

# ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY INCLUSION AND SPACE THROUGH VALLETTA 2018 CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURAL PROJECTS

**Dr Antoine Zammit**

## **Objectives**

The scope of this research is to understand the spatial (physical) and social (behavioral) impact of cultural infrastructure, primarily architectural and urban design interventions, in terms of broader culture-led regeneration objectives for the various community and stakeholder groups. The focus of this research are the four Valletta 2018 cultural infrastructural projects, namely MUŻA, the Valletta Indoor Market (Is-Suq tal-Belt), Strait Street and the Valletta Design Cluster<sup>2</sup>, and their immediate neighbourhoods.

## **Methodology**

This is a mixed-methods approach comprising deductive and inductive avenues and qualitative and quantitative methods. Stages include an initial literature review leading to a theoretical framework that is piloted on the ground to become an analytical framework, followed by application of such framework to the case study areas to assess their physical urban design quality. A behavioral analysis (structured observations) and follow up expert interviews enable an understanding of broader, non-physical phenomena that are influencing the urban spaces. This feeds into PPGIS workshops, which provide this research with a bottom up perspective that is matched up with the results emanating from the other research stages.

## **Results**

Key findings from each of the analyses carried out are:

- Spatial quality and built fabric analysis: There is a direct correlation of results from the spatial quality analysis and the Census data, wherein the MUŻA neighbourhood scores highest and Biċċerija tends to have the lowest quality rating in terms of spatial quality and built fabric out of the four sites.
- Land use analysis: The MUŻA neighbourhood has the highest presence of active frontages (from ground floor use analysis), meaning the highest degree of vitality, an important contributor to spatial quality. The predominant land use in the Biċċerija neighbourhood, Strait Street and the Valletta Indoor Market is residential whereas in the MUŻA neighbourhood it is offices.
- Analysis of development planning applications in terms of change of use: The study reveals that the highest impact due to change of uses (in terms of

---

<sup>2</sup>The Valletta Design Cluster Project is currently being developed in the area commonly known as *Il-Biċċerija*

people generation/movement, visual, aural, olfactory implications and litter generation) for all categories throughout the period 2012 (the year Valletta was announced as European Capital of Culture) to 2016 is within the Biċċerija neighbourhood, and least within the MUŻA neighbourhood. Post-2012, the amount of development planning applications for change of use has increased significantly. In the Biċċerija neighbourhood and along Strait Street, the majority of the premises are changing their uses into commercial uses (from residential or vacant premises), or into a higher level of commercial use (for instance, from office to retail, or from retail to catering).

- Social analysis: Although the spatial and social data is from different sources and thus non-comparable, it is worth noting that the highest percentages for illiterate, unemployed and non-schooled residents corresponds to the lowest spatial quality score and reported state of repair for the building stock within the Biċċerija neighbourhood. This may lead one to speculate that there may be a direct correlation between the state of the urban space/housing conditions and the level of achievement of the residents but this is a point which should be investigated through further research.
- Behavioural analysis: Collating behavioural patterns into broad categories illustrates that Strait Street, the Biċċerija and the Valletta Indoor Market neighbourhoods are dominated by sensorial/environmental influences whereas Pjazza Jean De Valette (MUŻA neighbourhood) is dominated by people/users and their interaction. The changing nature of the four sites will play a major role in either reinforcing or changing the nature of the behavioural influences.

### **Way forward**

In 2017, this research will converge the various results to be able to understand the socio-spatial implications on the four neighbourhoods in question. The PPGIS, which will take place during 2017, will allow this research to include a bottom-up approach to complement the top-down data available as at date. A pilot exercise around the Valletta Design Cluster has been carried out in late 2016 and results are currently being analysed. The exercise will be spread around all areas included in this study throughout 2017.