

LA DISTILLERIA NICOLA DE GIORGI A SAN CESARIO DI LECCE.

DA "FABBRICA DI SPIRITO" A "FABBRICA PER LA CULTURA".

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Abstract

In San Cesario di Lecce, a small town near the capital of Salento, known as the "City of distilleries", the alcohol industry has written an interesting page of economic and social history, leaving peculiar testimonies of a heritage of artefacts: the distilleries, better known as "*spirit factories*". Between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, six distilleries were active; activities carried out all on an artisanal level, ie with the use of simple, direct-fire stills. The first industrial distilleries appeared only around the twenties of the 20th century. The entrepreneurs of San Cesario di Lecce (De Bonis, De Giorgi, Pistilli, Laudisa, Cappello) converted the alembics with industrial plants to columns. Thus the distillation industry developed, which supplied alcohol to well-known companies in the north. Since the late nineties of the last century, the city administration promoted research on the industrial heritage of the city, with particular regard to the distilleries that were no longer active. After these studies, the administration paid attention to the recovery and conservation of the distillery of the industrialist Nicola De Giorgi who, in 2000, after 90 years of activity closed due to bankruptcy. On July 6, 2005, the plant was recognized as being of "cultural interest". On 16 March 2011 the distillery was purchased by bankruptcy from the "Rico Semeraro" Foundation, which in 2012 donated it to the Municipality of San Cesario di Lecce with a specific intention: to allocate the industrial plant, where hundreds of workers had worked, for cultural and social returns to the local community. The contribution illustrates the entire journey made by knowledge, capitalization and reuse (still in part, because they are 7,000 square meters covered) of the industrial site, to return it to the Salentine communities (and not only) for social and cultural purposes.

Key words: Industrial heritage, distilleries, conservation, refunctionalization