



SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS

Valletta: Beyond 2020

Valletta, 9 April 2016

Seminar organised by:



Valletta Alive Foundation

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Editor's Note

Societies are constantly changing. Like any urban area, Valletta is changing. Valletta beyond 2020 will need to meet the needs and aspirations of Maltese society of the future. Seminar speakers were asked to be forward looking in their approach. What actions and initiatives should be taken so that future aspirations for Valletta will be achieved? On the other hand, the discussion inevitably looked at the current situation and consider how this will impact Valletta's future. The topic areas discussed are: architecture and urban spaces; leisure and entertainment; economic/ financial activity; arts, culture and heritage; liveability; and regeneration.

There is an underlying theme that runs through these different perspectives. This is people. It is pointless discussing culture and urban heritage unless we keep people foremost, and that includes Valletta residents.

Each of the speaker is very well acquainted with Valletta and with the various issues that are often the subject of public discussion. They brought their own perspectives based on their knowledge and experience.

The papers presented at the seminar are compiled in this publication. The seminar was held on 9 April 2016 at the University of Malta's Valletta campus.

Dr. John Ebejer

Valletta Alive Foundation would like to thank

All the speakers for their participation and contribution.

VAF organisers (in alphabetical order): Elisabeth Aquilina, Tonio Camilleri, John Ebejer, Vince Fabri, Emy Micallef, Geoffrey Pisani Bencini, Pauline Tufigno.

Valletta Mayor, Alexiei Dingli for his support to the event.

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Papers included in this compilation:

Prof. Alex Torpiano compares today's Valletta with a vision for Valletta set out 50 years ago. He discusses the nature and quality of Valletta's urban spaces and emphasizes the need for the enhancement of the public domain and makes recommendations how this can be achieved. He makes observations on residential aspects and the community life of the city.

(Spaces for People: Lessons from Valetta - pages 4 to 18)

Vince Fabri gives a detail account of events that take place in Valletta and how they developed over the years. He also looks at how Valletta's evening leisure has changed to one which is vibrant and interesting. He notes and makes recommendations how certain deficiencies can be resolved.

(Valletta: a Leisure City or a City of Culture? - pages 19 to 23)

Joseph F. X. Zahra notes how Valletta is changing thanks to many developments over the past decade. He asks however whether Valletta is being transformed into a live museum and an events arena. He makes proposals for Valletta's regeneration, including one involving financial instruments.

(Economics, liveability and Urban Heritage: can they co-exist? - pages 24 to 27)

Sandro Debono emphasises the importance of participation and community engagement in museums and describes how this concept is being applied in MUŻA, Malta's new museum of art.

(Valletta Museums in the Community - pages 28 to 30)

Dr. Reuben Grima considers the liveability of Valletta today, based on my experience as a resident. It focuses on four key themes which he has become acutely aware of, as areas where Valletta's liveability is under threat. These are shorelines, soundscapes, viewsapes and social fabric/affordable housing. Today Valletta is under a siege of a different kind, which is no less of a threat to its fabric, its sense of place, and the quality of life of its residents.

(Living in Valletta: The liveability of a historic city - page 31 to 34)

Dr. John Ebejer emphasizes the need for clear about objectives when discussing Valletta's regeneration. He proposes eight objectives namely: well-maintained urban heritage; enjoyable urban spaces; a liveable city ; a vibrant city ; a city reflecting national identity; a great place to visit; sustainable commercial activity and easily accessible. For each, Dr. Ebejer considers where we are at by looking at past trends and future prospects.

(Regenerating Valletta: A vision for Valletta beyond 2020 - pages 35 to 44)

Dr. Lawrence Gonzi spoke about his government's vision for Valletta and how this was being implemented during his tenure as prime minister (2004 – 2013). He explained how a series of major Valletta projects, the most important being City Gate, were set in a framework of clearly defined strategic objectives.

(Valletta: The Pride of what makes us a Maltese and European Nation - pages 45 to 47)

Closing address by the Mayor of Valletta
Prof. Alexiei Dingli

(pages 48 to 49)



Spaces for People: Lessons from Valetta

(paper)

Prof. Alex Torpiano

Barely two weeks ago, Valetta celebrated the 450th anniversary of its Foundation. To mark this occasion the Times of Malta re-printed a Special Number that was first published fifty years before, on the 28th March 1966, to mark the 400th Anniversary of the Foundation of Valetta. Practically all the twenty-four articles in this supplement looked at various aspects of Valetta's past, except for the final one, by Perit Salvino Mangion (1) who wrote about the Valetta of the Future. In order to look forward into the future, it is normally always necessary for us to look back into the past, into history; in the context of this seminar, I found this article of greatest interest, because it is a vision of the future that was conceived fifty years ago. It really ought to be a picture of Valetta today, and therefore, by looking at it in detail, it can suggest to us how easy, or difficult, it is to anticipate the future.

Perit Mangion, who was then the Director of Public Works, refers to Valetta as the administrative, cultural, commercial and business centre of Malta, which still receives "a daily influx of large numbers of people and cars"; however, he predicts that the growth of tourism development in the north-west of Malta and the development of a Freeport in Marsaxlokk, would lead to a degree of decentralisation of the administrative, commercial and business activities. He predicts that growing "business, industry and professional practice" would require more "adequate" office space, which, he presumes, has to be located in Valetta; he predicts that the "machinery of Government" of the recently independent Malta would grow substantially, and salutes the Government plan to start relocating some of its offices to Floriana.

Perit Mangion predicts a growth in the "hotels, restaurants and places of entertainment" required to cater "for a much larger influx of foreigners"; he also predicts that the quality and number of shops was bound to increase. One of the fascinating aspects of the 1966 publication was, for me, the large number of commercial establishments, that are advertised within it, which no longer exist, or which changed destination; as well as noting the smaller number of the ones that survive!

The reference to residential accommodation is particularly interesting. Perit Mangion refers to five areas where slum clearance still needs to be undertaken. He makes the comment that the density in these areas is 1235 persons per hectare (500 persons per acre, or 8 sq.m per person), and that therefore, in the new "modern, efficient and hygienic dwellings" that would be erected in these areas, only about half of this population could be accommodated. The concept of the relatively new townships of Sta.Lucia and Msieraħ, and the proposed development on Corradino Hill, to jointly receive the overspill from this impossibly large population, is highlighted, given that within Valetta there was "no land available for expansion".

This level of density is indeed high. In a 2009 study (2), the author presented a comparison of residential densities in city-states such as Singapore or Hong Kong, (150 sq.m. per person), with contemporary

residential densities in Valetta and Birkirkara, (125 sq.m. per person) and Sliema, (100 sq.m. per person), and with the average residential density in Valetta in its heyday, (44 sq.m. per person).

The slum clearance projects, namely in the St.John's Cavalier area, and the Arċipierku (Old Hospital Street), and Due Balli areas, were carried out in the 1970's, in a context of great political controversy and confrontation. The slum clearance projects envisaged the replacement of the "run down" areas by blocks of social housing. It is interesting to note that Perit Mangion envisaged that, in some areas, where "traffic noises" were not an issue, and which enjoyed "very attractive views", it was possible (he uses the word "likely") that the redevelopment would involve multi-storey residential blocks catering for "higher income" families, wishing to return to Valetta, and seeking "to recapture the old social life". This is a very important issue which will be developed later on in this paper.

Perit Salvino Mangion's paper also addresses the other major problem of Valetta, namely the issue of vehicular access. He points out that on the one hand, it was not possible for the city to continue to accommodate the daily onslaught of cars, to the extent that "traffic barely moved". He makes the very revealing observation that if traffic projections were to be made (in 1966) the results would "prove conclusively" that it was not feasible to cater for cars "on the scale of, say, one car per family" – something which, he considers, in 1966, as not an "unrealistic forecast for the next 20 years"!

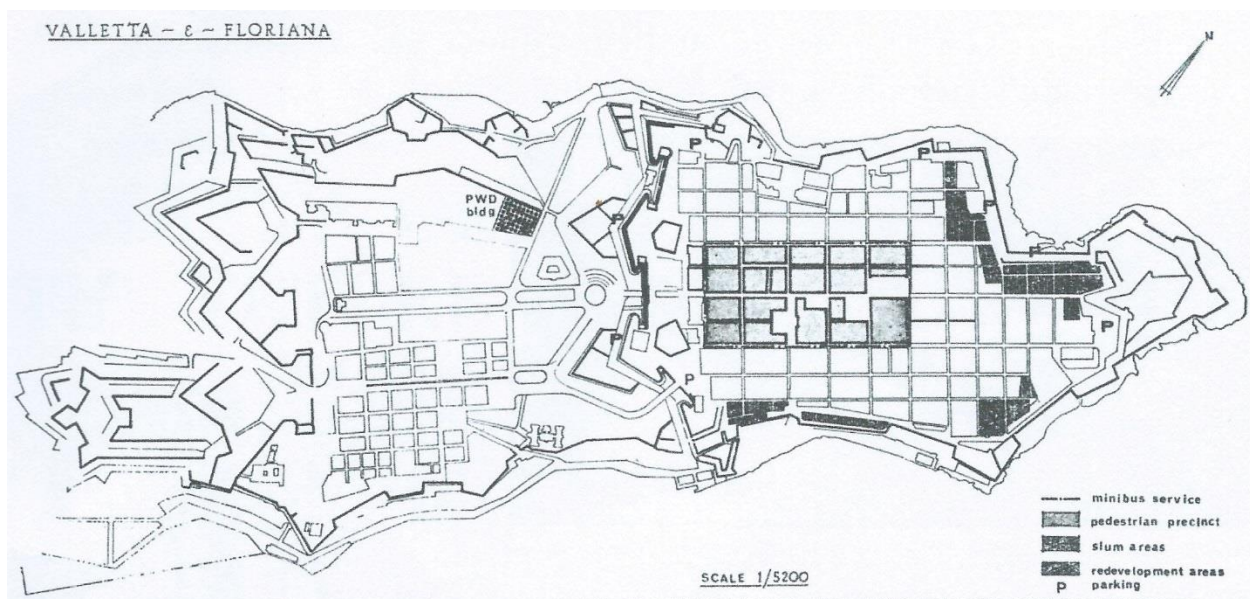


Fig. 1: Valetta pedestrian core, from Mangion (1)

In order to resolve this tension between the historic aspect of the city "with very definite character which must be preserved" and the requirements of a thriving capital city of a young independent state, Mangion talks about his vision of a balance between redevelopment and preservation. Within the central part of the city, which he defines by the lines formed by Merchants' Street and Old Bakery Street, and South and Archbishop Street, he proposes that redevelopment had to be very restrained, Fig. 1. He predicts that cars would soon be permanently excluded from Kingsway (Republic Street), and

possibly from the whole central part of Valletta as defined above. He is not insensitive, however, to the needs of good accessibility and communication, and proposes that this central area be served by a circular mini-bus service.

In the peripheral areas around this centre, he proposes that modern redevelopment, allowing “latitude in the use of materials and in the shapes and treatment of buildings” would not be harmful as long as the Valletta skyline is respected. He acknowledges that, within these redeveloped areas, it would be very difficult to “recapture the characteristic urban scene of the small town” because of “modern daylighting and planning standards” and, of course, the demands of the private car. The latter must be served, he suggests, by large underground car-parks, or located in ditches, or along the bastion periphery, or outside the bastions. This point of view is probably very typical of city planning of the 60’s.

However, Mangion also makes a very strong case for the importance of walking, and especially for “maximum separation between vehicles and pedestrians”. His most memorable quote, which is highlighted by the editor on the second page of the article, is taken from Colin Buchanan’s paper “Rebuilding for Traffic”, (not referenced but probably from *Traffic in Towns* (3)). It is worth repeating the quotation here:

“This simple act (of walking) is responsible for a great deal of movement in towns, including all the final distribution from bus stops and car parks and it is common sense that it should take place in conditions of reasonable comfort and safety. Walking is also involved with more subtle matters such as looking in shop windows, admiring the scene and talking to people, and it is almost true to say that *the ease and comfort with which a person can walk about and look around is a measure of the civilized quality of an urban area*”.

This article highlighted issues that are still relevant today, namely vehicular access, pedestrianisation, new development and “gentrification”.

In the 28th March 2016 issue, there were also two relevant articles, the first by Prof. Alexei Dingli and the second by journalist George Cini. In both contributions, there is hint of wistful nostalgia; George Cini (4) decries the disappearance of the “barbers, tailors, and cobblers”, the “itinerant hawkers”, and writes about “the vacuum being filled by gentrification” which caused property prices to rise, “well beyond the reach of the locals”.. He decries the shops sporting “international brand names” and “garish shop signs” (ironic comment in the context of Mangion’s prediction of a better quality of shops) – and calls for “entrepreneurs capable of resurrecting the old world charm Valletta was known for”. Prof. Dingli (5) also warns about the risk of “over-development” and of “gentrification”, but, at the same time he comments about how Valletta is “devoid of young families”, and salutes the investment in the city by public and private investors, over recent years, which is now waking Valletta up, after lying “dormant for so many decades”.

