



THE IMPACT OF VALLETTA 2018 ON THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY OF THE MALTESE POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

The 'European dimension' is key to European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programmes. There is a general expectation that ECoCs will have an impact on the feeling of European-ness of the host societies. Yet whether and to what extent this is actually the case is unclear, for at least three reasons. First, the variable of interest – European identity – is an inherently elusive concept. Second, identity is by definition a relatively stable character, which hardly changes in the turn of a few years. Third, to capture the nuances and specificities of single environments, most studies of identity are strictly tailored to the context; which hinders systematic analysis, comparison, and replication.

This study aims to provide a systematic assessment of the impact of Valletta 2018 on the European identity of the Maltese society. In order to overcome the constraints to a comprehensive and reliable analysis, the study draws on advanced approaches to the study of European identity as developed in recent large-scale comparative research. In particular, the study builds on a multidimensional notion of 'European citizenship' based on three interrelated components: identity (the feeling of belonging to the European Union (EU)), representation (the extent to which actors perceive that the EU provides representation to their interests), and scope (the degree to which actors would like the EU to have jurisdiction on a wide range of policies). While the core identity component is more resistant to change, the representation and scope dimensions could instead be expected to change following exposure and participation to Valletta 2018 events.

This project applies a mixed methodology based on both quantitative and qualitative techniques. A panel study – that is, a study observing the same sample of population over time – will monitor European identity in the Maltese society, and the impact of Valletta 2018 on it, between 2015 and 2019. A desktop research exercise will form the basis of the study, capitalising on several European and National data sources followed by a quantitative large-scale survey will be carried out in the early and final years in order to obtain systematic comparable data, while intensive interviews with focus groups will be carried out in between to obtain a deeper insight on the nature, degree, and causes of identity change (if any).

Keywords: European Identity, European Citizenship, Cultural participation, European Capital of Culture, Malta

INTRODUCTION

Goals and scope

In October 2012, Valletta was selected as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) for 2018. While Valletta will be hosting the title, the initiative is set to include all the Maltese Islands, with a view to spreading the impacts throughout the whole Maltese territory. Participation of the citizens of Malta and Europe is a key goal of the initiative, considered integral and expected to be a sustainable aspect of the long-term social, economic and cultural development of Valletta itself. The Cultural Programme envisages community, educational, outreach and skills development components.

One of the requirements of hosting an ECoC, is to generate consistent, accessible and comparable research and evaluation directly linked to culture (Garcia and Cox 2013). This research study aims to contribute towards the analysis of the impact of Valletta 2018 and is expected to shed light on the aspects of 'European identity' that may have been affected by the Programme, to what extent, and among what segments of the population. It employs a mixed-method approach spread over a five year (2015-2019) period.

The "European dimension" is a key aspect of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) Programme. Programmes are to a) foster cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities from the relevant Member States and other Member States in any cultural sector, b) highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe and c) bring the common aspects of European cultures to the fore (European Parliament, 2006). The assumption is that by hosting an ECoC, feelings of "European-ness" will be enhanced among members of the host community.

But whether this is actually the case remains a question worthy of investigation. Indeed, the term "European identity" is itself an inherently elusive concept. Moreover, what we do know about it, suggests that that it is relatively stable in nature, and therefore unlikely to change markedly in the turn of few years or as a result of the ECoC. In addition, conducting a comparative study of the impact on European identity, capable of systematic analysis, comparison, and replication is complicated by the fact that identity is considered to be context-specific.

This study seeks to overcome these constraints by:

- a. providing a comprehensive and nuanced definition of European identity among people in Malta considering European identity, representation and scope;
- b. systematically documenting any changes therein which may have occurred over a period of five years during which the country hosted the ECoC;
- c. systematically documenting any determinants that may have contributed to the change in that sentiment;
- d. focusing on the extent to which the ECoC, knowledge thereof and participation therein may have contributed to such change, if any, once other factors are carefully controlled for; and
- e. conducting in-depth qualitative analysis to understand the nuances which the numbers may not reveal.

