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## Imprint

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*Sardinian — a digital language?* | Authors: Irene Russo, Claudia Soria

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# 1. Overview

**H**ow does the linguistic diversity of Europe reflect in the new media? Do regional and minority languages contribute to EU digital language diversity, and to what extent? Is it possible for regional or minority language speakers to have a digital life in those languages?

In this report we present the results of the first survey about the actual needs of European minority language speakers regarding digital opportunities. The survey is part of the work carried out by the Digital Language Diversity Project (DLDP), a three-year Erasmus+ project started in September 2015.

The goal of the DLDP is to help minority language speakers in the acquisition of intellectual and practical skills to create, share, and re-use online digital content, and, at the same time, defining general guidelines and best practices for the promotion of minority languages with poor digital representation. This lack of digital presence further prevents their usability on digital media and devices.

The focus of the project is on four European minority languages at different stages of digital development (Basque, Breton, Karelian and Sardinian). This focus enables a comparison on the role of the availability of digital content for the promotion of digital usage of these languages and the development of language-based digital applications.

With the aim of understanding the specific needs and the particular behaviour of speakers of these languages, during the spring of 2016 we conducted a survey focused on gathering information about their personal digital use of the language and about any known digital resource and services that make use of the language. We received feedback from almost 2,000 speakers and we are now in the position of showing the results for future actions.

The survey was launched on the Internet, using social media in particular; thus, the profile of the respondent belongs to a person who makes at least a minimal digital use of the language in their everyday life. This fact must be taken into account by the reader.

## 2. Sardinian, a Brief Profile

Sardinian (*sardu*, ISO 639-3 *srd*) is an autonomous Romance language spoken in the island of Sardinia, Italy. Traditionally, scholars tend to distinguish two dialectal macro-areas: a Northern-central one (Logudorese) and a Southern one (Campidanese). This hypothesis, which has been sustained for a longtime, is being challenged by more recent research that shows a dialectal continuum between Northern and Southern areas rather than a definite boundary.

Today, Sardinian lacks a generally agreed written standard, although standardization efforts characterised the recent history of the region. The first attempt to introduce a written system based on an integration of phonetic, lexical and morphological features of modern Sardinian varieties was made in 2001, when the basic rules of LSU (*Limba Sarda Unificada*, Unified Sardinian Language) were presented. In 2006, the Giunta della Regione Autonoma di Sardegna adopted a written standard for use in the PA. This standard, called “*Limba Sarda Comuna*” (LSC, Common Sardinian Language), was made official by the Regional Committee resolution n° 16/14. LSC made the effort of taking into account the dialects of the transition region in the centre of the island. Although the regional administration recommended its use for written public documents it is still reluctantly accepted by some speakers who perceive it as too distant from the varieties they speak.

The estimate number of speakers varies between 1,000,000 and 1,350,000, and most of them are bilingual (Sardinian-Italian) speakers in a diglossic situation, with Sardinian being spoken in familiar and local contexts and Italian for public and written use. A study (Lupinu et al., 2007) promoted by the Sardinian Region in 2006 revealed that 1,495,000 people understand Sardinian, and about 1,000,000 are able to speak it. Only 3% of people residing in sardophone areas have no knowledge of the language.

Sardinian is officially recognized as a minority language of Italy according to the National law 488/1992. It is also protected according to Regional Law (26/1997). This institutional framework allows for the use of the language in education, the mass media, and cultural initiatives.

After the Second World War, compulsory instruction in Italian and other assimilatory policies heavily discouraged the use of Sardinian and its profile lowered decisively. At the same time, the wider availability of television made Italian more accessible to those people who previously always used Sardinian exclusively. In more recent times there have been numerous campaigns for creating awareness about the benefits of bilingualism and about the role of Sardinian as an identity element; as a result public opinion is slowly attaining a wider awareness of the problem.

Sardinian was extensively used in the Public Administration in the period 2006-2009, but today its use has declined in official domains due to lack of political support. Despite a considerable number of speakers, Sardinian is still heavily subordinate to Italian, and little use is made of it in commerce, church, university, and mass media. According to UNESCO, Sardinian is definitely endangered, and threatened according to Ethnologue.

Regarding education, Italian is the primary language of instruction for pupils in Sardinia. Education institutions have the right to propose some projects focusing on Sardinian language and culture. The fact that some pupils asked to do their final exams in Sardinian gained press coverage.

The presence of the Sardinian language in mass-media is limited: the two most widespread newspapers, *La Nuova Sardegna* e *l'Unione Sarda*, do not publish in Sardinian. The publishing companies *Papiros*, *Condaghes*, *EDES*, and *Edizioni Castello* (among others) publish titles in Sardinian. A search on the website *l'Editoria Sarda* (<http://www.editoriasarda.it>) returns 1,034 titles in Sardinian. The presence of Sardinian on the radio and TV is very limited.

### 3. Speakers' Identities: Gender, Age and Provenance

For the analysis of the Sardinian language we received 596 replies. The majority of people were contacted through Facebook, e.g. they found a post in a Facebook friend's page advertising about the initiative and decided to complete the survey. The data confirms the presence of a lively Sardinian speaker community on Facebook.

The sample is quite varied and balanced with respect to age, with the three most numerous groups being 40-49, 50-59 and 30-39. In terms of gender, the male group is by far the most numerous one.

A small majority of respondents declare themselves as activists for the language (51.8%), i.e., they take part in revitalisation activities, cultural initiatives etc. related to the language. However, only 39.3% report not having a professional involvement with Sardinian. This means that only a small percentage of people helping in the revitalization of Sardinian are professional. The majority of them chose voluntarily to be involved in this effort.

Concerning provenance, in fig. 1 the geographical distribution of respondents to this survey illustrates the geographical distribution of places of birth, while fig. 2 shows the distribution of places of residence.



