



# **COMMUNITY INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY IN VALLETTA 2018**

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# ABSTRACT

This research paper looks at the factors which may help or hinder social participation in Valletta 2018. It also investigates accessibility issues on a number of levels, and the concerns and requirements of persons with limited mobility. The local population has been subdivided into six community groups based on criteria of a sense of belonging to Valletta and patterns of residence. A group of persons with disability has also been included to assist in investigating accessibility issues.

This study concludes that attention to the social context in which Valletta 2018 will be implemented is key to ensuring social engagement and the achievement of ECoC's goals. Likewise, consultation and direct involvement of the communities involved are also vital. Other factors deemed important for the success of Valletta 2018 are: to develop a clear social strategy; to enhance visibility and communication of its goals and events; and to take steps to increase accessibility, despite inherent challenges presented by the topographical and built fabric of the territory in question. It is strongly recommended that the Valletta 2018 Foundation remains cognizant at all times of concerns about gentrification and monumentalisation to be able to ensure as much as possible that all innovations are assessed against the criterion of whether they will improve the quality of life of people in Valletta and Malta, as host city and country respectively, through culture.

**Keywords:** Community inclusion; Accessibility; Participation; Social engagement.

# INTRODUCTION

The Valletta 2018 Foundation has been tasked with the implementation of a cultural programme “which will enable the participation of the citizens of Malta and Europe and will form an integral and sustainable part of the long-term social, economic and cultural development of Valletta” (Valletta 2018 Evaluation & Monitoring Committee, p. 1). Its objectives include the transformation of Valletta into a creative city, improving the quality of life in Valletta through culture, stimulating awareness of Malta’s diverse cultural identities, and driving collaboration and excellence in culture and the arts in Malta (Valletta 2018 Evaluation & Monitoring Committee, p. 1).

The Palmer report of 2004 acknowledged that “the social impact of ECoC is a vast question since almost all ECoC programme outcomes can be seen in social terms” (Palmer-Rae Associates, 2004, p. 132), but also noted that social questions tended to be marginal to most ECoCs at the time, while “profile raising and improving the city’s image” (Palmer-Rae Associates, 2004, p. 136) were more central concerns. Notably, the report included local involvement as one of common success factors for ECoCs. Another identified common success factor was the importance of context, i.e. taking into consideration the historical, cultural, social and economic development of the city (Palmer-Rae Associates, 2004, p. 152).

Likewise, the 2013 report by Garcia and Cox has noted that not only is “the engagement of local communities and the city’s public” considered important at bidding stage, but engagement, from both stakeholders and the public, is an “indicator of potential success in delivery”, and “reflects the concept of ECoC as a catalyst for change beyond the delivery of cultural activity” (Garcia & Cox, 2013, pp. 63-64). The same report has indicated that apart from an increase in audiences and on the engagement of diverse audiences, there is a “significant absence of real evidence relating to the social impact of ECoCs” (Garcia & Cox, 2013, pp. 113).

Each European Capital of Culture presents a particular social landscape which may differ in significant ways, and the achievement of the established objectives is highly dependent on an in-depth understanding of the social milieu in which the Valletta 2018 project is to be implemented. Such insight is all the more essential in light of the fact that the success of several of the project’s goals is dependent on the response from the various community groups involved.

This research project aims to identify some of the factors affecting participation by various community groups related to the Valletta 2018 project, with particular emphasis on elements that promote or hinder inclusion of a diverse audience, and on accessibility (including physical, social, geographical, financial, linguistic, and intellectual).

This report will present a brief literature review, particularly focusing on understanding the various ways in which the notion of culture may be used, and locating Valletta and Malta within anthropological and sociological literature. This will be followed by an in-depth discussion of the methodology used, which will serve as a baseline for the methodology to be used throughout the continuation of this research project. Finally the findings of this year’s research will be presented, together with the conclusions and the proposed way forward.



# LITERATURE REVIEW

For reasons of brevity, this literature review will be restricted to a discussion of two key concepts, namely:

- a critical appraisal of the notion of culture as it is discussed in the literature, and as applicable to the Valletta 2018 programme;
- an understanding of Valletta and Malta, as host city and country of Valletta 2018, within the anthropological and sociological literature.

There is more literature that is available and that is being noted, but which may not be included in this review to preserve conciseness, including:

- student work submitted at the University of Malta with regard to Valletta and Valletta 2018;<sup>1</sup>
- general statistical information compiled by the National Statistics Office;<sup>2</sup>
- research conducted with regards to European Capitals of Culture, including those mentioned in the Introduction to this report.<sup>3</sup>

## Unpacking the notion of “culture”

A research project which proposes to study the implementation of a cultural programme through an ethnographic approach must necessarily take into account the various ways in which the notion of “culture” has been conceived.

This keyword has been described as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” and, according to Williams (1976, p. 7), has developed three broad categories of usage beyond any purely physical reference (such as when referring to the culture of crops, or of bacteria).

The first sense of the word “culture” refers to an abstract process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development and, up to the eighteenth century, this was the general meaning of the term. The second way in which the term is often used signifies the way of life of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general. The innovation in this usage was that it enabled a discussion of “cultures” in the plural rather than as a single, abstract noun, and this interpretation forms the basis of the way in which the term “culture” is mostly deployed within the social sciences, although not without controversy<sup>4</sup> Finally the third sense of the word “culture” identified by Williams, and which he states “seems often now the most widespread use”, is the one whereby culture refers to “music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film” (Williams, 1976, p. 90).

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<sup>1</sup> Theses related to Valletta and/or Valletta 2018 have been submitted by students studying Accounting, Anthropology, Built Environment, Conservation, Creative Industry and Business Administration, Criminology, Diplomatic Studies, European Studies, Tourism. The Valletta 2018 Research and Evaluation Committee maintains an updated list of relevant theses.

<sup>2</sup> The National Statistics Office has published a number of statistics which may be relevant, including: the Census of Population and Housing (2011); Culture Participation Survey (2011); Demographic Review (2010); Education Statistics (2006-2007/2007-2008); Lifestyle Survey (2007); Social Security Benefits: A Locality Perspective (2013); Transport Statistics (2014). Of specific relevance is the Valletta Participation Survey which is being conducted in parallel to this study.

