

A PILOT OPERATION IN THE OLD TOWN OF BARI: RESTORATION OF A GROUP OF BUILDINGS AND THEIR REMODELLING FOR PUBLIC USE

In almost all the towns of Apulia the old centre is characterized by its medieval layout and its buildings of modest architectural importance; frequently they belong to different periods and are built on foundations of earlier works, the materials used being partly stone and partly tufa masonry. Tufa is a relatively homogeneous sedimentary rock of marine origin resembling sandstone, cheap but unfortunately of low resistance and subject to rather rapid decay. The problem of their consolidation and conservation therefore has the priority and is in itself a huge one.

At the same time the operation involves big technical and technological difficulties (In most cases it is necessary to replace the decayed mortars by means of forced injections of cement grout, or to substitute new blocks of tufa or limestone for large portions of the masonry; there must also be replacement of the masonry in the foundations, which has decayed through age, through the action of moisture in the sub-soil, etc.).

But the main problem is the size of the operation, which in Bari would involve, we might say, round about 5% of the existing volume of buildings and hence of the totality of the residential accommodation available in the whole city (as against anything up to 50% in other centres).

However consolidation and conservation are obviously meaningless if they are not coordinated with remodelling and re-use for the purpose of creating better living conditions, partly through a redistribution of the internal space but above all through the introduction of the essential technological amenities.

At the end of the last world war more than thirty thousand people were living in Bari, within an area of just under 275,000 square yards. Today they number little more than twelve thousand; the population, that is to say, has been reduced by almost sixty percent, a reflection of the very rapid physical degradation which has been stimulating this flight from the old town. The urban community there has be-

come more and more composed of old people and of semi-marginal social groups with extremely low incomes which are now partially involved in such illicit trades as drugs, smuggling and prostitution. This has made the old town a "socially dangerous zone" — dangerous even to walk in, because of the real risks of purse-snatching and aggression which are by now daily events whose frequency is increasing at an incredible rate. As a result there is an inevitable lack of interchange between the old town and the rest of the city and more generally with the whole surrounding urban area, so that there is no possibility for the old town to supply that element of balance and alternative use of urban space generally provided by the old part of a town. The total financial cost of a global solution to the problem has been calculated, on the basis of present prices, to be around fifty or sixty thousand million lire, or roughly less than three hundred million French francs, not at all an absurd amount if one considers what would be the results of a full physical, human and social rehabilitation scheme.

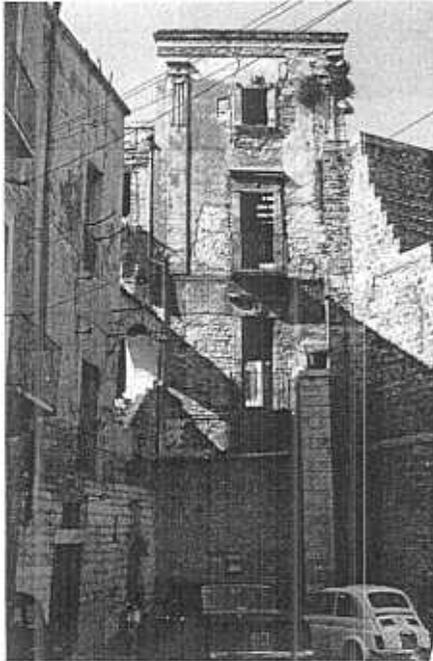
The chauvinistic attitude of the population of old Bari is a negative factor, since there is rejection of all outside social or economic interference. In the almost total absence of private initiative the Civil Engineering Authority has carried out a certain number of operations confined purely to restoration and remodelling on isolated pilot blocks, with the aid of public funds, the designing and architectural assistance being provided by the Architecture and Design Institute of the Bari Faculty of Engineering. The essential aims of these operations have been of two kinds, namely:

1. Restoration and remodelling of a number of slum buildings which lacked the fundamental prerequisites of habitability.
2. Restoration of individual buildings or entire blocks possessing a degree of interest as historical monuments which have then been turned over to public use.

In both cases the original masonry of the buildings has been freed of obstruction through demolition of all the superimpositions and subdivisions of later periods which had altered their character, such as contiguous masonry structures, walls so built as to create mutual incompatibilities, buttresses, etc., and, on the inside, extra floors, partitions, small wooden staircases, garrets, etc.



