

COMMUNITY INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY IN VALLETTA 2018

**Michael Deguara
with Marguerite Pace Bonello
and Rene Magri**

INTRODUCTION

This research project was commissioned by the Valletta 2018 Foundation to assess the social involvement of the local population and the accessibility of the Valletta 2018 Programme. This report presents the findings of this project spanning a period from 2015 to 2018.

The importance of citizen participation is confirmed by previous research on European Capitals of Culture, such as the Palmer report of 2004 which cited local involvement and the importance of the historical, cultural, social and economic context of the city as two factors that commonly promote success (Palmer-Rae Associates, 2004, p. 152). Likewise, the 2013 report by Garcia and Cox notes that not only is “the engagement of local communities and the city’s public” considered important at the 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 literature sheds light on how social questions, nevertheless, tend to be marginal to most European Capitals of Culture, while “profile raising and improving the city’s image” are considered to be more central concerns (Palmer-Rae Associates, 2004, p. 136). Furthermore, 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). Thus this research project intends to contribute towards addressing this lacuna in the literature.

Throughout the development of this research project, four key themes emerged. The first theme, **Valletta – The city and its accessibility**, deals with generating an in-depth understanding of the social milieu in which the Valletta 2018 project has been implemented. Given that each European Capital of Culture presents a particular social landscape upon which the achievement of established objectives is highly dependent, insight into Valletta’s social context has been deemed to be important from the inception of this research. The picture that emerges is one where Valletta can best be understood as a complex social space encompassing multiple layers of meaning for different community groups and individuals. Accessibility was also found to be an integral aspect of how people experience and engage with the city.

The second theme, **Urban regeneration and its impact on communal life**, explores concerns that first emerged in the 2015 cycle of research, but became more prominent in subsequent cycles where attention was given to how respondents reacted to Valletta’s foreseeable developments, particularly those related to the city as a community space. The Valletta 2018 initiative was widely seen as being a catalyst for urban regeneration, and this naturally raised both hopes and apprehension about the impact on the city’s communal life.

The third theme, **Awareness and accessibility of the Valletta 2018 Programme**, was strongly present in the research from the start, mapping fluctuations of how knowledgeable respondents were about the cultural programme of Valletta 2018, its objectives and the individual events and projects that comprised it.

The fourth theme, **the legacy of the Valletta 2018 Programme**, emerged in the final cycle of research in 2018. Interviews were held at a point where the cultural programme had been mostly completed, and this allowed respondents to be able to think retrospectively and reflect upon what sort of legacy Valletta 2018 will, or ought to, leave.

This report will present an in-depth discussion of the methodology used, followed by a holistic account of the findings in the past years regarding the key themes emerging from the research. Finally, the report will give its conclusions and will proceed to provide recommendations.

The authors of this report are indebted to Dr Josephine Burden, a Valletta-based author and academic who has generously allowed us to quote extensively from an unpublished paper presented at the “Sharing the Legacy Conference” organised by the Valletta 2018 Foundation in October 2018, and to Alfred Camilleri, an artist from Valletta who kindly allowed us to refer to and reproduce one of his artworks from his exhibition “Civitas”, held in the Malta Postal Museum and Arts Hub in Valletta in June 2018.

METHODOLOGY & KEY THEMES

This research project has been commissioned to look at two key factors, namely:

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

These concerns stem from one of two key criteria for cultural programmes of European Capitals of Culture, as expressed in Decision No 1622/2006/EC, namely “City and Citizens”. As per this Decision, cultural programmes of European Capitals of Culture between 2007 and 2019 shall:

- a) foster the participation of the citizens living in the city and its surroundings and raise their interest as well as the interest of citizens from abroad;
- b) be sustainable and be an integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city.” (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2006)

This section explores in detail an elaboration of the two key factors that form the core of the project, and the way in which the methodology for this research project was developed.

The social involvement of the local population

As discussed earlier, the literature supports the notion that the engagement of local communities is a common indicator of the success of the programmes of European Capitals of Culture. The term “local population”, however, calls for some further elaboration and must be understood within the context of Valletta as a contested space at the centre of claims made by various community groups. While this concept will be developed further in the following section, it is essential at this point to note that although residence may constitute an official state-recognised form of assigning individuals to a particular locality, this does not readily capture the culturally nuanced sense of *belonging to* and *being from* Valletta - being *Belti* or *Beltija*.¹ The terms derive from *il-Belt*, “the City”, as Valletta is generally referred to in Maltese, and thus *Belti* (male), *Beltija* (female) and *Beltin* (plural) identify individuals as being *from* Valletta, regardless of residence.²

¹Residence is formally recognised through the identity card as per Cap 258 of the Laws of Malta, Art 5(2)(b) in the case of holders of a Maltese identity card.

²Mitchell (2002) suggests that *Belti* and *Beltija* are roughly translatable as “Vallettan”, but the term is not used in the English form in general practice. Thus, *Belti*, *Beltija* and *Beltin* will be the terms used throughout this report.

Several waves of migration from Valletta to other parts of the island have occurred since the wartime period and these have indeed drastically reduced the resident population in Valletta to just over 6,000 individuals. However, this movement of people also created a significant diaspora of individuals who still consider themselves *Beltin*, an identity most often retained and negotiated through family history and memory, participation in parish feasts, Carnival and other celebrations and, significantly, through support for the Valletta football club.

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. In this regard, someone with family ties in Valletta may identify as *Belti* or *Beltija* even if they have never actually lived in the city, while Valletta residents may not readily identify as being *from* Valletta unless they have family ties within the city. Nevertheless, this was also found to be somewhat fluid. Indeed, not only is it frequent to find that several *Beltin* come from families that moved into the city a couple of generations back at most, but some of the respondents in this research project identified themselves as *Beltin* despite having moved to the city relatively recently. Thus, although *Belti* identity is often depicted by people from Valletta as something virtually autochthonous, this discourse cannot be taken at face value – this form of identification is naturally always somewhat subjective and contested, but above all dynamic – ultimately 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, such as family histories, socio-economic status, adherence to particular zones in the city, membership of parishes and band clubs and 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.³

Moving beyond the boundaries of Valletta as a city, it is also important to locate this phenomenon within the regional context which has, in turn, informed the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme. In terms of the human geography of the island, Valletta forms part of the Inner Harbour area, which comprises the towns surrounding the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour. This region has recently been referred to as the “Greater Valletta” area, although this is not a term that is free of contention, as it gives priority to actual demographics over culturally-defined discourses of identity. The latter perspective, rather, would create sharp distinctions between localities – for instance, between Valletta and Floriana, which lies just outside Valletta’s city walls. It is noted that the Inner Harbour area comprises the most densely populated area of the island, and has often been further split into “Northern Harbour” and “Southern Harbour” areas, as these tend to be characterised by different socio-economic realities.⁴

Furthermore, on an even wider level, account must be taken of Malta in general, which has been marked as the host region for the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme. This becomes more significant when one considers the high level of engagement of Maltese people in general with the capital. Anthropologist Jon Mitchell, in his ethnographic monograph titled “Ambivalent Europeans”, compares Valletta to other European capital cities and concludes 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

³This identity comes out strongly in the discussion of *Il-Festa l-Kbira*, a Valletta 2018 event which brought together the four parish feasts of Valletta, and was seen by several respondents to be a message of unity amongst *Beltin*.

⁴ This is the case, for instance, in most of the statistical information produced by the National Statistics Office.

important commercial, administrative and infrastructural centre that is heavily used by Maltese people irrespective of residence. The number of commuters is 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 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. Furthermore, 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 across the whole population, which is proven time and again through the heated debate raised across the nation regarding any significant change in the architectural, aesthetic, infrastructural or social fabric of the city.

Thus, with the exclusion of tourists, who lie outside the scope of this research, at least five groups emerge on the basis of residence and belonging, all of which have been considered as stakeholders of Valletta 2018 and who have been addressed in this project, namely:

- Persons who identify as being from Valletta (*Beltin*), and who reside in Valletta;
- Persons who identify as being from Valletta (*Beltin*), but do not reside in Valletta;
- Persons who do *not* identify as being from Valletta (*non-Beltin*), but who reside in Valletta (including expatriates);
- Persons who are residents of the Inner Harbour/Greater Valletta area;
- Maltese people in general, who commute to Valletta with different levels of regularity.