<sup>3</sup> In particular, significant research has been produced with regard to Liverpool 2008, which follows similar thematic lines as to the current research projects, vide: Garcia, B. (et al), (2010). Creating an Impact: Liverpool’s experience as European Capital of Culture. Retrieved from University of Liverpool website: [https://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Papers/Creating\\_an\\_Impact\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/Papers/Creating_an_Impact_-_web.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> For a defense of the use of the term which takes into account the various critiques of the notion of “culture” within the social sciences, see: Brumann, C. (1999). Writing for Culture: Why a Successful Concept Should Not Be Discarded. *Current Anthropology*, 40(S1), S1–S27.

Bourdieu (1984) offers insight into the creation of the concept of culture by bringing to the fore the dynamics which lead to the social production of activities that are considered to be cultural. Bourdieu concluded that there is a “very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding opinions) to educational capital ... and, secondarily, to social origin” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 5). The consumption of culture – particularly “the aptitude for taking a specifically aesthetic point of view on objects already constituted aesthetically” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 40) – becomes a definer of class, and “legitimate” forms of culture are likewise defined and stratified by the bourgeoisie.

From its inception at application stage, the deployment of the notion of “culture” within the vision of Valletta 2018 appears to have been rooted in the third definition indicated by Williams, namely the promotion and production of cultural activity through an official programme expressed in various art-forms<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the vision is also inclusive of the notions of cultural identity, with this being done within a context of intercultural dialogue and innovation.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst admitting that the difficulties associated with the usage of this term have never been solved, Williams dismisses as an easy reaction any attempts at trying to find the “true”, “proper” or “scientific” sense of the word. Rather, we are invited to reflect on the way in which the term “records a real social history and a very difficult and confused phase of social and cultural development” (Williams, 1976, p. 92). Nevertheless, it is essential that any discussion on culture is informed by the recognition that there are a number of ways in which the concept is used, and that oftentimes, these various usages will intersect.

### **Locating Valletta 2018 within the anthropological and sociological literature**

Understanding the social impact of Valletta 2018 requires us to look at Valletta and Malta, as the host city and country respectively, through the relevant anthropological and sociological literature. An ethnography which is particularly pertinent is *Ambivalent Europeans – Ritual, Memory and the Public Sphere in Malta* (Mitchell 2002), by anthropologist Jon P. Mitchell, whose research deals with Maltese ambivalence towards Europe and modernisation, based on research carried mostly in Valletta prior to Malta’s accession to the European Union. This text documents the “glory, decline, [and] rehabilitation” of Valletta, and the various discourses and opinions surrounding these processes, as well as other wider themes including gendered lives in Valletta, the generation of community through festivities and ritual, and the influence of nostalgia and modernisation.

One particular insight that Mitchell provides when comparing Valletta to other European capital cities is that, while capital cities are “always important foci for the nation, both as sites for national monuments and as contexts for important state occasions”, they are seldom - if ever - visited by many nationals (Mitchell, 2002, p. 45). However, in the case of Valletta, “the engagement with the capital is less imagined than known” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 45), with the city being an important commercial, administrative and infrastructural centre which is heavily used by Maltese irrespective of residence, with the number of commuters estimated to be of up to 60,000 daily. Mitchell (2002) argues that “because of this daily engagement, Valletta has adopted a specific position in the national imagination” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 46). This statement requires some critical interpretation, in that a significant part of the number of daily visitors may

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<sup>5</sup> An example of this is in the following opening sentences of Valletta 2018’s vision: “V.18 is the catalyst to a long-term, culture-led regeneration that sees cultural and creative activity as the most dynamic facet of Valletta and all Malta’s socio-economic life. Our vision is one where culture is the overriding force in building individual creative careers, promoting our well-being, and in fostering our communities’ international and intercultural outlook.” – *Imagine18*. (p. 18). Retrieved from <http://valletta2018.org/the-bid-book-story/>

<sup>6</sup> The vision statement follows with: “V.18 is an exciting opportunity to experience our cultural identity afresh in new contexts that push the boundaries and allow for ideas, dialogue, creativity and innovation to flow freely.” – *Imagine18*. (p. 18). Retrieved from <http://valletta2018.org/the-bid-book-story/>

be constituted by persons who repeatedly access Valletta for work-related reasons and this would therefore limit the notion of daily engagement largely to a specific group of repeat-visitors. Thus, the statement that Valletta's centrality to the national imagination is a result of daily engagement, may not be entirely descriptive of the situation, and this would need to be complemented with understanding the way in which Valletta is central to the national memory due to events that are highly significant in the creation of the nation state as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991), as well as the connection which the city has to figures such as St. Paul and Grand Master de Valette, who are considered crucial to the constitution of traditional Maltese identity as European Christians of long-standing (Cassar 2000). What is beyond doubt, however, is Valletta's importance to the national imagination, which has been proven time and again through the heated debate raised across the nation whenever a significant project, particularly of an architectural or infrastructural nature with aesthetic or practical implications, is undertaken in the city.

Also of note are Boissevain's views in the edited volume *Revitalizing European Rituals* (1992), which anticipated developments with regard to an increase in the amount and complexity of festivities and events within the European context, even while other rituals are in decline. Boissevain's analysis may be applied not only to the reanimation and elaboration of established celebrations such as the parish festas or football-related event, but also to the creation of new festivities and events such as the *Notte Bianca*, which has now become a staple of cultural life in Valletta in its own right.

A complementary perspective to Boissevain's observations are the arguments that Giddens brings forth with regard to detraditionalisation, where "the radical turn from tradition intrinsic to modernity's reflexivity makes a break ... with preceding eras" (Giddens, 1991, 175-176). Although the theory of detraditionalisation does not per se anticipate a desire to revitalise and reinvent tradition and ritual, it certainly does not exclude this. In this perspective, the proliferation of festivals, particularly those presenting aspects of culture deemed traditional, together with nostalgia, could in certain cases be considered a response to the "disembedding" which Giddens associates with late modernity.

