A Rehabilitation Strategy For Valletta

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ABSTRACT

Up till the present day, there have been several restoration projects going on in Valletta. The restoration of public and private buildings is a useful exercise. However, one could tend to compare such an exercise to a plastic surgery operation, whereby the physical appearance will be improved but the life span does not necessarily extend. It is useless to restore a building without finding for it a suitable use which can guarantee that at least for the next quarter of a century the building will be in use and properly maintained. It is useless to restore the whole of Valletta without tackling the emigration problem. On the other hand it is impossible for any Rehabilitation Committee, Local Council or any form of government to tackle this problem without breaking it into smaller issues which could be solved individually.

One solution, could be to identify potential nodes in Valletta, upgrade and rehabilitate those nodes, and then eventually the remaining areas will follow automatically. This rehabilitation process has been also suggested by Renzo Piano in his action plan for Valletta. However, the identification of such nodes should be done after conducting a number of surveys throughout Valletta.

When the nodes are selected, other surveys need to be done on each separate node. For the purpose of this thesis, a node was chosen as a case study, and these surveys were conducted. The node chosen is the area surrounding Auberge de Baviere in the lower part of Valletta, an area which is thought to have all the pre-requisites to qualify as one of the nodes to be rehabilitated. Besides the Auberge itself, this area has other historical buildings. It is the last area of Valletta to be developed and an area of falling at the end of one of the five valleys of Valletta – the Ghetto Valley, and having a direct access to the water front through the Jews’ Sally-Port. A spring of fresh water was found in this area during the course of rock cutting, when water supply in Valletta was one of the most serious problems. A fountain was erected to commemorate this event. This area was also occupied by the old slaughter house – Il-Biċċerija I-Quadima. In the centre of this area is a two level building bounded by Bull Street, St. Christopher Street, and St. Charles Street. This building is made up of a series of rooms, each having an independent access, either directly from the street or from a terrace. The area is also known as the Jewish Ghetto for it is thought that is served as a Jews’ quarters. Besides these special historical aspects, one should also mention the considerable number of 16th and 17th century buildings, some of which have windows and doors with the “fat” Melitan moulding surrounds.

The present problems and shortages of the area need to be clearly identified. Obviously social problems and buildings below acceptable standards are the first problems which
prevail. The exercise in trying to rehabilitate this area is to find the best mix of uses possible, to make the rehabilitation process sustainable. This exercise leads to a development brief and could be launched as a partnership scheme between the Government, the Local Council, the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, the present residents and entrepreneurs.