A sixth group was added which comprised Maltese persons with a disability, with the available respondents being primarily persons with physical disabilities. This inclusion was considered important for the research project because, although accessibility is not limited to issues related to physical mobility, it soon became clear that the degree of physical accessibility of spaces conditions the degree of social engagement that is possible with those spaces. Furthermore, the richness of the interviews has allowed insights into a wider range of issues than merely physical notions of access and included emotional and socio-environmental concerns. The notion of accessibility was also raised with all the groups so that questions on the subject were asked to all respondents.

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

- a. the effects of the monumentalisation and gentrification of Valletta on the various populations, particularly Valletta residents;
- b. the negotiation of the public aspects of Valletta as the 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 that were identified.

These concerns eventually fed into the four key thematic areas described earlier. Nevertheless, these themes proved to be incomplete without the integration of the dimension of accessibility. The development of this aspect is discussed in more detail in the following sub-section.

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 in particular 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 sought to measure accessibility on several 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 regarding 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 a disability (which includes elements of social accessibility) (Cap 413 of the Laws of Malta), and has a national Commission dedicated to promoting the rights of persons with a disability and their families, while providing them with the necessary assistance and support. This latter Commission, previously the National Commission for Persons with Disability (KNPD), but which has been reformed as the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD), 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 a disability, but to everyone (National Commission for Persons with a Disability, 2011). This wider dimension, particularly concerning elderly people, children and their families, is also addressed in the research by mainstreaming accessibility concerns with all of the community groups.

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 public. Since this research project is limited to the local population, the focus was on geographical accessibility within

the Maltese islands. In this regard, the research takes into consideration the way in which Valletta is easily reachable by public transport, but this occurs in a wider context of a highly car-dependent population.⁵

Financial accessibility required investigation as to whether the financial cost of accessing the Valletta 2018 Programme created any restrictions on participation by the communities involved. However, as the research progressed it became clear that a wider understanding of financial accessibility, also covering the cost of experiencing the city as well as living in it, was needed.

The notion of **linguistic accessibility** covers the ways in which language barriers can have an impact on the accessibility of the Valletta 2018 Programme. Although Malta has three official languages, namely Maltese, English and Maltese Sign Language, linguistic ability in residents (inclusive of Maltese and expatriate residents) is variable, and attention was given to whether the linguistic needs of diverse audiences are adequately satisfied. Issues related to disabilities are also relevant here, given that impairments can limit access to language.

Intellectual accessibility has been defined as “ensuring that visitors and staff can understand any information which [an] organisation provides” (Museums Galleries Scotland, n.d.).

Finally, because accessibility is a social issue in the broader sense of the term, the category of **social accessibility** includes all the other categories to some extent, which may, in turn, present overlaps between them. 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 and socio-economic status.

The theme of accessibility in general and the various forms of accessibility mentioned above in particular informed the research particularly the thematic areas of the accessibility of Valletta as a city and that of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme. However, there was also significant linking with the other two key thematic areas – with urban regeneration being also seen through the lens of Valletta becoming a more accessible space, and with increased accessibility being seen by some respondents as a key part of the legacy of Valletta 2018.

Research choices

This research was carried out through an ethnographic, qualitative approach, based on semi-structured interviews which were intended to provide an in-depth understanding of perspectives from members of the six community groups that were identified, with a view to providing rich descriptive material addressing the concerns, opinions and ideas of the various stakeholders. Ethnographic research aims at *giving an account*, interpreting the meaning of observed behaviour (Agar, 1996, p. 129). The ethnographic approach was selected because it is particularly well-suited to understanding participation and accessibility, given that “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 semi-structured interviews from each of the community groups that were identified – a process which was repeated over a period of four years with a mix of

⁵As per the Transport Statistics issued by the National Statistics Office, the number of vehicles per 1,000 total residents went up to 780 from 770 in 2015. (<https://nso.gov.mt/en/nso/Media/Salient-Points-of-Publications/Pages/Transport-Statistics-2017.aspx>)

new and repeat respondents. This allowed for the collection of comparative data on any changes in perception even on an individual level whilst allowing new perspectives to come forth. The interviews were complemented with participant observation within Valletta and selected events in the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme.

The project was carried out by a team of three researchers, with each individual researcher being assigned two of the community groups. Regular meetings were 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 chosen community groups, respondents were selected through a snowball sampling technique, where the researchers identified persons within the required populations and proceeded to ask the respondents to recommend 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 because 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, throughout the interview process, researchers allowed space for respondents to highlight any other topics that had not been raised by the interviewer, or followed any other emerging lead that may have been of possible interest. This allowed for the consideration of concerns which were raised directly by respondents even if they did not form part of the original set of issues covered by the researchers.

All interviews were held face to face either in the interviewee's residence or in a public place that was convenient to the interviewee, except for some interviews in the case of the disability community group which were conducted via video conferencing or email due to difficulties experienced by the respondent.

Finally, 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 purely 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 foster citizen participation and encourage the sustainable, long-term cultural and social development of the city.

A full list of questions administered to the interviewees may be found in the Appendix at the end of this report.

FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the most salient points emerging from the research conducted between 2015 and 2018, primarily stemming from the semi-structured interviews held with the various community groups that were identified, but also from available literature as well as participant observation carried out in Valletta. This report presents a holistic synthesis of the findings throughout the course of this project and aims primarily to explore the four key themes already referred to, namely:

- Issues related to accessibility and day-to-day life in Valletta;
- The role of Valletta 2018 as a catalyst for urban regeneration, and the impact this has on communal life;
- The level of awareness of the Valletta 2018 Programme and its aims, together with the accessibility of the Programme itself;
- The legacy that respondents feel that Valletta 2018 is likely to leave, or ought to leave.

Valletta – The city and its accessibility

One of the consistent findings throughout this research project is that Valletta is a complex, socially-constructed place which fulfils several roles. Valletta is the political, administrative and cultural centre of Malta and increasingly a commercial and entertainment hub, and yet it also retains the intimacy of a hometown to Valletta residents and the communities and individuals that identify themselves as *Beltin*, regardless of whether they reside in Valletta. This subsection will explore these various narratives that Valletta embodies for different individuals and groups and the engagement that communities have with the city. Furthermore, since accessibility in its various forms is intrinsically linked with the level and quality of engagement with the city, this will also be explored in detail.

Narratives of the city – Capital and home

Anthropologist Jon Mitchell, carrying out fieldwork at the beginning of the last decade amongst the parishioners of the St Paul parish in Valletta (known as the *Pawlina*), noted how the city was widely conceived of through a narrative of “glory, decline [and] rehabilitation”, at a time when Malta’s possible accession to the European Union was a principal subject of national debate (Mitchell 2002). Through the lens of the feast of St Paul in Valletta, Mitchell analyses the paradoxes that characterise Maltese society: the tension between the national and the local, as well as that between, on the one hand, embracing a European identity and modernity, and on the other, the assertion of a distinct, Mediterranean and national identity, and a critique of the values that “Europe” represents.

The paradox between the national and the local that Mitchell found in the feast of St Paul’s Shipwreck is representative of Valletta as a whole. The feast celebrates an event ingrained as a defining moment in the national narrative, and is attended by people from all over Malta, notably by politicians from all political parties. However, as with any other parish feast, it is also related to the intimacy of a local community. Likewise, Valletta often lies at the crossroads between the national and the monumental on the one hand, and the local and intimate on the other. Sites which were previously a central, functional aspect of Valletta society, such as the Covered Market (*is-Suq tal-Belt*) become national projects, all buildings including dwellings are scheduled according to their historical value and new monuments, official and spontaneous, are on the increase. Indeed, an expatriate who has lived in Valletta for several years stated in 2017, “It is my home and I love it, but it is also a capital city”, going on to describe the tension often experienced between the two faces of Valletta.

It has already been noted how according to Mitchell, engagement with Valletta as a capital city is not merely symbolic, but actual. This was confirmed by the current research project. Both *Beltin* and non-*Beltin*, regardless of residence, tended to demonstrate a significant degree of engagement with the city. However, while non-*Beltin* tended to emphasise the historical, architectural, administrative and commercial importance of Valletta, *Beltin* more frequently spoke about its intimate aspect as a place of community, local history, personal memory and nostalgia. Significantly, the only cohort to be somewhat disengaged from Valletta in the initial research carried out in 2015 was the group of respondents with a disability, for reasons that will be discussed further.

