories] 741.5945, 741.5952, etc.,"

Suppose no one cataloging method seems to meet all the needs of libraries and the problems posed by comics. In that case, it must also be said that DDC is indispensable for public reading libraries, as it is the most widely used bibliographic organization system in Italian libraries. However, it is possible to constitute a section within which, while staying within category 741.5, a functional placement can be articulated for comics. In short, a creative, adaptive, and elastic approach seems best, as Tarulli (2010) also suggested.

For example, the CFPAZ does not follow DDC but divides its collection of 60,000 thousand volumes into,

- Monographs.
- Periodicals.
- Series.

The three groups are, in turn, divided by publisher and by format. This choice is guided by visual pleasantness and ease of retrieval (Ginevra in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 24:10).

Referring to **H**'s response regarding genre classification, these also seem quite varied within comics collections. However, many (**A**, **B**, **D**, **E**) emphasize the non-prevalence of a specific genre. **A** specifically speaks of heterogeneity. **B**, specifying that there is no main genre in the collection, mentions comics adaptations of literary classics, biographies, and superheroes. **C** emphasizes the significant presence of Bonelli, perhaps the largest and one of the older publishers of Italian popular

comics.[36] **D** lists superheroes, science fiction, westerns, graphic novels, memoirs, journalism, and biographies. **H** mentions graphic journalism and noir, while **I** mentions the adventure, fantasy, and graphic journalism genres. In addition, 55.6% of participants specify that they have a comics non-fiction section.

DISPLAYING

The 85,7% of the libraries surveyed – with the exclusion of the two that exclusively manage comics collections – display comics in a separate section. For example, **A** has dedicated two shelves to display new comics, one dedicated to manga and one for other comics. **B** placed the comics collection in the young adult section of the open-shelf children's Room. Furthermore, comics "are displayed alphabetically by the author but are not distinguished by genre. Users can choose for themselves." While the prevalence is the open-shelf display, often explicitly following DDC (**C** and **E**), only one (**I**) claims to display comics by sorting them by format. The format of comics volumes, significantly if oversized, poses specific problems related to display management for 55.6% of respondents. In particular, these tend to be damaged and be more prone to wear and tear (**B** and **C**), while some particular formats – the specific case of Joe Sacco's *The Great War*[37] (**D**) – are reserved only for internal consultation (**C**, **D**, and **E**). Only **G** emphasizes how non-standard formats are more liked by users.

Following **D**, non-standard formats also prevent the display of comics among others from the same publisher (posing a problem for those who opt for this type of classification/display). This choice sometimes forces the display of comics by showing the cover board rather than the spine, taking up more space (**C**). However, "the small pocket format is difficult to handle" for **D** "because there is the risk of theft." In conclusion, the uneven graphic novel format still seems to be a winner, as "book-sized volumes with titles on the spine are easier to manage and better recognized by users" (**G**).[38]

LOANS AND AUDIENCE

While Silleni notes that "the circulation index of comics is very high" (in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 43:20), survey participants provided more diverse responses.

Excluding the two comics libraries, 5 out of 7 participants noticed an increase in lending and circulation after the introduction of comics in their collections. Specifically, 55.6% noted an increase in user circulation lending, both in number and type of users. **A** cannot precisely quantify the percentage increase since the establishment of a comics section is recent. However, the collection consisting of 750 titles is consistently 30/40% on loan. On the other hand, **C** states that the percentage increase is between 15% and 20%. When the expansion is factual, it is related – according to one librarian's statement – to titles by authors born on and/or active on the web (**H**), due probably to their popularity. In only one case, one of the surveyed entities does not lend the titles in the comics section.

The increase in readership is mainly related to a specific age group (namely the 12-18 age group) (**A** and **C**) who previously did not attend the library (**A**). Only two of the survey respondents (**B** and **H**) record no change in readership, while **F** points out a steady increase in female readers. However, according to **G**, the audience borrowing comics is across the board, including "school-age children, college students, comics enthusiasts, illustration professionals" (**I**). The main attractor of

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[36] Bonelli is the publisher of such titles as *Tex*, *Dylan Dog*, *Zagor*, and *Martin Mystère*.