Further anthropological literature which is pertinent to the relation between the Maltese and their heritage is the work of Reuben Grima, in particular his 1997 paper *Ritual Spaces, Contested Places: the Case of the Maltese Prehistoric Temple Sites* (Grima 1998) and the work of Kathryn Rountree, which likewise looks at various contesting claims and views on various heritage sites and artifacts (Rountree 2010). Although strongly focused on heritage from Malta's Temple period, the texts of both authors serve to bring to the fore the way in which the management of heritage is a complex matter which often provokes conflicting emotional reactions, and over which various community groups may have conflicting claims.

From a Mediterranean perspective, the work of Michael Herzfeld is also highly relevant, particularly his ethnography *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town* (1991), which describes the conflicts that emerge from state intervention in Rethemnos, a historic town in Crete. This study provides an interesting parallel to Valletta in that Rethemnos is not only a town that is rich in history in the formal sense of the term, but is also, for its inhabitants, a site steeped in intimate, personal histories. Likewise, his more recent ethnography *Evicted from Eternity: The Restructuring of Modern Rome*, also offers a scenario that can be fruitfully compared to that of Valletta. In this latter work, Herzfeld observes, amongst other things, that the notion of "culture" is deployed in various ways: as a "scapegoat" for "failure to adhere to civic values"; as a "positive term of political self-identification", the "attitudes associated with a profession", a "political ideology", and "habits that signify a person's economic standing" (Herzfeld, 2009, p. 191-192). Herzfeld's ethnography also provides insight on the effect that gentrification and "the inexorable power of the market to define the course of events" (Herzfeld, 2009, p. 266) can have on a city's inhabitants, as well as the way in which Romans negotiate the role of Rome as their home city against its function as the national capital – concerns which resonate with those of the Valletta community.

# METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the Terms of Reference of this research project, there are two principal areas of research that need to be addressed by the report, namely:

- (a) the social involvement of the local population; and
- (b) the accessibility of the Valletta 2018 programme.

## **The social involvement of the local population**

The notion of “local population”, together with the requirement for inclusion of Valletta residents, brings to the fore Valletta’s particular situation as a contested space at the centre of claims made by various community groups. In particular, although residence may constitute an official state-recognised form of belonging to a particular locality, especially if confirmed formally through one’s identity card (Cap 258 of the Laws of Malta, Art 5(2)(b)), this does not readily capture the culturally nuanced sense of belonging to and being from Valletta: being Belti or Beltija. (The term derives from il-Belt, “the City”, as Valletta is generally referred to in Maltese, and roughly translatable as “Vallettan” as per Mitchell (2002), but the term is not used in the English form in general practice.)

In fact, as a result of the waves of migration by families from Valletta to other parts of the island ever since the wartime period, a significant diaspora of families exists outside Valletta who still consider themselves Beltin, an identity most often negotiated through family history and memory, participation in festivities and, significantly, support for the Valletta football club. On the other hand, Valletta residents who do not have family ties in the city would tend not to characterise themselves as being from Valletta and indeed, living in Valletta is neither a requisite nor a guarantee of being from Valletta. The boundaries of Valletta in terms of identity are thus more socially constructed than spatially defined.

Nevertheless, it is frequent to find that several Beltin come from families that only moved into the city a couple of generations back at most. Thus, although Belti identity is often depicted by people from Valletta as something virtually autochthonous, this discourse cannot be taken at face value, and in the fieldwork conducted for this report, two persons who were not originally from Valletta – one young person and one senior citizen – adopted the self-identification of Belti after living there, shedding light on the fact that a Belti can be made, not necessarily born.

Valletta identities are also internally complex. Within the microcosm of Beltin, identity may become segmented through the inner faultlines of belonging, as are family histories, socio-economic status, adherence to particular zones in the city, and membership of parishes and band clubs, not to mention political affiliation. Nevertheless, there are also many instances in which a unified identity as Beltin or “Tfal tal-Belt” (Valletta’s children) is invoked as the card that trumps all segmentary divisions.

In terms of human geography Valletta is at the heart of the Inner Harbour area of Malta, which is the area surrounding the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour. This region has recently been referred to (not without the possibility of contention) as the “Greater Valletta” area. While this view gives priority to actual demographics regardless of culturally-defined discourses of identity (which would create a sharp distinction, for instance, between the people from Valletta, and those from Floriana, which lies just outside

the city walls), it is undeniable that this region comprises the most densely populated area of the island. The same area is split in most statistical data produced by the National Statistics Office as the “Northern Harbour” and “Southern Harbour” areas.

Furthermore, on a wider level, account must be taken of Malta in general, which has been marked as the host region. This is doubly the case when, as has been observed previously, there is a relatively high degree of engagement with Valletta amongst Maltese people in general. Thus, with the exclusion of tourists, at least five groups emerge, all of which have been considered as stakeholders of Valletta 2018, and which have been addressed in this research project.

A sixth group was added which addressed persons with a disability, in view of the fact that the terms of reference included also an emphasis on accessibility, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. For the sake of initial research, the focus of this group was on persons with physical disabilities and impaired mobility. Nevertheless, observations were taken regarding all possible issues of accessibility with this group especially, and generally with all the community groups in the research.

Thus the six community groups covered by this study are:

- (a) Persons who consider themselves as being from Valletta, and who reside in Valletta;
- (b) Persons who consider themselves as being from Valletta, but do not reside in Valletta;
- (c) Persons who do not consider themselves as being from Valletta, but reside in Valletta;
- (d) Persons who are residents of the Inner Harbour / “Greater Valletta” area;
- (e) Maltese people in general, who probably commute to Valletta with different levels of regularity;
- (f) Maltese people who have a disability.

At the onset of this research it was felt that, without prejudice to the exploration of any significant themes that could emerge during the course of research, it was expected that the issues that arise from the available literature and which would likely prove central to this research project were the following:

- (a) the effects of the monumentalisation and gentrification of Valletta with regard to the various populations, particularly Valletta residents;
- (b) the negotiation of the public aspects of Valletta as capital city of the nation state against the intimacy of Valletta as a home-town, being a place of everyday life, residence, and private memory, particularly for Valletta residents and the Valletta diaspora;
- (c) the negotiation of what constitutes “culture” in the implementation of the Valletta 2018 project, particularly with a view to identifying the various notions of culture as understood by the various community groups identified.