Map of the old centre showing the various stages by which it was built (Calordias).



2. - Block 49 before restoration.



3. Block 49 after restoration.

Work on this pilot group of buildings was planned with due allowance for the subsequent further work which would be essential to suit them to their new uses once restored, not excluding the possibility that, if considered appropriate, they might be used as living accommodation and so require the improvements corresponding to present-day needs.

I shall now very briefly describe the work performed on Block 49, of which I was personally in charge.

On the practical level the most important problem that had to be faced was that of the statics of the building. The fact was that the demolition of superimposed walls built on to the original ones had obviously created complicated problems connected with the consolidation of the surviving structures, through the loss of mutually compensating loads and a change in the albeit precarious balance which had developed over the centuries. Furthermore, during the actual work there came to light, over and above

the general tendency of the structures to crumble, specific instances of instability previously hidden by the confused state of the structure as a whole.

Various systems of consolidation were adopted to suit the different situations which arose; for the most part the work had been planned before the demolition took place and there were only a few cases in which the plans were completed after that time. The purpose of this part of the work was to consolidate the structures while at the same time preparing them for the subsequent stages after the restoration work, making due allowance, meanwhile, for the damage and instability inevitably associated with demolition.

Foundations were consolidated with the aid of *pali radici* ("root" piles), cement grouting, grouting combined with the embedding of steel bars in the masonry, etc. All these operations required to be executed with particular care, both because of the heavily damaged state of

the whole building and in order to preclude any change in the external aspect of the masonry walls from an aesthetic point of view.

The building, which has been perfectly consolidated, and remodelled as a cultural centre, may now readily and peacefully start on its new career.

In the case of this same block there has also been significant retrieval of the terraces; the various levels have been linked by a system of small staircases which has provided a very useful and pleasant complex of equipped external areas at the disposal of the public and serving the cultural and educational functions of the building.

It is around basic structures of this kind that a community life could spontaneously develop, even outdoors, such as traditionally existed in the place and has only recently disappeared. The whole of old Bari was indeed laid out on the principle of the courtyard with groups of buildings facing on to it. In the past the court-



4 - In spite of the restrictions the old town is invaded by cars.



5 - Although the old town has been declared a pedestrian precinct, all residents want to park their cars immediately in front of their own doors.

yard was the real place for community life, the place for intercourse and relaxation — a spatial application of the theoretical concept of the "unity of the neighbourhood". Today the courtyards are still there, but the neighbourhood spirit has disappeared.

It is not now possible to imagine the rebirth of a community spirit except as a future prospect, with minimum development and encouragement of the tertiary sector, the opening of small shops, craft shops, restaurants, cafés, bars, etc., and the improvement of standards of living and income levels in the old centre. The kind of spirit we are alluding to would permit the use, in a collective sense, of those external spaces which, together with the wider streets and the tiny squares, could develop into a system of equipped community areas — naturally for pedestrian use only — which would be at the disposal of the whole city.

