ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY INCLUSION AND SPACE THROUGH THE IMPACT OF VALLETTA 2018 CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE ON VARIOUS COMMUNITY GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

The research is concerned with the assessment of the spatial and social impact of cultural infrastructure, understood primarily as architectural and urban design interventions, in order to gauge the manner with which they may result in broader culture-led urban regeneration within specific Valletta neighbourhoods. Four areas of intervention within the Capital have been chosen for in-depth study – the Biċċerija (the upcoming Valletta Design Cluster) and its surrounding neighbourhood; the entire extent of Strait Street; Pjazza de Vallette/MUŻA and its immediate environs; and the area surrounding the Covered Market (along both Merchants Street and St. Paul's Street).

The nature of the subject matter demands an assessment of the urban space and the various (physical and non-physical) phenomena that affect it. Following the initial identification of the primary socio-spatial phenomena/elements that influence the areas under study, through both inductive and deductive methodologies working in parallel, analytical frameworks are subsequently developed and applied within the analysis of the physical spaces. The latter are monitored closely throughout the five-year period for changes (both each urban space per se and its interfaces/enclosure through the frontages that define it) and key patterns are derived therefrom, categorised and correlated to the NSO data that was obtained throughout 2015 at the specific neighbourhood level. In this manner socio-spatial phenomena may be brought together.

Over the past year, the main research objective was to collect 'on the ground' baseline data, particularly due to the lack of adequate available data. These in-depth observations have resulted in a very comprehensive set of data comprising 347 properties within the four sites – an important milestone in itself – that shall be followed by drawing out key observations and patterns throughout 2016, a potentially longer stage than was originally envisaged but a necessary one given the breadth of this available data and its complexity. In addition to this data, two further studies carried out in parallel (via inductive and deductive approaches) have led to the identification of some significant spatial and social patterns, which are currently being collated and shall be categorised throughout 2016.

Keywords: Involvement, accessibility, cultural infrastructure, regeneration

INTRODUCTION

The main research question of this study is – What role can cultural infrastructure play in the achievement of culture-led regeneration? The question is answered through the assessment of three key considerations:

(i) those aspects of place that may reflect the cultural values held by the community – analysed separately from a deductive spatial approach to social conditions and an inductive social approach to space;
(ii) the potential impact of cultural infrastructure within the place from a socio-spatial point of view – requiring the study of the interface/overlap between the social and spatial perspectives through 'on the ground' investigation of the urban fabric and close monitoring of any change therein; and
(iii) the manner with which culture-led regeneration may affect the use of the surrounding urban spaces of place, at a later phase of the research.

The research objectives formulated from the above questions centre primarily on the physical urban space/built environment, in terms of establishing important spatial parameters and qualities that, in turn, have direct and indirect social implications. These themes are amply discussed within the literature.

Place-making, sense of place, identity and meaning

Central to the discussion on the relationship between urban space and people is the concept of 'place-making', or the creation of meaningful places as opposed to anonymous spaces. Place attachment is an intrinsic part of human nature (Horan 2000, Rad and Ngah 2013) and is an important prerequisite for broader urban regeneration objectives.

'Space' is a term describing a physical area composed of physical elements. The philosophical study and explanation of space depends on experiences and feelings. By giving meaning, a space is transformed into a place (Carmona and Tiesdell 2007). Heidegger (in Knox 2005) states that people need to relate to the physical surroundings and form a space which gives them a sense of origin. A place is context-dependent and holds human purposes, experiences, and actions in a physical setting. People's understanding of their surroundings is related to known places, which obtain meaning in a spatial environment (Seamon and Sowers 2008); it is a result of how people perceive and behave in space. Places therefore contain "physical, spiritual and social dimensions" (Aravot 2002, 207).

Place-making is amply discussed in the literature by numerous authors – Cullen (1971), for instance, explains how this is related to the sense of being 'here'; Alexander (1979) argues that timeless buildings may achieve this regardless of scale; Krier (1979) revisits traditional towns and approaches place-making as a solution to modernist architecture. A number of authors connect place-making intrinsically to social considerations – Jacobs (1961) insists that it is 'vitality' (the activities of people within the space) that makes a place. On the other hand, Relph (1976) discusses place making, meaning, and identity from the social science point of view (Aravot 2002). Other salient sources include Gehl (1987), who places the focus on the public realm – the spaces between buildings. In turn, Tibbalds (1992) discusses how the objective of good design should be the creation of character areas with identities, relating to historical and regional context.