This research project was carried out at a time when the impact of several rapid changes to the socio-economic fabric of Valletta (also representative of trends around Malta in general) started becoming visible. These changes will be explored in more detail further on in this report, but include increased commercialisation of spaces, changes to legislation resulting in the liberalisation of the private rent sector, as well as demographic changes. Reacting to these changes, as early as 2015, *Beltin* tended to express a concern with the imminent demise of history, memory and continuity in Valletta, as testified by a number of statements that were collected in the initial cycle of this project such as: "In my opinion, history is dying";¹ "Valletta no longer belongs to the *Beltin*";² and "Many young people just love Valletta as long as football is concerned."³ One expatriate resident in Valletta also added 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."

The notion of "home" should not be dismissed simply as a romanticised notion – indeed, the concept of "home" is a central social concept and has been defined in many ways, including as "where one best knows oneself" (Rapport and Dawson 1998) – where "best" means "most", even if not always "happiest" (Rapport and Overing 2000, 158). Thus it is important to understand the ongoing changes in Valletta, especially where significant changes in the social fabric and residence patterns have a direct impact on personal and social well-being. Despite this sense of transience, the use of the term "home" to describe the city remained significant and persistent throughout the lifetime of the research project. In fact, in the whole research period, *Beltin*, both resident and non-resident, tended to describe Valletta as "home";⁴ and as a place which they feel compelled to live in or visit regularly even if they do not have family living within the city. This sentiment was in no way restricted to older *Beltin*, who understandably often display a strong sense of romantic nostalgia. Rather, one *Belti* who is in his thirties and has lived abroad for long stretches, as well as in other towns in Malta, reported that Valletta gives him a unique sense of solidity:

"Valletta is the only place I feel comfortable in. It feels like the most real – concrete, as opposed to transitional – place I have lived in. It exists in so many people's minds. In-betweenness is such a part of my narrative – but Valletta gives me something to hold on to."

Despite the impact of the processes of rapid urban regeneration that have been catalysed by Valletta 2018, as well as by other convergent political and economic processes, Valletta retains this sense of "home" for many *Beltin*, and even to non-*Beltin* who have adopted Valletta as their home.

¹ "Il-history qed naraha tmut."

² "Il-Belt m'ghadhiex tal-Beltin."

³ "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, especially given that other respondents have identified the support for the Valletta Football Club as being one of the binding factors amongst *Beltin*, resident and not.

⁴ 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").

An example of how the notion of “home” ties into personal and social well-being comes from one respondent who mentioned how during a difficult period in her life, Valletta remained a touchstone, a place that remained a constant, where she could rely on her family, friends and community network. Others talked about how Valletta is their “life” and explained how community networks have given them support, often allowing them stability in turbulent times, including managing ageing and chronic illness, recovering from addiction and dealing with personal grief. *Beltin* respondents were particularly concerned about elderly people being pushed out of their communities. This relationship between place, community and personal and social well-being, which is concisely expressed in the word “home”, has sadly not been incorporated into policy-making, although it clearly has a direct impact on people’s quality of life and therefore should be integrated into all decisions related to urban regeneration in Valletta and elsewhere.

Geographical accessibility and transportation

As has been discussed earlier in the section on Methodology, 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).

There are several levels on which accessibility can be analysed, including physical, social, geographical, financial, linguistic and intellectual accessibility. However, it is typical to find that any form of hindrance to accessibility contributes to another. Thus, obstacles to physical accessibility may hinder a person’s participation in cultural life and thereby contribute to social and intellectual accessibility. They could also present a hurdle to finding gainful employment and therefore place limits on financial accessibility. In the following discussion, therefore, accessibility will be discussed holistically rather than separating it into its separate constituents. However, for ease of discussion, this part will deal specifically with concerns about accessibility in terms of geography and transportation, particularly about how people from outside Valletta can access the city. The following discussion will focus on how issues of accessibility within Valletta can impact one’s engagement with the city and the cultural programme.

Geographically, Valletta was generally seen to be reachable, although certain limitations were noted. As a geographical space, Valletta remains well connected by public transport, being an important hub of the public transportation system and having been given improved connectivity through the ferry service in both the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour following agreements between the Valletta 2018 Foundation and service providers in 2015. Clear information on getting to Valletta is also provided on the Foundation’s website and in the literature that has been distributed to the public. The information screens outside and around Valletta have also been mentioned as a good step, especially by the disability cohort who felt that the provision of clear information was one factor that made the city more accessible.

Despite this, car dependency and demand for parking remain recurrent concerns, especially amongst non-Valletta residents. One of the reasons for this is that public transportation services are often time-bound and this restricts the possibility of participation in evening and night-time events. Respondents mentioned the variability of bus timetables especially to peripheral areas of Malta, as well as the Upper Barrakka lift which closes at 9:00 pm from November to May. The Floriana Park and Ride facility also closes at 9:00 pm. Concerns about public transportation and parking shortages were particularly expressed by respondents with physical mobility limitations and those with young children.

One respondent who is a young mother said: "From my own perspective, parking is the main sore point. There needs to be a place where you can park your car and then catch a shuttle – which needs to be an affordable service - that takes you inside the city. The Park and Ride service finishes at 9:00 pm so evening events are cut short. At least, there is a nice atmosphere now, even in the evening. I no longer feel apprehensive going to Valletta."

Overcoming fear-based exclusion is a theme that will be explored further in the subsection on urban regeneration. However, it is to be noted that according to several respondents, increased commercial activity has made Valletta, especially certain areas such as Strait Street, a safer place to be as respondents no longer feel the need to avoid these places in the evening. In this case, the respondents are deploying a more socially-informed understanding of accessibility. Valletta in general, and certain areas in particular were often stigmatised, and many people perceived these spaces as unsafe especially after dark. Commercialisation, however, has encouraged larger amounts of people to feel safe and access these spaces, even though in terms of perceived safety, some areas were still mentioned as places to be avoided after dark "to avoid problems".⁵

In terms of car-based traffic, respondents residing in Valletta observed how incoming vehicles largely pass through St Paul Street and to a lesser extent through St Mark Street, creating congestion and restricting walkability in these areas. This has also been a concern of business owners, especially those having restaurants and shops in St Paul Street, as they feel that at times the street itself becomes inaccessible and that this has an adverse impact on their enterprise. Likewise, concerns about unrestricted delivery hours in specific areas of the city were expressed by several Valletta residents and business owners.

Accessibility and its impact on engagement with the city

At the beginning of this research project, all the community groups interviewed showed a significant level of engagement with the city, except for the cohort of persons with a disability. Barriers to the various forms of accessibility are strongly interlinked and thus, it was noted that difficulty in accessing Valletta as a physical space, in turn, limited the level of engagement that individuals have with the city as a social place and consequently with the Valletta 2018 Programme. As a result, when this research project started in 2015, the persons with a disability interviewed showed a marked lack of engagement with both the city and the cultural programme that contrasted starkly with all the other cohorts.

In fact, in the baseline study, engagement with Valletta for most respondents with a disability was virtually restricted to the Valletta Waterfront as the city itself was seen as very inaccessible.⁶ Interviewees in this group had little sentimental engagement with the city and rarely visited Valletta for entertainment or for cultural activities. They generally went to the city only to purchase clothes, noting that they would often have to be lifted into the shop and would then choose clothes to try at home because the changing facilities would not be accessible.

Accessibility issues can affect various aspects of a person's social life, including interpersonal relationships, work and cultural participation. This is indicated in the following quotes from 2017.

"We went to eat at a restaurant which was not accessible and I had to just go home and leave my friends for the night." (Respondent with a disability, 28, male)

⁵ *"biex tevita l-fastidju"*.

⁶ The Valletta Waterfront is an area which is a commercial and entertainment area alongside the Grand Harbour and very close to Valletta but outside the actual perimeter of the city.

"In my case - I use a catheter so I do not particularly need to use facilities. But what I can tell you is that there are some establishments which, albeit accessible, offered amenities that are not up to par to what we deserve or require." (Respondent with a disability, 28, male)

"There are certain places where I feel really included and others where I feel totally left out, literally and metaphorically. What is the message here? Am I not entitled to have fun; to meet people of my own age; maybe to find love?" (Respondent with a disability, 28, male)

"At work, the lift was out of order and I had to ask them to relocate the meeting as I could not access the meeting room, and they did. A bit embarrassing." (Respondent with a disability, 48, female)

"To access culture - you have to be in a good financial position to do it. Access requirements incur additional costs and to have these regularly met is next to impossible for most of us." (Respondent with a disability, 48, female)

Restrictions on accessibility generate a sense of detachment with Valletta and the Valletta 2018 Programme. Respondents with a disability often talked about how the lack of accessibility provisions in commercial establishments, for instance, made them feel "unwelcome" in the city. Incidentally, this has an effect also on Valletta residents who have often talked about being "besieged in [their] own homes" because of improper parking practices and noise levels amongst other factors. One respondent, who is a Valletta resident, talked about how when a family member had to move out of Valletta because of mobility issues, she developed a sense of resentment to her home city which had, as it were, excluded a close relative.