### **The accessibility of the Valletta 2018 programme**

Accessibility, as a concept, is distinguished from mobility in that it is not limited to the ability of individuals to move around, but looks at structural factors that influence whether something is “get-at-able”, both in terms of places (i.e. the accessibility of a location), and in terms of people (i.e. their ability to access goods and services) (Knowles et al, 2008, p. 50).

The accessibility of culture is a requirement for the fulfilment of Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which establishes “the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits” (United Nations, 1948, Art. 27).

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the research into this area should seek to measure accessibility on a number of levels, namely:

- (i) physical;
- (ii) social;
- (iii) geographical;
- (iv) financial;
- (v) linguistic; and
- (vi) intellectual accessibility.

Of the forms of accessibility referred to, physical accessibility constitutes the category that is most formally defined and regulated, particularly with regard to accessibility for persons with a disability. Malta is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007), has legislation protecting the right to accessibility for persons with disability (which includes elements of social accessibility) (Cap 413 of the Laws of Malta), and has a National Commission dedicated to eliminating any form of direct or indirect social discrimination against persons with disability and their families while providing them with the necessary assistance and support. This latter Commission, namely the National Commission Persons with Disability (KNPD), has also issued Accessibility Guidelines aimed at creating a more accessible built environment to ensure a better quality of life not only to persons with disability, but to everyone (National Commission for Persons with a Disability, 2011). This wider dimension, particularly with regard to children and their families, as well as elderly people, would need to be addressed in the research.

The mainstreaming of universal design policies in the implementation of Valletta 2018 would be highly beneficial to promoting accessibility - particularly physical and social accessibility - although the limitations imposed by the historical nature of many sites, as well as the challenges set by the topography of the Xebb ir-Ras<sup>7</sup> peninsula, must be kept in mind. Whilst noting that it is not within the competency of this research programme to make any formal site assessments or recommendations, it is essential that concerns regarding physical accessibility issues, amongst others, are reflected in the collection of data. This would require that provisions are taken to seek inclusion of concerns by the particularly vulnerable groups identified, namely persons with disability, children and elderly people. Thus, while accessibility was a particular focus for the sixth community group identified, namely persons with disability, this concern was explored with all the community groups who may have children or elderly relatives.

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<sup>7</sup>Xebb ir-Ras is the peninsula over which the city of Valletta was built.

Geographical accessibility is, after physical ability, the next most widely-discussed form of accessibility, with public transport and congestion being matters of especially longstanding concern for the general public. In view of the fact that this research project is limited to the local population, it is understood that the focus will be on geographical accessibility within the Maltese Islands.

Valletta remains a central hub of the public transport system and is easily reachable by bus - however, the number of people who rely or depend on private transportation has increased, with Malta having a high ratio of cars per capita<sup>8</sup>. This has resulted in widespread congestion, particularly when a series of events is focused on a limited geographical area such as Valletta, which creates difficulties not only for persons travelling to Valletta but also (and possibly especially) for residents. There are also significant logistical limitations in travel between the islands of Gozo and Malta, thereby restricting geographical accessibility for Gozo residents.

Financial accessibility requires investigation as to whether the costs of accessing the various projects that are expected to emerge from Valletta 2018 create any restrictions on participation by the communities involved. It would also be interesting to note whether from the statistical evidence it transpires that events that are free of charge or low cost register higher turnout, and whether this may aid in cementing a more widespread interest in cultural events and strengthening the valorisation of local resources as well as allowing several local business initiatives to flourish.

The area of linguistic accessibility is concerned with the ways in which language barriers may impact Valletta 2018 and any emerging projects. Although both Maltese and English are official languages, linguistic ability in residents (inclusive of Maltese and expatriate residents) is variable, and attention needs to be given to target audiences for events and whether the linguistic needs of such audiences are adequately satisfied. Disability issues may also need to be considered, such as whether sufficient measures have been taken to reasonably cater for persons with hearing or vision impairments, as well as restricted literacy skills.

Intellectual accessibility has been defined as "ensuring that visitors and staff can understand any information which [an] organisation provides" (Museums Galleries Scotland, n.d.). There is an overlap to an extent with linguistic accessibility due to the importance of language to intellectual comprehension. However, intellectual accessibility may also be understood to require indicators of whether people feel welcomed at the various sites and events, whether special events may help people with different backgrounds, skills and knowledge levels engage with the material being presented, and whether specific community groups are being reached by the project. Importantly, one group which needs to be reached by Valletta 2018 is children, and therefore it is important to consider the programme's accessibility for this group.

Finally, in view of the fact that accessibility is a social issue in the wider sense of the term, the category of social accessibility includes somewhat all the other categories, which may themselves present overlaps. Nevertheless, this form of accessibility may cover other aspects which have not been specifically mentioned under the other areas, such as those related to gender (e.g. whether the culturally apportioned

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<sup>8</sup> As per the Transport Statistics issued by the National Statistics Office, in 2013, the number of vehicles per 1,000 total residents was 763, and the number of vehicles per 1,000 total residents aged 18 and over was 928. National Statistics Office, (2014). Transport Statistics (p. 109). Valletta. Retrieved from [https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Publications\\_by\\_Unit/Documents/A4\\_International\\_Trade\\_and\\_Transport\\_Statistics/Transport\\_Statistics\\_2014.pdf](https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Publications_by_Unit/Documents/A4_International_Trade_and_Transport_Statistics/Transport_Statistics_2014.pdf)

gender-roles may have an effect on cultural access) and socio-economic status (e.g. whether events are perceived to be accessible to all persons from all socio-economic backgrounds, including events that are free of charge and therefore present no financial restrictions).

In all cases above, the research will eventually need to consider statistical indicators as they become available, whereby attendance may then be compared to national figures in terms of disability, gender, socio-economic status etc. However, it is also important to explore the level of accessibility through qualitative research to obtain a rich description of the user-experience.

### **Research choices**

It has been decided that a qualitative approach, based on semi-structured interviews, will be used to provide an in-depth understanding of perspectives from members of the six community groups identified. It is also noted that work on matters related to participation is also being undertaken by the National Statistics Office (NSO), and statistical data, as it becomes available, may be used to complement the qualitative research. Likewise, it is hoped that the qualitative research may enrich any analysis of any quantitative data collected by providing rich descriptive material addressing the concerns, opinions and ideas of the various community groups involved.