Relevant academic or non-academic issues related to the topic at hand

The study builds upon innovative approaches for the study of European identity as developed in recent, authoritative, large-scale comparative research (Bellucci and Sanders, 2012). Following this lead, we envisage identity to be complex in nature resulting from the interaction of three interrelated components: (i) identity, or the feeling of belonging to the EU; (ii) representation, or the extent to which actors perceive that the EU provides representation to their interests; and (iii) scope, or the degree to which actors would like the EU to have jurisdiction on a wide range of policies.

These three components together define the extent to which actors feel 'European'. Each component results in a different form of identification and is driven by distinct motivations. Identity captures the affective dimension of identification, resulting from long-term socialisation processes. Therefore, this core component of European-ness should be relatively more resistant to change. Representation and scope, in turn, capture respectively a rational/instrumental and a political form of identification. Since rational/instrumental and political judgements are relatively easier to change than affective judgements, the representation and scope dimensions of European-ness should be more likely to change following exposure and participation to Valletta 2018 events.

The question is, what do we know about ECoC, or more broadly, cultural participation and its effects on identity? This study is located at the intersection between different strands of literature that so far found little connection. Studies of European identity can be traced back to classic studies of European integration (e.g. Deutsch, 1953). The shift from economic to political integration, and the recent legitimacy crisis, revitalised this area of study and sparked a new wave of empirical analyses of European identity (Bellucci and Sanders, 2012; Cram, 2012; Duchesne and Frogner, 1995; Fligstein, 2008).

Although the development of a European (cultural) identity always was a clear goal of ECoC programmes, the analysis of their impact on identity was mostly neglected. While the study of the impact of cultural events became more sophisticated (Richards, 2000; Richards and Wilson, 2004) and multi-dimensional and longitudinal monitoring became increasingly the norm (Richards, 2015), the impact on identity also became the object of analyses. However, most such studies analysed identity in the repertoires of action, discourses, and frames in ECoC events (Sassatelli, 2002 and 2009). The actual impact of those events on the identity of the host societies was confined to in-depth studies of single events (Dragoman, 2008; Lähdesmäki, 2012; O'Callaghan and Linehan, 2007).

Social Context

The study takes a whole country approach in the context of Malta. Contemporary research on Malta's European identity focused on the impact of Europe on the complex, multidimensional identity of the country (Baldacchino, 2002; Cini, 2000). Some empirical studies focused on Malta's attitudes towards the EU. While the Maltese society was relatively lukewarm in comparison to other 'new' EU members (Pace, 2011), recent studies found evidence of an increased positive image of Europe (Carammia and Pace, 2015). However, the causes of this change have not been the object of systematic analysis.

The study is also informed by recent research in Malta on the extent and nature of cultural participation in Malta. A recent study finds that three years ahead of hosting the ECoC, both active and passive participation were generally lower in Malta than in other EU countries (Briguglio and Sultana 2015). The study also documents evidence of higher levels of life-satisfaction among Maltese people with higher cultural participation, arguing that while this provides some basis for justification for interventions like

ECoC, it is important to conduct longitudinal studies to find causal effects. Meanwhile a recent pan-European study (Steiner et al., 2014) which did examine the effects of hosting ECoCs over time and across a number of ECoCs finds that this necessarily improves wellbeing in the host country. An ECoC, they argue, may well have beneficial impacts on culture, infrastructural improvements, the creation of additional jobs, tourism and economic turnover, but can also create environmental deterioration, crowding-out of public investments, mis-matched infrastructure, crime, and housing affordability (Steiner et al., 2014).

Hypotheses

On the basis of this, the main hypotheses which will be tested are:

H1. The impact of Valletta 2018 on the European-ness of Malta's society is conditional on the definition or dimensions of European-ness. Impact will be more visible on rational/instrumental and political dimensions rather than on affective dimensions of European-ness.

H2. The impact of Valletta 2018 on the European-ness of Malta's society depends on the type of participation and degree of involvement in the ECoC. More intense and active exposure to Valletta 2018 initiatives will have a stronger impact on the feeling of European-ness.