Urban places are a hybrid of physical elements and public interactions. They have physical attributes that act as a forum for human interaction. The physical aspects, regulations, users of the space, and key stakeholders involved in the process of place-making, all determine how the physical context may influence behaviour. Places have personality, a quality which cannot (and should not) be assessed only through design, but also through user behaviour. The historical and political milieux, together with the social context, define the realities of place (Gehl and Matan 2009).

Another term that relates closely to place-making is the 'sense of place', or 'spirit of place'. This is not simply a summation of physical form, economic and social activities, and significance of past and present events, but it is related to the degree to which a place may retain its identity and distinctiveness. Although harder to analyse, it may nonetheless be assessed in terms of the uniqueness of places (Relph 1976), which has both physical and non-physical implications – the latter demanding a study of people and their activities as they interact with urban space. The activities that happen within a place give it importance, identity and meaning. Indeed, in the words of Shah (2009):

> "Place physical and functional qualities influence the degree of dependency on and attachment to place as a platform for activities and social interaction. This means that to secure identity is to ensure continuity in the physical, social together with meanings and attachment held by the people (Shah 2009, 158)."

While a place may be defined through its physical properties, it is nonetheless a result of culture and symbolic processes – which defines its identity. Identity is not static – it is a dynamic component of culture that changes with circumstances and attitudes (discussed amply by Relph (1976) and Montgomery (1998)). The process of 'image building' within the human brain is a result of the dynamics of identity and perception (Lynch 1960). Individuals associate meaning and relate to places (express feelings about places) as a result of cultural forces, values, beliefs and ideas. Cultural characteristics affect the way people perceive and use space, influencing place identity. The latter may effectively be defined through three characteristics – the physical setting, activities, and associated meaning (Relph 1976).

Unlike an objective observer trying to capture movement patterns, the user experiences the physical fabric of place through senses and emotions. Urban interventions, and the urban spaces therein, are perceived as welcoming or alienating, attractive or unpleasant, pleasant or detestable (Relph 1976). Public open spaces form a significant component of the city's identity and are central to this discussion. They should therefore constitute a central component of analysis. Individual activities encounter the physical fabric within urban space. Places, therefore, together with the connections between them and their urban form, have wider cultural implications and influence life patterns (Montgomery 1998).

A related concept that is dealt with in literature sources is 'insideness' – a term which suggests safety, enclosure, and comfort. People feel 'inside' a place because they are part of it; in the sense that they may relate to the identity which the place gives them. Negative feelings such as alienation, lack of perceived safety and potential threats result in the opposite phenomenon, 'outsideness' (a feeling of separation between themselves and the physical environment). Within the same space, different levels of insideness and outsideness may be experienced by different people (Seamon and Sowers 2008).

Perhaps a more difficult term to describe is meaning, largely due to the fact that it is not a tangible quality of the space or the activities therein. It depends on, and is an element of, human intentions and feelings (Relph 1976). Since meaning may be both "practical and emotional" (Lynch 1960, 8), it cannot be

easily changed by the manipulation of the physical environment. Meanings are related to memory and collective memories, another important theme that is dealt with in the later stages of the research once the primary socio-spatial patterns are defined and correlated. "Place-based meanings" (Hull, Lam and Vigo 1993, 110) may be considered as a social process, similar to the manner with which people interact with one other, and should not be underestimated. People carry out activities within urban places on a daily basis. This provides a familiar setting, where the collection of these regular experiences provides meaning to place. Thus, the way people speak, dress, and move within a physical setting gives meaning. Meaning influences people's approaches and emotions about how they see themselves in their locality and the symbolism which attaches them to place (Knox 2005). All these patterns, and others, are effectively analysed within this research through an inductive analysis.

Attaching meaning to a place is the result of individuals' psychological and social processes that in turn influence place perception, implying that in order to study place identity holistically one must move beyond physical components and address the meaning and links between people and places (Shah 2009). Meaning is intrinsically related to place because of the association with group activities that happen in the space. Place-based meanings may be described as the phenomenon that binds people to the physical setting (Hull, Lam and Vigo 1993). In simple terms, meaning is the 'significance of place' – a collective element shared within groups of individuals based on their experiences.

From the above discussion, therefore, and in line with observations by a number of authors (see Shah 2009, for instance), both physical and psychological components must be integrated together in order to assess a place, hence the reference to the socio-spatial milieu within this research.

Due to the inherent difficulty in assessing 'meaning' and 'identity' of place objectively (not least due to the strong subjectivity characterising them), it may be simpler to dissect the role of place-making, which ultimately revolves around the creation of good quality urban environments that improve individuals' quality of life, the latter being a central objective of any urban regeneration/renewal intervention. Posing the question "what makes a good urban place?" is important as it explores how the physical environment (and the meaning thereof) may be translated into manageable components that in turn may be objectively assessed.