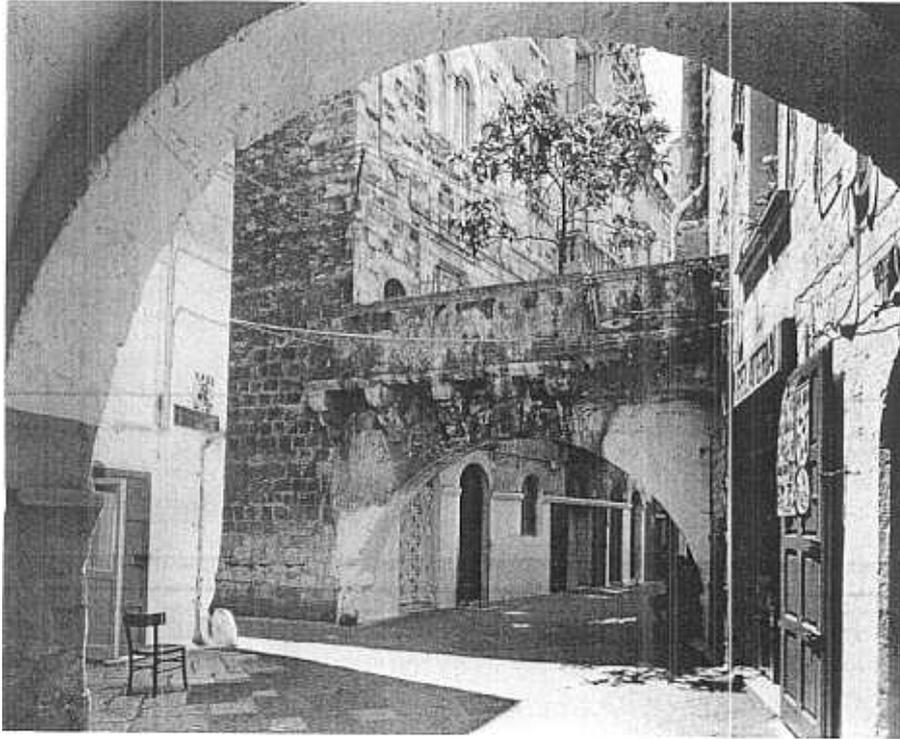
For the moment it is not only impossible to plan an enjoyable use for such spaces; it is even difficult to preserve their mere physical structure.



6 - Semi-private open spaces like this courtyard often have interesting limestone slab pavements, graceful staircases, or niches with naïve images.



7 - One of the many covered passages leading to the Hohenstaufen castle.



8. - The mild climate and the high quality of the architectural surroundings should make these areas suitable for social intercourse and recreation; but not even the *gelateria* provides any accommodation for outdoor life. The owners of the houses sit outside alone, on their own chairs close to their own doors.

In the case of old Bari the townscape is made up of small and modest but not insignificant details, which together give the place its typical pattern and its distinctive character. They are features that have been there for a long time: staircases, stone pavings, terraces at many different levels, balconies, chimney-tops, small fountains, vaulted passageways, small sacred niches with statuettes, and engraved slabs, all of which should simply be safeguarded, protected and treated with care and affection to prevent their being tampered with, becoming degraded or disappearing. This task is usually undertaken case by case and is left to the initiative of technicians, who are quite often insufficiently prepared and not in a position to deal with this delicate aspect of the environmental problem with sufficient sensitivity and circumspection.

At the same time the environment of today is disrupted and contaminated by innumerable new fixtures and special pieces of equipment

which have a distinctly negative effect. Very often the original and ingenious pattern of the paving, made of limestone or porphyry, has been covered over with asphalt. There are perfectly valueless modern street lamps, or, worse still, lamps of coarse design intended to resemble gas or oil lamps. There are traffic lights, the poles carrying telephone or electric cables, signposts crowded confusedly together, glaring neon signs, telephone boxes, news stands and street signs. All of these are new types of urban fixtures which brutally invade the environment, altering its physical appearance and introducing an often intolerable degree of disorder and chaos.

Meanwhile time presses. For every restored building at least ten others are in danger of collapse or irremediable decay. The scale of the damage extends far beyond the city of Bari itself.

Vittorio Chiaia

**UNE OPERATION PILOTE DE
RESTAURATION ET REMODELAGE D'UN
ILOT D'HABITATION DESTINE A UN
USAGE PUBLIC DANS LA VIEILLE VILLE
DE BARI**

Le principal problème de la vieille ville de Bari est l'importance des travaux de conservation qui s'imposent. Tous les bâtiments étant en partie construits en tuffeau, ils nécessitent une aide technique complexe pour éviter le délabrement. L'auteur décrit les techniques qu'il a utilisées pour restaurer un bâtiment qui s'effondrait et qui devrait maintenant être utilisé comme centre culturel.

Les risques d'effondrement ont vidé cette partie de la ville, qui est maintenant habitée presque exclusivement par des personnes âgées ou des groupes sociaux semi-marginaux.

Tout esprit de quartier a disparu; il est maintenant difficile de préserver même les structures physiques du réseau de « cours » qui ont permis par le passé la vie sociale de la communauté. Dans une perspective à long terme un minimum de développement de l'activité tertiaire ainsi qu'une amélioration du niveau de vie et de revenus dans la vieille ville, permettraient un usage piétonnier de ce réseau d'espaces collectifs équipés. Entretemps, la tâche de sauvegarder les caractéristiques modestes mais non négligeables du paysage urbain (escaliers, pavages de pierre, terrasses à différents niveaux, passages voûtés) est entre les mains de techniciens qui très souvent ne sont pas suffisamment préparés.