METHODOLOGY

Choice and rationale

The study aims to generate both quantitative and qualitative data over a five year span and, on this basis, to provide a critical analysis of impact of the ECoC initiative on European identity in Malta. The qualitative and quantitative original data generated by the study will permit mutual reliability verification and iterative fine-tuning.

Recent research on ECoC programmes and stock-taking exercises emphasised the need to provide replicable and comparable research frameworks to strengthen the legacy of single ECoC projects and to make the results capable of standardisation (European Capitals of Culture Policy Group, 2010). EU institutions have explicitly called for the development of a "far more robust and objective data collection mechanism" that goes beyond "anecdote and 'myth management' " and ensure that "the story of the next 30 years can be told with even greater confidence" (Garcia & Cox, 2013). Such standardisation, replication, comparability, and robustness, are best achieved with quantitative methodologies.

But while quantitative approaches are key to ensure standardisation, replication, comparability and robustness, a full understanding of the inherently complex nature of the feeling of being European requires the depth of analysis that only qualitative approaches grant. Moreover, replicating the survey exercise on an annual basis would be unlikely to tap significant yearly changes in the target population. For these reasons, the study will complement the quantitative panel survey with qualitative focus groups. By complementing the quantitative analysis with qualitative findings we provide the "further explanation, depth and texture", as recommended by ECoCs stock-taking documents (European Capitals of Culture Policy Group, 2010).

Both analyses follow a desktop research component. Commencing the study with desktop research has several advantages: it helps researchers to generate new ideas based on old data verify and improve existing research and analyse data through the use of a different methodology. Furthermore, it contributes to transparency and creditworthiness as it verifies and motivates new and original research.

Desktop Research

The Desktop Research component serves as an ex ante state of reference through an overview of what previous literature has found on the variables of interest and also as an ex post robustness check through which one can compare research findings with past literature. It draws insights from seminal comparative studies of European identity (Bellucci and Sanders, 2012). In turn, this allows us to contextualise the findings of the analysis.

Data sourced in our desktop research was classified into three main categories; the European identity (as the main dependent variable), the exposure to the European Capital of Culture (main independent variable) and controls (such as political preference, cultural behavior and lifestyle). This approach was adopted in order to better align a priori expectations with current existing research and use secondary data as a measuring rod with which to judge the representativeness of the sample. The appendix showcases the results on each all variables of interest where data is available.

As indicated by the literature, data on European Identity is captured by questions pertaining to (i) identity and belonging; (ii) representation; and (iii) scope. Data includes that on the degrees of attachment of people to their town or village, region, country, Europe, nationality and what it means to be of that nationality. Data also includes the degree of attachment to being European and what it means to be European, feeling European and voting in European elections. Data on representation and scope focuses on consequences of Europe on people, the benefit to the country and the individuals of being part of the EU, views on the extent of unification and roles of EU/National government in various domains. Further data sourced includes that on trust and political interest.

Data on cultural participation and the ECoC exposure includes awareness of the ECoC, participation and attendance of ECoC events and media exposure. Those on cultural participation include participation as audience in various cultural domains and active participation in key cultural domains. The data on Liverpool as the ECoC proves to be particularly rich as a benchmark.

A third component of the data collection seeks to capture the necessary demographics and preferences necessary to parse out the effects of the ECoC, net of confounding impacts from other sources. These include data on age, gender, locality of residence, number of persons and children in the household and educational level. They also include labour and marital status, income, self-assessed health, wellbeing, level of socialising and on religious affiliation and frequency of service attendance. They also include residing abroad for a continuous period of at least 12 months or having visited another EU country in the last 12 months.