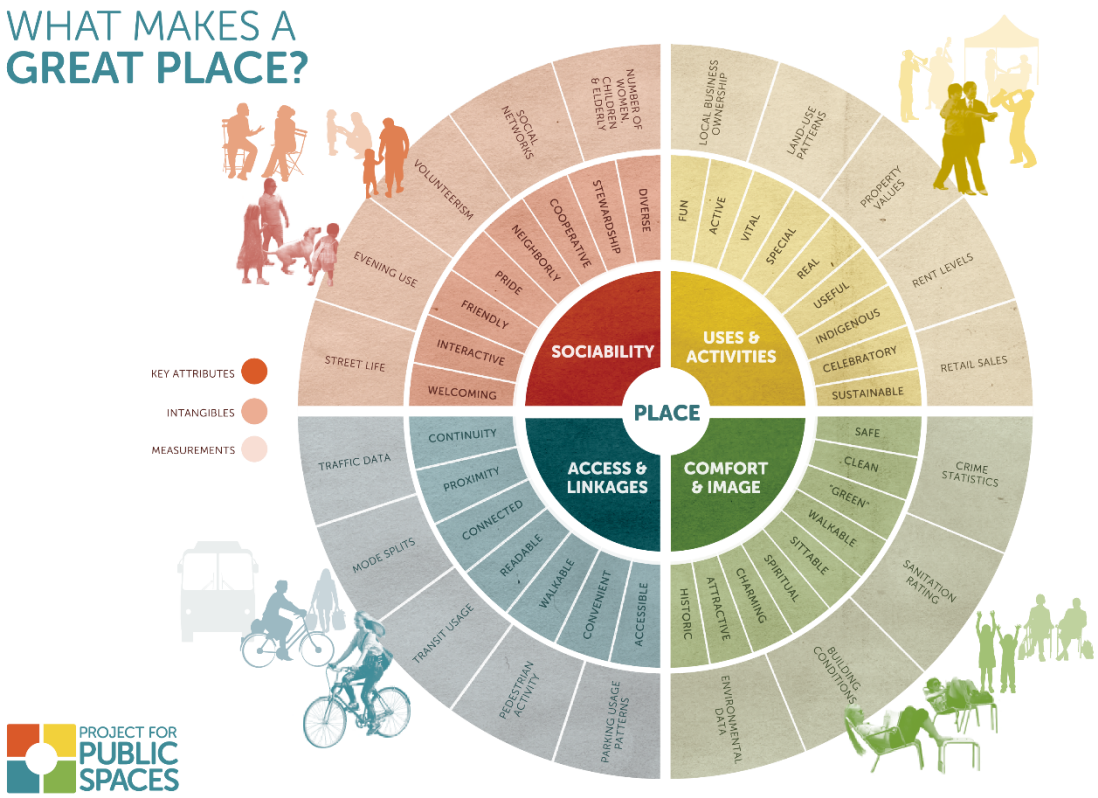
A Good Urban Place

... successful urban places must combine quality in three essential elements: physical space, the sensory experience and activity (Montgomery 1998, 96)

In line with Montgomery's observation, a good place addresses physical, functional, environmental, social and perceptual dimensions – all aspects which ultimately contribute to quality of life. William H. Whyte observed, through his seminal work as part of the Street Life Project in New York City, that a good place must encourage interaction that may cater for both active and passive participation within the urban space (Whyte 1980).

Following on Whyte's key research, the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) describes good urban places through the activities that may be held within the space – a place where "social and economic exchanges occur, friends run into each other, and cultures mix" (PPS 2015). Successful places are characterised by four key qualities: sociability, uses and activities, access and linkage, and comfort and image. This is in turn very similar to Montgomery's (1998) definition of urbanity through activity, image, and form (Figure 1).