Cities have their own life, and there are limits to how much one can avoid the cycles of flourish, decline, re-building, re-flourish. The fear of gentrification is a curious one, in this respect. The original city was built by “gentlemen for gentlemen”, and as also explained by Mangion (1), the original city consisted of big architectural statements in the form of, of course, churches, auberges and convents, but also, and especially, of large beautiful palaces or noble houses, belong, first, to the noble families who came to live in the city, and then the rich merchants who lived and traded in the city. This is the genesis of the

central part of Valetta, which Mangion envisages as a completely pedestrian area. The space around this core, going out towards the bastions, was gradually filled up with the people who needed to live in the city to make a living, either in the service of the Order of St.John, or of the noblemen, or of the merchants; this included the butchers and fishmongers, and cloth merchants, and artists and artisans, and carpenters and metal workers. In addition, there were also for those tradesmen who supported this army of “support staff”, as it were – hence the cobblers, the barbers and the hawkers. It is as a result of the exodus of, first those who had alternative dwellings elsewhere, and who no longer needed the safety of the city walls to live comfortably, and secondly of the middle class, whose aspirations for higher quality dwellings, but probably also aspirations for social advancement, that led to the emptying of the city, leaving only a small number of residents, whose socio-economic strength is weak, below the national average, and certainly not representative of maltese society in general.

In this context, to talk of “gentrification” as if it were a loss for the city is to deny that the problem of the city results from “de-gentrification”. Being nostalgic for an “old charm Valetta” is not enough to guarantee a future for the capital city, not unless we are happy with the city remaining a “museum” with lots of things to show the tourists, or a Saturday night place, with a number of cultural activities (some high culture, and others much lower!) and restaurants attracting custom from outside the city, but whose resident community otherwise slowly disappears. Is that the future of our capital? The author therefore feels that one must ask who the “locals” are, which Cini (4) refers to when he comments that there is the risk that the latter will not be able to afford the price of property in the city, if such property becomes sought after by more prosperous, prospective residents.



Fig.2: Streets taken over by restaurants for residents or tourism?



This discussion also raises the issue of density. As has been pointed out before, Valetta was certainly inhabited at much denser level than nowadays. Density is, however, not just a simple calculation of the number of people living in a given area. An interesting characteristic is the number of acquaintances of an average resident, which is also referred to as the social-tie density. Social-tie density has been identified as a prime factor in the fostering of innovation, and hence economic well-being, (Pan et al. (6). Loss of density, therefore, is also the loss of potential economic advantage.

The author has recently re-visited a publication by Jon Mitchell (6) where the author himself is quoted as having argued in favour of a balance between the Baroque City and the Modern City. This was in the context of a forum organised in 1993, on “How can we *really* give life to the city of Valletta?” (– “Kif nistgħu verament ngħatu hajja lill-Belt Valletta”). This author had completely forgotten about the event, and is therefore not quite sure of his contribution then, but it seems, from the report in Mitchell, that the concerns in 1993 were the same as those held in 2016. The forum had referred to the excellent work which had been carried out by the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, set up in the late 1980’s, to repair and restore the architectural fabric of the important public buildings in Valetta; but it wished to explore what else could be done to *really* give life to Valetta. The population in Valetta in 1990 was 9000; in 2014 it was recorded at less than 6500, and therefore the trend is still terminal. The trend was downwards even when, in the 80’s and 90’s, the population growth rate of Malta was hovering around the 1%. In 2016 it is 0.22% and falling – in 2020 it is projected to fall to 0.167% and by 2035 the population is expected to start declining, because the current fertility rate is already below the replacement rate. In other words, the problem of the absence of young families, decried by Mangion (1), and Dingli, (5), is likely to get worse, unless something drastic happens. Surely if “gentrification” brings in new residents, then it cannot be a bad thing, since the locals are, in any case, a, literally, dying breed (unless you include, as Mitchell (6) suggests, you include under the term “Beltin” those who were born and bred in Valletta (like the author), and worked or studied in the city. Can these “locals” be enticed back?

The promoters of this seminar refer to the need to address the “aspirations of Maltese society of the future”. The author thinks that this is a very important issue. What do we really want the future of Valletta to be? If the population continues to decline, do we envisage a situation when the buildings within it accommodate offices, private or government, shops or tourist-related facilities, , (Fig.2)? There are cities of a comparable size where this has happened. There are even places (in Italy, for example), where all the buildings are empty and the place more or less vacant. If that were the case, then we might not need to worry about making the city “liveable, safe and healthy”. If we are not worried about attracting residents with young families, we would be less concerned about noise pollution, about green spaces, and even about the type of evening entertainment we attract. The mayor wishes to have a city which respects its residents, (5); this presumes that the city continues to have residents.

We could have a balance, but we cannot have the cake and eat it.

So, to try to respond to what the promoters asked the author to talk about, what architectural and urban space lessons can be learnt from the city, which could help us address Valetta of 2020 and beyond.

First of all, it is necessary to acknowledge that we are lucky that in Valetta we have an abundance of interesting urban spaces, the like of which it is difficult to find elsewhere. Valetta is, by any standard, a beautiful city. It is excellently located between two beautiful harbours, it has an abundance of interesting public urban spaces, (Fig.3). Probably because of the bastions that circumscribe it, Valetta has also, more or less, maintained its coherence, and its urban consistence. There are many spaces that have been designed with people in mind. The (in)famous steps in some streets inhibited their being taken over by the car, and therefore their particular character has survived more than other places, (Fig.4). There are many places where the play of light and shade creates interest, where change in scale, from the restrained to the monumental, creates surprise and delight. There are many spaces for people to discover and enjoy.



Fig. 3: Valetta is still full of beautiful spaces to discover on foot



Fig. 4: Steps kept cars out!

As discussed earlier, “gentrification” can bring problems. But do urban improvements, and the restoration of vacant dilapidated buildings, really push existing residents out? The example of the ongoing transformation of Birgu suggests that this is not necessarily the case. As a result of the infrastructural investments that have been made by public funds, and the corresponding investments in houses by private individuals, Birgu, today, suggests that a balance may exist. Many of the original residents of Birgu still own and live in their houses, and even if some other houses are gradually being transformed either into new homes for foreign residents, or small hotels for a different type of tourist, there is no overall feeling that the place is being “gentrified”. It could be argued, of course, that as the returns from such private investment are demonstrated to be very satisfactory, the pressure may rise for existing residents to sell out and hence move to other places.

However, Birgu is also different. It is smaller, and has always been. At the beginning of the 20th century, Birgu had a population of about 6000 people, and by 2014 it had declined to just over 2500. Its physiognomy is also very different, in the sense that, apart from the damage caused during the Second World War and the subsequent reconstructions, the distribution of major buildings such as palaces or churches and convents, amongst the fabric of more modest residential units is more diffused.

The attractiveness, or otherwise, of modest residential units to new residents depends not only on the quality of the units themselves, and the views they perhaps afford over the harbours on either side, but also on the qualities of the urban spaces around, or immediately adjacent, to the units. This is where conflicts can arise.

Herman Hertzberger (7) gives some interesting insights into the characteristics of public and private space, and of, what he refers to as, the “in-between”: “The concepts “public” and “private” can be interpreted as the translation into spatial terms of “collective” and “individual”. In a more absolute sense you could say: public: an area that is accessible to everyone at all times; responsibility for upkeep is held collectively. Private: an area whose accessibility is determined by a small group or one person, with responsibility for upkeep”. The “in-between” then is the “threshold” providing the “key to the transition and connection between areas with divergent territorial claims, and as a place in its own right, it constitutes, essentially, the spatial condition for the meeting and dialogue between areas of different orders.”

Hertzberger is an architect of the Dutch social tradition, working in a society where the difference between the upper and lower income families is not as wide as it is elsewhere – and where there was certainly the desire to promote this social uniformity through the design of new urban settlements, or the interventions in existing cities. Hertzberger consequently associates the “inexorable decline” of the “public domain” with the decline of the collective and the rise of the individual. He comments “the more buildings stand apart as autonomous volumes with individualized facades and private entrances, the less cohesion there is”.

It is not useful to be judgemental about this trend. The point is that it exists, and no degree of social engineering can reverse it. In cities, the “closeness”, the limited space between buildings, that nowadays we recognise as urban attractiveness, almost invariably was motivated by defence, and especially by communal defence. This military requirement often had other, more social, consequences. Especially in the areas where prosperity was limited, and therefore the houses small, the street becomes a communal living room. This is where children play together in the street, where neighbours can take their chairs out, in the summer evenings, to socialize with the neighbours, or even simply to watch the street. The street is also where people could look out for each other.

Hertzberger comments about how the character of an area depends on who determines the “furnishing” and “arrangement” of an urban space, much as of an interior space; the character depends on *who takes charge of a space, takes care of it, and who is, or feels, responsible for it*. Public spaces, including streets, are increasingly looked after by the local authorities, and therefore there is both a reduced scope for personalisation, as well as a general dilution of the concept of the street as a collective space.

Groups of streets, then, form the “parish”, and the individual street community would then relate to other specific street communities. Valletta had, and, to a certain extent, still has, a strong parish structure. The primary ones, reflecting not only the location of the churches, but also the density and uniformity of the residential quarters, are the parishes of St.Paul’s Shipwreck, of St.Dominic, of St.Augustine and of the Carmelites. The ownership of the public streets of these parishes could not, for obvious reasons, be seen at any stage during the year, since the responsibility for looking after them remained that of the city or national authority. But, during the special days when the parish celebrated its feast, the responsibility for the “furnishing” of those particular streets was delegated to the parish collective.

This type of street can be contrasted to the typical “suburban” urban space, where the space for vehicular movement, for car-parking, for cycle lanes, for pedestrian walkways, and, even more, for the

ubiquitous front garden – often in the name of some building regulation or another - pushes buildings away from each other to the extent that the space in between does not exist, and, consequently, to the extent that the social interaction across buildings cannot bloom. Or perhaps, we increasingly do not wish it to bloom? Hertzberger comments that the affinity between inhabitants tends to diminish as prosperity increases. Arguably, better economic circumstances of people result in a reduced dependance on doing things together with your neighbours.

There are however other spaces, which are nominally public, but which, by reason of their geography and location, do not feel public at all. Sometimes they are public spaces which have been converted into extensions of the private dwelling. In other case, these spaces could probably correspond to those spaces which Hertzberger refers to as “in-between” (Fig.5). This can still be observed in some particular spaces in Valetta, sometimes in spaces that are not, strictly speaking, streets, but also elevated terraces, alcoves under archways, landings in steps, or unfrequented street ends, which are “taken over” by the residents of the immediate neighbourhood. These spaces exist because the responsibility for looking after it has been effectively delegated to the local collective. Communities are often built around such spaces, spaces which are thus “taken over”, even if nominally public. The casual visitor, or even the new resident, may even find it difficult to enter into this “public” space, because of the overt “ownership” claims by others, generally collectively – although sometimes also by an individual. The “in-between” space, which is meant to be the “threshold” to the private spaces in a particular location becomes, instead, a buffer space, much as the front garden in suburbia does not act as an in-between space between the public street and the private dwelling, but a further buffer against the community.

Communities can also exist in other ways. The author grew up in a post-war block of apartments located at the corner of St.Paul’s Street with St.Dominic’s Street, which shared an open courtyard with another two apartment blocks, one which was also accessed from St.Paul’s Street, but also another one accessed from Merchants’ Street. The author remembers the courtyard space – not the ground level, which belonged to a separate entity, but the actual multi-storeyed air space of the courtyard – as the primary community focus of the residents of the three blocks, where they shared their daily stories, lent things or support to each other as the need arose, to the extent that the children were brought up to think of these neighbours as aunts and uncles.



Fig. 5: Public urban space; but feels private?

How do new potential residents relate, therefore, to these “public” areas, located adjacent or in the immediate vicinity of their prospective residence? Do they feel inhibited by the need to be less private (and hence the need to concede more to the communal), and hence inclined to give up? Or, if in sufficient numbers, can the arrival of new residents dilute the collective nature of the space, and even push them out completely? In St.Barbara’s Bastion, which has always been one of the most beautiful and desirable areas of Valletta, many residents have moved out – probably against considerable financial gain – in favour of either rich corporate clients, or rich expatriate residents.

How can the process of attraction of new residents be moderated?

In Valletta, there are few opportunities for designing new buildings and designing new urban spaces. A potential exists in the redevelopment of the 1970’s social housing that were built following slum clearance operations – but which were not ambitious enough, and which therefore laid the seeds for the slums of the future. In order to attract new residents, particularly new young families, we need to find new ways to use existing urban spaces. The revival of the public street as the communal living room is unlikely to be successful, not least because of the reduced social homogeneity, and reduced appetite for the sort of neighbourliness that characterised previous communities; but also because of the continuing dominance of the car – unless the steps in the street prohibit the car!