[37] This book is tangential to comics in both format and intention. Joe Sacco's work is a 7-meter sequential image in a concertina-opening format. The fragility of the volume prompted the interviewed library to exclude it from lending, as is often the case for delicate or valuable books.

[38] Regarding the perception of comic formats, it is worth recalling what Valentina De Poli, former editor-in-chief of Disney's hugely popular *Topolino* magazine, said: " Kids lost the concept of the periodical magazine [...] many treated the magazine like a book, they were surprised that there was an advertisement at the end and not the back cover" (Allegri 2018).

the teenage group is manga, while classic Italian comics – such as the Bonelli comics, as mentioned earlier – have a significantly higher age elective audience in the 45/60 range (**C**). This is not confirmed in the Milan Library System report. In fact, among the most borrowed volumes by adults are mainly national and international bestsellers. For example, comics by Zerocalcare – one of Italy's top authors – occupy the top eight positions of loans. In contrast, the ranking for children is more diverse and uneven (Sistema Bibliotecario di Milano 2022). However, making comics that are thought to be intended for a specific age group accessible to everyone can create surprises. Although Bonelli Publishing House's *Tex* (1948 - ongoing) is read primarily by older readers, it is sometimes enjoyed by children, often through the intermediary of grandparents (Aiudi in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 6:33:22; Ginevra in 2023 6:35:36).

Creating a collection of comics usually generates positive effect feedback, with limited mistrustful attitudes from "some strong readers of the older generation" who "criticized comics as being a minor genre" (**B**). After all, as stated by **C**, "non-comics fans tend to change their minds with difficulty." Libraries seem to fail to shake the idea that comics are just entertainment. When asked how comics are perceived by their audience, 57.1% answered "as something 'serious,'" while 42.9% "only as entertainment and amusement."

COMMUNICATION AND EVENT PLANNING

Consequent to what has just been said, how comics are communicated and disseminated gains central relevance. For Ginevra (in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 15:47), the library activity is instrumental for all the other activities, such as presentations, exhibitions, and critical works.

The promotion of comic-centered events is substantial to a consistent collection. The survey reveals that 66% of the libraries surveyed organize initiatives to raise public awareness of the medium. In addition, 55% of respondents use comics to create educational paths related to science or issues of a social or environmental nature or related to the local community's history. In addition, for most participants (88.9% of eight respondents), broadening and diversifying the target audience is crucial. This goal can be achieved by expanding and diversifying the collection (**A**, **B,** and **C**), but also by conducting events (**B**, **C**, **D**, **E**, **F**, **H,** and **I**), including in collaboration with schools (**F**). Libraries collaborate with institutional and associative realities in the area, especially with educational institutions, through workshops in which material and bibliographic selections designed *ad hoc* are offered. Mainly, the following activities were highlighted:

- Book presentations.

- Drawing courses.

- Exhibitions.

- Meetings with authors.

In addition, future planning contemplates events such as exhibitions, lectures, life drawing sessions, and festivals. These events could increase awareness of the medium, promote reading, and convey a more diverse and numerically more extensive user base to libraries. However, the preferred user always seems to be the school-age one (5 of 8 respondents), as in the case mentioned above of *OssiBOOki* and other similar initiatives across the country.[39] This is also reflected in the already mentioned AIB training courses focused on younger readers.