Figure 1: What Makes a Great Place? (PPS, 2015)



A high quality physical setting attracts more people and may be singled out from other urban spaces through the number of social interactions occurring within it. A primary indicator of good design is therefore, high use (Gehl 1987). Good design is not dependent on style or taste and is not formulaic, since individuals play an important role in defining a space – and individuals come with different cultural baggage and set of values, thoughts and beliefs (Simmons n.d.). Good design is intrinsically related to quality of life, economic and social transactions (Macmillan 2006). In the words of the Urban Task Force (1999):

Quality of design is not just about creating new developments. It is also about how we make the best of our existing urban environments, from historic urban districts to low density suburbs. (Urban Task Force 1999)

Various authors discuss the manner with which the quality of place may be analysed, through an analytical framework that comprises a set of components that may be scored/rated, thus indicating the success (or otherwise) of a place (Zammit 2013). The PPS (2015) qualifies four characteristics of place, with corresponding questions to analyse space. Montgomery (1998) lists 'urban success indicators' and explains the 'principles for achieving urbanity'. In turn, CABE & DETR (2001) provide a useful 'design analysis tool' that measures the value of urban design. All concepts revolve around the manner with which principles of good design may be used to address the physical and functional qualities of space, and how this may improve and increase the amount (and types) of activities, which in turn influence sociability and interaction.

In line with the above discussion, three main research themes therefore characterise this research:

Theme 1: Cultural infrastructure as an urban intervention, examining the degree of 'robustness' of the intervention (in terms of whether it is adaptable and resilient to change and whether it may be exploited as a means to knit/tie in different parts of the urban fabric (and its diverse communities) together.

Theme 2: Cultural infrastructure as an urban catalyst, investigating whether the intervention may instigate further-reaching positive change and spark off wider urban design and socio-cultural processes (multiplier effects).

Theme 3: Cultural infrastructure as a vehicle for urban regeneration/renewal, attempting to understand the role of the intervention for broader urban regeneration (whether it is reflected in the cultural infrastructure) and its effect on the local community. In turn, this important theme explores two relevant sub-themes:

- Sub-Theme 1: Accessibility to cultural infrastructure, necessitating an understanding of socio-spatial morphologies (spatially through an 'on the ground' urban design and architectural analysis and socially through important demographic and household data at the neighbourhood level). In addition to the physical considerations on site, the research also questions whether the process is bottom-up, inclusive and participatory (and to what degree).
- Sub-Theme 2: Overarching considerations in relation to 'quality', 'amenity' and 'value', necessitating a discussion in relation to place-making and (in the later stages of the research) the potential risk of gentrification (due to increased value)

METHODOLOGY

The research deals with product – the physical (design) interventions on the ground – and process – notably, planning and socio-cultural processes that manifest themselves in physical (product) terms. In line with this duality, the research methodology comprises a mixed methods approach that includes the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The mixed methods approach is particularly relevant in this type of study that is concerned with the interfaces between the built environment and its social implications.

Being a longitudinal research, most of the empirical work will include repeated observations of set parameters taken over the research timeframe. This includes:

(a) monitoring physical change to the urban spaces due to urban interventions or due to the proximity to such interventions, building on the baseline data obtained throughout 2015; and
(b) monitoring the changes in attitudes and behaviour of a defined target audience or local community members living in the neighbourhood under study, the subject of subsequent stages of this research.

The mixed research methodology comprises both deductive (formal) and inductive (informal) approaches and comprises the following key stages:

Stage 1 (carried out throughout 2015)
Collation of baseline data (in relation to the urban environment within the four case study areas) and the initial Literature Review using secondary sources (salient aspects of which have been discussed in the Introduction above).

Evaluation of critical baseline data collected by NSO. To this effect, there were some initial difficulties with data collection in terms of NSO data due to the way the Census data is structured using Enumeration Areas and the requirement of this research to be very specific in terms of immediate neighbourhood areas (in relation to the four case study areas). Nevertheless, following a number of meetings with NSO and preparatory work from our end (in terms of collection of some primary data) we were able to extract the required Census data that is specific to the neighbourhood surrounding our sites under study.

Stage 2 (carried out throughout 2015)
Formulation of theoretical principles and hypotheses, definition of initial 'product' and 'process' frameworks (following a deductive and formal approach), which have been piloted within the chosen case study areas.

Stage 3
Testing of frameworks through empirical work – case study analysis, subdivided into three parts (primary data collection and analysis; partly carried out during 2015)

Focus groups (to be carried out in 2017)
Followed up by a textual analysis; patterns generated from this analysis are used to define categories (in an inductive manner) and refine the process framework (in line with the deductive approach in Stage 2). A focus group for each of the chosen four project sites (discussed in Section 5 of this report) will be carried out and an exercise of purposive sampling will occur prior to the definition of each focus group.

Urban design (socio-spatial) temporal analysis (ongoing, commenced in 2015, to be repeated in 2017)
Including a quantitative (scoring) mechanism carried out by different stakeholders and community groups.

Follow-up results with key stakeholder interviews (to be carried out in the latter part of 2016 and in 2018)
Interviews may also be analysed through a textual analysis and through which the process framework may be further refined.