Fig. 1 - Distribution of places of birth



Fig. 2 - Distribution of places of residence

### How did you learn about this survey?

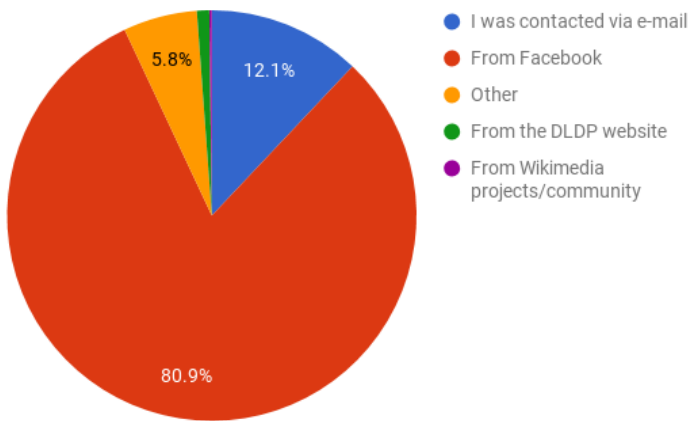


Fig. 3 - Source of information on this survey

### Age distribution of respondents

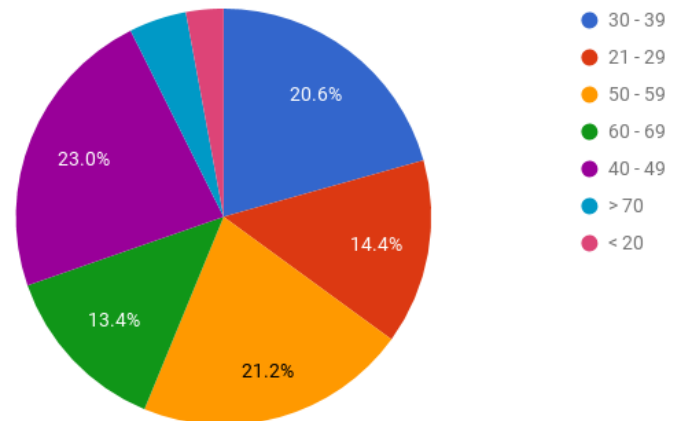


Fig. 4 - Age of respondents

### Gender

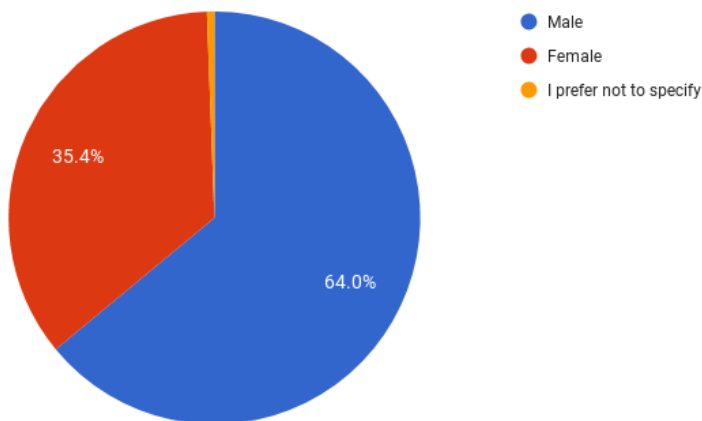


Fig. 5 - Gender

### Do you take part in any revitalization or protection activity related to Sardinian?

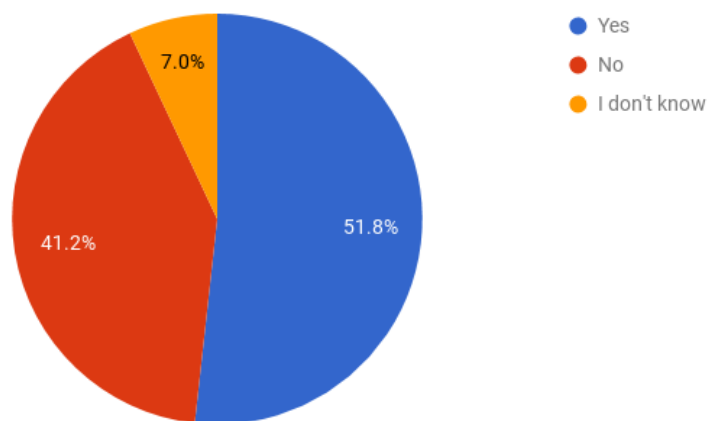


Fig. 6 - Sardinian revitalization activities

### Are you professionally involved with Sardinian?

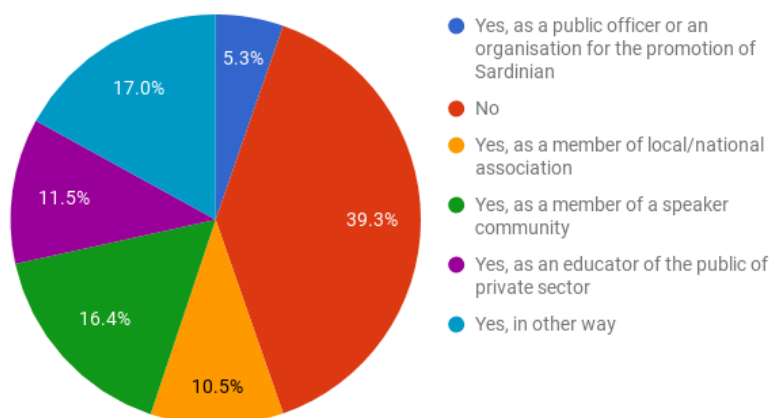


Fig. 7 - Professional involvement with Sardinian?

## 4. Self-Evaluation of Competence in Sardinian

Almost half of respondents (46%) describe themselves as bilingual Italian-Sardinian. Of the rest, one half are native speakers of Italian, and the other half native speakers of Sardinian.

As far as competence in Sardinian is concerned, most people declare a good knowledge of the language, especially passive oral knowledge. This may reflect that Sardinian lacks a commonly agreed written standard and is not officially taught in primary schools. As a consequence speakers are most familiar with the language in its spoken form.

As we move to active written competence (writing), self-assessment appears more varied, with the majority of respondents declaring a good to average to basic knowledge of the written language.

The same pattern can be found in answers relative to the use of Sardinian in and outside institutional contexts. People listen and speak the language with almost the same frequency in the two contexts (e.g. everyday).

The majority of informants report using Sardinian everyday in informal more than in formal contexts.

In informal contexts, such as with family, friends, relatives, and in recreational activities, Sardinian is used everyday by the vast majority. Written use is far less common, and its frequency again is probably due to the lack of a written standard.

The pattern of use is rather similar in informal and formal contexts, with oral use being more frequent than written usage. Following on from this pattern of usage, there are less people reporting using Sardinian rarely or never in informal contexts, while in institutional contexts, the number of speakers reporting to usage of Sardinian rarely or never approaches that of occasional or regular users. In institutional contexts oral use of Sardinian is quite widespread.

Concerning the value system associated to Sardinian, the strongest value attributed to Sardinian almost unanimously is the first (cultural) and the third (identity). Less agreement is observed in relation to status (no. 5).

The least agreed upon value is the instrumental one. This is also the reply for which agreement is less unanimous.