The survey participants agreed that targeted initiatives increase the effectiveness of the comics collections. These initiatives should be shared through a collaborative network, including

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[39] For a more in-depth discussion, refer to the panel *Biblioteche e autori* of the *Ti leggerei ovunque* conference (Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023).

libraries and schools, which should "utilize comics in educational situations and study it [...] as a specific medium and language" (**H**). Some responses reveal the importance of the possibility of using comics for educational purposes, not only to communicate social and historical issues. In fact, it is clear that raising awareness and promoting the medium goes through "a greater focus on the centrality of comics," precisely understood as a narrative form (**H**).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summing up the findings presented, comics are an essential asset for libraries and vice versa. Notably, introducing a comics section can lead to increased circulation, diversification, and number of patrons. Conversely, libraries play an essential role in promoting comics, helping spread awareness of the medium, and enhancing its potential as an educational and cultural tool. Libraries should promote comics as a narrative and artistic form, as well as an educational tool or simple entertainment, unhinging the view of comics as only or primarily as children's stuff. This, however, must be helped by a greater and more accomplished integration of comics within the national library system so that the medium would no longer be seen or perceived as an exceptionality, an alien body, or an eternal novelty.

In fact, today, the breakthrough of comics in the Italian library is no longer a new phenomenon. However, it has gained more and more relevance in the last few years and is evolving, paralleling society and readership habits and tastes. Library comics collections – historically focused on a young audience – are changing, and the users are diversifying regarding the genres and socio-demographic profiles. This evolution, the increasing cultural recognition of comics, and its growing economic relevance made or should make this medium a must-have for any library. As a prominent agent of the contemporary cultural debate, as well as a long-standing and relevant presence in the Italian landscape, comics ask today for better recognition in the library system, more decisive and structural interventions, better tools, and new rules, and to put it in a more prosaic way, more funds. It is not easy.

As mentioned, the Italian library system has been subject to heavy funding reductions for years, if not decades, as it has been afflicted, as Valenza notes, by interference, bureaucracy, lack of economic investment, increased voluntary labor, precarization, and in essence, scarcity of funds, means and prospects" (2021, 48): this makes the work of Italian libraries and librarians arduous. However, beyond these difficulties, the network of public libraries is Italy's most widespread cultural structure, albeit not homogeneously across the territory (Istat 2021). Moreover, as Fagiolani states, libraries are

> a real 'point of reference' in neighborhoods and cities for 'cultural growth,' for the strengthening of 'positive social relations,' in general, for the 'well-being' of people (children, adults, the elderly, students, workers, scholars, etc.). Perceived as 'close,' 'welcoming,' and 'safe' places, libraries are configured as a real 'growth opportunity' (2021, 8).

That of cataloging, which may seem like an abstract problem, adds to the economic difficulties. Asked about the possibility of networking, the CFPAZ director replied as follows:

> We promoted a meeting, a network of comics cultural places, private libraries, specialized libraries, and comics libraries. Broaden the thinking to museum spaces [...]. So many realities have come up over the years. They are too diverse realities and struggling with their organization and funding problems. We can't share collections if they are cataloged differently. More effort is needed, and more help is needed to carry on the reflections (Ginevra in Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 6:40:33).

Against the backdrop of this challenging economic and administrative context, but also within this fundamental cultural and social infrastructure, comics represent both a resource and a particular challenge for libraries with specific critical issues in addition to the more general ones. Some of these difficulties – concerning, for example, classification criteria and management of exhibition space – reflect similar problems recognizable in the other international studies cited here, while others are specific to the Italian context.

Regarding the whole national library system, some aspects seem to be particularly relevant:

-   The lack of a centralized policy and ministerial guidelines related to comics acquisitions (both through donations and buying) added to the insufficient economic resources at the disposal of the libraries.
-   The lack of trained comics professionals, full-time and not part-time or voluntary workers, who are thus well integrated into the library system.

As for the second point, comics acquisition seems to be conducted based on the specific and previous knowledge of the medium and the market by the librarians, who are fans and passionate. This probably depends on the lack of centralized and univocal training – that is not totally absent but seems occasional and on a local rather than national basis – of the professionals and the relevant presence of volunteer workers. This is the case, for example, at the *Biblioteca delle Nuvole* – which has cataloged just 5000 comics out of the 60000 that make up the entire library collection.[40] In this library, "all workers involved in cataloging, lending, and all activities within the facility (including classes, lectures, and comics discussions) are exclusively volunteers – in some cases, redundant workers – who lend their labor for free in their spare time" (Rota 2022).