Indeed, accessibility is not a concern that affects only persons with a disability and questions about accessibility were raised with all cohorts. Several respondents, for instance, sympathised with elderly people who had to access Valletta. On this score, it was noted that: "There should be lifts or escalators everywhere. I don't know how the aged or persons with disability are supposed to get around the city. And none of us is getting any younger". At times, it was the widespread restoration and construction frenzy within the city that was seen as an obstacle to accessibility. One Valletta resident, for instance, complained particularly about the number of cranes that are allowed, often resulting in the blocking of access.

Most of the built infrastructure of Valletta was put in place before contemporary accessibility standards were in force, and it was widely recognised in each cycle that this creates systemic difficulties to access. As one of the respondents from the group of resident *Beltin* put it, "in Valletta, you are never working with a blank canvas". This respondent had, in fact, been involved in a project related to a building in Valletta. Initially, it did not meet certain accessibility requirements because the building was not wheelchair friendly – but the building itself was located in a narrow street with steps.

Indeed, respondents with a disability found problems because of Valletta's topography, the city having been built on a hill and therefore characterised by steep slopes and steps in many streets. They also noted that 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, respondents have consistently 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. Museums and historical sites,

too, presented a challenge for wheelchair users, with very little information being offered to persons with sensory impairments.

This lack of accessibility invariably has a negative impact on cultural participation. In 2015, most of the respondents in the disability cohort never went to the theatre or any other performance, mostly as it is not physically accessible. At least two areas which are central to the Valletta 2018 Programme, namely Strait Street and the Old Abattoir (*il-Biċċerija*) area, were indicated by respondents as being largely inaccessible to anybody who is not able-bodied and the researchers have observed instances in which even the electric taxis that operate around the city have refused to drive to these areas.⁷ It is also worth noting that at least 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.

Despite the detachment found in the initial year, the research carried out in 2016 and 2017 showed that although persons with a disability were still pointing out how Valletta was very far from being accessible, there was a marked feeling among this cohort that the situation has improved. Valletta 2018 was mentioned as a main contributor to this development. Progress was noted at several cultural venues which have become wheelchair accessible, such as Pjazza Teatru Rjal, a performance venue inaugurated in 2013 on the site of the former Royal Opera House. It was also observed with satisfaction that the Valletta 2018 Foundation commenced a working relationship with the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) and that this augured well for making Valletta and the Valletta 2018 Programme more accessible.

In fact, contrary to 2015, respondents from the disability cohort in 2016 said that they would participate more in cultural life if accessibility to cultural spaces became more reliable. Two respondents attended the *Notte Bianca* and said that they enjoyed it greatly, but had to stick to events held in Republic Street itself, as most museums and palaces were not fully accessible. One of these respondents also attended the Valletta Pageant of the Seas and stated that he would consider moving to Valletta if it became more accessible. This sentiment persisted in 2017 when several respondents stated that although more could be done, accessibility within Valletta has come a long way, especially considering that it is somewhat limited by the existing topographical and built fabric of Valletta.

This distinct optimism registered at this phase of research is reflected in the statements below, taken from interviews carried out in 2017 with respondents with a disability.

“I have noticed a societal change in attitude. I would like for disabled people to be seen as ordinary citizens within Valletta, not disabled people who are being included. I would like to see an attitude that is positive and based on acceptance. ... In the last year I have seen a gradual acceptance and more inclusiveness in these events. There is more acceptance that disabled people are included - and they are interested in what they are doing not just because they are disabled. Changes are happening. Disabled people are trying to make more of an effort.” (Respondent with a disability, 48, female)

⁷The Old Abattoir (*il-Biċċerija*) area lies in a part of Valletta which is only accessible through streets that are steep, and as indicated above, it was observed that several electric taxis refuse to drive to the area because of the steep slopes. Regarding Strait Street, reports of the inaccessibility of this area was a commonly reported experience among the cohort of persons with a disability, and this is due to a combination of factors including the fact that the narrowness of the street make it impossible to reach directly by car, and the streets leading to Strait Street can also be quite steep. In addition, the tables and furniture placed outside by entertainment establishments make the street difficult to navigate for people who are in a wheelchair or have other impairments that restrict physical mobility. A fact often mentioned by respondents was also the lack of accessible facilities in most of these catering or entertainment establishments, or even public toilets in the area itself after a specific time.

“Eventually accessibility will be taken care of. Valletta will be for everyone, disabled, old, foreign, local, residents, non-residents. ... Valletta’s dynamism will keep coming to the fore.” (Respondent with a disability, 41, male)

In these years, an increased demand for accessibility as a right was also expressed. For instance, in the 2016 cycle of research, although it was appreciated that many buildings in Valletta are historical edifices and that this poses limitations on what interventions are possible, respondents stated that there are innovative ways to make such spaces accessible, for instance by using chairlifts or temporary ramps. One of the respondents noted that regarding accessibility, Valletta ranked poorly when compared to other European capitals, which displayed creativity in the way that old, historically-sensitive places were made accessible.

“We need to be more creative when we plan, or when we do an uplift or an upgrade. Architecture is an art, and this implies creativity - but I rarely have seen much creativity in making buildings and spaces accessible! ... We need the will, the political and social will, to make this our focus, to make sure that contractors do not just do the bare minimum.” (Respondent with a disability, 41, male)

This opinion persisted in 2017, where some respondents voiced scepticism that there are times in which Valletta’s historical infrastructure is used as an excuse to delay initiatives that can make Valletta more accessible.

“At times this is justified as it is truly difficult to provide accessibility, but more often than not, there is just inertia and lack of initiative to really include us.” (Respondent with a disability, 28, male)

“I do understand the challenges of working around a historical city, and to ‘uglify’ the city with certain amendments - but something surely needs to be done.” (Respondent with a disability, 32, male)

In 2018, respondents were even less willing to accept these limitations as intrinsic and insurmountable, pointing to such cases as the Museum of Archaeology, which is fully accessible, as an example of good practice. Such respondents want to see policies being put in place to make Valletta even more universally accessible.

“I do not understand this. The excuse that this is a historical place, and that steps cannot be taken to make them accessible, is total bull. The pavement, in general, is always fixable. Just because a place has historical value, it does not mean you cannot make it accessible. I say that since the place has historical value, we should be all the more intelligent in the way we provide accessibility, as this place ought to be used and enjoyed by all.” (Respondent with a disability, 40, male)

As in previous years, respondents with a disability in 2018 shared anecdotes in which they were excluded from participating in activities, often because public buildings were inaccessible.

“Europe House, the premises of the European Commission Representation in Malta, is another charade. The stairlift does not take all kinds of wheelchairs! My wife had her

graduation there and I had to give it a miss as I did not feel like making a fool of myself. Same with the premises of Identity Malta - it is not accessible.”

The newly opened MUŻA, Malta’s new national-community art museum and one of the flagship projects of Valletta 2018, was seen by many of the respondents as being a test of commitment towards improved accessibility. It is noted that at the time the 2018 interviews were conducted, MUŻA had not yet officially opened, so most respondents with a disability simply limited themselves to expressing their hope that it would be accessible. In a private conversation with Sandro Debono, Senior Curator and MUŻA Project Lead, however, it was established that accessibility has been integral to the museum’s plan. Specifically, the MUŻA Project included a redesign of the premises to introduce ramps and reduce the number of stairs, the inclusion of wheelchair access, lifts, subtitled video productions without audio commentary (intended to neutralise the distinction between persons with and without hearing impairments) and plans to provide staff with training to conduct tours for visually impaired visitors.