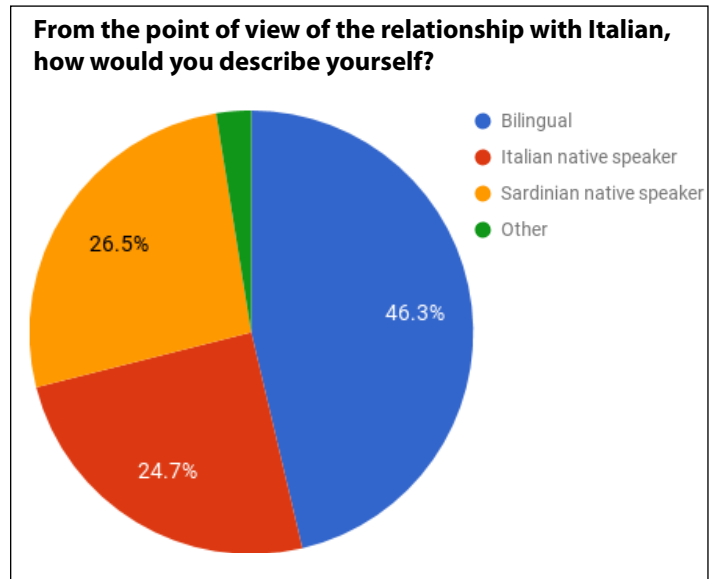


Fig. 8 - Native language

### How would you evaluate your own knowledge of Sardinian?

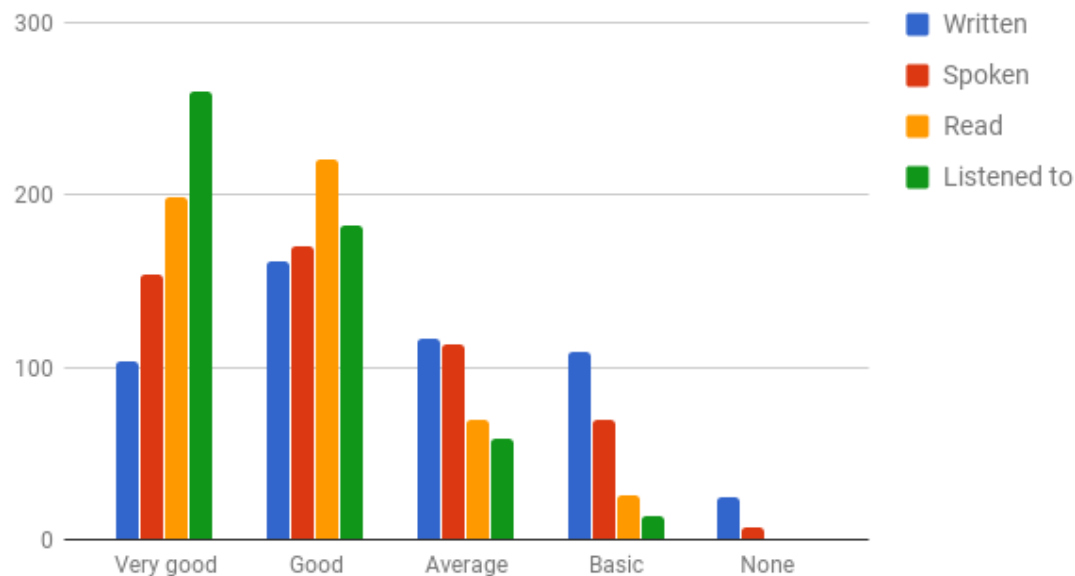


Fig. 9 - Knowledge of Sardinian



### How and how often do you use Sardinian in an institutional setting?

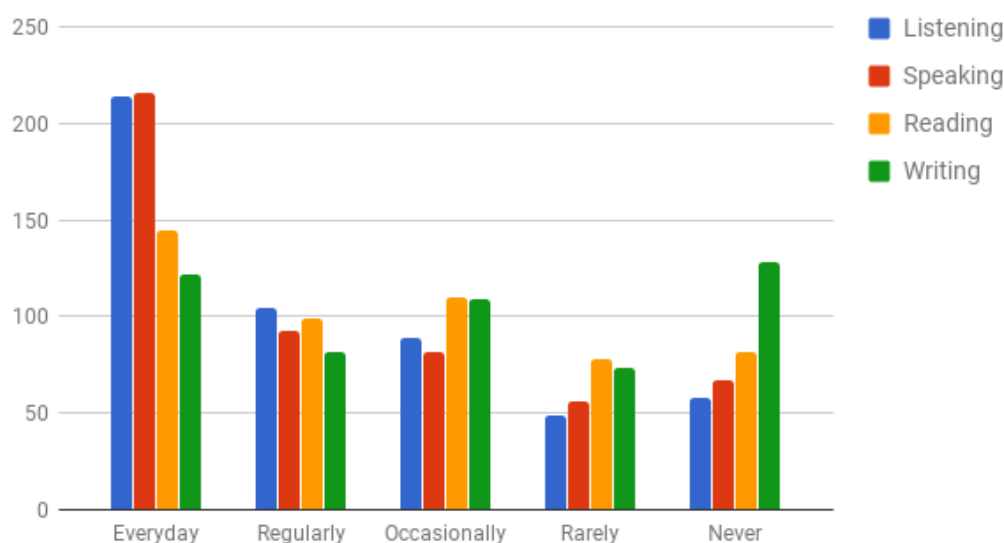


Fig. 10 - Use of Sardinian in an institutional setting

### How and how often do you use Sardinian outside an institutional setting?

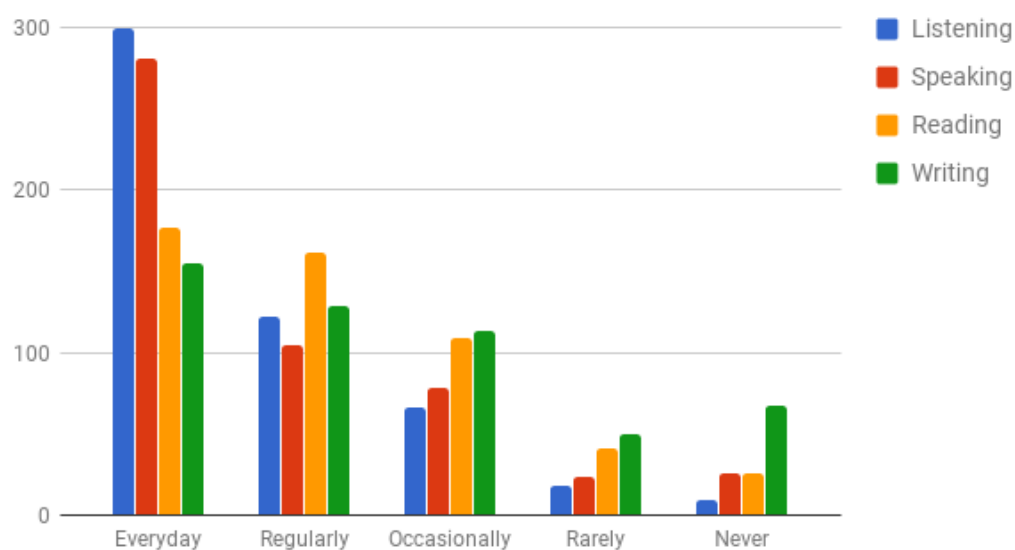


Fig. 11 - Use of Sardinian outside an institutional setting

### Sardinian is important because...

- 1) ...it embodies the history and culture of the region/country.
- 2) ...it is the language of my childhood/my parents/grandparents.
- 3) ...it gives me a sense of who I am and where I belong.
- 4) ...it is a tool for communicating with the people of the community I belong to.
- 5) ...it provides access to opportunities (work, studies, access to information).

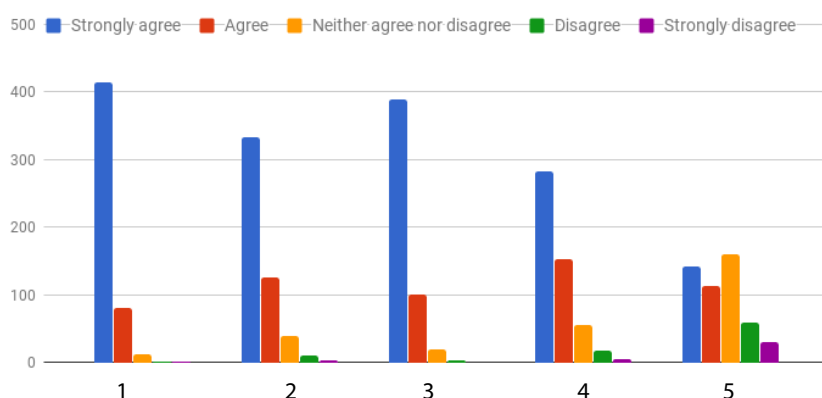


Fig. 12 - Importance of Sardinian

## 5. Digital Use of Sardinian

Of all respondents, 85% report using Sardinian online, mainly passively, but a consistent number of people (ca. 200) make an active digital use of the language, i.e. they create digital content by writing blog articles, posts and comments on forums and websites. A minority (8%) reports managing a blog or a website where Sardinian is used exclusively.

The majority of the respondents also report using Sardinian for electronic communication (72%), that is for writing e-mails, texting, chatting or using other instant messaging such as WhatsApp, Google Chat, Snapchat, Skype, and Facebook Messenger. Instant messaging applications appear to be the most used instruments for e-communication (an informal rather than formal medium), followed by SMS and regular e-mail. It is interesting to note how the percentage of people declaring their use of Sardinian for e-communication is lower than the one of people reporting using Sardinian online generally.

People express a strong desire to be able to use Sardinian on the Internet as part of their everyday life. They don't agree that Sardinian as a spoken language cannot be used on the Internet or is not worth it. The more varied reply, in terms of agreement, is the one related to the statement that it's easier to use Italian (the majority language in the Sardinian context) instead of Sardinian.

Among the reasons for not using Sardinian on the web (16% of respondents), people stress the lack of competence in how to write the language properly and the lack of a written standard. Others consider Sardinian as a language that is not used on digital devices at all, and instead has an almost exclusive oral use.