The lack of adequately trained staff could also be reflected in some problems when acquiring and cataloging comics, as, for example, managing DDC could be challenging for volunteer workers. Furthermore, as noted by Ginevra (Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 26:55) and Righi (Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 39:15), comics librarians need better and more specific training.

Regarding the first point, initiatives like the ministerial technical committee on comics and funding opportunities like *Promozione fumetto* seemed a step forward. However, the first has stalled, while the second's exceptional and transitory nature does not allow long-term planning. The lack of clear ministerial guidelines could be filled by the works of private associations involved in providing comics selections and suggestions for libraries. However, this type of support seems to be missing in Italy, or at least, it is not clearly recognizable regarding the reliability and authority of the sources, even though there are examples of these kinds of associations and support groups. If there is a lack of coordination at the national level, the individual local entities often organize themselves, as in the case of the Milan Library System mentioned above.

Although this problem weakly emerges from the survey, it is easy to imagine that preserving comics is not always easy, especially considering the fragility of some old editions. However, it is a critical issue to consider, especially in light of the relevant weight that donations from private collections have. Therefore, the problem arises of finding a balance between preservation – including the medium's historical memory – and the comics' free enjoyment. The latter goal is more easily achieved through acquiring more solid and recent – but often more expensive – book-format reprints of old works.

Intending to bring comics out of the confines of pure entertainment, stepping outside a vision that puts children and adolescents at the center of comics enjoyment is necessary. It should always be remembered that education in the 'language' of comics is not only about the youngest and cannot be delegated to or focused only on schools (Quaianni Manuzzato, Tonfoni, and Tosti 2023 6:45:23). Therefore, activities such as events, workshops, and competitions, which can bring people first to comics and then to libraries, are welcome. Unfortunately, these events are primarily designed for a young audience. It could be possible to do more and better, following the track of what happens, for example, in the USA where libraries organize little comic-cons (Baume 2017; MacDonald 2014). These festivals attract hundreds if not thousands of participants, making

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[40] Data are available on the library website: https://www.bibliotecadellenuvole.it/catalogo/.

peripheral libraries more attractive and helping people who have difficulties reaching far and sometimes very expensive conventions. Moreover, running these activities within a fragile system – both economically and labor-wise – as the library system entails a human and economic burden that cannot be overlooked.

Finally, the involvement of comics publishers seems to be a vital aspect to be increased. According to Istat (2022), promoting reading in the territory through initiatives in schools, libraries, bookstores, and cultural venues is essential for more than one in ten publishers (12.8%). An equally significant share of operators (18.4%) report the expansion and reshaping of offerings as a strategic objective to intercept new target readers. In addition, support for enhancing heritage and disseminating public reading libraries is among the objectives considered a priority for promoting the publishing industry. Assuming the comics' growing importance in Italy, closer collaboration between libraries and publishers could benefit both stakeholders.

For example, concerning the acquisitions, donations by private patrons are a relevant part of the library comics collection. Donations by publishing houses are – beyond the legal obligation – equally so too, but they could be incremented, especially because, as said, libraries can be an effective marketing and displaying tool for their products. The role of publishers should also not be limited to donations but could extend to events, educational meetings, etc., to organizing small comic-cons. Bringing library users closer to comics could create new readers and buyers and build a broader and diversified audience, also for the publishers.

NEW RESEARCH HORIZONS

The research presented here is an initial investigation of a complex and evolving phenomenon. Although it is exploratory research on a still underdeveloped field, the small number of respondents to the survey cannot sufficiently reflect the phenomenon's complexity. Future research must involve more respondents and deeply explore the complex relationships between comics and Italian libraries. In particular, the demographic, gender, and geographic characteristics of comics library readership should be better investigated. Users' reading habits will have to be investigated in-depth, as well as the specific problems related to the digitization of comics and the management of digital lending and, more generally, how the library holdings of comics can be increased and made more homogeneous and easily accessible throughout the country.