The use of the ethnographic approach aims at giving an account, of interpreting the meaning of observed behaviour (Agar, 1996, p. 129). Ethnographic research is particularly well-suited to understanding participation and accessibility since "it is done in the field and depends upon attentive observation". Thus, it is "well suited to assisting us in gaining a better understanding of what impacts programs have and what happens when policies are implemented" (Luton, 2010, p. 85).

Since the scope of ethnographic research is not statistical representativeness but contextual description, the study has been based on four in-depth case studies from each of the community groups identified – a process which will be repeated for subsequent years. The case studies include semi-structured interviews coupled with more general observation not limited to the individuals who would be the basis for the case studies. Each individual researcher was assigned two of the community groups, with regular meetings held for the individual researchers to share findings and provide peer support and advice for further research. All researchers were involved not only in the collection of data but also in the analysis to ensure continuity in the process leading from fieldwork to the presentation and interpretation of results.

Given the specific nature of the community groups as identified, respondents were selected through a snowball sampling technique, where the researchers identified persons within the required populations, and proceeded to ask the respondents to identify further possible respondents. While no statistical representativeness is claimed for the sample used, there has been an effort to have a mix of gender and ages in each community group to provide a diversity of responses.

The fact that social phenomena are studied through fieldwork on location enables the ethnographer to frame such phenomena within the conceptual framework of culture, understood here in the wider sense of the term as comprising the whole cluster of socially constructed meanings in which daily life is embedded. Ethnographic research inherently necessitates a continuous reworking and modification of the project's design, particularly in view of the fact that ethnographic projects need to remain open to the material that emerges from the fieldwork, rather than persist in imposing concerns that have been determined a priori.

Indeed, the first cycle of fieldwork which informs this report constituted a particularly exploratory phase, in which, although following a set of questions administered in a semi-structured manner, the researchers specifically allowed interviewees to highlight any other topics which had not been raised by the interviewer, or to follow any other lead that may have been of possible interest.

Almost all interviews were held face to face either in the interviewee's residence, or in a public place that was convenient to the interviewee. In the case of the disability community group, one interview was conducted via videoconferencing, and the other was conducted through email due to difficulties experienced by the interviewee.

Apart from background demographic data and information on current cultural participation, the main qualitative indicators for this cycle were:

- Knowledge of the Valletta 2018 programme (awareness of programme, awareness of aims of programme, awareness of events, experience of events, access to events);
- Personal views on Valletta and the Valletta 2018 programme (personal significance of Valletta, experience of Valletta, opinion on Valletta's issues and likely future developments, impact of Valletta 2018 on Valletta and Malta, and on the respondents' communities).

It is noted that this research was emphatically dialogic in nature, in which neither the concerns of the community groups involved, nor the aims of the Valletta 2018 project could be taken as existing independently of each other. To do so would have risked either considering local concerns as being mere limitations to the implementation of the project, or to view the aims of the project as a hegemonic imposition on the city. The research rather was informed by an approach that takes constructive dialogue and mutual understanding of these two poles as essential to the fulfilment of the project's objectives, namely Valletta 2018's intention to bring about cultural and infrastructural change.

A full list of questions administered to the interviewees may be found as an Appendix to this report.

# FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the most salient points emerging from the semi-structured interviews conducted with persons from the community groups identified. This report, which encapsulates the findings of the first cycle of this project, aims to provide a baseline study of the level of social involvement amongst the various community groups, as well as current concerns or opinions regarding the accessibility of the Valletta 2018 programme.

## Importance of context

As has been stated in the introduction, the Palmer Report of 2004 identified the importance of context, including the social context, as one of the common success factors for ECoC (Palmer-Rae Associates, 2004, p. 152). Furthermore, as per the literature review, there are several elements that are crucial to understanding Valletta as a social space, including:

- the way in which Valletta shares the role of both national capital and intimate hometown;
- the process of “glory, decline, [and] rehabilitation”, often resulting in a tension between nostalgia and gentrification;
- the creation of strong identities and a sense of belonging which transcends, and is not dependent on, residence.

It transpired that the overwhelming message from most of the interviews conducted was that Valletta is a space which has multiple layers of meaning to people from different backgrounds, with the various community groups giving varying perspectives on the nature of this space.

People who identified themselves as Beltin emphasised the intimate aspect of Valletta as a place of community and local history, which is often invoked with a sense of nostalgia. Beltin tended to express a concern with the imminent death of history, memory and continuity in Valletta, as testified by a number of statements such as: “In my opinion, history is dying”;<sup>9</sup> “Valletta no longer belongs to the Beltin”;<sup>10</sup> and “Many young people just love Valletta because of football.”<sup>11</sup> One expatriate resident in Valletta also added on to this set of notions by stating: “that the Beltin are a ‘dying breed’ makes me anxious because I feel that I am part of the group that is pushing the Beltin out of their rightful home.”

Non-resident Beltin tended to describe Valletta as “home”;<sup>12</sup> and as a place which they feel compelled to visit regularly or daily even if they do not have family living within the city. The methodology section included a discussion on how Valletta identities are internally complex, with Beltin negotiating their micro-local identity (i.e. as belonging to a particular district, parish etc.) against a unified identity as Belti or Beltija. One interviewee said that Beltin often voice this unified identity by calling each other “kugin” (cousin), a form of fictive kinship that expresses a familial bond between all Beltin. Likewise the term “it-tfal tal-Belt”, which could be translated as “Valletta’s sons and daughters” is also used to connote the Beltin.

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<sup>9</sup> “Il-history qed naraha tmut.”

<sup>10</sup> “Il-Belt m’ghadhiex tal-Beltin.”

<sup>11</sup> “Hafna zghazagh il-Belt ihobbuha biss taht il-kappa tal-futbol.” – It is important to note that this particular statement was made by a person involved in one of the parish feasts within Valletta, and therefore it can also be read as a lamentation about a decline in youth participation in feasts.

<sup>12</sup> Generally the word “home” was used in English, even if the rest of the sentence was in Maltese, e.g. “Il-Belt ghalija hija home.” (“Valletta to me is home.”); “Inhossni home meta nkun il-Belt.” (“I feel at home when I am in Valletta”).