Commercial establishments also prove to be difficult for persons with a disability. A report commissioned by the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability, which has not yet been published but has been covered by the media, indicates that only 30 out of a sample of 400 commercial establishments in Valletta were considered adequately accessible (Falzon 2018).⁸

These difficulties were also reflected in this research project. On this count, one respondent said: “I remember going to Valletta recently to see the opening of the Triton Fountain, after which I went to a restaurant. However, after all the effort in the world to get there, I realised it was not accessible for wheelchair users. I have no idea why they do not cater to us. All it takes is a ramp, and we are ready to spend money there! CRPD monitors this, but unfortunately, certain pubs and entertainment areas of a certain small size are not obliged to be technically accessible. Local councils and the government should provide incentives to these places to provide ramps. I have never witnessed any normal shopper not venture into a shop just because the shop happens to be tiny. It should be the same for us wheelchair users.” (Respondent with a disability, 40, male)

Nevertheless, the small size of many commercial establishments, as well as the fact that toilet facilities are seldom found on the ground floor, presents obstacles which may be insurmountable for small entrepreneurs in Valletta to resolve in isolation. One respondent who runs a restaurant in a very compact space said: “I would like to make my restaurant more accessible – after all that would bring me more customers, but you’ve seen my restaurant. It’s not only wheelchair inaccessible – it’s even pushchair inaccessible – that’s simply what the space can offer.”

According to some respondents, on certain occasions accessibility was restricted due to aesthetic choices, with a number of respondents pointing to Triton Square as an example of this. While the similarly coloured steps create a sense of open space and visual continuity, it was also very difficult for people with visual impairments to navigate these steps. One of the respondents, who is himself visually impaired, said: “You don’t even need to be blind to trip on those stairs and fall flat on your face.”

Thus, from the responses received from respondents with a disability throughout the cycles of this research, it appears that the situation of accessibility has come full circle. In 2015, most respondents from this cohort expressed feeling excluded and unengaged with both the city and the cultural

⁸ The study in question targeted four areas in Valletta, namely Republic Street, Merchants Street, St John Square and Freedom Square (Falzon 2018).

programme. This was followed in 2016 and 2017 by two years of cautious optimism and increasing engagement, leading to 2018, the final year of the ECoC. Respondents feel disappointed that Valletta is still very inaccessible, in a way reflecting the original concerns of 2015. However, what has changed is that in 2018 this cohort shows itself to be far more strongly engaged with Valletta and willing to demand accessibility as a right. One respondent said that: "There is still a long way to go. We are far from making Valletta truly accessible. However, we have to be the ones to push for this." (Respondent with a disability, 42, male)

Walking the city

One emerging theme in the research was Valletta's walkability. Several respondents mentioned that Valletta is a walkable city, or at least has the potential to be so. There is a certain skill in finding one's way around Valletta. People, especially those living in the city, either have these skills or need to develop them to function well. A resident *Belti* who had spent several years living abroad as well as in other Maltese towns described how living in Valletta, he had to learn to weave his way through tourists and café tables on the streets. Likewise, one of the expatriate respondents who has been living in Valletta for a few months talked about how he is still in the process of making the shift from doing his shopping in supermarkets, as he is used to doing in his home country, to discovering a network of smaller shops around his area through which he can source his needs. The same respondent also wondered who is more frustrated, or who is "braver" – pedestrians or drivers. However, he sees Valletta as essentially a walkable city and anticipates that the problems caused by the mix between vehicles and pedestrians would clear up if all parking is moved outside Valletta, with concessions.

Conceptually, this dynamic recalls the way in which Michel de Certeau describes the city as a set of urban practices and a locus of memory, caught in a dialectic between *strategies* and *tactics*. For de Certeau, *strategies* are the wider systems of organisation created by governments, institutions and centres of power. *Tactics*, on the other hand, are the myriad ways in which the people of the city, the "walkers" or *Wandersmänner*, use and navigate the streets. De Certeau notes that because of the technical and scientific logic deployed when regeneration initiatives are applied to urban spaces, "the restoration economy tends to separate places from their practitioners" (de Certeau et al., 1998:139).

Valletta resident author, Dr Josephine Burden, in her presentation "Process, Outcomes and the City: Reflections of a Valletta Resident" (Burden 2018), given at Sharing the Legacy, the fifth annual conference by Valletta 2018, explored the importance of the tactical use of pathways, public buildings and routes, where she looks at the alternatives for "the flaneur" who "arrives at a jumble of parked cars and motorbikes cluttering the footpath." In the case of MUŻA, Burden expressed a hope that people walking in the city could use this space as an access between two key areas in Valletta, namely Jean de Valette Square and Merchants Street, perhaps stopping for a coffee at the museum itself, making this cultural space part of the living, walking routes that people use.

Burden, who kindly allowed her work to be quoted in this report, relates her joy at finding that the Valletta campus of the University of Malta had restored a connecting passage leading from two main streets, namely Merchants Street to St Paul Street. Particularly, she noted that: "The space became a delightful linking haven away from traffic with occasional exhibitions to raise awareness of the University as a cultural institution engaging with the local community. The University became part of my cultural map and during the week, I walked through with my groceries and greeted the security people on the desk. Here was a cultural and academic institution that was part of the community and part of my life."

However, this was short-lived as the author was told that the site was a “prestigious institution” and that she could not just walk through it and would have to use alternative routes. Burden explained her disappointment at this when she said: “My sadness is about an opportunity missed, a chance lost to create Valletta as a city where cultural institutions work with the local community to develop pedestrian routes that are safe and pleasant and build our social capital. Instead, the privileged world of the academic is separated from the everyday life of a working city. A pity.”

Despite topographical limitations, Valletta still provides an array of services within a contained area of land, has an urban plan that was intended to make the city accessible primarily on foot and has several restrictions on vehicular access. Burden’s reflection could be a provocation for planning initiatives to bridge the gap, following de Certeau (1984), between “strategies” – particularly the control and organisation of space - and “tactics” – the everyday practices of people moving about. This would mean taking steps to encourage the interweaving of the routes that walkers take with the havens and repositories of culture. Such initiatives, as indicated by Burden’s anecdote, may involve infrastructural changes, such as the opening of a passage linking two main streets. However, as also reflected in the experience, making such spaces accessible often requires authorities and institutions to remove social and conceptual barriers.

Local concerns in the national capital

Mention needs to be made of the recurrent concerns noted by respondents, particularly by Valletta residents, which have been voiced throughout the lifetime of the project, and which must conceptually be framed within a situation where issues of national importance all too often overshadow local concerns. The common themes, in this case, are refuse collection and cleanliness, street infrastructure, parking and abandoned buildings.

When it came to **refuse collection**, interviewees took issue with collection times and with the piles of black bags that accumulate at collection points. These were noted even by visitors to Valletta, who found them unsightly and unpleasant. One Valletta resident, originally from the UK, however, remarked that collection in Valletta is actually much more frequent than in her home country, where it is carried out on a weekly basis.

It was also generally felt that there were weaknesses in the **street infrastructure**, particularly with pavements that needed to be fixed, as well as potholes and the occasional issues with the sewage system.

The issue of **parking** is twofold. Whilst commuters find it challenging to find parking every day, for the Valletta residents (*Beltin* and non-*Beltin* alike), the primary problem is lack of access caused by inconsiderate parking, especially if they are using a pushchair, pram or shopping wheellie bag. In one case which was mentioned by a Valletta resident, a neighbour who has an impairment which impacts his ability to walk frequently finds problems entering his home because the entrance is often blocked by a parked car. The same respondent said: “Not only do we have few pavements you can walk on – but the ones we have are used as a parking space for cars.”

The topic of **abandoned buildings** was also a recurrent theme, although this decreased towards the end of the research as many buildings had been bought up, often to be converted into catering establishments or accommodation. *Beltin* in particular, whether residents or not, tended to use the metaphor of the city’s vitality – *il-ħajja tal-Belt* – and saw abandoned buildings as being an affront to

this sense of thriving urban life. Towards the beginning of this research project, investment by foreigners and the restoration of buildings to be used as boutique hotels was, in fact, often seen as a lesser evil, being preferable to leaving buildings in an abandoned state, but causing concern on the long-term effects of such trends. One commuter, who feels very attached to Valletta, stated: "The main problem is what to do with the old buildings, to make the city more liveable. Otherwise, it can end up with lots of empty gaping holes. So how do we bring it back to use without knocking buildings down? How do we make it a living city?"