Stage 4
In parallel to Stage 3, carry out Ethnographic Research within the chosen case studies, following a more inductive and informal approach and subdivided into two parts (commenced in 2015)

Physical observation (ongoing, commenced in 2015, to be repeated in 2017)
Supplemented by photographic recording, regard to be given to sensorial 'atmospheres'.

Participant observation and engagement (ongoing, commenced in 2015, to be repeated in 2017)
Supplemented by informal participant engagement through discourse/dialogue, storytelling and anecdotes, in relation to the local community's experience of the urban space, intended to enrich the analysis developed through the more formal research structure.

Stage 5
ollowing a process of data gathering and analysis for Stages 3 and 4, follow-up the results with Participatory Planning GIS workshops (scheduled for the latter part of 2016 and 2018)

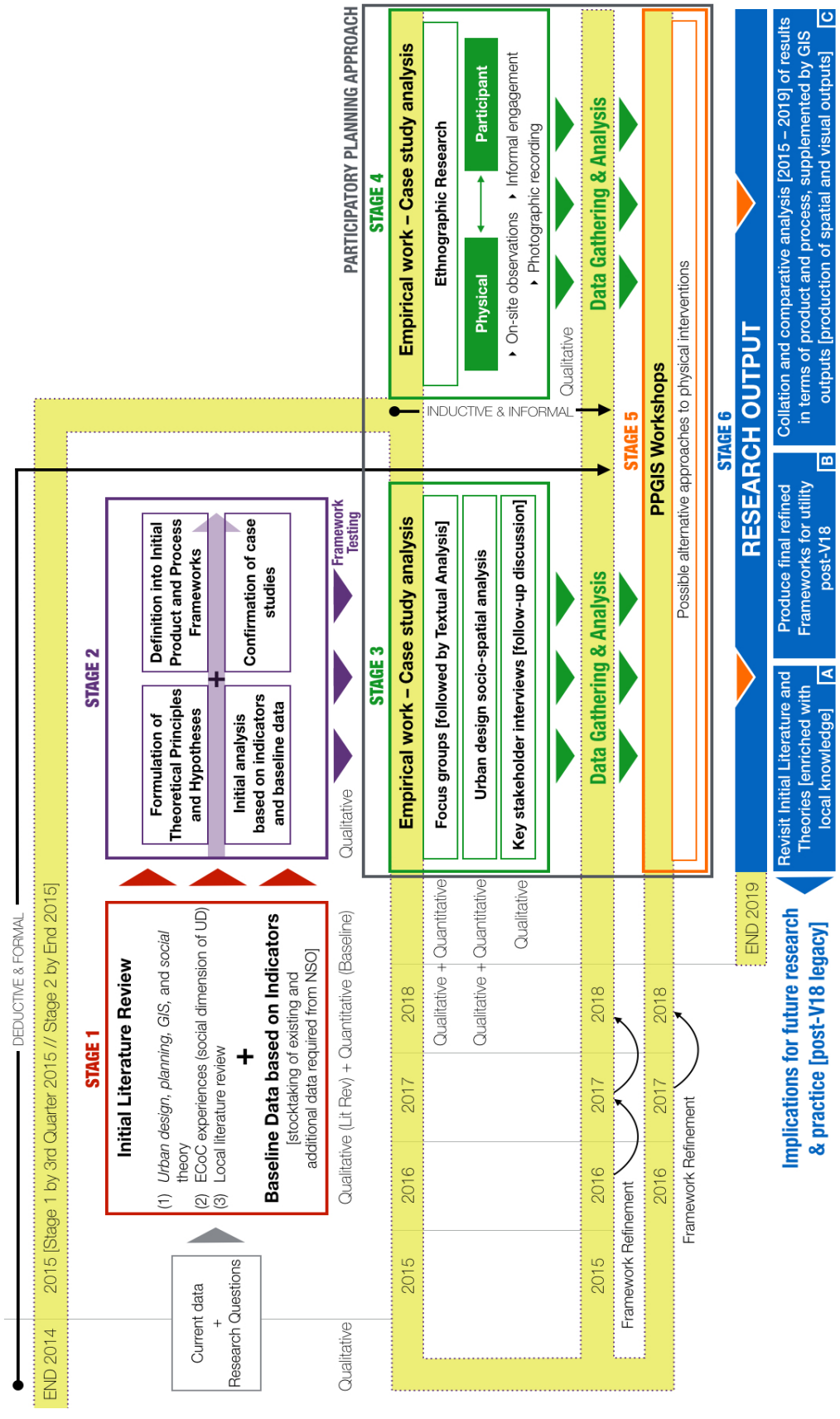
Using the results from Stages 3 and 4, discuss different approaches or alternatives to the architectural/ urban design interventions, developing spatial and visual outputs (GIS outputs).