The gridiron nature of Valletta has not really been exploited. Although the grid ought to facilitate the linkage between the periphery and the centre, this has not been the case. The central zone, even if not as delimited as proposed by Mangion, continues to dominate, partly by reason of geography – the character of the lower part of Republic Street changes where the slope becomes steeper, as does the upper part of Merchants’ Street – but also by ease of access, quality of public infrastructure, and distribution of amenities. There are areas on the periphery of the city where investment is still

necessary, (Fig. 6). These areas need to be brought back into the urban collective, so that the liveable core is stretched to extend to the enclosure of the bastions- because this is where more people actually live. It is necessary to create tension in the City, by stretching the centre, and linking it more intimately to the periphery. This can also be done by the creation of public facilities/buildings which can have the function of promoting social interaction.

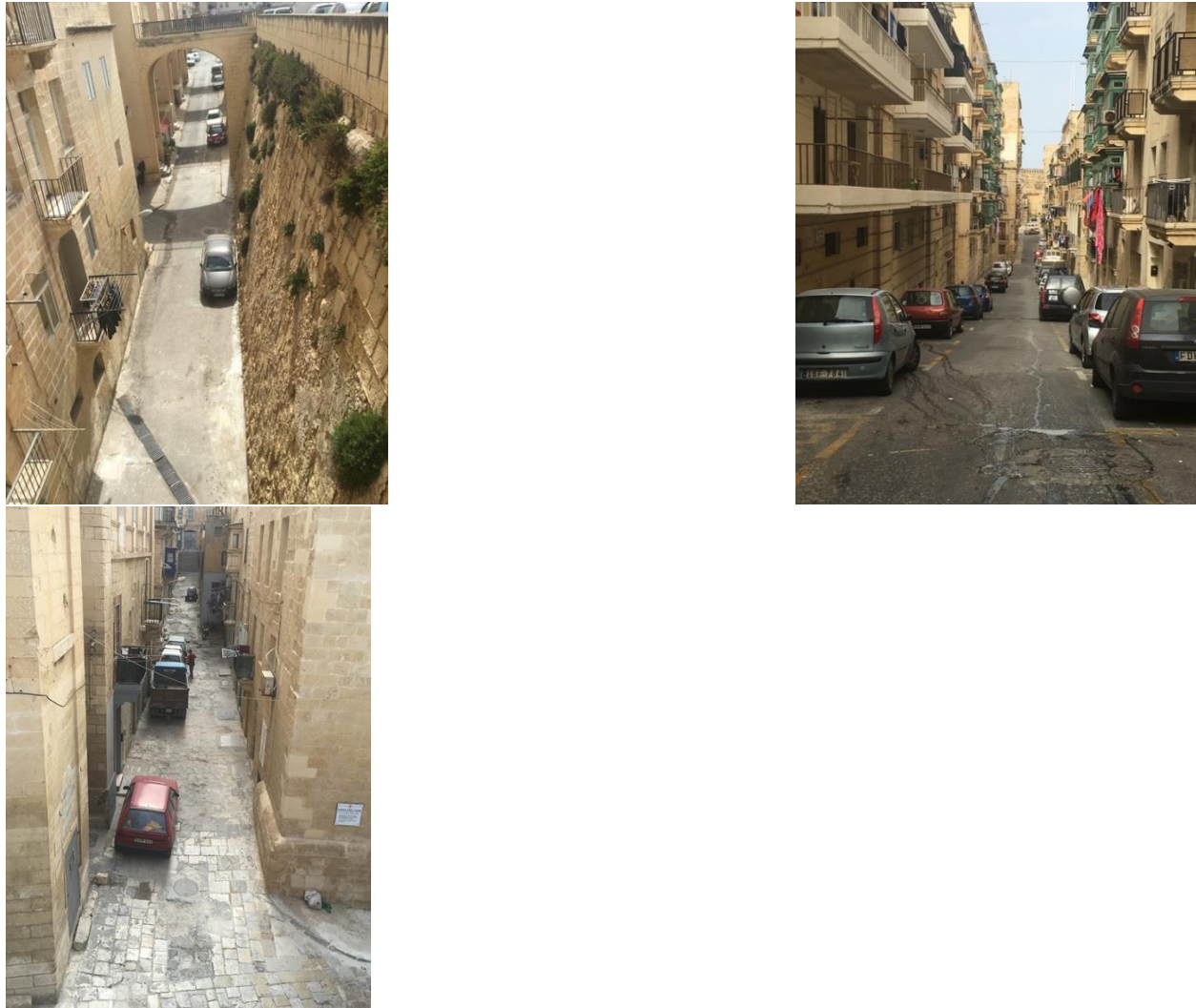


Fig.6: Urban spaces on the periphery where investment is still necessary.

In the 19th century, many cities benefitted from a number of “private” buildings which became part of the public realm, where social interaction was possible, for example, exhibition buildings, department stores, railway stations, covered arcades. In Valetta, there are some, such as the Old Market, and now, possibly the Pjazza Tijatru Rjal, the Fort St.Elmo Museum, which could have the same function, if promoted as such. It is necessary to enhance these facilities, and to distribute them over the whole of the city so as to “stretch” it. One idea could be the recovery of the magnificent buildings that until recently were Malta’s best equipped furniture factory, as a building which serves this type of public function.

It is also necessary to put more emphasis on the enhancement of the public domain. Valetta has gardens located at its periphery, notably the Upper Barakka, the Lower Barakka, and Hastings, but it is first of all necessary to upgrade the latter two, to make them places for young families, (Fig.7). It is also necessary to improve the green infrastructure within the public spaces throughout the city. We need to have less advertisements and less paraphernalia in the public realm, and more well-detailed public furniture and well maintained green areas. The author would urge the City to assiduously pursue the dream of creating more gardens and leisure spaces in the Ditch, particularly where, one hopes, it will be more easily accessible via the projected elevator.



Fig. 7: Upper Barraka

In recent years, there have been some excellent additions to the public realm of Valetta, especially the entrance to the City, and the Parliament area, and, to a degree, St.George's Square, (Fig.8 and 9). Other recent interventions feel less successful; the area adjacent to the Auberge d'Italie has "not happened" yet, and almost invites the ubiquitous "festa hot-dog gabbani" to keep company with a forlorn-looking La Valette, (Fig.10). And Castille Square is surely a badly missed opportunity for a grand public open space (Fig. 11) – admittedly in a difficult site – in front of one of the most beautiful public buildings in Valetta. Unfortunately, these types of opportunities do not often arise. Following the opening of this square, and embellishing it with yet more statues of politicians, (can we ban these, from now on?), does anybody, tourist or resident, really feel any attraction to visit the square (other than to take a photo by the guns), as one does to visit the Campidoglio or Covent Garden or the Place de la Concorde. Could well have been!



Fig. 8: St.George's Square, reclaimed from the car.

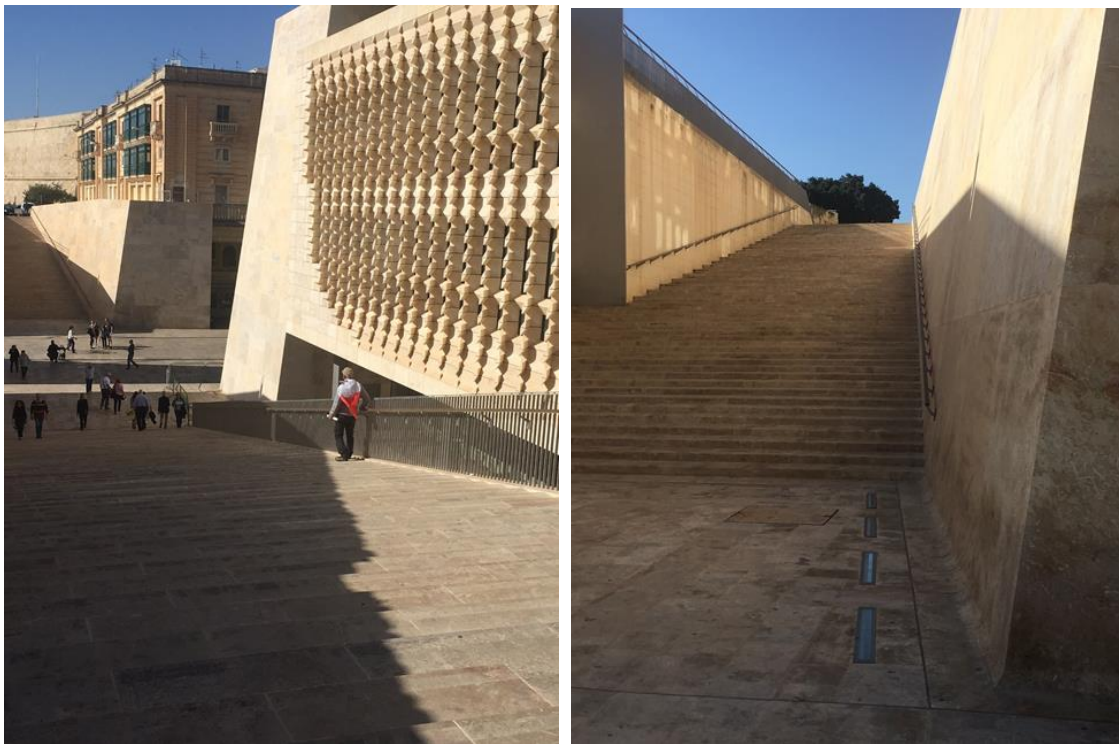


Fig.9: Urban theatre – City Gate



Fig. 10: Forlorn looking La Valette – this urban space is not really working, yet.



Fig. 11: Castille Square: Missed opportunity?

So, what is the future of Valetta looking like? What can we expect (or hope for) for 2020? The core areas of Valetta are currently looking bright and lively, as a result of the investment that went into these areas. Public money has gone into public buildings, museums, palaces, etc. Private money has gone into shops, offices, some residences, and now boutique hotels. However, the resident population of the city is still declining. And it is vitally necessary to understand why; and then to do something about it.

More investment is required to help existing and new residents to upgrade the public and private infrastructure of the more peripheral dwelling areas. The existing residents can no longer afford the upkeep of the areas that the local communities used to “look after”. The investment has to come from other sources. There are various funding mechanisms that can be explored to serve this purpose.

The Local Council should be given the resources to understand, (i) the current socio-economic profile of its residents, and the quality of dwellings they inhabit; (ii) the factors that encourage existing residents to stay in Valetta, or alternatively push them to leave, if they could; (iii) the geographical distribution of vacant or under-utilised property which could, under some form of corporate intervention, be upgraded and brought into the market for families with children. It is important that planners, and other City managers, do not misunderstand the type of investment and the type of uses that can make Valetta a city which is beautiful to live in, and not just a city to visit as a tourist, or for evening entertainment.

This is a tricky stage of the revival of Valetta. Getting new residents in must be a top priority.

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Valletta: a Leisure City or a City of Culture?

(paper)

Vince Fabri

Until the 1970s, the City of Valletta was the most important centre for the administrative, cultural and the commercial sector of Malta. From early morning, until late at night, for seven days a week, our capital was a vibrant hub of continuous activity. However, with the development and growth of our tourism industry, other localities, such as Sliema, Saint Julians, Bugibba, Qawra and Marsascala, were also attracting both locals and foreigners for their modern entertaining and commercial facilities, with the consequence that the importance of Valletta as the island's main cultural and commercial centre, started to diminish. The increasing number of private vehicles meant that the Maltese could now travel to various destinations without the eleven o'clock curfew imposed by the public transport.

These circumstances had a negative impact on our capital, while during the morning Valletta kept its administrative and commercial momentum, with over forty-thousand daily commuters, after office hours, our capital commercial zones were now being deserted. This meant that cafeterias and restaurants, were now closing their service during the evening, and for various other reasons, the once most attended cinemas in our Islands, were closing down. Sadly, what once was the most busy and sought-after meeting place in Malta, was now turning into a ghost town.

There were also new social realities, leaving their mark on a number of residential areas, where most of the houses were now inadequate and below the standards of the modern life style. Consequently, a number of houses were being left abandoned and degenerating. Young city citizens were left with no other option than to find their residence elsewhere. This situation contributed to a sharp drop in the residential population of our city. These circumstances contributed to years of social and infrastructural neglect. For about twenty years our capital was put aside from the authorities' agenda. Ironically it was at this time in 1980, that Valletta was declared as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

The Capital City was put back on the authorities' agenda in 1987, with the setting up of the Valletta Rehabilitation Project. The agency name shows that the authorities were finally realising that Valletta was in dire need of an intensive rehabilitation program. A few years later in 1993 Valletta had its first Local Council elected. This marked the beginning of an intensive and ambitious infrastructural programme, partially supported by European Funds for the restoration and renovation of bastion walls, historical buildings, squares and gardens, street paving and the pedestrianisation of open spaces. The year 2009, marked another milestone in the rehabilitation of our Capital, which saw the transformation of our city main entrance, with a new parliament building, and an open air cultural space, designed by the world renowned architect Renzo Piano.