In this context, one of the interviewees noted how festi tend to separate, while football tends to unite – and how in view of this, football tends to be generally given more importance by Beltin. This same interviewee had also made a recommendation to bring the titular statues of the main religious feasts in the city together on Valletta Day in 2018, since “that would be our greatest victory, as we would have shown everybody that neither feasts nor politics can divide us, but that we are Beltin first and foremost.”<sup>13</sup>

Non-Beltin, regardless of residence, tended to emphasise the historical, architectural, administrative and commercial importance of Valletta. The interviewees that were most disengaged from Valletta were those from amongst the group of persons with a disability who, due to accessibility reasons which will be looked into in more detail, have very limited involvement with Valletta as a place.

A general concern with the preservation of the character of Valletta was more or less consistent across the community groups. The topics of Valletta’s emerging nightlife and increase in boutique hotels were subjects on which there was divergence between various interviewees, although both trends were generally felt as being, at least in part, a response to Valletta 2018.

Non-Beltin were inclined to see the development of boutique hotels as a positive trend, while the opening of entertainment establishments, particularly in Strait Street were seen as potentially leading Valletta to lose its character. Younger interviewees, nevertheless, tended to see Valletta as providing a better nightlife alternative to Paceville, as it offered something different than the standard nightclub model and offered less noisy entertainment spaces which did not prevent patrons from engaging in conversation.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand the Beltin interviewed had varying reactions to the same issues. Both boutique hotels and entertainment establishments were seen as reviving Valletta and giving it something of the social importance and glamour that it had in the past, as well as providing significant business opportunities to the owners, a substantial number of whom are themselves Beltin. However, Beltin also often complained that this has pushed prices up and has consequently made it more difficult, if not impossible, for young Beltin to buy property in Valletta and live there. It is noted, however, that this is also made difficult by the fact that most buildings in Valletta are old and often do not cater for homebuyers’ requirements today. Nevertheless, a good number of the respondents allowed for the fact that the trend of boutique hotels and the Airbnb phenomenon (which is less well known) have given unprecedented opportunities to Valletta landowners to capitalise on their property. Furthermore, some respondents also said that these trends have helped to reduce the number of vacant properties in the city, thereby “giving it more life”.

Some Beltin voiced concern about nightlife in the area, with the main reasons cited being the loss of the city’s character, although this was not unanimous. One interviewee criticised the revival of Strait Street as being simply the transference of the standard nightlife model upon Valletta, without consideration of context: “2018 should be all about culture but all we are seeing are new arriviste bars and restaurants, when the restaurants that promote genuine stuff, and the old bars, are being forgotten. We’re faking Valletta as it used to be and tearing the thin veil of the society there. We’ll make some money out of it but will it rip the identity of Valletta?”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “...tkun l-ikbar rebha li nkunu ghamilna ghax inkunu urejna lil kulhadd li la l-festi u lanqas il-politika m’huma se jifirduna, li ahna Beltin qabel kollox”.

<sup>14</sup> Paceville is a district within the town of St Julian’s which developed into an area populated mostly by nightclubs and other entertainment establishments.

Others from the Beltin interviewed were more concerned about possible nuisance to residents, but were satisfied as long as the night entertainment remained restricted to specific zones. One of the interviewees, however, actively called for a further expansion of the entertainment industry in Valletta, with a view to reaping the economic benefits, but also to “give life” to the city: “If we want Valletta to be given life, we need to have nightlife and not just fix the streets. The tourists of today are the replacement of yesterday’s sailors [who used to patronise Valletta’s bars].”<sup>16</sup>

One other concern voiced by many of the Beltin interviewed was to negotiate the historical and national aspect of Valletta with their daily needs – one respondent, for instance, stated that he does not agree with the introduction of a modern aesthetic which may clash with the city’s appearance. Nevertheless, the same respondent also argued that “you cannot turn Valletta into a museum”,<sup>17</sup> as this would negatively impact on its commercial success as well as on residents’ lives. One other respondent also said that there is a tendency to restore sites but then render them unusable, because “one ends up not even being allowed to have drinks in the square”.

Finally, Beltin and Valletta residents tend to feel that their home city, being the capital city of the nation-state, is particularly prone to all sorts of interventions by Government as well as other authorities and/or entities. They have often voiced resent at the fact that such changes often take place without adequate consultation with residents. One significant exception was the MUŻA project which is being organised in liaison with Valletta 2018.<sup>18</sup> As part of this project, a focus group of Valletta residents were asked to give their views on Valletta and Valletta 2018. The participants were also asked to choose an artwork, a reproduction of which would be placed in their communities in a place of their own choosing. This approach, which has been defined as “community curatorship”, was strongly welcomed by the participants, some of whom stated that this was the first time that they had been actively involved in something happening in their own home city. This project was also helpful at breaking barriers of social accessibility, with some of the members of the focus group entering the Museum of Fine Arts for the first time, despite having lived in Valletta for all their lives. The strong acceptance of the project shows that consultation is certainly one of the key factors in ensuring a successful engagement of local communities with cultural projects.

### **Level of engagement with Valletta 2018**

There was a very good level of awareness across all the community groups that the title of European Capital of Culture for 2018 had been awarded, with all interviewees being conscious of this. Particularly within the community of Beltin, the awarding of this title was welcomed as an international recognition of Valletta’s uniqueness. One interviewee mentioned a statement he had seen on a social media platform which, with a touch of hyperbole, expressed this local pride: “Valletta is now the capital of Europe – bow your head in respect!”<sup>19</sup>

There was, nevertheless, a widespread poor level of awareness of the aims of this project and what

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<sup>15</sup> Most of this quote was said in English, with the exception of the last sentence which was originally “Se ndaħhlu sold, imma will it rip the identity of Valletta?”

<sup>16</sup> “Jekk il-Belt irridu ntuha l-hajja, irid ikollna d-divertiment ta’ bil-lejl u mhux sempliciment nirrangaw it-toroq. It-turist illum huwa flok il-bahri tal-bierah.”

<sup>17</sup> “Ma tistax il-Belt tagħmilha mużew ghax se twaqqaf hafna mill-affarijiet – il-hwienet, il-hajja tar-residenti...”