L'environnement aujourd'hui est également rompu par d'innombrables additions modernes; lampadaires, enseignes au néon, cabines téléphoniques, etc ...

Le risque de détérioration générale des bâtiments ne permet d'accorder aucune priorité à l'aménagement des espaces extérieurs qui sont à tort considérés comme accessoires.

Mais leur qualité médiocre contribue, d'un autre côté, à marginaliser la vieille ville, en la coupant de tout échange avec le reste de la cité. Bari est en train de perdre une partie de son noyau le plus central, et cette perte affecte d'une certaine façon chaque habitant.



9. - Decay of the buildings in the old town. On an average of ten buildings on the way to collapse only one has so far been restored.

1. - Plan du centre ancien montrant les différentes étapes de la construction (Calordias).
2. - Ilot 49 avant restauration.
3. - Ilot 49 après restauration.
4. - Malgré les restrictions la ville ancienne est envahie par les voitures.
5. - Bien que la vieille ville ait été déclarée zone piétonne tous les habitants tiennent à garer leur voiture immédiatement devant chez eux.
6. - Les espaces semi-publics tels que cette cour ont souvent d'intéressants pavements dallés, d'élégants escaliers ou des niches abritant des statues naïves.
7. - L'un des nombreux passages couverts menant au château des Hohenstaufen.
8. - La douceur du climat et la haute qualité de l'architecture devraient faire de ces quartiers des lieux particulièrement adaptés aux échanges sociaux et au jeu; mais même la « gelateria » est dépourvue de tout aménagement extérieur. Les propriétaires des maisons s'asseyent dehors sur leur propre chaise sur le seuil de leur porte.
9. - Délabrement des bâtiments de la vieille ville. Sur une moyenne de dix bâtiments en passe de s'effondrer, un seul a été restauré jusau'à présent.

**OPERACIÓN PILOTO DE UNA
RESTAURACIÓN Y REMODELADO DE UN
CONJUNTO DE HABITACIONES PARA
USO PÚBLICO EN LA VIEJA CIUDAD DE
BARI**

El problema principal de la vieja villa de Bari reside en la importancia de los trabajos de conservación que se imponen. Todas las casas siendo contruidas en toba necesitan un sostenimiento técnico complejo para evitar su deterioración. El autor del informe traza en detalle las técnicas que utilizo para restaurar un edificio que se hundía y que ahora debe servir como centro cultural.

El temor de los hundimientos fue la causa de la

desocupación de esa parte de la ciudad por sus vecinos tradicionales. Los que aún quedan son casi exclusivamente personas de edad o grupos sociales en margen.

Todo vínculo de barrio a desaparecido y es difícil, por el presente, hasta preservar las estructuras materiales de los corrales que fueron en el pasado el medio de la vida social de la comunidad. En una perspectiva de largo plazo habría que preveer: un mínimo de desarrollo de las actividades del sector terciario, una mejora del nivel de vida y de los ingresos familiares en los barrios antiguos lo que permitiría el uso peatón de la red de espacios colectivos equipados. Por ahora, la labor de salvaguardar las características modestas, pero no despreciables del paisaje urbano (escaleras, pavi-

miento de piedra, terrazas en niveles diferentes, pasadizos abovedados) esta entre las manos de técnicos que no están siempre muy bien preparados para tal trabajo.

En la actualidad, el ambito queda tambien desbarullado por innumerables añadizos modernos : faroles, rótulos de neon, locutorios, etc ...

El peligro de deterioración general de los edificios no permite dar ninguna prioridad a la organización de los espacios exteriores que son considerados sin razón como accesorios.

Pero su mediocridad contribuye, por otra parte, a poner en margen a la antigua villa, interrumpiendo todo intercambio con la otra parte de la ciudad. Bari esta perdiendo una parte de su núcleo más central y esta pérdida afecta de cierta manera cada uno de sus ciudadanos.