### Do you use Sardinian on the Internet?

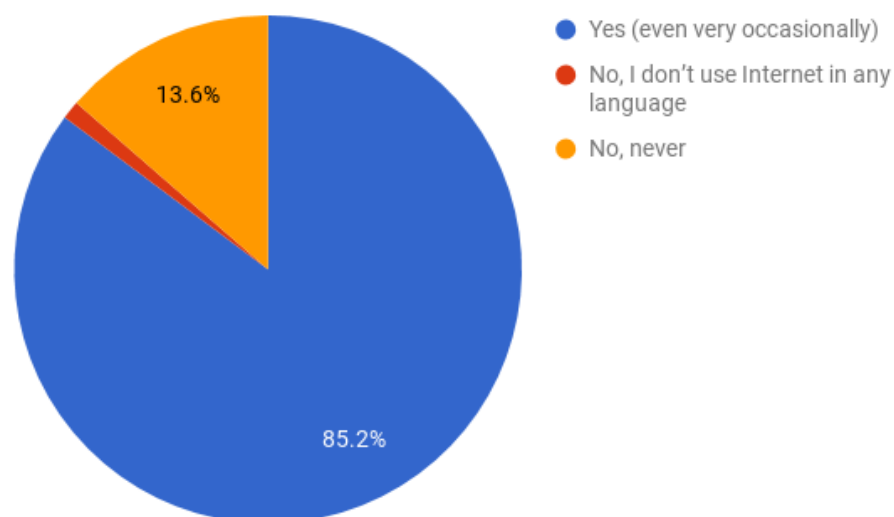


Fig. 13 - Use of Sardinian on the Internet

### If yes, how do you use it?

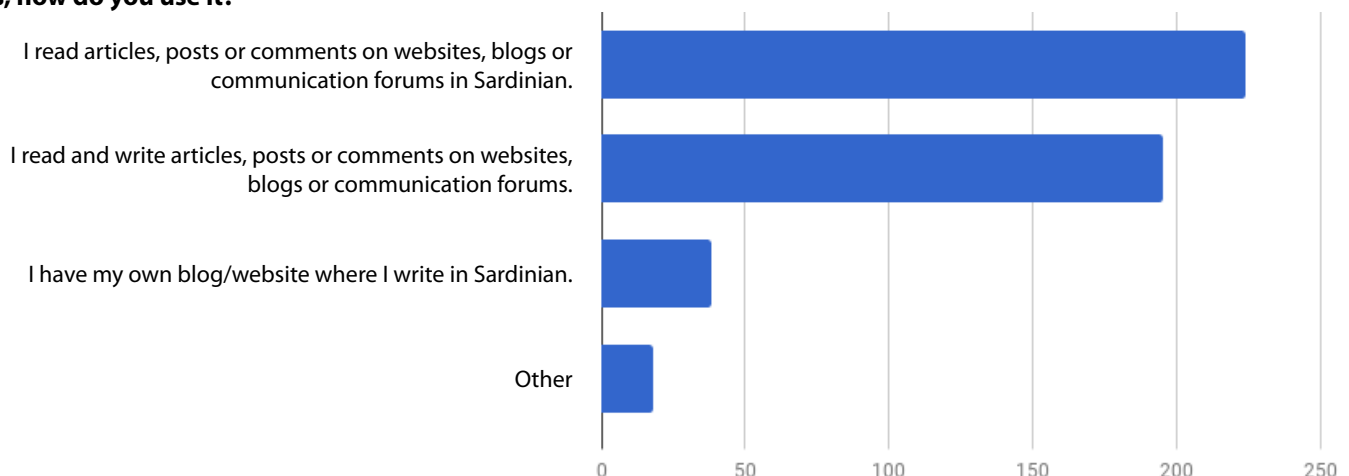


Fig. 14 - Sardinian language activities on the Internet

### Do you ever use Sardinian for electronic communication?

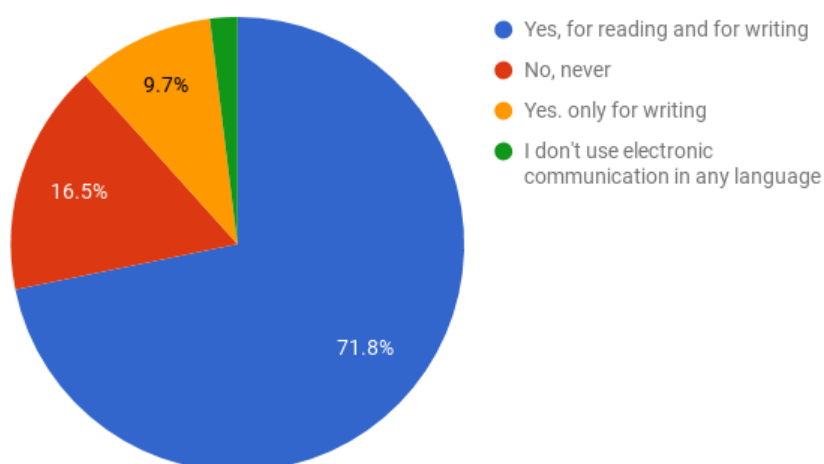


Fig. 15 - Use of Sardinian for electronic communication

### How often do you use Sardinian for electronic communication?

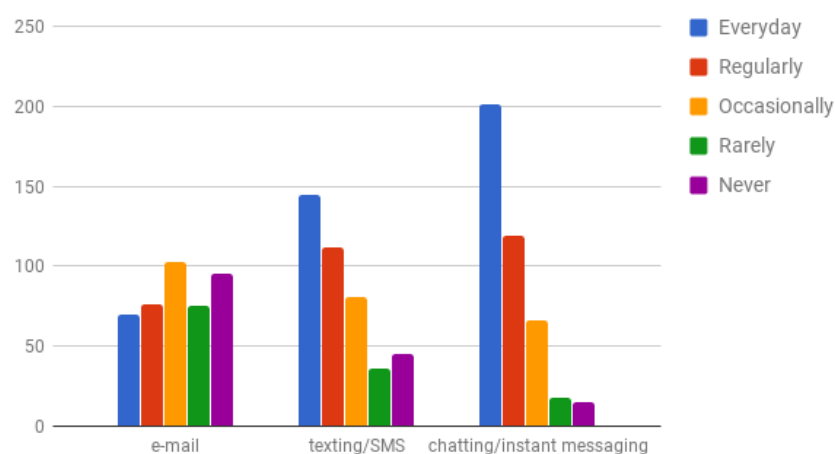


Fig. 16 - Frequency of use of Sardinian for electronic communication

### How much do you agree to the following statements?

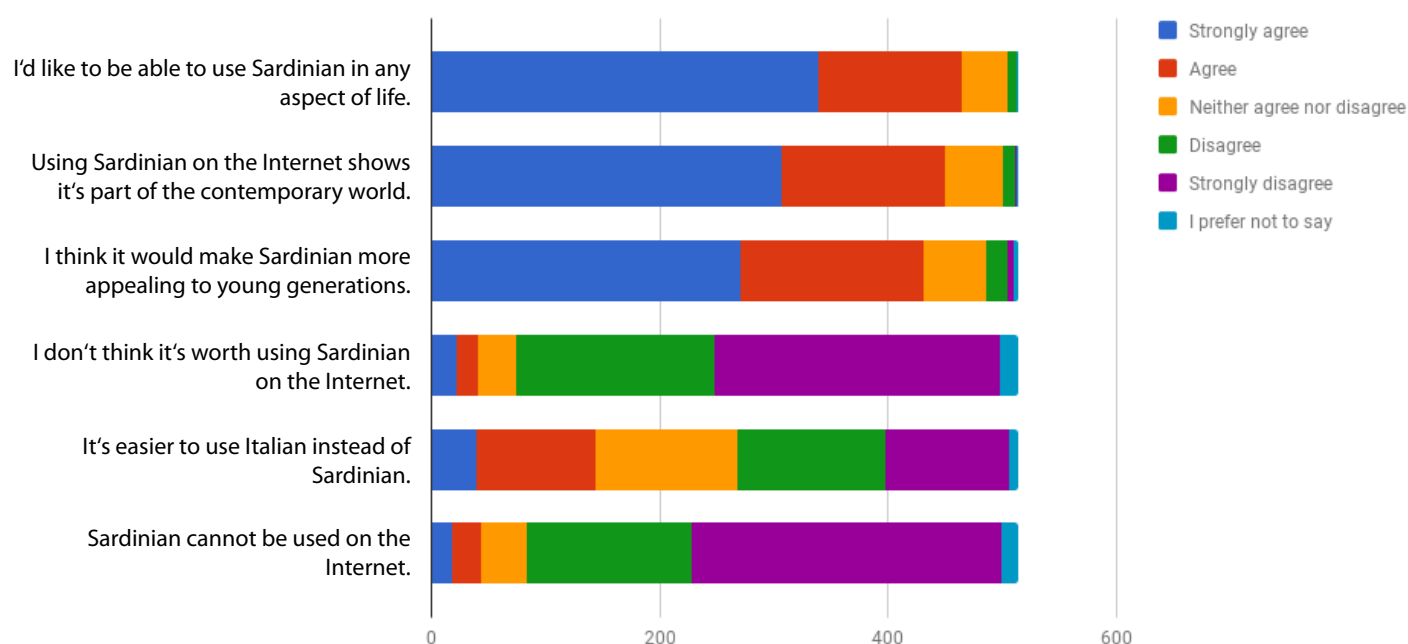


Fig. 17 - Statements on Sardinian



## 5.1 Sardinian on Digital Media

Digital media are available in Sardinian. Websites, blogs and forums are the most widespread, while few speakers are aware of the existence of smartphone apps, Internet television, streaming audio and video. There is a Wikipedia available for Sardinian, but a considerable sum of people (46%) are not even aware of its existence. Of those knowing about it only a few (8%) are active users and content producers. 44% browse it but up to 45% do not make any use of it. This means that the Sardinian Wikipedia suffers heavily from competition with the Italian version, to which the majority resort to when looking for information. The reported reason for this is the lack of useful content and the fact that the Italian version is preferred to the Sardinian one.