From a Ghost Town to a City Alive

In 2005 the first Notte Bianca was organised, it drew thousands of people to Valletta, and it took the business community by surprise. This event marked the beginning of a new era for our city. It was evident that the Maltese were still faithful to their historical capital and were eager to see Valletta regaining its status as the cultural centre of Malta.

Another important ambitious step was when the Valletta Local Council submitted the application so that Valletta will be considered as The European Capital for Culture in 2018. The Valletta 2018 Foundation was set up, so that it will steer up the process. The application was accepted in 2012, and now we are less than two years closer to this important event.

In this context I would like to list a number of important cultural activities that were organised throughout these recent years and which now are part of Valletta's ongoing cultural diary.

Being the capital, Valletta has the highest concentration of cultural venues: Manoel Theatre, Mediterranean Conference Centre, the Centre for Creativity, the Museum of Fine Arts, the National Museum of Archaeology and St. John's Co-Cathedral. Apart from hosting numerous high standard cultural activities, they are also historical attractions of interest to visitors. Valletta hosts national activities that draw thousands including national days celebrations, Carnival, religious feasts and Holy Week celebrations. For Carnival and Holy Week celebrations, many Valletta citizens participate creatively.

In 1992 the **International Jazz Festival** was organised for the first time and has since hosted numerous international Jazz musicians. It was also an opportunity for Maltese musicians to participate in this prestigious annual international event. In 2005 the **Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival** was organised by the NGO INIZJAMED, with renowned writers from all over the Mediterranean countries, who are also joined by local writers, for days of literary workshops and presentations. Last year this festival was held at the newly restored Fort St Elmo, which apart from its own historical attraction, it is also being wisely used to host a number of cultural events.

In 2006, the **Malta International Spring Orchestra Festival** was organised, focusing on classical and contemporary orchestral music, with the participation of renowned international and Maltese musicians. For the cinema lovers, Valletta has been hosting The Kinematic Film Festival since 2004. The event has now become the **International Valletta Film Festival** and aims to become one of the most important Mediterranean film festivals. The event is a celebration of high standard artistic films, screened in the early summer at unique historical open air venues in Valletta.

In 2013 the first International **Valletta Baroque Festival** was organised. This festival has been a successful celebration of Baroque music in a Baroque City. This event has managed to attract hundreds of foreign music lovers who come to Malta for the festival. Organisers claim that it generates about 5 million euro to our economy, during the winter shoulder months. This has been a successful story in cultural tourism. The **Valletta International Visual Art Festival**, known as VIVA, was organised for the first time in 2014. Everyone remembers the controversy, and the reaction created by a statue of a three legged house which was set up at the Valletta main entrance. The response and discussion created about this statue by Austin Camilleri, shows how art is not just about form, but a medium that could

effectively open endless discussions. Undoubtedly the three legged house experience, represents the philosophy behind the Visual Arts Festival.

Another event that drew the crowds to Valletta is **Science in the City**, the European Researchers' Night Festival, that is organised by the University of Malta with a large number of partners. This Festival is funded by the European Commission's Research and Innovation Framework Programme. Hundreds of students share their science related projects, with thousands of visitors, in an exciting and entertaining manner. During summer the Arts Council holds the **Malta Arts Festival**, comprising a wide variety of art forms, such as theatre, dance, music and art. Most of the performances are now hosted at the Pjazza Teatru Irjal.

Two educational and entertaining events in Valletta are for children; **Ziguzajk**, a festival with about 150 performances shared by about 10,000 participants, and **Toi Toi** which is a series of monthly interactive musical concerts for children.

The **Malta Fashion Week**, is a celebration of creativity, by Maltese and foreign artist in the fashion design industry. Some of the most exciting Valletta iconic urban landscapes are being used as backdrops during this event. The **Malta Fire Works Festival** held at the Valletta Grand Harbour is a spectacle of fireworks displays designed by foreign pyrotechnic companies as well as some of the best local fireworks factories.

Hosted at the historic and popular Barrakka and Hastings gardens are the annual wine festivals, an enjoyable activity for thousands of local wine and food lovers. **Kelma Kelma Nota Nota** is a successful fusion of Maltese literature with popular Maltese songs. Last year three different acts had ten performances at Pjazza Teatru Irjal.

With the initiative of the Local Council, for these last few years Valletta is also joining other capital cities around the world for the **New Year's Eve Celebrations**, thousands of Maltese and foreigners gather primarily at Pjazza San Gorg for a spectacle of music, dance, fireworks and an animated laser show. The **Valletta Green Festival** was organised in Piazza San Gorg for these last two years, with the main attraction being the infiorata featuring over 80,000 potted plants, creating a carpet of flowers. This is an initiative of the Valletta 2018 Foundation.

The above is an overview of the main activities. Thanks to these and other activities we can now talk of Valletta, a city alive.

The private sector took note of the level of public activities in Valletta and the City was being considered a viable option for investment. A new cinema and retail complex was opened in year 2000. More recently, many new catering establishments have started business in Valletta. Soon the old traditional Valletta Market will be refurbished, and hopefully will be reopened by next year. A considerable number of once abandoned old houses are now being renovated and transformed into boutique hotels.

A vibrant evening destination

In 2012 the Local Council, organised an activity called **kNights** in the City, with the aim to encourage the catering establishments in the city centre to keep their outlet open after 7.30 pm. The Council provided



the musicians, and the idea of having permits for tables and chairs outside their establishment. It was not an easy task to persuade the owners to keep their outlet open for a few hours more, it was evident that most owners were not convinced that it was financially worthwhile, but somehow they agreed to give it a try.

The outcome of this activity was surprisingly very effective, with owners requesting to extend this activity for the whole summer. The success was mainly due to the unpredictable number of tourists that were visiting Valletta during the evening. It seems that we were not aware that it is just naturally logical that tourists will visit the capital any time of the day, and statistics shows that over 95% of our tourists visit Valletta. It could be that we had also forgotten that Valletta has a particular charm during the night. The idea of tables and chairs and live music started to be introduced in other areas in Valletta. The Maltese also realised that Valletta suddenly has become a pleasurable evening destination.

It is only obvious that these sudden changes had also their negative implications, mostly because the regulations regarding the outside furniture were not being observed, and the music and the numerous patrons outside the outlets were getting noisy. The waste collection system for these areas was not adequate for the amount of waste that was now being generated. This situation created a new challenge for the Local Council, the police and other related authorities. Enforcement is not an easy task, when most of the regulations regarding outdoor catering and entertainment on public areas, needs to be updated, and to be applied in context of a historic and residential capital city.

The Council believes that the commercial entertainment businesses should treat Valletta as a five star destination, where only high quality entertainment acts will be acceptable. Any form of entertainment must be appropriate in context of the historical surroundings of our city, and in respect of the residential areas.

I will conclude by trying to integrate what I have been saying, with the theme of this conference, Valletta beyond 2020. No doubt that Valletta has been transformed in these last few years from a degenerated ghost town to a restored and vibrant capital city. The process is still on, while we must continuously maintain what we have achieved, we must now direct our priorities also to the residential areas. Some residents claim that there is a discriminatory line that divides the commercial and the residential areas of our city. It is a fact that most of these areas are in dire need of an infrastructural uplift. The issue is not just that it is unfair on residents. Being small visitors can easily walk across the City, and the many failings in infrastructure in the residential areas reflects very badly on Valletta and even on the reputation of our country, with the hundreds of overseas visitors walking around the city. I am referring to the area around the recently restored Fort St Elmo, which is attracting thousands of visitors and the Mediterranean Conference Centre, which recently hosted two international conferences, and which will next year be the main venue hosting the European Parliament in Malta. I wholeheartedly believe that we must address this situation very urgently.

Recently we saw the Castile Square being renovated in just a few months, undoubtedly another positive step in the regeneration of our city, but the question arises, why other important projects are being shelved? Although we have inaugurated the new parliament nearly a year ago, other areas which makes part of the Renzo Piano project are still under construction. Why is it taking so long to install the three public lifts by the city entrance, what about the landscaping under the entrance bridge, the



pedestrianisation and paving of the terminus area, and the restoration of the Triton Fountain? Why does Pjazza Teatru Irjal look distinctly different from the original design? What happened to the semi transparent acoustic panels, that were supposed to surround this theatre? My concern is, are we at a risk of losing Renzo Piano's artistic signature? I can understand that there could be other priorities, but I firmly believe that every euro spent on the regeneration of our Capital is a solid investment.

As I previously remarked nearly all foreigners who come to Malta visit our capital, so Valletta must be seen as a reflection of our country, and safeguarded continuously by keeping it on top of our administrative agenda.

I finally congratulate all those participating in this conference. Although we may have different opinions on what is the best way forward, we all agree that our Capital City must always reflect the dignity and the aspirations of our nation and its people.



Economics, liveability and urban heritage: can they co-exist?

Is Valletta still missing a heart and a soul?

The real significance of a renaissance in our capital city

(paper)

Joseph F X Zahra

It is my great pleasure to be invited again by the Valletta Alive Foundation to address this gathering of residents and admirers of our capital city. It was more than seven years ago when I voiced the plea for a modern make-over, a renaissance of Valletta with the aim of recreating our city in both character and personality and to re-establish and re-energise its social and economic life.

Valletta's natural geography, history, urban planning, architecture and art, inherited from the Knights of St John and Maltese and European nobility and its citizens have created an ethos to a city which is in the periphery of Europe and so close to North Africa. This foundation has played a pivotal role in determining the social fabric of the city based on an economy that predominately trades either goods or services. Valletta has also been the centre of political and administrative life of the country. The folklore and traditions of the city reflect its character and personality nourished by social and economic development over the four hundred fifty years of its existence.

Serious scars on the face of the city caused by the bombings during the Second World War left behind a devastated society with families leaving the city in search of safer houses with better modern amenities. This social neglect took over sixty years of Valletta's life – lost years of people and families leaving the city and depleting it of its core organs – the lives of persons and families. For sixty years the city was in free fall as it was deserted in the evenings with a restricted circulation of people visiting it in the morning to attend court hearings, visit Government departments and to shop. The traders left the city as the once busy streets of Merchants, St Paul and Old Bakery, were left deserted with abandoned shops and houses. It was only in the last years of the end of the last century that renewed attention started being given to the city.

The situation now is changing – the Renzo Piano plans for City Gate, the Opera House and the new Parliament building are now a reality, and an integral part of Valletta's attractions. The € 80 million investment marks a contemporary and vivid statement in the heart of our capital city. The restoration of the bastions, metaphorically representing the values of faith, fortitude and perseverance, have revived the splendour of what Malta represents in the minds of many – the defence of our Christian values and culture.

A traffic congestion payment scheme has made room for people to roam around the streets with pedestrian zones taking prominence in Republic and Merchant streets and other surrounding areas.

Open spaces like St George's Square and Castille Square have been embellished and restored close to their original design, making these piazzas regain their role as meeting places.

A varied calendar of cultural events – and lest we forget, re-ignited by the Valletta Alive Foundation with its *Streets Alive* events, have been a source of attraction to both Maltese and tourists. Valletta is today a hub of cultural and artistic events – Notte Bianca, wine festivals in summer, food and fireworks displays and concerts.

A number of palazzi and large town houses have been converted or are being earmarked for boutique hotels. Two iconic Valletta hotels – the Osborne and the British are being modernized and renovated. Derelict buildings are also being restored by law and notary practices. High street retail chains are recognising the potential of a growing trade. Real estate agents are focusing on a renewed residential market. The proposed regeneration of the closed market, *is- Suq*, and the renovation of St Elmo are a vivid proof of this positive drive to revamp the idea of making Valletta the pride and joy of the nation once again.

These various improvements and events form part of a collage that is reshaping Valletta. This does not restrain me from asking a serious question... are we transforming Valletta into a live museum and an events arena. Throughout the centuries, our capital city's character has swerved and twisted predominantly around its neighbourhoods... are we now at another bend?

Are we satisfied with the commercialisation of Valletta? The developments in Strait Street which is developing into another Paceville with open air entertainment, loud music and tables and chairs of bars and restaurants taking over the pedestrian areas? Are we satisfied with the still decaying neighbourhoods with young Valletta citizens looking for houses outside the city as prices of town houses are going up?

Could it be that we have tackled the Valletta problem the wrong way? Were the decisions on Valletta taken without consultation with its residents? Does this new Valletta reflect the ethos of the city? Or is it a superficial dressing to our capital city which does not resonate with the aspirations of its inhabitants?

Where is this taking us? Can we correct the route that we have taken?