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 the government as well as other authorities and/or entities. They have often voiced resentment at the fact that such changes often take place without adequate **consultation with local communities**. A number of Valletta 2018 initiatives, however, were a stark exception to this rule. These include the MUŻA project which directly involved people from Valletta, in line with its approach of "community curatorship".⁹ This project was also good 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 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. Other projects which involved local communities directly were two Valletta 2018 projects, namely "*Il-Festa l-Kbira*" and "*Ġewwa Barra*", as well as the renovation of the Old Abattoir and its repurposing as the Valletta Design Cluster, all of which will be discussed in more detail later. Although, as elaborated further, it is felt that Valletta 2018 could have included further community-based projects, through the above-mentioned initiatives, an example has been set which ought to be followed more widely.

Urban regeneration and its impact on communal life

At the beginning of this research in 2015, Valletta had already seen a substantial amount of commercialisation and urban regeneration. This primarily included the opening of an unprecedented number of catering and entertainment establishments and the restoration of buildings, most often for use as tourist accommodation, notably boutique hotels. Respondents at the time showed a general concern with the preservation of the character of Valletta, which was consistent across the community groups. However, the topics of Valletta's emerging nightlife and the proliferation of boutique hotels were subjects on which there was divergence.

In the baseline study of 2015, for instance, *Beltin* respondents saw boutique hotels and entertainment establishments as a factor that contributed to the revival of Valletta by giving it back something of the social importance and glamour that it enjoyed in the past. They also provided significant business opportunities to the owners, a substantial number of whom are themselves from Valletta. 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". However, *Beltin* also complained that these processes have pushed prices up and consequently made it more difficult, if not impossible, for young *Beltin* to buy property in Valletta and live there. This was also being made more complex by other existent factors, such as the fact that many buildings in Valletta require extensive restoration and often do not cater to current homebuyers' requirements.

⁹ 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 in relation to the MUŻA project. This invitation made the following observations possible and greatly enriched the findings of this report.

At the time, some *Beltin* voiced concern about nightlife in the area, with their main reason being the loss of the city's character, while others were concerned about possible nuisance to residents. One interviewee criticised the revival of Strait Street as being simply an imposition of the standard nightlife model upon Valletta without regard for context. Specifically, the respondent noted that: "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 society there. We'll make some money out of it but will it rip the identity of Valletta?"¹⁰

However, these concerns were certainly not unanimous. One of the respondents 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. In particular, the respondent said: "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]."¹¹

By 2016 and even more so in 2017, all the community groups appeared to have had an overarching realisation that the fabric of Valletta's communal life was changing at a rapid rate, with more respondents expressing concern about increases in property and rental prices, leading several interviewees to state that Valletta will eventually become a city in which only wealthy foreigners and some well-off Maltese can reasonably afford to live. This opinion was frequently voiced with a sense of helplessness with respect to Valletta's long-term future in the face of market forces. Non-*Beltin* who either lived in Valletta or aspired to do so also echoed the sentiment that Valletta was becoming increasingly difficult to reside in and described how their initial enthusiasm of wanting to live in the city was eroded by the day-to-day inconveniences or overwhelming affordability issues related to doing so.

Respondents who were living in private rental property, or had close relatives who were, were understandably the most concerned. A non-resident *Belti*, for instance, talked about how his elderly mother was informed by her landlord that rent on her Valletta apartment will be increased to an amount which she cannot reasonably afford and how this is likely to result in her eviction from a community she has lived in for decades.

"Unless people live in a government rental, Valletta residents are facing dramatic increases in rent. My late father had never wanted to buy property because, at the time, rents were low. Now they have increased the rents a lot, and they want her to move out because they want the flat to rent out to foreigners."

This situation has arisen because of several factors, including changes in rent laws, increased foreign investment, the regeneration of areas such as Strait Street and the proliferation of boutique hotels and other tourist accommodation, as well as the spotlight cast on the city through the title of the European Capital of Culture. The respondent in question sees this heading towards a peak, after which momentum will be lost and this will be followed by a collapse, which to him will be a final blow to Valletta's resident community.

"When Valletta faced a decline in the past, there were still people living there. This time, the residents will be gone. Few people in Valletta have their own property ... and since government

¹⁰ Most of this quote was said in English, with the exception of the last sentence which was originally "Se *ndahflu* sold, *imma* will it rip the identity of Valletta?"

¹¹ "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*."

has stated that it will not be interfering with the rental market, I can't see a solution. Valletta has been all frills, but her spirit is dying because people are leaving and there are other problems: traffic, pavements in disrepair, parking problems – they are letting Valletta die.”

Property owners in areas that are being considered commercially exploitable were only marginally less worried and reported feeling pressured to sell and move out. In fact, respondents have indicated that it is not only financial considerations that have made living in Valletta difficult. The respondent above talked about how noise pollution and extensions of entertainment facilities have created a disturbance to residents and that in conjunction with other difficulties “one ends up deciding that one might just as well leave Valletta”. A Valletta resident stated:

“Certain areas of Valletta are already dying. Strait Street is killing off the residential area around it. I know of someone who bought two flats between St Albert’s school and the *Tico Tico* area in Strait Street. They are now for sale because he realised that no one can live there any more. In the morning there is noise from the school and delivery vans. In the evening, noise from the entertainment and diners.”

Another respondent has stated that she is afraid of being pushed out of her home because a property tycoon, who has been known to aggressively purchase Valletta property, lives in her neighbourhood. She describes the possible future of Valletta as: “One large boutique hotel if they manage to attract enough *crème de la crème* society members who are willing to pay the price”. This business model, she observes, depends on people coming to see Valletta’s particularities, which they themselves are killing off – “so it is a cannibalistic model that will eat itself. ... Alternatively, if Malta’s reputation deteriorates and foreigners start to leave, Valletta will become a liveable place. But that means that things have to get a lot worse before they get better.”

Another resident, who is also a property owner in an area considered desirable, confirmed that pressure is made on property owners and tenants alike to move out, saying that: “The balance lies always in favour of businesses – there are holiday flats even in the *Biččerija* (Old Abattoir) area now!”¹² Like other respondents before him, this person believes that only government can bring significant policy change and disagrees with activists who claim that such change can be carried out solely through civic action. According to this respondent, “we need government policy to be more resident friendly and less aggressively pro-business.”

A young Valletta resident stated that: “If current trends continue, there won’t be any people living in Valletta any more. Up to now, I could only afford to live here because I shared the rent with co-lessees. I fear Valletta 2018 will bring more of the same effects that have already happened: high rents; change of use from residence to commercial, unaffordability for *Beltin* and Maltese. I will probably no longer afford to live in Valletta and that would make me very sad.”

A resident *Belti* respondent who is involved in real estate specializing in Valletta property paradoxically synthesises his personal love for Valletta with his business acumen and ability to appraise Valletta’s property market. Although he is capable of compartmentalizing his sentiments and his eye for profit, he acknowledges that living in Valletta can be difficult.

¹²The Old Abattoir, now being repurposed as the Valletta Design cluster, was the heart of an area which was considered particularly dilapidated.

"Some very well-known families are selling out. They don't care anymore about Valletta – and I can't blame them entirely. As a *Belti* I can't say anything against Valletta but there are problems of (availability of) parking, dilapidated property and (lack of) open spaces."¹³

This has led to some of the respondents quoted above describing Valletta as "a fragile old lady who needs a lot of TLC" or "a bit like Frankenstein's monster – being patched here and there but ultimately not having a soul, or at least its soul is dying". As anthropologist Robert Redfield (1960, 59) said: "As soon as our attention turns from a community as a body of houses and tools and institutions to the states of mind of particular people, we are turning to the exploration of something immensely complex and difficult to know. But it is humanity, in its inner and more private form; it is, in the most demanding sense, the stuff of community."

Indeed, what these respondents meant by the "soul" or "life" of the city in the above quotations is somewhat different from what had been described using the same terms in 2015, where the concept of the city's vitality was related principally to commercial activity and to vacant buildings being filled. Following 2016, these concerns were overshadowed by the more pressing issues of Valletta remaining a liveable city and having a sustainable social fabric, which was also reflected in the chosen theme for the Valletta 2018 Fourth International Conference held in 2017, namely that of "Living Cities, Liveable Spaces". The response of *Beltin* and Valletta residents generally tends to privilege the communal aspects of living in Valletta. Interestingly, as the research progressed, this extended even to non-*Beltin* and expatriate Valletta residents who have said that one of the reasons for living in Valletta is the feeling that there is still a palpable sense of community.

Valorising communal aspects of city life is clearly not reducible to a case of nostalgia nurtured by older persons, as even a sixteen-year-old respondent described how Valletta's social aspect was something which she felt was central to her life.