To your best knowledge, which of the following media are available in Sardinian?

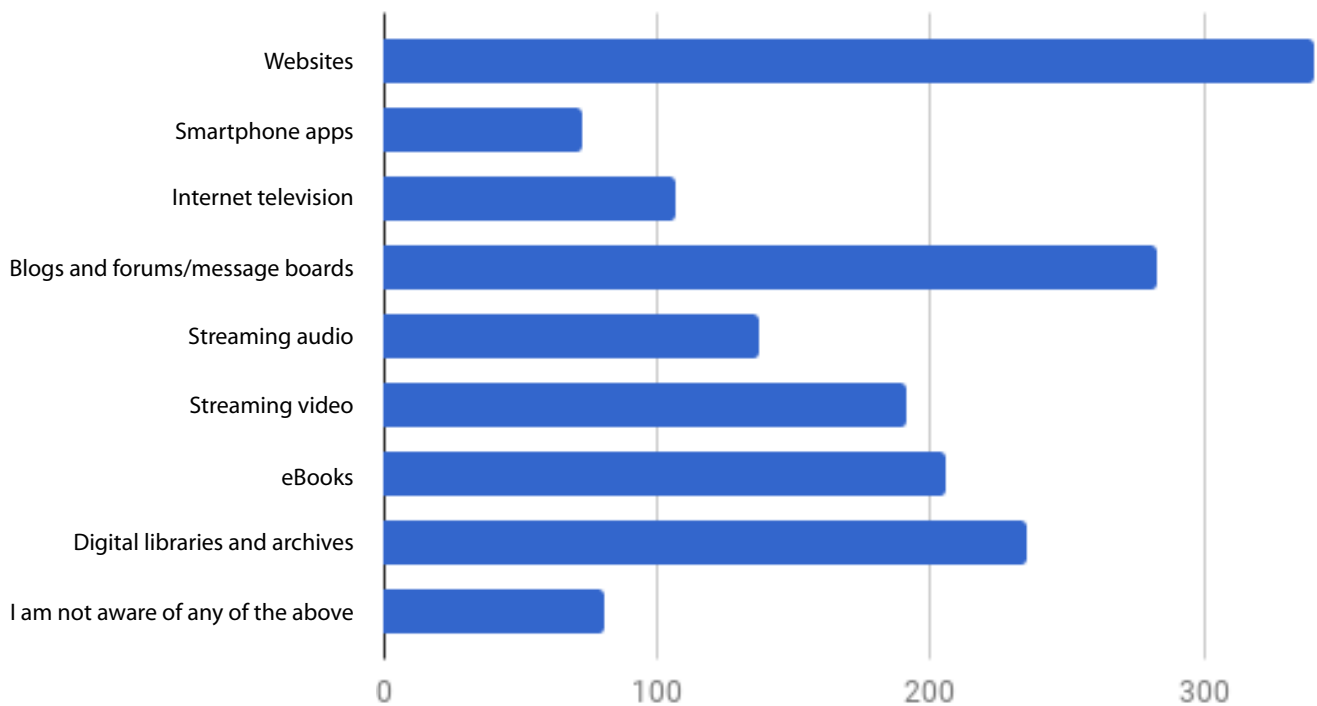


Fig. 18 - Existing media in Sardinian

Is there a Wikipedia for Sardinian?

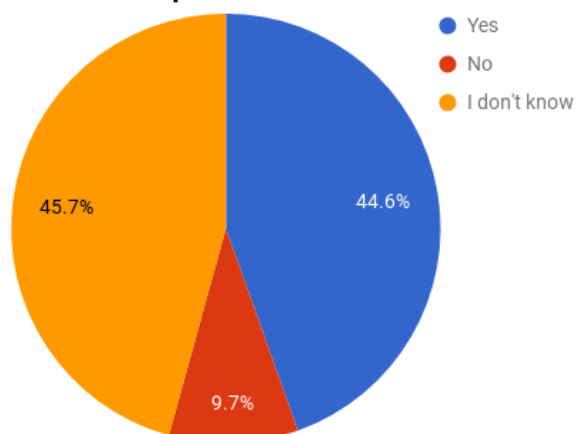


Fig. 19 - Existence of Sardinian Wikipedia

If yes, how do you use it?

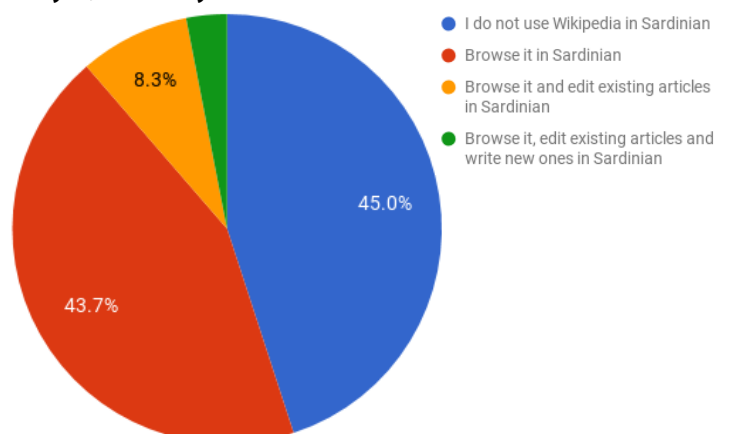


Fig. 20 - Use of Sardinian Wikipedia

## 5.2 Sardinian on Social Networks

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and LinkedIn are the five most used networks by Sardinian speakers, but Sardinian is used pre-eminently on Facebook. 96.5% of respondents claim to use Facebook also state that they use Sardinian, either for reading and/or for writing. Facebook users employ Sardinian everyday (53%) or regularly (30.1%). On Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and LinkedIn the language is used proportionally less: 65.7% for Twitter, 54.9% for Instagram, 56.3% for Google+, and 25% for LinkedIn. Yet, these figures represent the majority of users of those social media, with the exception of LinkedIn, which reflects the fact that Sardinian is used less in the workplace or for institutional purposes than it is for recreational ones. Users of other social media tend to never use Sardinian (76.3% for LinkedIn, 58.3% for Google+, 41.3% for Instagram and 32.1% for Twitter, where almost 25% also appear to use the language „regularly“)

The main reason behind not using Sardinian on social media is, according to 32% of those surveyed, the lack of competence in written Sardinian. Secondly, both the lack of a written standard and the fact that is perceived as a purely oral language. These replies are consistent with those replies on the lack of use of Sardinian on the Internet.