Urban regeneration projects have failed in other countries because they heavily discounted the human and social side of such development. The main difficulties arose from the lack of consultation with the local residents in the decision making process of renewal projects, the failure to take into consideration the welfare of the people living in the city, the over-reliance on physical development, mostly construction for renovation, in the urban renewal, and the missed link between commercial development and the development of the local community. This implies that one of the major dangers of urban regeneration is the lack of a holistic view of development.

The new Valletta is still without a heart and a soul. During the past century, Valletta experienced an exodus of its citizens. The bleeding is still going on. The city has not managed in keeping its young people living in the city, and it is not attracting young families to have their home there. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the population of Valletta was that of 23,000 inhabitants, whereas the latest

statistics show a population of less than 6,000. Valletta's mean population age stands at 45.5 years, which is well above the Islands' average age of 40.5 years. The population is predominantly skewed towards the lower income groups, which contrasts largely with the case found in other European cities where you have households with a wider ranging income.

Regeneration is not to be measured by how many people you have in the streets, and how long food and drink outlets remain open at night during the week-end. It has to be measured by how much the welfare of the citizens has improved, by how much they are willing to go on living in the city, and how comfortable they are living in their homes.

Valletta needs therefore to be transformed into an animated and lived-in organic city with a revival in the neighbourhoods where citizens can live with all comfort. The different quarters of *I- Arcipierku, il-Fossa, il- Biccerija* and *id- Due Balli* need to be reanimated with families, particularly younger families, living in comfortable residences and with surrounding amenities.

One strong recommendation goes in the direction of strengthening the Valletta Local Council. This might be considered as a pilot project in the spirit of subsidiarity. The local council of Valletta must be given wider responsibilities to tackle the issues of this important capital city. The local council cannot be considered as any other council as it spans a circle of responsibility which is much larger than that of others. To start with, it needs to have proper representation of the citizens of these neighbourhoods to give a stronger voice to the inhabitants of the city.

It is the Valletta local council that contributes to the design of a social and economic policy for the city that considers the needs of both its residents and its visitors. These are only a few ideas that the Council may address.

The authority to issue bonds, with preferential withholding tax enjoyed by holders, as a financial instrument specifically issued to finance housing and environmental and recreational projects. Major attention is to be given to renovation and modernisation by existing citizens of sub-standard housing

Promote independent grocery shops, green grocers, butcher shops and confectioners to fulfil the daily needs of the residents.

Design a master plan for infrastructural improvements including parking facilities for residents. Perhaps underground structures with the aim of complementing the policy of increasing pedestrian zones and factoring the physical constraints created by the priceless buildings to host garages or parking spaces.

A policy for a more young family friendly capital city, with the setting up of crèche and kindergartens.

A primary health centre which caters for the needs of the Valletta community, particularly the elderly, and with the setting up of residential homes for the elderly.

The vision of a living city encompasses a strategy which calls for the reallocation of faculties and institutes of the University of Malta in Valletta to transform parts of it into a university town. The most natural faculties being those of Law and the Humanities which can use the old University building as well as restoring Evans into part of the university or as a university residence.

Valletta had been a university city for centuries. University students have animated its streets and participated together with academics in political dialogue as any ancient university would do. Just imagine transferring the University of Bologna from the centre of the city. Get at least part of our university back to the centre.

The private sector, especially the financial sector, can be encouraged to set up offices in Valletta with zones such as Old Bakery Street and St Paul Street catering specifically for this sector. The restoration of palaces and buildings can be accelerated by providing fiscal incentives to businesses in specific categories interested in setting up there. All major cities have a financial quarter – we already have the Central Bank and the Malta Stock Exchange located in Valletta. A Valletta address for a bank, an insurance company or an investment services company adds to its reputation. The financial services sector needs a base in Valletta.

Over the past years a marked effort was observed in enhancing the City's aesthetical side and in the revival of activities, as part of Valletta's journey to the European Capital 2018 deadline. Although no effort and investment should be spared to present Valletta at its best for this special occasion, to showcase the Island's priceless assets, valuable history and exciting culture, frenetic decisions should be restrained. The emphasis must be more on quality than on quantity, and the quality of events has to resonate with Valletta's charism. The renaissance is meant to stretch over the years with the objective of reviving the life of our capital by turning it into a lived-in city. History will not forgive us if rash and uniformed decisions tamper with the inspirations of the people who reside and raised families there.

The vision outlined today is meant to shape the future life of our citizens who inhabit the city, and not only as a source of attraction to its visitors. We should give Valletta's citizens the space and opportunity to satisfy its long-standing urge to find again its soul. An ambition to become a liveable city, inherited from our ancestors, enjoyed by generations and handed to the next full of life, hope and optimism.

Valletta Museums in the Community

(paper)

Sandro Debono

Our capital city, Valletta, is the venue of some of Malta's top museums and heritage sites of cultural significance. These sites of memory are one of the country's prime assets at the service of the tourism sector. Indeed, these key tourist attractions, are well-known and also publicised by the Malta Tourism Authority worldwide. I have come to realise that in spite of these efforts to publicise most of these are, as yet, paradoxically unknown to Valletta's residents. Recent local community initiatives, jointly undertaken with Valletta Local Council, brought Valletta residents to visit museums for the first time ever. The recent initiative, *Naqsam l-MUŻA*, jointly undertaken with Valletta 2018 foundation, also brought the MUŻA project, the new national-community art museum and one of Valletta 2018 flagship projects for Malta's European Capital of Culture Title, and the collection of the National Museum of Fine Arts in touch with the community. Ten Valletta residents, purposely chosen to represent the community's varied districts and identities, were invited to choose artworks which they also spoke about and described, also highlighting the reasons behind their choice which was later displayed in the streets in visual form accompanied by the thoughts of each participant. Other projects have sought to engage with Valletta's communities in varied ways but these are by and large sporadic and uneven.

These initiatives may be highlighting the need, long felt, to engage with Valletta's community; caught between upper Valletta, perceived to be the place where things happen, and lower Valletta, where what happens is perceived to be not so frequent. This may not be entirely correct, given that the latest findings by the National Statistics Office suggest that the city's cultural profile has improved and that the city has become a centre of activity. How and to what extent the residents engage with these initiatives remains to be better understood although museums and heritage sites are probably not prime motivators. Two reasons may account for this lack of interface. The first concerns location. Valletta's key museums and heritage sites are within the footprint of upper Valletta, on the main thoroughfares and also on the periphery. They are not within direct reach or adjacent to the main community areas. The second concerns status and perceptions. Valletta's museums and heritage sites have been oftentimes understood to be exclusive, oftentimes dogmatic and endorsing official knowledge. This is also partly due to the history of the Maltese museum institution which was conceived in a top-down approach, focused on the conservation and preservation of Malta's cultural heritage and coinciding with Malta's aspirations to become a nation-state. This is also one of the guiding values for Malta's curatorial profession, still unrecognised even within Malta's legal structures. Outreach has, indeed, improved over the past years; cultural heritage management too. The question beckons - Why are Valletta's museums and heritage sites still seemingly detached from Valletta's community? Is a strong dialectic between museums and the Valletta community a possible achievement in the immediate future?

These questions have a wider context in the ways and means how the museum institution in particular is expected to evolve and develop in the foreseeable future. I choose to quote two particular sources out of a substantial corpus of studies and research.



The first source refers to the Austrian artist, curator and theoretician Peter Weibel who suggests one possible scenario in his study *The Museum of the Future* published in 2006:

"The museum of the future lives from the recognition that it is a public instrument of communication. Therefore, in the future, critical co-operation between museum operators and their visitors will be necessary, in order to bring about the past, present and future in the first place. Visitors must be freed from their passive role as consumers and encouraged to become active and interactive agents. The museum becomes a stage for the visitor – a place of options for activity and interactivity. In return, the museum elevates itself from a place of and for art to the level of art itself".

A recent source is the 2016 issue of *Trendswatch*, published annually by the American Alliance of Museums, summarising emerging trends. Various contributions underpin the potential of cultural institutions, particularly museums, to become a community hub. *Trendswatch* also suggests that museums consider 'the opportunity (many consider it an obligation) to play a role in community dialogue: defusing, healing, rebuilding.' Such role may concern 'collecting and exhibiting artefacts and oral histories that document conflict and calls for social change.' and 'bringing together people of good will to find common ground on contentious issues.'

Both authoritative sources are broadly indicative of an emerging trend. Indeed, the 21st century museum is slowly evolving into a community space. Education and outreach projects are just the point of departure, albeit important, of this growing trend concerned much more with co-creation and participatory governance. This is no mean feat, and in our case there are, as yet, unknowns which need to be better understood, prior to embarking on necessary policy development. I shall summarily refer to two of these requirements; necessary to rethink and develop pro-community heritage management models, with particular reference to Valletta.

The first concerns Valletta's demographic profile. Malta's capital city has always been cosmopolitan ever since its foundation 450 years ago. The city's demographics have been, historically, in constant flux although in varied and uneven ways. This is also the backdrop history to contemporary Valletta and the ways and means how the community continues to change, evolve and seemingly become increasingly international. Valletta is far from being an exception. Indeed, communities all over the globe are becoming more than ever fluid and multi-cultural. Members often acknowledge more than one place as 'home' and, in spite of perceived expectations that communities hold shared values, cultural identities are becoming increasingly broad, varied and subject to constant shifts. This is also the case of Valletta's community. Valletta's museums and heritage sites have to increasingly engage with a community which is in constant flux and includes not only the 'traditional' locals from the various parishes and districts, but also a seemingly increasing number of expatriates. The challenge ahead concerns the extent to which an individual's cultural heritage is represented within the mainstream cultural arena, the opportunities to participate in culture production that an individual has and the opportunity to enjoy culture, including one's own culture. Do we have a clear picture of Valletta's demographics? Not probable.

The second concerns the lack of information about the current visitor profile of Valletta's museums and heritage sites which should serve the purpose of our point of departure as we develop pro-community heritage management models. The need to quantify visitor numbers is clearly acknowledged, although

the preferences, choices and tastes of the audiences to Valletta's museums and heritage sites is still, by and large, based on perceptions. The ways and means how audiences participate in the heritage experience also gets very little attention. Indeed, this needs to be much better understood for participatory governance to happen. We still lack most of this necessary data.

Valletta's museums and heritage sites hold potential to become public spaces where collections become resources to inspire rather than commodities to admire. Pro-community heritage management models would acknowledge collections and publics as having equal value and museums recognised as a place where debate and discussion happens through collections and cultural heritage which, in turn, acquires new meanings and a renewed significance for today's communities. Social cohesion is, indeed, one of the significant challenges ahead as an increasingly varied cultural diversity becomes even more detached from the museum's institutional narrative. The museum can become a tool for social cohesion and this can also be the case for Valletta.

This vision would not run counter to the national remit and aspirations of Valletta's museums and heritage sites. For a country the size of Malta, with a population slightly over 400,000, the nation-state paradigm can be neither an imagined community nor a neatly stratified society. There is no issue with museums holding on to the trappings of a nation-state cultural institution although reforms, particularly in both mission and vision of some, are necessary. In a sense, Malta can be recognised as a community in its own right albeit a complex and surprisingly multicultural one. The need for critical co-operation between cultural institutions and their publics, the necessity to move away from passive roles and embrace active and engaging participatory experiences, would still hold. What we should aspire to change is where this participatory process begins. The active engagement between Valletta's community and its cultural institutions should be the point of departure, the test bed for developing pro-community heritage management tools for Valletta's museums and heritage sites.

The challenge does not concern whether this is at all possible. It rather concerns the risk of adopting models developed elsewhere, or generic theoretical models that might work with one community but fail miserably with another. Home-grown pro-community heritage management models can help transform museums and heritage sites into the community's culture spaces where collections are acknowledged as resources rather than commodities holding values ascribed by art markets.

Nina Simon's concluding remarks in her 'The participatory Museum' serves the purpose of a fitting conclusion

'I dream of a comparable future institution that is wholly participatory, one that uses participatory engagement as the vehicle for visitor experiences. Imagine a place where visitors and staff members share their personal interests and skills with each other. A place where each person's actions are networked with those of others into cumulative and shifting content for display, sharing, and remix. A place where people discuss the objects on display with friends and strangers, sharing diverse stories and interpretations. A place where people are invited on an ongoing basis to contribute, to collaborate, to co-create, and to co-opt the experiences and content in a designed, intentional environment. A place where communities and staff members measure impact together. A place that gets better the more people use it.'

This too, is my vision for Valletta's museums and heritage sites.