<sup>18</sup> The researchers of this report thank Sandro Debono from Heritage Malta and Marcia Grima, then also working with Heritage Malta, who extended an invitation to participate as observers in the sessions being held with regard to the MUŻA project. This invitation made the following observations possible and greatly enriched the findings of this report.

<sup>19</sup> “Valletta l-Belt Kapitali tal-Ewropa. Baxxi rasek!”

events have been or are being organised. With regard to aims, a minority of interviewees were aware that although beyond cultural events which would be held in 2018, the ultimate aim was to leave a long-term impact. Many others emphasised tourism and, as has been stated, also connected it to the boom in the boutique hotel business as well as the increase in nightlife. However, almost all respondents, including the ones who gave the replies above, said that they were unsure of what the aims really were, or how it is being proposed that these goals are achieved.

Likewise, there was a lack of clarity as to which events formed part of the Valletta 2018 programme. With the exception of a few interviewees who did not attend any cultural events at all due to lack of interest or accessibility issues, most respondents had attended some cultural events, but were unable to identify whether they were related to Valletta 2018 or not. *Notte Bianca* was one event that virtually all respondents were familiar with, although not all chose to attend.

Some of the expatriate respondents resident in Valletta stated that they appreciate the synergy created by the mix of Maltese and non-Maltese participants at certain events, and that such events allowed them to interact with the local population.

With regard to persons with a disability, there was a marked lack of participation in cultural activities, especially those occurring in Valletta. Whilst these respondents often voiced a lack of interest in such activities, it was clear that problems of access, including Valletta's natural topography and built infrastructure, constitute a definite barrier to participation in cultural events.

Residents, whether Beltin or not, as well as non-resident Beltin, often expressed some hope that Valletta 2018 would create some improvement in city management, in particular with cleanliness (e.g. garbage collection and street cleaning), better parking regulation, and the recuperation of old characteristic shops.

Residents who are not Beltin expressed a fear that the whole ECoC process may result in the "Disneyfication" (Zukin, 1995) and/or gentrification of Valletta with the attendant loss of social diversity. This would be mainly due to the inflation of real estate prices to which they may have contributed themselves with the result that Beltin and other "ordinary people" would no longer be able to afford to live in Valletta, and the city would become the reserve of affluent and probably absent owners. Of course, certain Beltin have nonetheless been very willing to sell off their property at favourable rates, and buy-to-rent investments are another factor that would contribute to this phenomenon.

The respondents in the Inner Harbour/Greater Valletta Area were very concerned that Valletta and its many economically disadvantaged residents will not be the ultimate beneficiaries of Valletta 2018, and rather that it will be the businesses responsible for gentrification that will reap the benefits. These concerns were also expressed by some Beltin, also in particular with the plans that are in place for the Valletta market (*is-Suq tal-Belt*), where there is concern that prices will be upmarked for a tourist audience and thus limit affordability for Valletta residents. There was also a significant number of interviewees who demonstrated strong skepticism as to whether the apparent changes in Valletta will do anything to improve the quality of life and the Valletta experience for residents and visitors alike.



## **Accessibility**

As has been stated in the literature review, the notion of accessibility is not limited to the ability of individuals to move around, but includes structural factors that influence whether something is “get-at-able”, both in terms of places (i.e. the accessibility of a location), and in terms of people (i.e. their ability to access goods and services) (Knowles et al, 2008, p. 50). Although there are several levels on which to analyse accessibility, including the physical, social, geographical, financial, linguistic and intellectual levels, it is not uncommon to find that one form of lack of accessibility contributes to another (e.g. the lack of physical accessibility may be an obstacle for a person to participate in cultural life and thereby contribute to social and intellectual accessibility). Thus in the following discussion, accessibility will be discussed holistically rather than separating it into its separate constituents. However, for ease of discussion, it has been separated into concerns about accessibility in terms of transportation, and the way in which issues of accessibility can impact one’s engagement with Valletta.

### **Concerns regarding transportation, public and private**

As has been mentioned, Valletta is very well-connected by public transportation, being the centre of the public transport system. Nevertheless, the high vehicle-per-person ratio in Malta means that congestion is a problem to which public transportation may not be immune, despite attempts to mitigate this through the introduction of bus lanes. Furthermore, public transportation is inherently not as flexible as private transportation, and interviewees have complained, for instance, that night buses do not run late enough, meaning that it was not feasible to depend on public transportation to be able to enjoy a night out in Valletta. Persons with a disability, elderly people or persons who otherwise have limited mobility might also be at a disadvantage if they are not able to use public transportation in a reliable way.

Amongst persons who use private transportation, complaints about lack of parking space were a common factor. Belkin were furthermore also concerned about problems of internal traffic flow within the city’s boundaries, particularly following the removal of the bridge formed by the old City Gate, which provided an easier connection between the Western and Eastern sides of Valletta. Those with elderly relatives living in Valletta, also complained about how it was hard to provide adequate transport to their family members with limited mobility.

The concern with lack of parking was felt particularly strongly by persons with a disability, who said that more parking spots reserved for persons with a disability would be an encouraging step.

Another concern was the congestion caused by mass events such as Notte Bianca, both for persons travelling to Valletta, and for persons living in Valletta, who would not be able to leave the city and return when such an event is being held. In fact two Valletta residents interviewed said that if they leave the city during Notte Bianca, they would have to secure an alternative place to lodge for the night, as it would be impossible for them to return to their home. One other respondent compared the imposition of Notte Bianca to a burglar breaking into one’s house.<sup>20</sup> One suggestion from the group of commuters to Valletta was to spread such mass events over a week to avoid congestion.

One respondent who is a Valletta Resident favourably mentioned the ferry project, as it has increased accessibility into Valletta and decreased congestion.

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<sup>20</sup> “Qisu xi hadd dahallek fid-dar.”

### **The impact of lack of accessibility on engagement with Valletta**

Engagement with Valletta, for most of the disability cohort, was mostly restricted to the Valletta Waterfront as this is an accessible area, but they rarely enter Valletta proper. Interviewees in this group rarely visited Valletta for entertainment or for cultural activities, and generally went to the city only to purchase clothes, where the person would often have to be lifted into the shop and would then choose a number of garments to try at home because the changing facilities would not be accessible.