### Do you ever use Sardinian on the following networks?

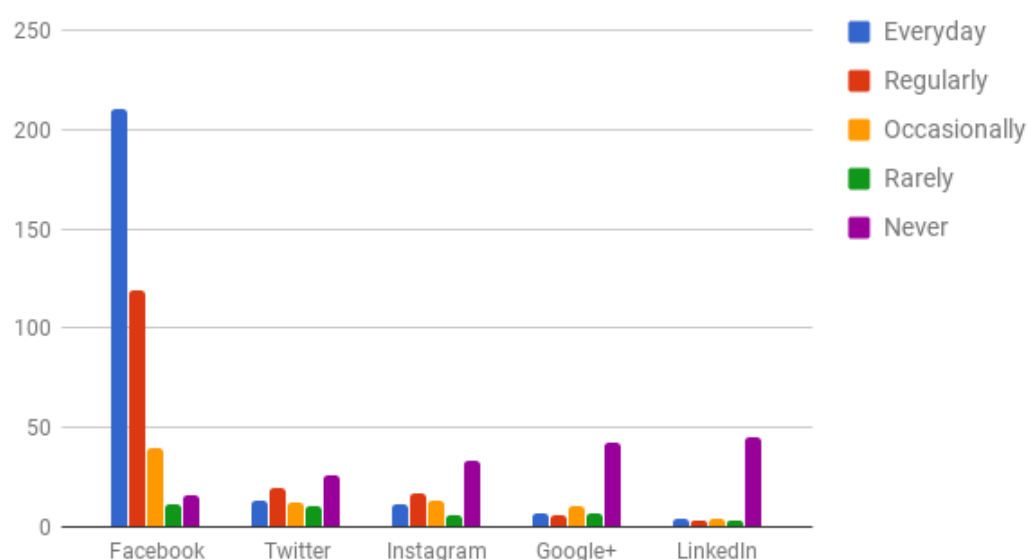


Fig. 21 - Use of Sardinian on social networks

### How often do you use Sardinian on those networks?

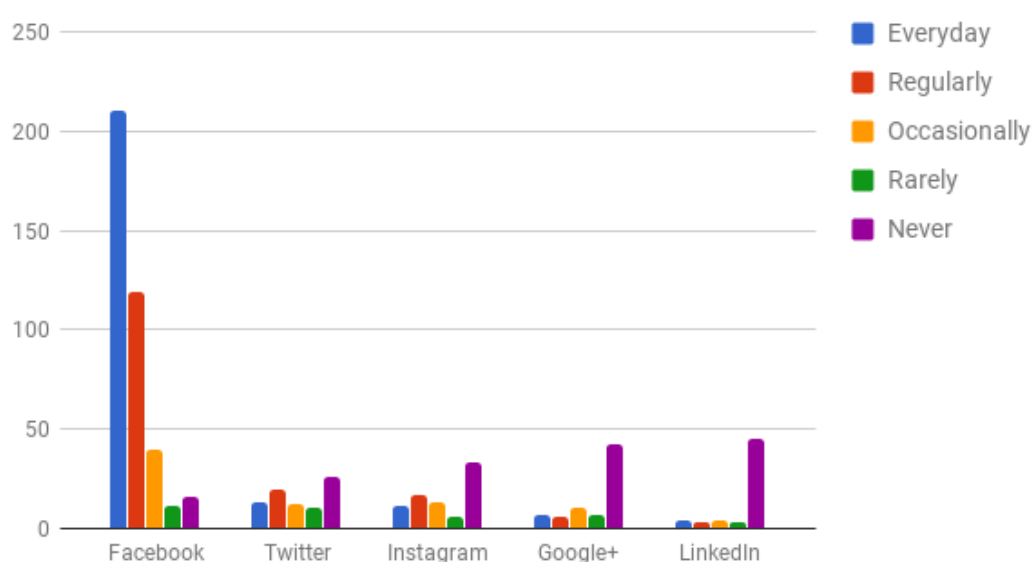


Fig. 22 - Frequency of use of Sardinian on social networks

## 5.3 Localised Digital Services/Interfaces for Sardinian

The existence and availability of digital services in Sardinian is mostly unknown by those surveyed. The only services being reported as available by at least 30% of respondents are online news and newspapers, entertainment and public administration services. If we adopt this percentage as a credibility threshold, then we must conclude that the rest of services are either not available, or it is known and accessible to a very restricted share of the Sardinian speaking population only.

Regarding the most desired services, there is no big difference among the various categories. Cultural services and customer-care ones are those that slightly stand out by comprising just over 30% of responses.

The pattern observed for digital services is repeated for the availability of localized interfaces. In fact, the only localized language version for Sardinian is MacOS. There is no officially available localized language version of Windows, Android, or iOS.

It is difficult to judge how the respondents could say that they are using these localized interfaces. Either they misunderstood the question, or they falsely assert that these localized interfaces are available when in fact they are not. This further stresses the need of correctly informing the language community and activating digital awareness initiatives.

In terms of digital resources, the availability of bilingual dictionaries is very well known as well as, to a lesser extent, that of monolingual dictionaries. Less than 30% of respondents know about the existence of spell-checkers, machine translation services, audio dictionaries and terminologies. This may be due to the fact that these are quite specialised resources that most people are not aware of, but also that these resources are yet to become widely available tools and for the time being they are niche products.

Finally, 88% of respondents affirm that available keyboards are well suited for using Sardinian online, as they can type all or most of characters using the keys available for Italian. Nevertheless, the majority would favour a keyboard specific designed for Sardinian.