Living in Valletta: the liveability of a historic city

(paper)

Dr. Reuben Grima

This short paper will consider the liveability of Valletta today, based on my experience as a resident bringing up a young family in Valletta over the past decade. It will focus on four key themes, not because they are the only issues, or even the most important, but simply because I have become acutely aware of them, as areas where Valletta's liveability is under threat. These are (i) shorelines, (ii) soundscapes (iii) viewsapes (iv) social fabric & affordable housing

Valletta is no stranger to sieges, and is today once again under siege. First conceived as a consequence of the siege of Rhodes, it was then created in the wake of the siege of 1565. After witnessing further sieges in the Napoleonic period, it suffered much punishment during the Second World War. Today it is under a siege of a different kind, which is however no less of a threat to its fabric, its sense of place, and the quality of life of its residents. The effects of this new siege will be examined in each of the four areas listed above.

(i) Shorelines

Standing on a narrow peninsula between two magnificent harbours, Valletta is defined and delimited by its shorelines. The narrow band of foreshore between the outer walls of the city and the sea has for centuries been pressed into service for trade and storage, fishing and shelter. Today it represents a vital lung and recreational space for residents who are otherwise deprived of gardens and open spaces. The foreshore is a vital node for popular leisure activities such as swimming or fishing, which have become integral to the quality of life of Valletta's residents.

Pressures on the shoreline are ever on the increase. Over the past decade, a growing number of proposals have been put forward for more quays and berthing facilities for cruise liners, yacht marinas and breakwaters. The implementation of any of these proposals could have a devastating effect on existing uses by Valletta's communities, and could have a direct negative impact on the liveability of the city.

(ii) Soundscapes

One of the great discoveries for me upon moving into Valletta a decade ago was its rich and varied soundscapes, which ebb and flow to their own rhythms and cadences. Voices and church bells, the flurry of commuters at the beginning and end of the working day, alternating with peaceful lulls in midafternoon and evening, in an endless orchestra with no conductor, shaping the acoustic space inhabited by the residents of the city, an intrinsic element of their quality of life.

This soundscape is being rent apart and drowned out by a new wave of noise. The impact of the recent re-designation of parts of Strait Street as a 24-hour entertainment destination has been rapid, relentless, and devastating for the lives of nearby residents. Several residents have reported how the constant throb of piped music has become unbearable, and some have already moved out. The same is happening in neighbourhoods where restaurants have mushroomed, such as Archbishop Street. The number of hotels and catering establishments has increased exponentially over the past five years, bringing with it a wave of noise that is directly threatening the health and wellbeing of existing communities. The severity of this acoustic impact is made worse by the particular acoustics of Valletta's streets and buildings. Noises at street level tend to echo and reverberate up the steep walls that hem in the streets, and when windows are open in the warmer months, may as well be inside residents' houses and bedrooms. A pair of revelers returning to their car after a late dinner has the ability to disturb the sleep of several hundred residents. For this reason, residents are increasingly objecting to applications for new catering establishments to be opened, particularly in areas designated as Residential Areas in the Grand Harbour Local Plan. Valletta is under siege, and unless its liveability is defended more vigorously, its liveability will quickly fall to that siege.

(iii) Viewscapes

The visual kaleidoscope that is Valletta has been treasured and celebrated in four and a half centuries' worth of paintings, drawings and photographs. The dramatic form of the peninsula, and the order of a grid-iron plan superimposed on its steeply undulating contours, give the city its distinctive visual character. Buildings from different periods are held harmoniously together by a common grammar of geometry, volumes, and the ubiquitous limestone. The roofscape of the city echoes the contours of the land beneath, and is intrinsic to the values and qualities of the city.

The present onslaught on Valletta is very much in evidence in its impact on its views and vistas. The roofscape is a particularly vulnerable dimension of the city.



As noted by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 2009, more clear regulation of changes and additions to Valletta's roofscape is required. Every other week, a new structure is puncturing the skyline of the city. Too often, the approval of such additions has been justified on the grounds that it is either set back from the street, and therefore not visible from street level in front of the building, or that it does not rise higher than nearby buildings, therefore not rising above the profile of the city when viewed from a distance. Both these lines of argument are myopic and destructive. The viewpoints onto the city are infinitely varied, and include viewpoints from other rooftops, balconies and windows within the city, or popular public viewpoints such as the Upper Barrakka Gardens and Lower Barrakka Gardens. From such viewpoints, the impact of each addition of a penthouse or 'washroom' (the current euphemism in planning jargon for any rooms added at rooftop level) is screamingly obvious.

Bodies that are expected to act in the public interest are hardly setting the best example. The gigantic tapestry hall that would tower over Merchant Street if the Saint John's Co-cathedral Museum extension is built would dramatically alter many of the perspectives along and around this axis. Walking up Merchant Street at present, for example, I find that from the moment I walk past the former Jesuit College, my eye is drawn in by the lantern and dome of Saint James' church, which delightfully commands the perspective of the street. The proposed tapestry hall would block out that view, and my life would be so much the poorer. In the neighbourhood of the house where I live, an massive, 1,000 square metre rooftop platform has been proposed to surmount the roof of the Long Ward of the former Sacra Infermeria. Meanwhile several fabulously preserved townhouses are being mutilated with pseudo-historic additions as they are converted into boutique hotels, on the dubious pretext that without rooftop additions they would not be economically viable. Valletta is under siege, and the qualities that distinguish it are visibly being eroded by the day.

(iv) Social fabric & affordable housing

The last of the four points that were chosen for this brief presentation is the impacts that are being observed and experienced on the city's social fabric itself. In spite of decades of restoration and rehabilitation, as several other speakers have noted, the city's population remains in decline. The familiar factors of an ageing population and many vacant and derelict properties are now being compounded by new threats. The threats to liveability outlined above, such as the increase in noise pollution, is already driving some residents out of the city. Valletta is clearly at a crossroads. The decisions that are taken over the next couple of years, in the final run-up 2018, when it will be Valletta's turn to host the European Capital of Culture title, will determine the direction the city will take for decades to come. On the one hand, there is the route of unbridled and opportunistic building activity, which may make some short term financial gains, but will leave communities gutted and displaced, and permanently scar the historic fabric of the city, and degrade its long-term economic potential. On the other hand, there is the route of sustainable and integrated development of the city, which has at its heart the wellbeing of existing resident communities.

One of the current dynamics is that low to middle income families have been priced out of the Valletta property market by the inflated prices driven by gentrification. The fact that the Government is the biggest property owner in the city, however, puts it in a unique stead to implement policies to help



reverse this trend. The quarter of the city bound by Bakery Street, Auberge d'Aragon and Auberge de Baviere, for instance, is largely government-owned, and contains a concentration of vacant and dilapidated buildings. It is in many ways the ideal testbed for an experiment in affordable housing, where clearly defined criteria would be used to allow new families and first time buyers to invest in the city. For the benefits of such a scheme to endure, the ongoing management of the ownership of such property would be vital, that is such properties should not be allowed onto the free market, but continue to be restricted to the preferred classes of candidates.

Conclusion

Valletta is experiencing more investment and interest than any other time since before the Second World War. It is an opportunity to be seized, harnessed by values and vision, and pressed into the service of the long-term sustainability and liveability of the city.



Regenerating Valletta: A vision for Valletta beyond 2020

(paper)

Dr. John Ebejer

1. Introduction

Rewind to year 2000. Valletta was a gem waiting to be discovered but many of its more important buildings were badly kept. The worst offender were the ruins of the Old Opera House. It was an eyesore in Valletta's strategically most important site. More than that it symbolised successive governments' failure to take action for Valletta. There were many different interests in Valletta each putting its own views as to how life can be injected into the City. There were different ideas and perspectives; promoting commercial interests, safeguarding of residents; protecting the urban heritage; enhancing Valletta as part of Malta's tourism product. But there was no single holistic view on what future Valletta should strive for.

It was a time when the idea of Valletta Alive Foundation was born. Different people in different organisations saw the need for a holistic vision for Valletta. I am proud to say I was one of that group of people who worked to bring Valletta Alive Foundation into being in 2006 and who then kept it going through highs and lows. We realised that there were many commonalities across the visions of different groups and individuals. The Valletta Alive Foundation acted as a lobby group with politicians and with the general public. VAF encouraged action in favour of Valletta.

Today Valletta is very different to the Valletta of year 2000. In some aspects it is much better but many problems persists. The process of change continues and will continue for the foreseeable future. But what will be the outcome of that change? What will Valletta be like beyond 2020; in 2025 or 2030?

2. Objectives for Valletta's regeneration

Valletta is undergoing a process of change and of regeneration. Urban regeneration is a process spanning years and even decades. A central feature of Valletta's regeneration was the implementation of many important projects for Valletta, including the Centre for Creativity, the pedestrianisation of Merchants Street, Pjazza San Gorg and Pjazza Kasitlja ; restoration and reuse of Fort St. Elmo; restoration of many Valletta buildings; the City gate project and the CVA/park and ride. Each is essential for the continued process of Valletta's urban regeneration.

Valletta is unique in many ways. The urban heritage, its role as a capital city, its many diverse functions as a living city and also as a commercial and administrative centre. Experiences of other countries and cities provide lessons but approaches to regeneration cannot simply be copied from one place to another. Solutions for Valletta should be derived based on a proper understand of the issues and of the cultural and legal context.

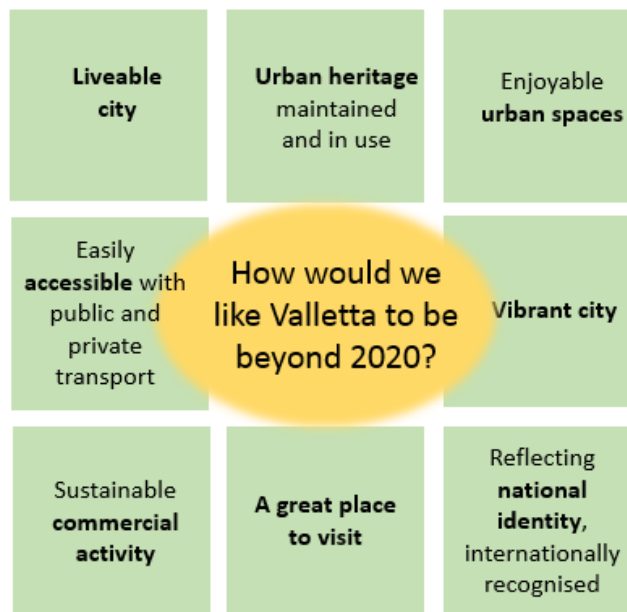
For an urban regeneration strategy to be derived, there needs to be a good understanding of what the objectives are. How would we like Valletta to be in 2020 and beyond? What are the objectives that we should set for Valletta's future? It is only on the basis of clearly defined objectives that decisions on planning policy and public sector investments can be taken.

In this paper I outline what I believe should be the main objectives for Valletta's continued regeneration process. These objectives are based on an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the City.

I would argue that policy approaches to Valletta should strive for eight different objectives namely:

- Objective 1: Urban heritage well-maintained and in use
- Objective 2: Enjoyable urban spaces with a strong sense of place
- Objective 3: A liveable city
- Objective 4: A vibrant city
- Objective 5: A city reflecting national identity and internationally recognised
- Objective 6: A great place to visit
- Objective 7: Sustainable commercial activity
- Objective 8: Easily accessible

Table 1 : Objectives for Valletta's regeneration



3. Objectives for Valletta: Past trends and future prospects

For each objective, I specify and explain what the policy objective should be and then I amplify on the current situation on that objective. My discussion of the current situation is based on frequent discussion on Valletta issues, in the Valletta Alive Foundation but also between VAF and other stakeholders. The comments I make on Valletta issues made in this paper are reliable in that they are not one-offs but have matured over many years of discussion and observation.

Objective 1: Urban heritage well-maintained and in use

- ***Objective: For most buildings in Valletta to be brought into use with owners investing adequately in building maintenance and upkeep.***
- ***Objective: For historic buildings to be adapted and modified sufficiently to allow viable reuse but not excessively that would compromise historic integrity.***
- ***Objective: For streetscapes and buildings facades to be kept clean and well maintained, with architectural features being restored.***

Urban heritage well-maintained and in use: Past trends and future prospects

Prior to 2006, Valletta was given low priority by successive governments. Investment was limited to minor restoration projects, with projects worthy of note being few and far between. The lack of public investment was mirrored by a lack of private investment in the City, creating a gradual yet steady downward spiral and increased dilapidation in many parts of Valletta. The exceptions to this were two projects that used Valletta's built heritage in a distinctive and unique way. The projects were the Centre for Creativity that entailed the restoration and adaptation of St. James Cavalier into a cultural centre and Valletta Waterfront that converted a row of waterfront historic stores into a cruise passenger terminal. (The latter is actually in adjoining Floriana.)

For many years, anachronistic rent laws acted as a disincentive against property owners renting property. They also were a disincentive against landlords investing in Valletta properties (Smith, 2010: 79). Legislation was changed in the mid-nineties to facilitate the renting out of properties but reluctance to rent properties to Maltese persisted. The effects of the old rent laws were lack of investment in private residential property, degraded streetscapes and high proportion of vacant properties. A very high proportion of dwellings are vacant; in 1995, 34 per cent of a total of 3,814 dwellings were vacant (Census 2005).