Half of the respondents in this group emphasised the need for a nationwide educational campaign for people to not park on parking spots designated for persons with a disability, as well as the need for the promotion of Universal Design, whereby buildings and spaces cater for the needs of all from the outset. Respondents indicated that more effort needs to be put into making museums and historical sites accessible not just for wheelchair users but for other types of disability, such as those emanating from visual impairments or hearing difficulties. It is also true, however, that the difficulty is not only in the design of individual buildings (most of which were constructed before adequate accessibility standards were put in place) but systematic. As one of the respondents from the group of Beltin resident in Valletta put it, "in Valletta you are never working with a blank canvas". The same respondent had, in fact, been involved on a project related to a building in Valletta which was not initially given a permit since the building was not wheelchair friendly – but the building itself was located in a narrow street with steps. Indeed, our respondents with disability found problems both because of Valletta's topography, being built on a hill and therefore having steep slopes and steps in many streets, and also because most commercial and entertainment establishments are housed in old buildings, with restrooms typically located at the end of a flight of stairs. Although there are inherent difficulties, however, interviewees have voiced a need to push for certain steps to be taken, such as ensuring that accessible public convenience locations are situated around these public spaces to render them more accessible. Museums and historical sites, too, harboured a challenge for wheelchair users, with very little information being offered for persons with sensory impairments.

The majority of the disability cohort never went to theatre or any other performance, mostly as it is not accessible physically. Two did mention that they harboured no real interest in seeing opera. It is also worth noting that one of the respondents was not economically active, as her disability is severe and has been an obstacle to her finding employment, thus also creating financial impediments to cultural participation. Financial accessibility was also a concern to a number of respondents, particularly those with families, some of whom stated that they make use of occasions in which museums and other sites have open days, and that such initiatives are to be encouraged.

One respondent, who stated that he was concerned that Valletta 2018 could turn out to be just an image-enhancement exercise, also said that he strongly believed that Valletta needs the ECoC initiative, and suggested that innovative ways of presenting art and culture need to be found to bring it closer to people, bolstering this argument with a provocative example – "more people go to the public toilet than to the Museum of Fine Arts, so why not have an exhibition at the public convenience?".

This example lends an important insight, namely that enhancing accessibility to Valletta 2018 by removing as many barriers to access as possible is vital, but it is not enough. In the implementation of Valletta 2018, it is important that the traditional boundaries of cultural spaces are reconsidered in such a way that Valletta becomes indeed a creative city.

# CONCLUSIONS

From the findings above, a number of factors emerge which are important for Valletta 2018 to ensure the participation of the local population, and which will ultimately determine its success.

Firstly, the overarching recommendation is that it is essential for attention to be given to the social context in which Valletta 2018 will be implemented to ensure social engagement and the achievement of the goals of the European Capital of Culture.

Secondly, as is evident from the way in which the MUŽA project has been strongly welcomed by participants, the consultation and direct involvement of communities are of paramount importance for the various community groups that make up the local population to feel that they are a part of the Valletta 2018 project. This is especially so in a situation where communities, particularly Valletta residents, have complained about consistently having interventions imposed on them by external authorities without any prior consultation.

In this regard, it is also ideal for Valletta 2018 to develop a social strategy. The Palmer Report proposed three avenues, which are by no means mutually exclusive, namely: Access Development, Cultural Instrumentalism, and Cultural Inclusion. Discussions need to be held to forge a clear strategy of how the involvement of the local population is to be integrated into the Valletta 2018 project.

Given the lack of clarity that was noted, it is also important for an investment to be made in a campaign that makes Valletta 2018's aims and events more visible and understandable to the general public.

Steps have already been taken to improve accessibility, but – whilst realising the inherent difficulties that Valletta's topographic and built fabric presents - more needs to be made to make the city accessible.

Many of the people interviewed had an interest in national or local history and culture, and while this understandably cannot be the sole focus of Valletta 2018, events targeting this field would be likely to attract attention on a more popular level, especially if the events are targeted to be family or child-friendly, and if entrance fees are free or low cost.

Finally, the concern with the gentrification and monumentalisation of Valletta is strong and has been, at least to some extent, justified. Adequate planning is required to keep this in check and to ensure that any initiative taken with regard to the Valletta 2018 project, and as much as possible any third party intervention within the city at all, is considered in the light of the impact that it will have on making Valletta a creative city, and improving the quality of life for residents and visitors through culture.

## WAY FORWARD

Since the inception of this research, there has been collaboration with the MUŻA project being coordinated by the Valletta 2018 Foundation and Heritage Malta, particularly in view of the fact that this is a community-driven project.

Furthermore, it is envisaged that community fora such as the Valletta Forum and the Valletta School Council may, depending on availability of respondents, be incorporated into the research. There is also room for fruitful collaboration with the National Council for Persons with a Disability with regard to accessibility issues.

Subject to availability of respondents, a number of respondents from the first cycle will be interviewed again at various points in 2016, while new respondents will also be included. We anticipate that as the Valletta 2018 programme rolls out, there will be more material (including academic work, media coverage, etc.) that will be available and which will need to be reviewed.

No specific changes in the methodology are envisaged but a meeting will be held to review the work done in 2015 and identify areas in which improvement can be achieved.

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# APPENDIX

## Questions administered to Interviewees

### Demographic data

- Age
- Gender
- Marital Status
- Progeny
- Socio-economic Status
- Residence
- Self-identification as Belti

### Valletta participation

- Reasons for visiting Valletta
- Frequency of visits

### Cultural interests

- Festa
- Theatre
- Museums and exhibitions
- TV
- Food
- Clubbing
- Sport
- Others

### Knowledge of Valletta 2018

- Awareness of Valletta 2018
- Awareness of aims of Valletta 2018
- Awareness of Valletta 2018 events
- Experience of Valletta 2018 events
- Access to Valletta 2018 events

### Personal views on Valletta and Valletta 2018

- What does Valletta mean to you?
- What is your experience of Valletta?
- What do you like about Valletta?
- What are Valletta's problems as you see them?
- How do you see Valletta's future developing?
- How do you think Valletta 2018 will impact Valletta or Malta in general?
- How - if in any way - do you think Valletta 2018 will impact you and your community (i.e. family, people you know etc.?)