**To the best of your knowledge, which of the following services are available in Sardinian?**

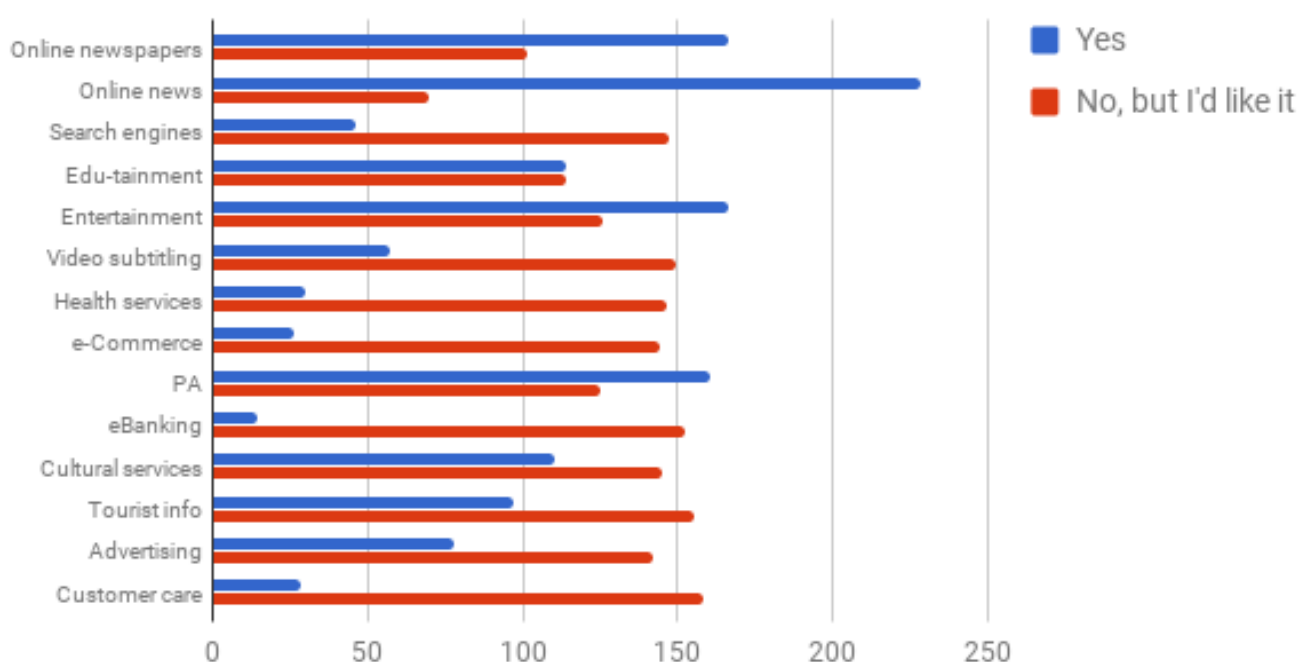


Fig. 23 - Existence of Sardinian internet services

### Do you know if any of the following software can be set to Sardinian?

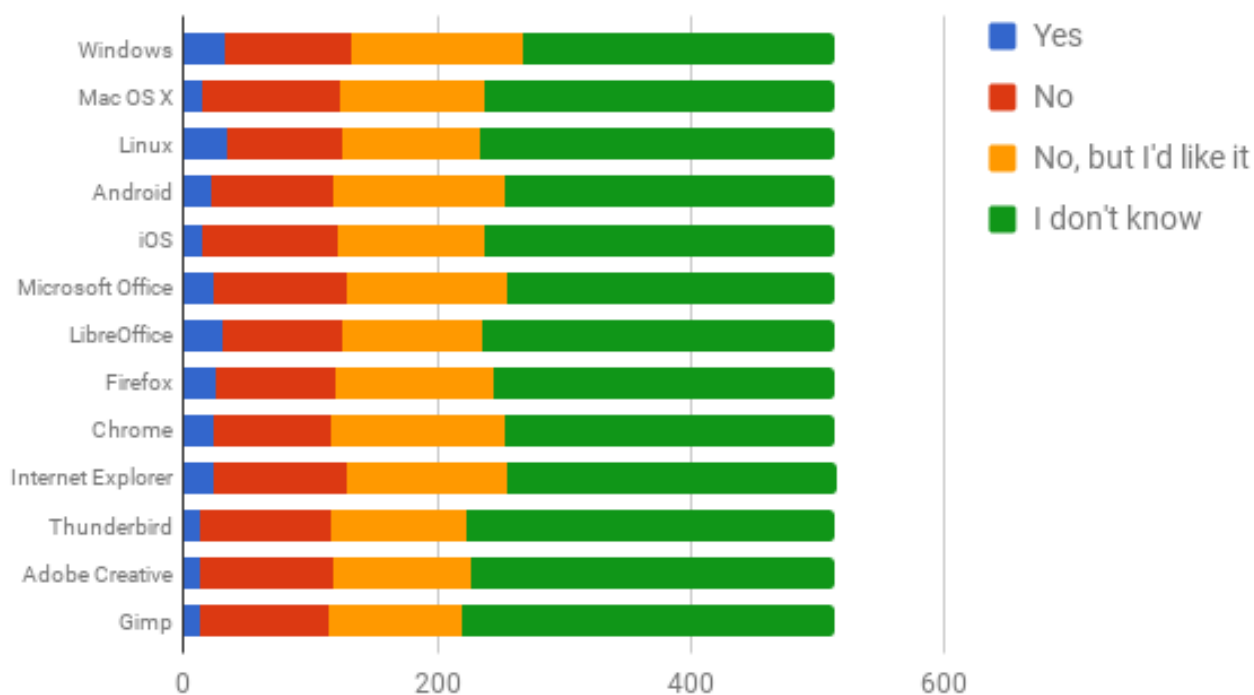


Fig. 24 - Software in Sardinian

### If yes, did you select Sardinian as first in the list?

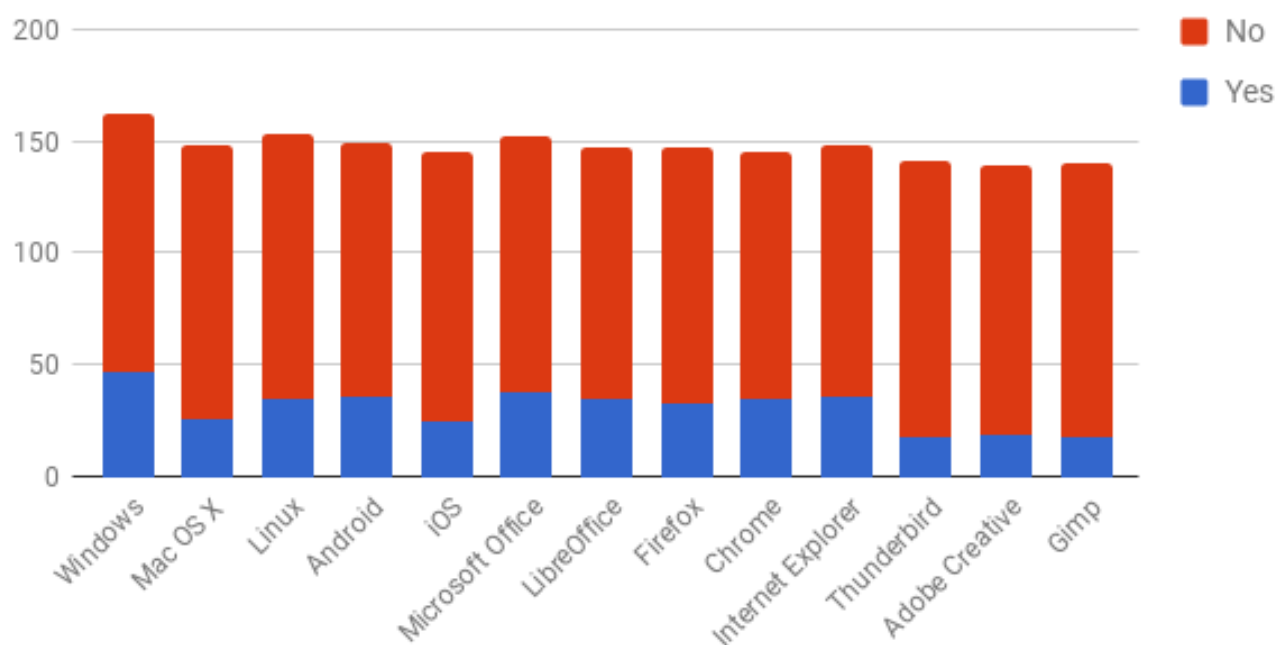


Fig. 25 - Use of software in Sardinian

**To the best of your knowledge, which of the following digital resources are available in Sardinian?**

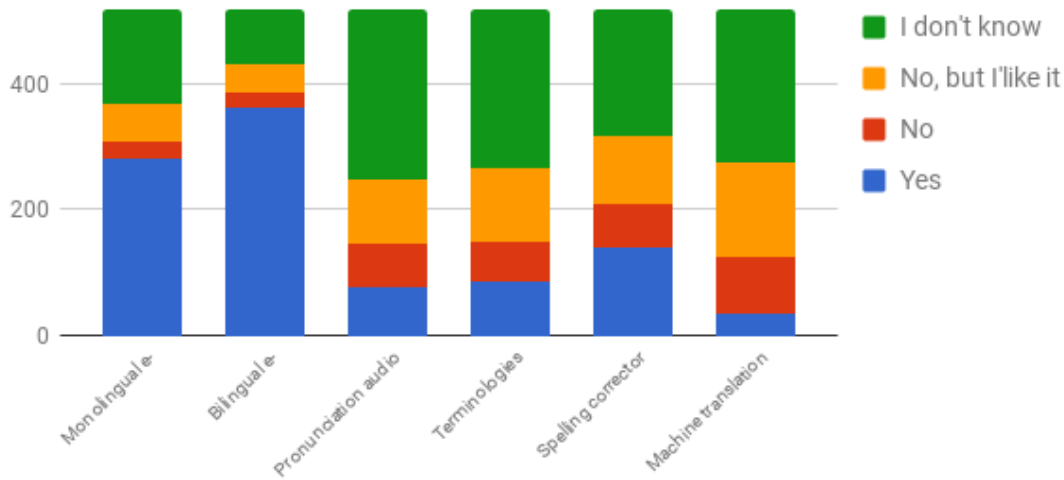


Fig. 26 - Existence of digital resources in Sardinian

**Is your PC keyboard adapted to Sardinian?**

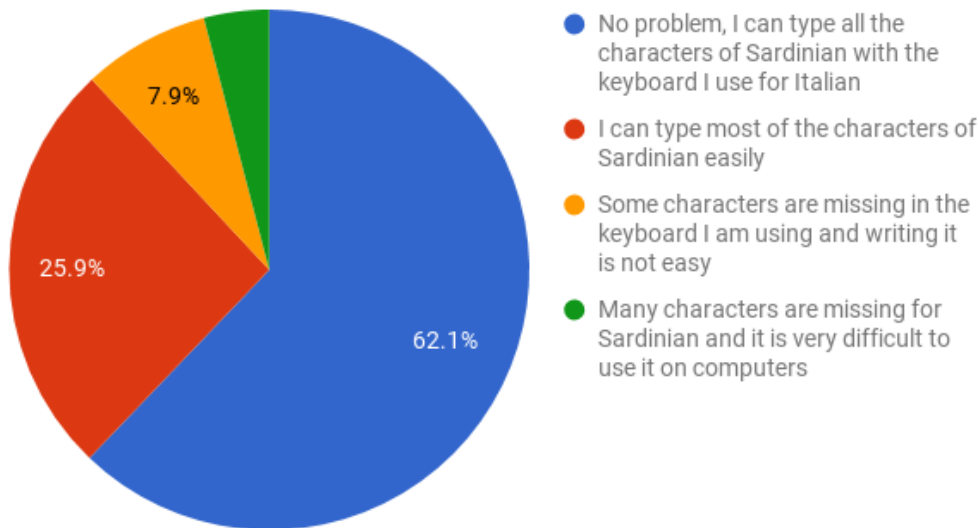


Fig. 27 - Sardinian PC keyboard

**Would you like a specific keyboard for writing in Sardinian?**

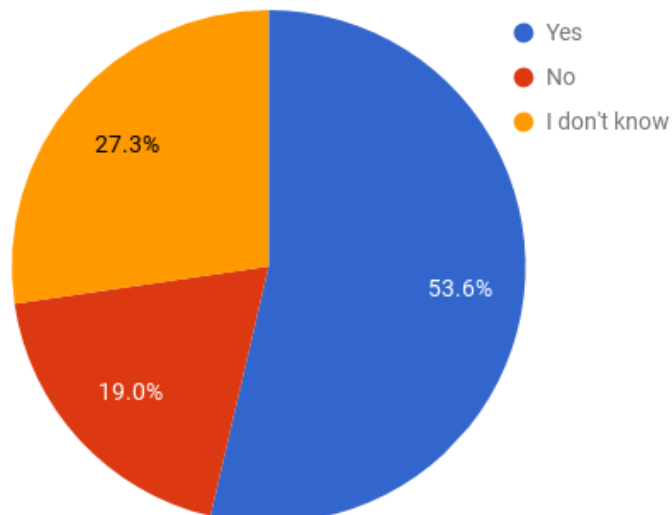


Fig. 28 - Need for Sardinian PC keyboard



## 6. Conclusion

According to the picture that emerges from the survey, Sardinian is extensively used online by the large majority of its speakers. 73% of survey participants declare the use of Sardinian everyday in electronic communication, in particular texting and chatting. The percentage reaches 87% for surfing, reading or writing on the Net.

Sardinian appears to be particularly vital on social media, among which Facebook is by far the most used network: the survey reports 143 different groups, pages or accounts that are accessed on a large scale. For Facebook there is even a localised interface available. The use of Sardinian on social media reflects the fact that, despite official recognition for the language being granted by the Italian State in 1998, the language is relatively little used on public sites and that it continues to be a language mostly for private use.

The vitality of Sardinian on social media does not correspond, however, to a strong and diffused availability of Internet media. The existence and availability of digital services in Sardinian is vastly unknown. Online newspapers and news are widely available, as is entertainment and, thanks to a previous investment by the Region, some Public Administration services. More advanced media such as smartphone apps, Internet TV, streaming audio and video are lacking. People express a strong desire to be able to use Sardinian on the Internet as part of their everyday life. It is worth noting that, in contrast to other regional languages, there are no technical obstacles for using Sardinian online. Typing is possible using the standard keyboard. Many respondents, however, lament a lack of competence in written Sardinian that prevents them writing the language with the necessary confidence.

The results clearly show the importance of encouraging the speaker community to use their language online as much as possible. The existence of a considerable number of language resources such as dictionaries, spell checkers, and even an automatic translation system, is a good sign of the potential for this language to become a fully digital language, provided that the speakers are supported and encouraged to overcome the psychological barriers that continue to hold them back from considering Sardinian as a language to be used in all sociolinguistic domains.

## 7. List of Relevant Websites

### **Sardinian on Facebook:**

The results of the survey returned 143 different groups, pages or accounts. Among those, 48 were cited more than three times.

The first 20 are the following:

Solu in sardu  
Coord. Sardu Ufitziale - Limba Sarda 2.0  
Règulas de su Sardu Iscritu  
Sa Gazeta  
Coordinamentu pro su sardu ufitziale  
...SCRIEUS IN CAMPIDANESU... CRIVIAMO IN CAMPIDANESE...  
SU SARDU UNA LIMBA PRO TOTTU/UNA LINGUA PER TUTTI  