Stage 6
Using the results from the above stages to define a three-pronged research output (to commence in the latter part of 2018 and throughout 2019)

The envisaged research output includes:
[A] Revisiting the initial literature and theories, enriching them with local results and knowledge
[B] Producing the final refined 'Process' and 'Product' frameworks for application post-Valletta 2018
[C] Presenting the collation of results, comparative data analysis (2015 – 2019) supplemented by GIS outputs

The Research Methodology (to be refined throughout the research process) is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Research Methodology *(Source: Author)*



RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The lack of available information and the need to carry out much more on-site analysis and in-depth observations than was originally envisaged have resulted in very rich, diverse and complex data. This in itself is already an important milestone and now necessitates an intricate process of drawing out patterns and correlating socio-spatial phenomena. The direction, albeit not necessarily 'new' (with respect to what was originally envisaged) is nevertheless one that has been dictated by the plethora of information that the research team has managed to extract 'on the ground' and thus deserves all the time and attention to understand it fully and move beyond simply presenting cursory observations. To date, the main focus has been an in-depth analysis and the development of an inventory composed of 347 properties (121 properties in the Biċċerija area, 66 properties along Strait Street, 47 properties within the neighbourhood surrounding MUŻA and 113 properties in the area around the Covered Market). On-site observations have led to the identification of some significant patterns, which are currently being collated and categorised; the result of 109 site visits translating into 26.5 hours for each of the four sites (or 106 hours in total). Throughout the coming year, the data shall be collated, and processed, categorised and correlated with the NSO data that has been obtained at the specific neighbourhood level.

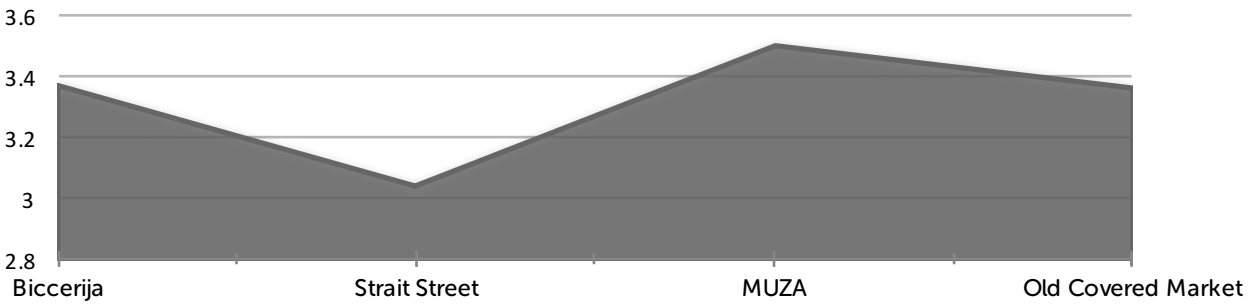
Throughout 2015, the following research targets were achieved:

BASELINE STUDIES

Key baseline studies were carried out 'on the ground' both in terms of urban design studies and sociological studies (based on key theoretical principles that were defined into initial 'product' and 'process' frameworks). Results are being collated and will be presented in the coming months. Some key observations from the baseline data may however be reported.

Scoring the neighbourhoods in terms of their state of repair (façade, apertures, other elements and materials, and averaging out these scores) indicates that the current highest 'impression score' is obtained for the neighbourhood around MUŻA (3.505, or 'fair – good'), followed by Biċċerija (3.372, or just over 'fair') and the Covered Market (3.362, or just over 'fair') and terminating with Strait Street (3.043, 'fair'). Figure 3 illustrates these scores for the four sites.

Figure 3: Impression scores for the four sites being analysed *(Source: Author)*



In parallel, this research has made possible the development of two Masters dissertations; developed through deductive and inductive research methodologies. The former study has been based on the development of an analytical framework dealing with urban design principles of permeability, movement, safety and security, conditions and maintenance, comfort, imageability, vitality and use, active frontages, venues and evening use. The individual categories within this framework have been scored by both professionals and non-professionals in order to enable a more complete analysis of the urban areas. The full results are currently being compiled; nonetheless they appear to further reinforce (in more depth) the baseline study's impression scores discussed above.