Another point that deserves to be investigated is how comics may or may not enhance a fragile but essential system such as the Italian library, which is very important and relevant to its users (Chiessi 2011; 2012). Appropriate studies should be conducted on the librarians' role in the footprint of what has been done in other countries (Berthou 2015). Future research should include the precarization of librarians' work in Italy, whether their role as mediators in the choice of comics is more or less effective – as well as what kind of mediation is best applied to avoid the risk, probably already in place, feared by Ciment that this role is played by "a number of mediators who seem cruelly (and uniformly) absent in comics" (2007).

Finally, specific trends, whether emerging, established, or growing, such as manga and its management, will need to be explored in greater depth.

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APPENDIX

Survey questions

Question	Type of question: MC (multiple choice) or OE (Open-Ended).	Number of respondents (out of 9)
Was your collection created due to an individual's initiative, or was it the result of a group's choices?	MC - An individual's initiative - A group's choices	9
Have you consulted any other libraries or institutions involved in disseminating comic works before you started?	MC - Yes - No	9
Do you have a dedicated budget available to purchase the volumes?	MC - Yes - No - In part	9
What percentage of the budget is devoted to buying comics out of the overall budget? How do the higher costs of comic volumes affect spending?	OE	9
Is the acquiring of the volumes the result of donations?	MC - Totally - In part	9
What are the supply channels?	OE	9
How do you select comics to buy?	MC - Associations - Book clubs - Websites	9

	- Institutional channels	
Do you receive donations from publishers?	MC - Yes - No	
What are the criteria for cataloging works?	OE	9
Do you think the Dewey code is suitable for the medium's specificity?	MC - Yes - No	9
If the answer to the previous question is no, give reasons.	OE	7
What fiction and non-fiction genres (e.g., memoir, graphic journalism, etc) are most represented in your comic collection?	OE	8
Do you have a comics nonfiction section?	MC - Yes - No	9
In your library, comics are on display:	MC - In a separate section - Integrated into the main collection	9
What are the display criteria adopted?	OE	9
After introducing comics, have you noticed an increase in lending and user circulation, both in the number of users and their type?	MC - Yes - No	9
By what percentage have loans increased?	OE	6
How has the type of users who attend and use the loan service changed, if at all?	OE	7
Do particular formats and paper specifications (oversized or oversized volumes, recognizability of volumes from the coast rather than from the cover, albums, book design, etc.) affect display management?	MC - Yes - No	9

If the answer is yes, please specify how.	OE		4
Do particle formats and paper specifications (e.g., fragility of volumes) affect loan management?	MC - Yes - No		9
If the answer is yes, please specify how.	OE		5
Do you organize initiatives to raise awareness or create a debate around this format/medium?	MC - Yes - No		9
Specifically, what kind of initiatives are organized?	OE		6
Do you use comics in your collection to narrate events related to actual facts or contemporary ones?	MC - Yes - No		9
What is your target audience?	OE		7
How did and how does your audience perceive your comic collection? Has there been mistrust, discussion, etc.?	OE		8
Comics are communicated and perceived:	MC - as something 'serious' - only as entertainment and diversion		8
Do you also use comics to create science-related or other educational pathways (raising awareness of environmental and social issues, local community history, etc)?	MC - Yes - No		9
How?	OE		6
Do you also use comics as a medium for multimedia narratives related to specific areas or events?	MC - Yes - No		9
What kind of events?	OE		4
Are you trying to broaden your target audience?	MC - Yes - No		9
If yes, how and through what initiatives?	OE		8
What initiatives do you think would increase the	OE		8

effectiveness of your comics collection?			
Do you have any suggestions for increasing the dissemination and enjoyment of this part of your collection?	OE		7