Several government projects were started and completed between 2005 and 2014. With some projects, historic buildings have been restored and were put to good use. More important, it was one of several factors which gave added confidence to people to invest in Valletta properties, either for private residential use or for commercial use. The level of private investment has picked up in recent years but dilapidation of buildings in some areas of Valletta still persists.



In the last decade, interest in Valletta has increased markedly and therefore it is likely that there will be more investment in Valletta properties in the coming years. This is positive in that old dilapidated properties will be rehabilitated and this will have a positive impact on the streetscape. It is unlikely however that first time buyers and young families will move into Valletta, because of the increase in property values. Most of the property rehabilitations in Valletta will be either for wealthy families or for commercial uses or for tourism accommodations (boutique hotels and short term tourist rental) . An interesting development has been short rentals to tourists (through Airbnb, Wimdu and similar agencies). This type of tourism accommodation brings back into use properties that might not otherwise be suitable for residential or other uses.

Objective 2: Enjoyable urban spaces with a strong sense of place

- ***Objective: For Valletta to have urban spaces that are of good quality and enjoyable to pedestrians including Valletta residents, non-residents and tourists.***
- ***Objective: For pedestrian enjoyment of public spaces not to be unduly compromised with commercial uses (i.e. tables and chairs) or inappropriate parking of cars.***
- ***Objective: For well-maintained buildings, combined with history and character, to provide a strong sense of place to Valletta's urban spaces.***

Enjoyable urban spaces: Past trends and future prospects

Since 2005, there has been a radical improvement in urban spaces in Valletta with the pedestrianisation of Merchants Street and Pjazza San Gorg and more recently Castille Sqaure.

The completion of the City Gate project has provided interesting urban spaces at Valletta's strategically most important location – its main entrance.

Many catering establishments have tables and chairs outside their premises and these generally create a pleasant ambience for diners and for passers-by. There are some instances however where the tables and chairs conflict other uses. In recent years, Valletta's urban spaces have deteriorated because far too many spaces are being taken over with tables and chairs, and the canopies/umbrellas that go with them. Weak enforcement is allowing the takeover of urban spaces with catering outlets' paraphernalia, making this a serious threat for pedestrian's enjoyment of Valletta's public spaces.



Objective 3: A liveable city

- ***Objective: For Valletta to be a liveable city and an attractive place to live, home to a sustainable community and to other residents who wish to share in Valletta's 'lifestyle'.***
- ***Objective: For Valletta to offer a strong social life and with ample opportunities for culture and leisure within walking distance.***
- ***Objective: For basic amenities to be available and for residents not to be subject to unwarranted inconveniences.***

A liveable city: Past trends and future prospects

Like many other towns and villages, the social and cultural of Valletta residents revolves around the parishes, the band clubs and the annual parish feat. Residents develop strong roots in the City, not least because it gives them a sense of identity. This sense of ownership is essential for a town or city to remain a vibrant liveable city.

In the 1990s there was the trend for residential properties to be converted to offices. Less residential properties were available making it more difficult for first time buyers and new residents to take up residence in Valletta. The Grand Harbour Local Plan (1996) included a policy for Valletta not allowing the conversion of residential properties to office use with some exceptions. The policy was instrumental in preventing widespread conversion of residential to office and hence prevented further significant loss in population.

The decline in residents experienced over several decades has stabilised at between 6,000 and 6,500 residents. On the one hand, there are intrinsic disincentives for first time buyers to buy a property in Valletta including the high initial and running cost of rehabilitated properties and the difficulties to find parking close to home. Planning constraints, even if well-intentioned, create further difficulties, including additional costs, making it more difficult for people to invest in Valletta's historic properties. On the other hand, there has been increased demand for residential properties in Valletta from two groups of people namely young persons (singles or couples) and wealthy foreign elderly persons. The former seek properties at the lower end of the market, normally a small apartment which they refurbish. The latter seek larger prestigious houses which they refurbish. More than just a property, property are seeking a lifestyle they would not find elsewhere in Malta. A lifestyle of living in a magnificent historic context, within easy reach of enjoyable pedestrian spaces and gardens and close to most social and cultural facilities.

Stable population numbers hide the changing nature of Valletta's residents. People with roots in the city are moving out and these are being replaced by people from outside who choose to live in the city. The downside of gentrification is the risk of losing the social and cultural activities that are rooted in local communities.

A central element in urban regeneration is the ability of an urban area to retain existing residents and attract new ones. New residents bring much needed investment into the capital. Properties which would otherwise decay are restored and brought back into use. Regeneration also means making an area more liveable. Most Valletta residents already face difficulties relating to the cost of building maintenance and parking. More recently, there is a factor which is making Valletta less liveable, namely late night disturbances from the catering establishments. Not enough attention is being given to the impact of the increased evening activity on residents. Noise in the evenings is becoming more of a nuisance to residents, to the extent that night time sleep is being disrupted. Unless the problem of night time disturbance is addressed, Valletta risks losing more residents and this would undermine regeneration objectives.

Objective 4: A vibrant city

- ***Objective: For Valletta's urban vitality to be reflected in lively urban spaces, a sustainable resident community, and a full cultural calendar.***
- ***Objective: For the City to display vitality in the evenings with leisure activity focused around bars and restaurants.***

A vibrant city: Past trends and future prospects

In recent years, there was also investment in open air cultural events in Valletta, the most notable being Notte Bianca and New Year's Eve Celebrations. The first Notte Bianca took place in 2006, and it is now a well-established event in Malta's cultural calendar. Historic buildings, churches, museums and shops remain open till late and streets come alive with recitals, opera, jazz, poetry readings, exhibitions, dance, walk tours, street theatre and more. Events are also part of the regenerative process of historic areas.

When speaking about Valletta's regeneration, some commentators refer almost exclusively to evening activity. This is incorrect. Although evening activity is important, there are countless other issues relating to urban regeneration which need to be addressed. Equating urban regeneration with the generation of evening/night-time activity is not only wrong but also harmful to Valletta, as it distorts the priorities that should be addressed to sustain regeneration.

Over the past five years, there has been a consistent increase in evening activity in Valletta. More catering establishments have opened in the evening and some are providing good music entertainment. Increased evening activity in Valletta is a welcome change, provided of course it does not cause undue inconvenience to residents.



Objective 5: A city reflecting national identity and internationally recognised

- ***Objective: For Valletta to be internationally recognised for its heritage and culture and to be generally perceived as a place well worth a visit.***

National identity and international recognition: Past trends and future prospects

Valletta is an icon, or has the potential to be an icon, in its own right because of the sense of place it offers. In historic fortified towns, genius loci emanates both from the fortified town in its totality and also because of specific buildings and urban spaces within the town. Entrance into a well-defined town through a gateway becomes the first part of the overall experience of the town – a sense of coming from ‘out there’ and into a place. A well-defined boundary also gives the historic town a stronger identity normally reflected by iconic images of the external walls or important gateways.

The urban fabric of Valletta conveys both a Maltese identity as well as a foreign one. The Valletta streetscapes are characterised by the ever present Maltese balcony and the extensive use of the typical Maltese stone. The numerous churches at various locations in Valletta signify the importance of religion in the social and cultural life of the people and hence the relevance of the Catholic religion to the Maltese identity. On the other hand, the more dominant and distinctive architecture of auberges, palaces and public buildings are a reminder of the linkages of the town to the Knights of St. John.

The siting of a parliament house at the entrance to Valletta is replete with meaning. The Maltese Parliament is one of just 27 EU-national parliamentary assemblies across the European Union. It is the legislative body of the smallest member in the EU and yet, its relevance in the EU is comparable to the British Houses of Parliament and the German Bundestag. Malta has a voice in the EU which is disproportionately stronger than its size.

Flagship developments enhance the image of the city as a tourism destination. The creation of a postcard image which is readily recognisable across Europe is worth millions of euros in terms of tourism marketing. Hopefully, the Piano development on the opera house/ Freedom Square will be a plus for tourism in terms of an improved tourism product and an enhanced tourism image of Malta overseas

Objective 6: A great place to visit

- ***Objective: For Valletta to remain a great place to visit for tourists.***
- ***Objective: For Valletta to offer a good choice of tourism accommodation is offered in Valletta or within walking distance.***

A great place to visit: Past trends and future prospects

Valletta is already a great place to visit because of its history and its many attractions. It also has diverse and interesting urban spaces giving visitors ample scope to explore and discover. Since 2005, there has been further radical improvements in Valletta as a place to visit. The pedestrianisation of Pjazza San Gorg, Merchants Streets and other streets has provided more space where people can walk and experience unique historic urban spaces. The completion of City Gate project gave Valletta an added important attraction namely an iconic building designed by a world renowned architect. The project also created important urban spaces that fit in very well in the overall urban fabric of Valletta.

Until recently, tourism accommodation in or near Valletta was very limited. The attractiveness of Valletta would inevitably result in demand for accommodation in or near the City. The number of hotel beds was insufficient to meet demand. The situation is currently changing with two types of tourism accommodation becoming more available in the City namely boutique hotels and short rentals for tourist.

A thriving resident community is also relevant to tourist attractiveness of the City. The social and cultural life of residents add vitality to the City and therefore make the City more attractive to tourists. When visitors see and share in life of residents, there is a sense of connectedness that enhances the visitor experience. The liveability of Valletta should be enhanced primarily for social objectives but also to make it more attractive for visitors.

Objective 7: Sustainable commercial activity

- ***Objective: For Valletta to retain good levels of daytime commercial activity (namely retail, offices and catering) sustaining the city's vitality without unduly undermining liveability.***

Sustainable commercial activity: Past trends and future prospects

Most of the commercial activity is concentrated within the central business area along the first half kilometre of Republic Street and the adjoining streets. Extensive ground floor frontages in this area, particularly on Republic Street and Merchants street, are retail or catering, the upper floors of buildings being commercial. Most shops are very small resulting in a shopping experience largely based on the



interaction between the shopper and the shop assistant. Some shops have retained the traditional Valletta shop front whereas more recent shop fronts are mostly compatible with the historic character of the City. Beyond the central business area, there are limited commercial activities as most buildings are residential.

Valletta offices tend to be small and/or fragmented into small rooms. Because of their heritage value, adapting properties for modern day offices is difficult and often office workers have to put up with some inconveniences. Despite the attractiveness of having a Valletta address, many companies have moved out of Valletta as their demands for office space grew.

Objective 8: Easily accessible

- ***Objective: For Valletta to be easily accessible by both public and private transport and this includes the lower parts of Valletta. Accessibility is sufficient to sustain the City's social, cultural and economic roles, without unduly impinging on the quality of Valletta's urban spaces.***

Easily accessible: Past trends and future prospects

Parking and access to Valletta has been a constant point of discussion amongst Valletta stakeholders for decades because it effects all Valletta users. Being on a peninsula, land based transport access is limited to one side only. This makes land-based transport more difficult. Valletta's main bus terminus is located just outside City Gate, making it relatively easy for people to get to Valletta from most parts of island. Sea borne transport across the two harbours is available but it satisfies only a very small proportion of the demand for travel to Valletta. With controlled vehicle access system, on-street parking in Valletta is against payment except for residents. There are good car parking facilities in Floriana, just outside Valletta and this includes a park and ride facility. There are no off-street parking facilities in Valletta. This is problematic mostly for lower Valletta because of the distance from the Floriana car parks. This creates intense parking pressures on the streets in lower Valletta and also on the shoreline.

No area can sustain economic, social and cultural activity unless it is possible to access it without undue difficulty. In the last decade, there were positive developments on access including CVA, park and ride, new car park in Floriana, Upper Barrakka lift and ferry services. These are not enough because, with regeneration, the level of activity and hence demand for access will increase.

4. Conclusion

This paper outlines eight objectives that I think are essential to safeguard Valletta social and cultural future. A clear understanding of objectives provides a framework upon which decisions can be based. A lack of understanding of objectives may result in wrong decision on policy formulation and decisions on public sector investment.

Three main observations emerge from this paper. First, the importance of urban spaces dedicated to pedestrians. The pedestrianisation of important spaces has created more attractive urban spaces and this in turn has made Valletta more attractive to visit and to reside in. Linked to pedestrianised urban spaces is the issue of accessibility to Valletta. Because of its geography, there is no easy solution but more attention is required by the authorities to improve accessibility while at the same time reducing the impact of the car on Valletta's urban spaces.

Third, Valletta is home to a resident community with a strong social and cultural life. Living in Valletta has always been subject to some inconveniences but these have increased in recent years. This is problematic as it will further deplete Valletta's resident community. Effective action is required to make Valletta more liveable and this includes addressing some of the inconveniences to which Valletta residents are subject.