The second study (based on the inductive approach) has been largely based on on-site observations to identify key socio-cultural dynamics that could have a direct influence on the physical space. The myriad of patterns have been collated and categorised into the following nine categories:

Cat 1_Aural: encapsulates all the sensorial experiences relating to sound.
Cat 2_Vehicular and pedestrian interface: reflects (a) the presence of moving vehicles; (b) the vehicular/pedestrian interface; and (c) the impact of parked vehicles on access (restriction) and/or views (blocking).
Cat 3_User Categories: sheds light on the types of users within the space, in terms of their age, gender, ethnicity and profession.
Cat 4_Thermal Comfort: refers to the level of comfort experienced by the researcher due to environmental influences and/or weather conditions.
Cat 5_Relating to Cleanliness: reflects the environmental condition of the space, state of cleanliness or absence thereof.
Cat 6_Actual Use of Space: reflects types of user experiences and activity relating to the use of the space and vice versa, in terms of how the space and the land uses set within the space induce human activity.
Cat 7_Perceptual Influences and Use of Space: abstract and intangible notions relating to the use of space, including the observer's perception of the atmosphere at the time.
Cat 8_Human Interaction: encapsulates the interaction between two humans or more.
Cat 9_Olfactory: encapsulates all the sensorial experiences relating to smell.

Preliminary results indicate that the strongest patterns (following frequency testing) in the various sites include:
Bićċerija – Category 1 (Aural), Category 6 (Actual Use of Space), Category 8 (Human Interaction) and Category 2 (Vehicular and pedestrian interface)
Strait Street – Category 1 (Aural), Category 2 (Vehicular and pedestrian interface) and Category 6 (Actual Use of Space)
MUŻA/Pjazza de Valette – Category 8 (Human Interaction), Category 6 (Actual Use of Space) and Category 3 (User Categories)
Covered Market – Category 1 (Aural), Category 6 (Actual Use of Space), Category 8 (Human Interaction) and Category 3 (User Categories)

These socio-cultural dynamics are currently being correlated to the components of the physical spaces per se, although most of the major pattern categories have clear and unequivocal links with the configuration of the individual spaces and their urban grain. Notably, Category 1 is strongest in sites having tight height:width ratios and/or characterised by numerous close apertures or projecting balconies; Category 2 is strongest in sites having tight street widths where the chance of potential pedestrian-vehicular conflict is most likely; Categories 3 and 8 are directly proportional with high pedestrian flows (particularly within main thoroughfares

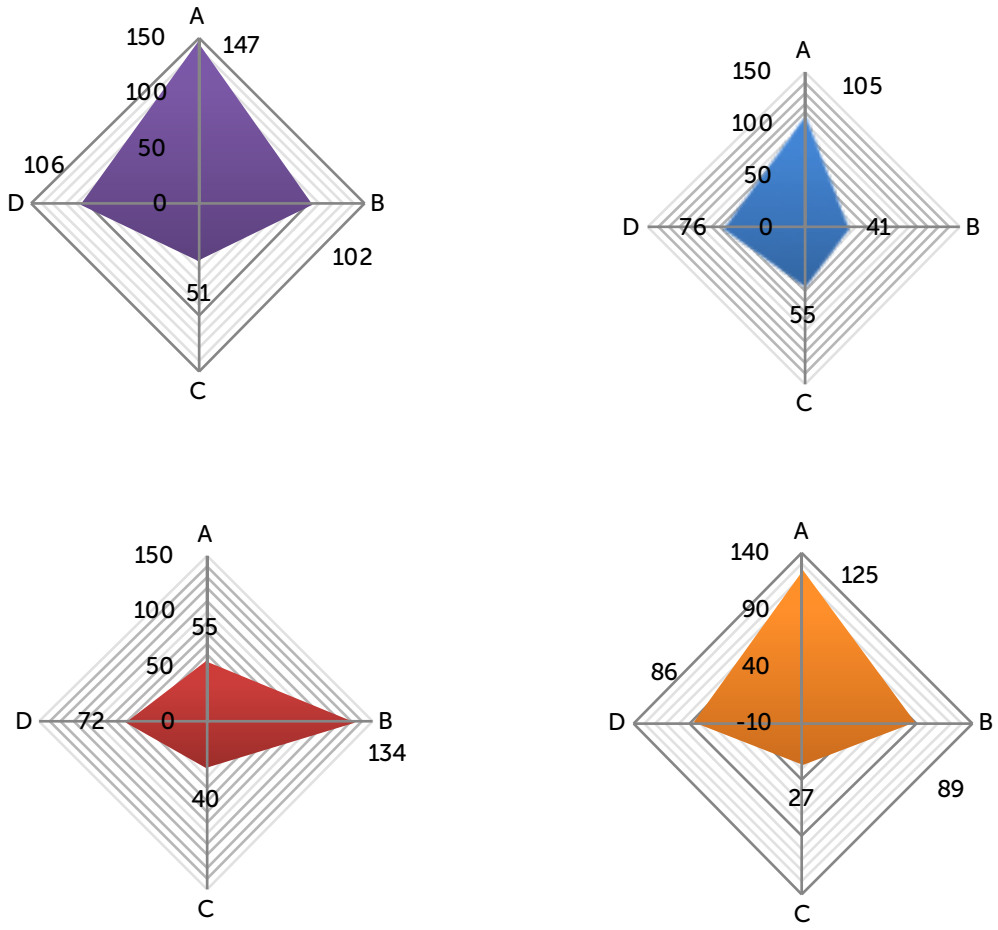
and transition spaces) where the occurrence of a 'chance encounter' increases exponentially; while Category 6 is consistently present within the four sites (although a closer look reveals that user experiences and activities vary significantly across the sites due to distinctive qualities of the urban environments and the presence of specific elements contained therein).