Survey component

The quantitative data component also entails a survey instrument, designed to conform to the highest possible level of compatibility with such established survey exercises as Eurostat, European Social Survey, and World Value Survey. Like the desktop research, the instrument taps the relevant dimensions of both the dependent variable of interest (European-ness) as well as the possible explanatory variables, of which ECoC participation is the key variable of interest. The survey design therefore also contains three main data generation components, the key component being that which seeks to render operational the definition of the dependent (target) variable (on European-ness). A second component of the data collection seeks to operationalise the predictor variable (exposure to the ECoC/Valletta 2018 programme), and to contextualise this within the broader notion of cultural participation. A third component of the data collection seeks to capture the necessary demographics and preferences necessary. The wording of these questions replicates major sources (like the Malta Census) for the purpose of comparability.

Survey data collection process

The collection of data was outsourced to the National Statistics Office. It entailed the generation of a fully representative sample (n=1000). The baseline study started on 7th December 2015 and was concluded on 13th February 2016, providing the necessary data for comparison with the next wave at the end

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

of 2018/9. Sampling was based on stratified random strategy (fixed margin of error for each stratum). Stratification/cluster variables were sex, age group and district. Importantly, Valletta was over-represented in the sample, so that samples are effectively two: a nationally (including Valletta) representative sample of 800 individuals, plus a sample of 200 households from Valletta. This will allow the extensive analysis of the country as well as the intensive study of the capital, which seems appropriate considering the special nature of Valletta 2018 as an ECoC programme whose reach stretches to cover the whole country.

Based on the first deliverables of the project, the following are the results so far:

1. Identified authoritative, large-scale comparative research and defined the variable of interest "European identity". Although this is a relatively stable character, which is unlikely to change markedly in the turn of few years, a complex notion of identity also includes dimensions which can be assumed to vary in a relatively short term, also a result of cultural policies. Also specified (particularly cultural) determinants of identity that are capable of comparison and replication, despite the nuances and specificities of single environments (results described above).
2. Designed a detailed survey interview, translated, pilot tested and simplified and generated a sampling frame capable of generating the necessary nationally representative data. An extra subset of respondents was identified to obtain a sufficiently sized sample from Valletta (survey instrument available upon request).
3. Conducted extensive desktop research on all variables of interest contextualising Malta in 2015 in cross-sectional and time-series data, wherever this was available (full results and sources available upon request).
4. A cross-cutting finding that emerges is that Malta is missing from several European and international large data sets including various Eurobarometer datasets, the European Values Survey. This makes comparison difficult in this field.
5. Key findings in comparing Malta to EU counterparts on the European Identity front include the following:
 - a. There seems to be a stronger feeling of attachment among the Maltese relative to their European counterparts not only to their town/village and country but also to Europe itself.
 - b. The self-assessed factor which most influences identity is the country in which respondents are born, both in Malta and in the EU.
 - c. The factor which has strongly determined European Identity is the common currency in contrast with other determinants like a common culture or symbols.
 - d. More Maltese than Europeans tend to admit that being European matters a lot to them. In terms of Influence, they feel that their voice counts a lot in the EU – relative to their European counterparts.
 - e. The Maltese turn out in far higher numbers to European Parliament elections than do European counterparts.
 - f. The Maltese are more knowledgeable about their rights as citizens than EU counterparts.

Asked about further integration, the Maltese tend to be more confused than European counterparts.