"In Valletta, I could call my cousin from across the street – you can't really do that in other places as people would look at you as if you are doing something wrong. ... Valletta is where I can fully be who I am."

Another respondent, an expatriate woman married to a Maltese person who has now lived in Valletta for many years and is well integrated into the community said:

"Gentrification is an issue as the sense of community I love can disappear. Foreign and local investors do not become part of the community. They are only in it for profit."¹⁴ (35, female)

Two resident *Beltin* put it the following way:

"This emphasis on the entertainment industry is symptomatic of a retrograde mentality – regenerating a place doesn't have to mean pushing people out." (*Belti* resident, 57, male)

¹³"Laqmijiet kbar qed ibiegħu. They don't care any more about Valletta – u ma ntihomx tort kompletament. Bħala *Belti* ma nistax ngħid kontra l-Belt imma hemm problemi ta' parking, dilapidated property, open spaces."

¹⁴This quote appears to be referring specifically to foreigners who invest in Valletta property. It needs to be borne in mind that the statement quoted was being made by a person who is an expatriate herself. Also, one other respondent stated that: "It is true that some foreigners do not live here for long but others do and try to integrate. I am organising some outings and half of the small group that gathers is made up of foreign residents."

“There’s a feeling that financial well-being is the only form of well-being, there is no pursuit of beauty or spirituality, but we need to look beyond this amazing economic growth to which we have all submitted.” (*Belti* resident, 35, male)

In 2018, concerns about the lack of affordable housing across the country, together with the need to control irregular and illegal practices related to the rental sector, led the national government to publish a White Paper for public consultation in October 2018, proposing mandatory minimum leases and financial incentives for contracts longer than a year as two possible solutions to the instability of the private rental market (Parliamentary Secretariat for Social Accommodation 2018). It is noted that the proposed reforms exclude leases negotiated prior to 1995 and “luxury properties”.¹⁵

The White Paper seeks to protect the interests of both landlords and tenants and is strongly informed by an economically liberal discourse. Although the explanatory booklet concedes the possibility of rent-capping by government should there be a practice of purposefully unaffordable rises being imposed by landlords (Parliamentary Secretariat for Social Accommodation 2018, 33), the White Paper generally steers away from direct price control, and proposes that “properly informed State intervention in the PRS (private rented sector) should not threaten market confidence, especially as landlords themselves stand to gain with a more stabilised environment” (Parliamentary Secretariat for Social Accommodation 2018, 6).

In this year, concern about the displacement of Valletta residents who are forced to seek cheaper accommodation in other localities was voiced by respondents from all cohorts. One respondent from the disability cohort, for instance, said: “It is happening. There are people who have lived in Valletta for a long time and cannot buy in the area. Foreigners are coming in and buying up properties. This is bad. It displaces people. The property then sits empty while local families who have lived in Valletta all their lives have to move out – that is terrible. It is sad for Valletta as the prices go up, and the younger generations cannot afford it, it will create a deserted place once again, and the vibrancy will be gone.” (Respondent with a disability, 49, female)

Other respondents emphasised the displacement of residents as part of the loss of character or heritage of the city. In particular, it was noted that: “Development is eroding the historical capital aspect of the city - the *Bicċerija* (the Old Abattoir), the *Suq tal-Belt* (the Covered Market) are all lost. There are some areas of Valletta which need to be taken care of, such as areas near St Elmo. But this need for development must be balanced, managed, so as not to lose the soul of the city, as I believe is happening right now. We do not value history that much, or heritage to be precise. We are more into commercialisation and business. The balance is not on the side of heritage, preservation and history.” (Respondent from the Inner Harbour area, 27, male)

Understandably, these concerns are felt far more strongly by *Beltin* themselves. The respondent whose mother faces possible eviction from her private rental reiterated the situation in 2018, saying that: “What’s happening in Valletta is that it is getting depopulated, while boutique hotels and other commercial enterprises are opening. You need commerce but you also need residents to keep a city alive. A city is made of its people – we are not talking about a necropolis, a tourist resort or an industrial estate.”

One of the respondents who until the previous year lived in Valletta with his parents, but had to move out of the city when making the decision to live with his partner, was more cynical, stating that, “money

¹⁵ 1995 is the year which saw the enactment of Act No. XXXI of 1995, which may be cited as the Housing Laws Amendment Act, and which was effectively a liberalisation of the rent market whereby new leases entered into would be controlled solely by the lease agreement and no further protective laws.

which could have helped people was frittered away, and in effect the lasting legacy has been speeding up the touristification of the city and the expulsion of its people.”

The increase in commercial activity, particularly boutique hotels and tourist accommodation on the one hand, and the proliferation of catering establishments on the other is another topic that was mentioned especially by Valletta residents. In both cases, respondents still tended to be ambivalent, welcoming the increased activity especially if they are themselves business owners, but also lamenting the disturbance that is invariably caused. This was sometimes encapsulated by respondents in the terse Maltese idioms: “*Thobb haġa u tobġhod oħra*” (“You love one thing and hate another”, i.e. there are positive and negative points to everything) and “*Il-progress rigress*” (“Progress is regress”, i.e. progress always has its disadvantages).

In the case of boutique hotels and tourist accommodation especially, apart from the annoyance created by the construction and restructuring works required, respondents in 2018 were more keenly concerned than ever before that these are contributing to the displacement of the resident population. Some responses from Valletta residents and non-resident *Beltin*, showing a variety of reactions to this phenomenon, include the following:

“The creation of boutique hotels means that large buildings, which most people couldn’t afford, are restored and made beautiful – but this does not justify the amount of traffic and garbage that the people of Valletta have to put up with.” (Resident *Beltija*, 41, female, working in the education sector)

“It is not true that boutique hotels are only taking up spaces that are not within the budget of the average person because they are buying up even small spaces and after all, many of the large *palazzi* that are being turned into boutique hotels used to be split up into smaller spaces.” (Non-resident *Belti*, 42, male, working in the education sector)

“In the past, we used to hear a lot of griping (*garr*) about Valletta, but now people who used to find fault with everything in our capital city and those who only used to come here when they had no other choice are buying up every nook and cranny (*jixtru kull toqba*). I don’t mind the boutique hotels, because wealth gets distributed (*tinqasam lira bejn kulhadd*) – as long as people keep coming to Valletta, things are good.” (Resident *Belti*, 45, male, business owner)

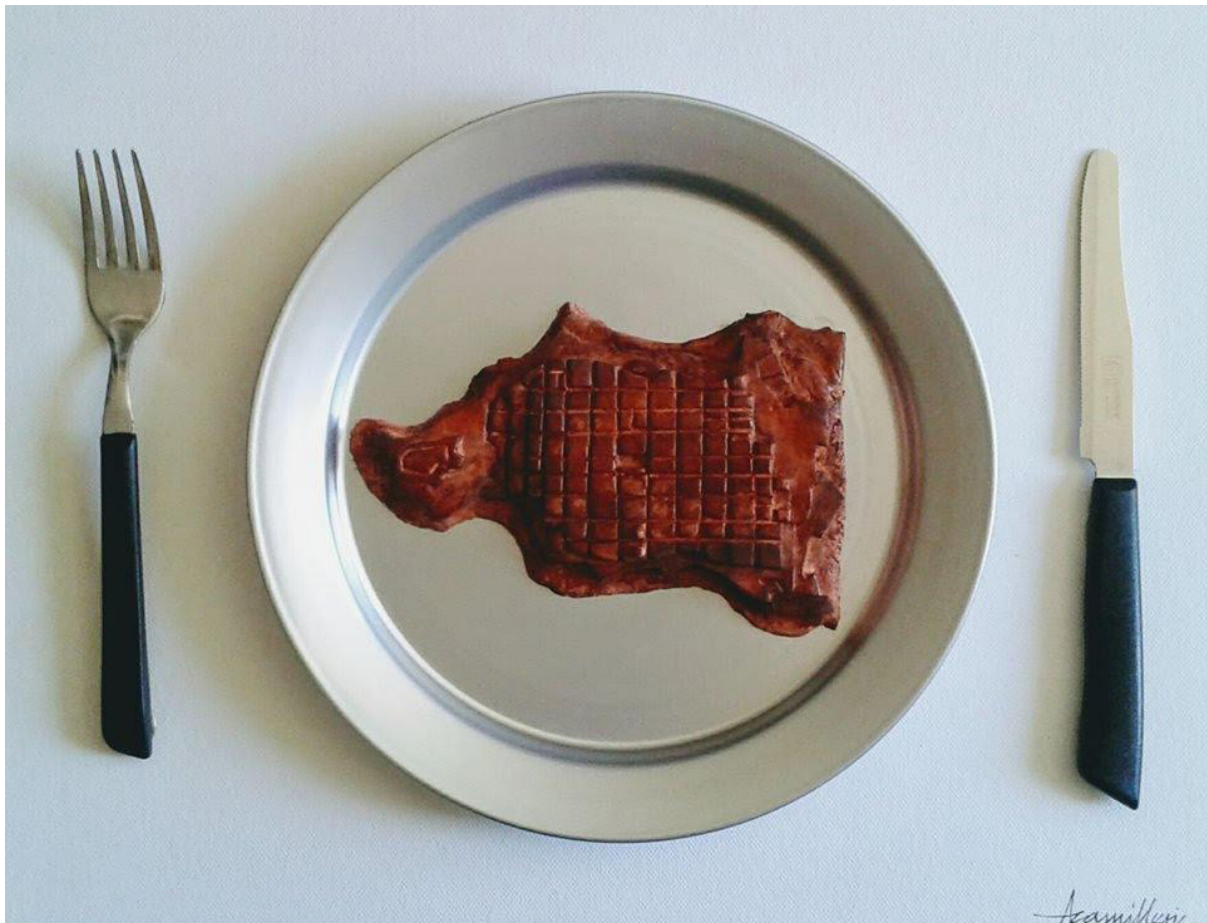
The commercial buzz in the catering and entertainment sector was also welcomed to some degree but was likewise not immune to being linked with the possible displacement of people and disturbing residents. One resident *Beltija* who works in the social sector explained: “I remember Strait Street as a very quiet area. I know elderly people and mentally disabled people who live there and they have had to move because the noise is just too much for them. And it is especially difficult for them to have to move away from the place they live in.”