As a last exercise, like-categories are collated into four main category groups, which allows for an easier understanding of the key typologies of patterns within the urban spaces, as follows:

- Sensorial/Environmental Influences (Categories 1, 4, 5 and 9) – Cat Grp A
- People/Users and their interaction (Categories 3 and 8) – Cat Grp B
- Vehicular and Pedestrian Interface (Category 2) – Cat Grp C
- Use of Space (actual and perceived) (Categories 6 and 7) – Cat Grp D

The predominant results may be visualised better through spider diagrams (Figure 4).

Figure 4: (from below, clockwise) Spider diagrams developed for Bićċerija, Strait Street, the Covered Market and MUŻA/Pjazza de Valette (Source: Author/Mr. Daniel Attard)



ADDITIONAL STUDIES

Short studies were carried out together with NSO in order to 'fill the gap' in relation to what presently exists (incomplete and/or missing data) – this is explained above (Stage 1 of the Methodology) in further depth. Results are being correlated to the physical observations and will be presented in the coming months.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A preliminary literature review was carried out, salient aspects of which have been presented in the Introduction above.

Future direction of research

The Methodology section discussed above already gives a clear indication of the direction the research study will be taking over the next years leading up to 2019.

Throughout 2016 there will be further data research and evaluation based on the case study analyses and empirical work including urban design analysis, focus groups, PPGIS, key stakeholder interview follow-ups, temporal analyses and participatory planning workshops.

Annual targets and potential outputs include: data gathering, collation and analysis, framework refinement, recording/digitisation of all observations and data categorisation.

In the medium-term, there will be an assessment on multiplier effects in terms of macro-scale regeneration, gentrification and rate of transfer of property in the proximity of the projects/areas in question. In the long-term, there will be an analysis of the perception of users in terms of intangible ownership of the space/place with predictions for long-term, sustained use in line with the Valletta 2018 legacy (assessed through the development of participatory processes involving the local community, focus groups and the PPGIS workshops).

No major changes to the Research Methodology are envisaged at this stage. Given that the analytical frameworks will now be in place (having developed, and refined, them throughout the past year through the baseline studies), the data collection in the upcoming years will be smoother and more focused, through a greater familiarisation of the sites in question and the (physical and social) forces that characterise them. This will allow more time for in-depth data analysis.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

The initial findings within this theme bring to the forth the importance of citizen participation within all aspects of urban regeneration, from the initial exploratory phase, to the final decision-making and implementation processes. Regular and ongoing consultation with local communities is crucial to ensure the accessibility of a project to those most directly affected by its impact.

This also applies to the four main Valletta 2018 infrastructural projects analysed throughout this study. Zammit's findings indicate that these four sites play host to a vast range of experiences and encounters, ranging from planned and casual interpersonal interactions, to different sensorial experiences. Taking these different encounters into account, and exploring the complex social dynamics behind them, may be of great value in ensuring that developments in these sites contribute to the further growth of their related social communities.

Finally, the accessibility of Valletta 2018 implies not only providing physical access to relevant events, activities, and locations, but also ensuring that all communities are kept abreast of the opportunities available to them to become active participants within the European Capital of Culture project. Whereas Valletta's physical infrastructure and topography create inherent obstacles to physical accessibility, stronger channels of communication with diverse community groups can help minimise educational and social obstacles to participation.