Assòtziu - Su Majolu  
Bilinguismu oi  
Podimus  
LSC [Limba Sarda Comuna]  
FB in sardu  
COMITADU PRO SA LIMBA SARDA  
Sa Bertula Antiga  
Letzioni Di Sardo  
ProgReS (Official)  
Sa lingua sarda in s'iscola  
Limbasarda  
Pronoismentigare Assotziu culturale  
Boxis

**On Twitter, the 20 most frequently cited accounts are the following:**

Limba Sarda 2.0  
A sa moda sarda  
C. Sardu Ufitziale  
fueddos  
EjaTV.com  
liberazione  
Academia Die Sarda  
Alà dei Sardi  
Assòtziu Su Majolu  
bentan  
Deo So Sardu  
Di-Die  
Disterru  
Luigi Ladu  
Pesa Sardigna  
Podimus  
Progetu Repùblica  
Proverbi Sardi  
Sa Limba Sarda  
SardinianConnection

### **Forums in Sardinian:**

Limba Sarda 2.0  
Gente di Sardegna  
Limba Sarda Comuna  
ProgReS Progetu Republica  
Bolognesu: in sardu  
Coordinamentu pro su SARDU UFITZIALE  
sardu.net  
Formaparis  
Itenovas  
L'Unione Sarda  
Mondosardegna  
Per non perdere la lingua sarda  
Podimus  
Sa gazeta  
salimbarda.net  
Sardinnia de Politica on Line  
Sotziu limba sarda

### **Services in Sardinian:**

As far as services in the language are concerned there are 48 different services mentioned that are available in Sardinian. The most widespread are online newspapers and news sites (82 examples with 13 different types). Secondly, public administration sites and services, such as those of the Region and counties. Finally, entertainment (19 examples with 6 types) and cultural services (18 examples with 10 types). Below are the names of the most referred to services (i.e. those that have been cited more than three times each):

#### **Online news:**

Limbas & Natziones  
Forma Paris

#### **Online newspapers:**

Sa gazeta  
Limba Sarda 2.0  
Boxis  
Il Minuto  
Làcanas.it  
Sardinia Post

#### **PA:**

Regione Autònoma de Sardigna

#### **Cultural services:**

Sardegna Cultura  
sardu.net

#### **Entertainment:**

ejatv.com

## References

Lupinu, G., Mongili, A., Oppo, A., Spiga, R., Perra, S. and M. Valdes. 2007. Le lingue dei Sardi. Regione Autonoma della Sardegna, Cagliari.

## Some Comments from Respondents

*Creo chi una de sas menzus cosas pro permittère a leghere et iscriere su sardu a totus et onzi die est sa possibilidade de lu aère in su smartphone pro ite lu juchimos sempere fatu e impitamos pro totu, puru pro custu cuestionariu.*

I think that one of the best ways to allow everybody to read and write in Sardinian everyday is the possibility to have it on a smartphone, because we always keep it with us and we use it for everything, even for this questionnaire.

*Mi diat facher piachere a tenner su sardu in su mundu digitale; addolumannu, paret chi non siat presente meda in zassos de importu comente Windows, Google Translator e gai sichinde. Pro fortuna, est un'annu chi lu tenimus in facebook, ma cantos annos tocat a isettare galu pro chi siat intottue, innantis chi sa limba si nche morjat? Saludos.*

I would like to have Sardinian in the digital world; unfortunately, it seems not to be there on important sites like Windows, Google Translate etc. Luckily, for a year we have Sardinian on Facebook, but how many years do we need to wait for it to be available everywhere and before the language has died?

*Creo ca su sardu est una limba cumente sas ateras e pro custa arresone debet essere in su matessi livellu.*

I think that Sardinian is a language like others and for this reason it needs to be at the same level.

*Mi diat piaghene meda de podere impreare su sardu comente onzi aterados limba in sos medios digitales e de la podere legere intottue e de la intendere in sa radio e in sa televisione.*

I'd like very much to be able to use Sardinian like any other language on digital media, to read it everywhere, and to listen to it on the radio and TV.