- g. Only a minority of Maltese people feel that Malta's membership to the EU was a bad thing, and fewer than EU counterparts. The majority feel that EU membership was of benefit to Malta. They also feel that they benefitted personally.
 - h. In terms of domains of competence, the Maltese believe that national government should remain responsible for unemployment policy and for health and social policy (just like their EU counterparts). In contrast many more Maltese expect the EU to intervene on migration. On environmental and on urban crime matters, the Maltese expect joint responsibility. On agri-fish matters, the Maltese tend to expect sole representation.
 - i. The Maltese tend to trust the EC and the European Parliament more than their European counterparts. They also tend to trust Maltese Parliament and National Government to a higher degree than EU citizens trust their own.
 - j. In general, there tends to be higher levels of trust in people of the same nationality, followed by trust in Europeans and finally trust in people outside Europe.
6. Key findings on ECoC and cultural participation include the following:
- a. An analysis of Liverpool as the ECoC finds increased media exposure with increasingly positive articles closer to the year. Disinterest in each activity type declined around the ECoC and audiences vastly increased and audience satisfaction was high.
 - b. Active cultural participation in Malta tends to be lower than in EU countries in several domains. Over two thirds of the Maltese have never had any form of cultural participation (compared to around half in the EU). Malta also lags behind in using the internet for cultural purposes.
7. Key findings on the control variables include the following
- a. Malta is a highly politicised environment with a high voter turnout and highly divisive bi-polar politics.
 - b. Maltese people tend to trust other people less than their EU counterparts.
 - c. The Maltese report better self-assessed health status and life-satisfaction than their EU counterparts on average.
 - d. The Maltese are predominantly of Catholic faith with a high rate – albeit declining - of religious practise.
 - e. The majority of the Maltese – even more than Europeans – are unlikely to emigrate over the next 10 years. The Maltese also tend to travel less than Europeans.
 - f. The gender split in Malta is broadly balanced, but the Maltese population is an aging one.
 - g. Malta has a larger mean household size than the EU average but over 30 per cent of households are just 1 person households. There are more households with dependent children in Malta than in Europe, on average.
 - h. Over half of the Maltese are married, a third are single and the rest are widowed, separated or divorced.
 - i. The majority of households in Malta are located in the Northern Harbour area, which is expanding. Valletta forms part of the South Harbour area which is also expanding.
 - j. Our educational levels are lower than the EU average, though this is corrected in the younger generation.
 - k. Malta compares well in terms of unemployment but has a higher rate of inactivity among the working age population.

FUTURE DIRECTION OF RESEARCH

Plan for the next years leading up to 2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Literature, method and research design	X	-	-	-	-
Desktop data collection	X	-	-	-	X
Quantitative data collection	-	X			X
Qualitative data collection	-	-	X	X	-
Analysis and report writing	X	X	X	X	X
Steering committee	X	X	X	X	X

Survey data collection commenced at the end of 2015 and was concluded by mid February 2016. The next clear milestone is mid 2016, by which time the following will have been carried out:

- a. undertake correlation analyses;
- b. perform a range of robustness tests to verify reliability;
- c. compare with available international datasets;
- d. model identity and undertake systematic regression analyses to investigate the causal relation and net effect between the two sets of factor.

Key changes envisaged and rationale

The research remains very much within the parameters of the original proposal.

- As envisaged in the brief, there will still be two focus group sets to further examine the nuances of both ECoC exposure and European-ness in Malta, and the relationship between the two;
- As envisaged, there will be three-waves of quantitative data. The two waves will take place as far apart as possible (early 2016 and early 2019), in response to the expectation that no significant changes in identity will be detected by a survey interview in the short term.

The changes are as follows:

- The 2015 data set sourced from desktop research, acting as the baseline to complement the focus groups and surveys.
- Greater emphasis on the respondent socio-demographics and preferences with a view to parsing out the effects of ECoC net of confounding impacts and to enable the analysis of sub-groups in the demographics.
- Less emphasis than originally envisaged on political preferences and fewer constructs on European identity given the necessity to limit the duration of the interview and avoid interviewee fatigue;
- The research team now includes a behavioural economist (Dr. Marie Briguglio) whose work on motives and cultural participation will be instrumental to the analysis.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

The studies forming part of this research strand seek to gain a deeper insight into how and why people participate in cultural activity, and what impact their participation may have on various forms of collective identity.

By gaining a holistic insight into broader cultural participation through the Valletta Participation Survey, this report allows researchers and cultural practitioners to benefit from a more thorough and evidence-based understanding of the factors influencing involvement in cultural activity, and the perceived influence of the European Capital of Culture title on these processes.

This is reflected in the subsequent two studies, whereby one can see that the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme is currently seeking to directly address lacunae related to cultural participation through a particular focus on community-related work with diverse communities across Malta and Gozo.

The Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme is also placing significant focus on the European Dimension of the ECoC title, encouraging international collaboration within the spheres of arts and culture. This is also reflected in the relatively high degree of trust placed in European institutions by the Maltese population, as evidenced by the final study listed in this report.