Valletta: The Pride of what makes us a Maltese and European Nation

(speaker's notes)

Dr. Lawrence Gonzi

1. Why the title ? Because Valletta is one of those special features of our island nation that brings us together, that merges us into one nation, that brings out in the open our character, our values, our identity our history - all those ingredients that make us what we are and that distinguish us from other nations and other peoples surrounding us. The architecture, the style, the successes and the failures, the beautiful and the ugly, the social mix, the economic mix – all this showcases our own identity. This is why I emphasise the sense of pride that we should all have in our capital city and which must continue to propel us towards 2018, 2020 and beyond.
2. A quick look at the past and the present : I speak as a Vallettan. I speak as a Maltese that is today proud of a capital city in which I lived during my childhood and my youth, in which I worked during my adulthood as a professional and as a politician and in which I enjoy savouring what is happening in my country which is today a proud European Nation and which in 2018 will celebrate Valletta as the European capital of culture.
3. Has Valletta changed and has it changed for the better ? Yes. A vast amount of restoration works have been carried out and key buildings have today been restored to their former grandeur (inside and outside) : Castille. St John's Cathedral. Castille Place, the Chapel of St Catherine of Italy, the Chapel of Our Lady of Victories, Upper Barrakka etc. I salute all the hard work carried out in previous years especially those started by the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee.
4. In 2004 I and my colleagues envisioned a 20 year project. I could summarise the objectives into the following three main ones : instilling a sense of national pride by upgrading our capital city; making it attractive for people to live and work in by strengthening its function as a social and economic hub of activity (which pulls visitors through the three access points of Valletta via City Gate, Via Grand Harbour and the lift to Upper Barrakka and via the ferry from Sliema to Marsamxetto Harbour); and finally making Valletta our own **permanent** Capital of Culture.

5. Of course, making Valletta liveable for residents and visitors alike is a priority. It is true that a process of gentrification has started and is growing in momentum. It is also true that it is vital for Valletta to keep its residents and to attract new families especially young ones. But to do so requires acknowledgement of the very special challenges that Valletta faces, namely :
 - a. Construction or restoration works in Valletta are more expensive than anywhere else;
 - b. Old residential property of architectural or historical value requires much larger sums of money to restore.
 - c. Accessibility in Valetta is restricted
 - d. Gentrification has meant that the value of property has sky rocketed and will probably continue to do so.
6. However the reality is simple : keeping and attracting residence can only happen if Valletta becomes attractive in the first place. There is no reason why a young couple would ever dream of wanting to live in a place which is dead, which is decrepit and which fails to instil a strong sense of “proud” belonging. It must also offer an investment opportunity for whoever decides to buy a residence in Valletta and intends to live in it.
7. Of course this means that there must be counter measures that facilitate, encourage and incentivises people to reside in Valletta. There could be a whole toolbox of measures to achieve this such as : tax incentives for first time buyers who purchase property in Valletta and live in it for a minimum number of years; special grants for restoration works; special benefits for children of parents who live in Valletta ; a social development plan to improves physical accessibility to Valletta (street escalators) and (perhaps) environmental measures such as allowing ONLY electric cars into Valletta.
8. Apart from these social aspects, the 20 year project for the future of Valletta can be said to be divided into three separate parts : the first is 2/3 complete. It focuses on the upgrading of the entrance to Valletta stretching from Castille Place to the entrance to the city. Of course it builds on the work that was done in preceding years. But it still lacks the completion of the Renzo Piano project regarding the ditch, the roofing of the Floriana car park, the restoration of the Tritons fountain and the open area at the entrance to city gate from where all buses should be removed.



9. The second part deals with the heart of Valletta – St George’s Square and the Grand Master’s Palace. The first stage is complete (St George’s Square). The second stage can kick in. It envisages the full and complete restoration of the Grand Master’s Palace and transforming it into a showcase of those jewels in our crown : often the topics of Patrimonju’s exhibitions.
10. The third part deals with the three end points of Valletta. St Elmo/MCC/Evans, Upper Barrakka and the lift and Marsamxetto harbour. The most challenging is St Elmo and its use AND upgrading & conversion of the Mediterranean Conference Centre Theatre. The choice and the decisions on this site are crucial because the objective must include activities that attract the flow of people and residents down towards the area on that side of the peninsula.
11. A budget of €100 Million – a time span of ten years – but an outcome that makes us proud to be Maltese.

Closing address by the Mayor of Valletta

Prof. Alexiei Dingli

We are very close to 2018, the year when Valletta will become the European Capital of Culture. A very important year for our city. A title which we've been working for since 2009 when I submitted my intention to Government, declaring the fact that Valletta, will be applying for the prestigious title. We all know what happened in these years, so I'm not going into it. I can say that Valletta transformed itself thanks to public and private funding. However, while emphasising the importance of that year, we have to prepare ourselves for what happens after. That is why this conference is highly relevant because it is looking beyond 2018.

If we had to take a snapshot of the current situation in Valletta, we find that the city hosts around 6000 residents. Valletta has an aging population. In fact, the average age of a Valletta resident is 54 (when compared to 48 of the rest of Malta). On average, these residents lived in the city for 46 years.

Around one every ten residents are foreigners. We have about 750 commercial outlets and offices. We also have eleven hotels (most of which are boutique hotels) and others are in the pipeline.

Everyday we host a crowd of around 40,000 people amongst which; tourists, employees and those that need some sort of service offered by the city. On average, almost 50% of the Maltese visit Valletta at least once a month.

This focus on Valletta has led to a reawakening of the City and one can easily find pockets of life distributed in every corner.

However this also brought some adverse effect on the city. This new activity is causing discomfort to the residents living in the area. The price of property is also shooting up at an alarming rate. This is why I believe that this is the right time to take a pause, digest what the city is going through and prepare for what's coming in the future.

Mind you, we are not against this development. However we are in favour of striking a balance between the residents and the commercial community.

I cannot imagine Valletta devoid from its citizens, they are the soul of the city. We don't want a museum city so we have to help them to flourish. And this can only be achieved if we once again make Valletta Liveable.

Liveability is a very important property of any city, which people sometimes tend to ignore. This can be further subdivided into other factors such as access.



Access to the city. Even though we've seen a substantial increase in alternative means of transport to and from the city (such as the ferry connection) the resultant impact is worrying. A survey held in 2010 shows that the number of people who used their car to come to Valletta was at 40%. A survey held towards the end of last year shows that 57% of people prefer to use their car when commuting to the city. An increase of almost 20%! This is very worrying.

On access within the city, we have seen an increase with regards to alternative means of transport such as the circular bus, the electric cabs and in the coming months we'll be seeing the electric trolleys. However, the state of the pavements is worrying. I like to describe the big restoration works in the city like a rusty necklace of diamonds. The diamonds are our buildings which have just been polished. The rusty necklace represents the pavements which link these diamonds together.

But how can we expect a council, with a pittance of a budget, to seriously maintain a 450 year old infrastructure. Valletta has to be given its due importance, it cannot be considered as any other Local Council. What's more frustrating is the fact that there are dormant funds lying around different entities, one of which is around 1 million euros, which we've been pledging government to allocate to the city so that we can expedite the much needed infrastructural works. Yet so far we didn't get any. We have to make do with 700,000 euros. When you remove the cleaning, wages and services, and when considering that the price of contracts is always on the increase, we're left with almost nothing for the infrastructure.

Access to properties. In the past decade, the price of properties in the city shot up. Some of which at a ridiculous amount. This is creating areas devoid of young families. We also have entire streets without children. This should not go on and if we're not careful, this element alone might kill the city. If we have a look at major studies behind urbanism, they tend to advocate various attributes behind successful cities. Valletta tends to tick most of them. However this spike in properties is damaging a vital pillar behind creating effective neighbourhoods. The city needs mixed primary uses because it activates streets at different times of the day. This won't happen if we go just for the high end market.

A few days ago, I spoke to the owner of a cafeteria that has been in the family for at least 150 years. An icon in Valletta. They will close in the coming years because of the rent law reform. In some cases, the rent is going up by more than 1000%

I've met young families who told me that it is impossible to relocate to Valletta because they simply can't afford it. This can't go on. We need to strike the balance.

These are just some of the issues which I meet on a daily basis. Issues which worry me. Because on the one side, I've seeing a lot of investment going on in the City. But on the other side, I've realised that the heart of the city is being depleted.

Finally I would like to thank Valletta Alive Foundation for organising this seminar. It is this type of debate that will enable us to more aware of the issues that affect residents and other users of our City.

Valletta Beyond 2020: Speakers' bios:

Prof. Alex Torpiano is currently Dean of the Faculty for the Built Environment, and Head of the Department of Architecture and Urban Design. He is also Vice-President of the Kamra tal-Periti. Alex Torpiano was born and bred in Valletta, but did not return to live in Valletta when he returned from his studies in the United Kingdom in 1986. He was appointed as Chairman of the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee between 1995-1996 and 2000-2001. He led the team of specialists responsible for the restoration of Fort Manoel and Fort Tigne', between 2000 and 2011, and is currently involved in the recovery of Fort Cambridge and Fort Chambray.

Vince Fabri was elected as Councillor in the Valletta Local Council in 2013. As a musician and song writer he has been involved in writing lyrics and composing music for television and theatrical productions. He studied at Johann Strauss School of Music and the University of Malta. He works as an Assistant Precincts Officer at the University of Malta. He is one of the coordinators of a Maltese literary group Poezijaplus, which has been holding monthly literary evenings since 1999. In 2007 he participated in the poetry festival Voix de la Méditerranée held every year in Lodeve, a town of southern France, in November 2008 he performed at Literature live Festival in Croatia and in the Biennale Internationale de Poésie en Val de Marne in France.

Joseph F X Zahra is a Maltese economist who is the Founding Partner of MISCO, an independent economic and management consultancy operating in Malta, Cyprus and Italy. He is a former director of the Central Bank of Malta (1992-96) and a former Chairman of Bank of Valletta plc (1998-2004). He led the National Euro Changeover Committee that had the responsibility to introduce the euro in Malta in 2008. He is a chairman or board director of a number of private and publicly listed companies including a bank and insurances with global reach. He lectured micro and managerial economics in universities in Malta and Italy and he regularly addresses conferences in Europe and North America. In July 2013, Pope Francis appointed him President of the commission for the reforms of the economic and administrative structures of the Holy See (COSEA), and consequently Vice Coordinator of the newly formed Council for the Economy.

Sandro Debono is a curator, art historian and academic. He is Heritage Malta's current Senior Curator at the National Museum of Fine Arts and Project Lead for MUZA, the national-community art museum for Malta and flagship project for Valletta 2018 European Capital of Culture title. Sandro is a regular visiting lecturer at the University of Malta, where he lectures in Visual Literacy and Museography. He has also lectured and regularly collaborates with various European museums and institutions. Sandro has fond memories of his childhood days with his grandfather who was a sexton at Valletta's St John's Co-cathedral.

Dr. Reuben Grima is a lecturer in the Department of Conservation and Built Heritage at the University of Malta, where he lectures in cultural heritage management. He studied archaeology at the University of Malta and the University of Reading, then read for his PhD at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. He joined the curatorial team at the National Museum of Archaeology in 1992, and from 2003 to 2011 was Heritage Malta's Senior Curator for prehistoric World Heritage Sites. He has represented Malta on the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, served as Malta's National Focal Point for UNESCO World Heritage Sites from 2006 to 2010, and as a member of Malta's National Commission for UNESCO from 2004 to 2013. His research interests include cultural landscapes, and engagement of the public with the past. He has lived in Valletta since 2006.

Dr. John Ebejer lectures at the University of Malta, with a special interest in urban tourism, tourism product development and urban regeneration. Prior to becoming a full time academic, he worked extensively as an urban planner and tourism development consultant. Over twenty four years, he was involved in numerous planning policy documents, some of which were relevant to Valletta. He was also involved in many tourism product development projects, the most notable being the restoration and reuse of Fort St. Elmo as a museum and ramparts walk. He sat on the Development Control Commission (2002-04) and was Chairman/CEO of the Building Industry Consultative Committee (2008-10). He was advisor to the relevant ministry on urban planning and on planning legislation (2004-08). He was one of a group of people who worked to bring Valletta Alive Foundation into being in 2006 and who was then actively involved in VAF's various initiatives.

Dr Lawrence Gonzi was born and raised in Valletta where he lived for 25 years before he married and moved to Safi. In his youth he was active in a number of Valletta Catholic Youth and sports organisations such as the San Gakbu group and the Catholic Action at Palazzo Caraffa. With a political career spanning twenty five years, Dr Gonzi occupied several positions prior to becoming Prime Minister including Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Social Policy and Speaker of the House of Representatives. Prior to public office, Dr Gonzi was Chairman of one of Malta's leading private companies and President of the National Commission for Persons with Disability. Although retired from active politics, he has recently acted as consultant for the Commonwealth Secretary General on constitutional matters. A lawyer by profession he is presently a senior partner and consultant with Gonzi & Associates.



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