Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Bari



THE REDISCOVERED PALIMPSEST

Palazzo Simi as a catalyst for physical and immaterial regeneration in the Historic Center of Bari

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The process of urban regeneration that has affected the historic center of Bari since the 1990s represents a fundamental case study in the landscape of redevelopment policies for historic Mediterranean cities. What was once perceived as a marginalized urban core, marked by serious social (drug dealing and petty crime), economic (poverty and unemployment), and environmental (degradation and neglect) hardship, has undergone a radical transformation. This metamorphosis has successfully combined the physical recovery of architecture with a new vision of cultural enjoyment, aiming to create attractive poles capable of triggering processes of immaterial regeneration. The challenge of Bari's regeneration lay in its ability not to statically "museumize" the historic center, but to transform it into a vibrant cultural district, where the protection, enhancement, and daily life of residents could coexist and feed off each other.

In this scenario, Palazzo Simi plays a pivotal role in both science and society. Located in the heart of the medieval neighborhood, the building has been the designated archaeological headquarters of the ABAP Superintendency for the Metropolitan City of Bari since 1999, transforming it into a key facility where heritage protection is experienced as a public and participatory function. The very shape of the palace is an infrastructure of knowledge: built in the 16th century for the Simi de Burgis family, it rests on a dense stratigraphy that descends underground. Here you can read the history of Bari like a book: from the remains of a Roman-late antique domus to a Byzantine church from the 9th-10th centuries, up to the Romanesque transformations and the imposing Renaissance structure with eighteenth-century modifications. Palazzo Simi is therefore not a simple office, but a "documentary monument," an exemplary case of the reuse and repurposing of urban spaces that has never erased traces of the past, part of the Bari Underground circuits.



The management of the site embodies the concept of "Caring for heritage with communities" through an exhibition program aimed at making citizens, and in particular the residents of Bari Vecchia, aware custodians of the common good.
A cornerstone of this strategy is the "Returned Patrimons" exhibition series: thanks to close collaboration with the Carabinieri TPC Unit, the Palace displays artifacts recovered from clandestine excavations or illicit trafficking, transforming the moment of protection into a powerful tool for educating on legality. Through the active involvement of schools and associations, the Superintendency has activated a process of collective self-recognition, defining an innovative model of "community archaeology." This approach is not limited to data communication, but invites citizens to co-create cultural content.



An emblematic example was the exhibition dedicated to Saint Nicholas (2025-2026), a symbol of Mediterranean connection, where the institution exhibited artistic productions developed by students alongside "family memories" and millennia-old finds, sealing the role of the community in the regeneration process.
Palazzo Simi demonstrates that modern conservation management can generate a sustainable cultural economy and combat gentrification, training citizens aware that protecting an artifact is, ultimately, protecting their future.



Michelangelo Pistoletto
Love Difference - Mar Mediterraneo
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