The same respondent, elaborating on the nature of the disturbance, said: “I used to prefer Valletta when it was quieter. I know it was run-down and shabby, and there wasn’t much to do. Now there has been the regeneration of buildings, people coming in and out, but for residents, it’s a headache. Parking, garbage, a disproportionate number of boutique hotels. There was a time when I couldn’t work from home. Construction, noise, people shouting, broken glass, noise from what I call “the Paceville area”.¹⁶ It comes at a price, especially for people living in areas where catering establishments or weddings take place.”

¹⁶ Paceville is the name of an area in St Julian’s which is widely renowned for its nightlife. In this case, however, the respondent is referring to areas within Valletta such as Strait Street, which have also become nightlife meccas.

Valletta artist Alfred Camilleri also captured this annoyance with the adverse impact of the catering industry in a work titled "Well Done". This artwork was the most critical of several pieces in an exhibition titled "Civitas"¹⁷, which explored the various facets of the capital city. This piece showed a representation of a steak shaped like Valletta's map, served up on a plate with a fork and knife at each side. The caption said, "We don't just meet expectations, we exceed them." In a private conversation, Camilleri elaborated: "Our capital city has been given on a silver platter so that people can eat it up – we see this in the encroachment of catering establishments on pavements, streets and facades. Everybody wants a slice of Valletta."

Figure 1: 'Well done', artwork by Alfred Camilleri, exhibited in 'Civitas', June 2018, Valletta



The contrast registered in the various years between the assertive, positive attitude that welcomes commercial activity and the restoration and reuse of buildings on the one hand, and fatalistic concern about the ultimate future of Valletta as a communal space on the other, presents a puzzling combination that reflects the inherently multifaceted nature of urban regeneration projects and requires further analysis.

In unpacking this ambivalence, it is important to consider the specific context of Valletta and how its social history, even within living memory, has been punctured by displacement. At times, this has been caused by historical forces, particularly the mass emigration to other localities starting with World War II, when Valletta and the area around the Grand Harbour were prime targets for bombing by enemy forces. Other reasons for the displacement of families from Valletta included a blend of social and infrastructural

¹⁷The exhibition was held at the Malta Postal Museum and Arts Hub, Valletta in June 2018. It did not form part of the Valletta 2018 Programme.

factors, such as homeseekers (commonly newly-wed couples) who moved to other localities because of the lack of availability of appropriate and affordable housing within Valletta; families who were compelled to move because their accommodation could not cater to their needs; and elderly people who have had to move out, often reluctantly, because the building infrastructure made it very difficult for them to continue living there.

One respondent in 2018, now a resident *Beltija*, talked about how her parents moved out of Valletta when they got married, noting: "We speak about gentrification nowadays, but really gentrification had already started in the 1980s, which was when my parents married. At the time, couples getting married would look for new accommodation outside Valletta, both because it would have been more accessible and larger, and also because there was value placed on having a dwelling that was a new building."

Another respondent, a non-resident *Belti* who moved out of Valletta when he got married in the late 1970s, confirmed: "They say that it isn't easy to live in Valletta today, but it wasn't easy at the time I got married either, because the available properties were occupied. Other properties belonged to specific families who didn't want to sell. It was far easier to move out and find a new property."

Another factor that colours the narrative which sees Valletta's recent developments as a restoration of former glory is connected to the fact, specifically mentioned by most *Beltin*, that being from Valletta has often been a source of stigma which has only been alleviated in recent years. *Beltin* were stereotypically perceived to be proud, rowdy and aggressive people and the city itself was labelled a "slum area" by outsiders.¹⁸ According to one of the respondents, a *Belti* in his sixties who has lived outside Valletta since he got married, noted that: "It is only now that the city is being recognised for what it really is – and it should have always remained like that."

In light of this, it is being argued that the fact that respondents, including *Beltin*, tended to demonstrate a positive outlook even regarding developments that are unlikely to benefit the Valletta community directly, needs to be seen against this socio-historical backdrop of displacement and stigma. Seen in this light, one reason why *Beltin* may express mixed feelings about gentrification is that significant displacement has in fact *already* occurred several times, and most *Beltin* actually live outside Valletta. Secondly, the upgrading of the building infrastructure and the influx of people are welcomed because they validate the dignity of Valletta in the face of the memory of stigma, and provide vitality to the city in contrast to the longstanding trend towards depopulation.

A concern with "cleanliness", while partly a response to issues mentioned earlier such as delays in garbage collection, also plays into the discourse of gentrification. A respondent who is a second-generation Valletta resident described how, in his opinion, the word "slum" is a label that has been imposed externally, often as a pretext to displace communities. This resonates with the observation of anthropologist Michael Herzfeld that hegemonic ideas of aesthetics and town planning give rise to "spatial cleansing", a term which signifies the "conceptual and physical clarification of boundaries" which replaces "relationships defined in terms of neighborhood" by "abstract description, enumeration and measurement" (Herzfeld, 2006). Through a top-down perspective of urban regeneration, former residents can become redefined as intruders or squatters, for instance.

¹⁸ In a way that is very typical of Valletta society, this prejudice is at times (not without a touch of self-irony) converted to a badge of honour and identity. One example is the fact that Valletta Football Club supporters call themselves "tal-Palestina" (literally "the Palestinians"), which is popularly explained as a reference to their rowdy and aggressive nature, similar to the stereotype which tended to be assigned to Palestinians in the news broadcasts of the 1970s.

In the case of Valletta, this analysis has been applied to the recent history of the Covered Market (*is-Suq tal-Belt*) (Pace Bonello, 2013), the restoration of which was a key Valletta 2018 project.¹⁹ Markets are notoriously resistant to state and administrative control and often come to be considered as “matter out of place” by the authorities (Herzfeld 2006, 129). The classification of the edifice of the Covered Market as a Grade 1 building in 2012, following years of neglect, meant that the shopkeepers who held their stalls within the site found themselves trading inside a national monument, with many voicing the opinion that the government should be making better use of the Nation’s heritage.

In this perspective, Pace Bonello argues, the shopkeepers were at best considered speculators waiting for a hand-out, and at worst they were considered squatters and a threat to national progress. Indeed, no great public uproar followed the closing down of the Covered Market as it was, and the leasing of the building to an important Maltese business group, thereby making this site the locus for renovation. In fact, although respondents questioned the Covered Market’s character and its affordability for locals, the *is-Suq tal-Belt* project was welcomed by many respondents as an upgrade to the erstwhile decadent institution which had occupied such a central place in Valletta and even in Maltese life in general.

This context can explain why trends that create challenges to liveability may be both welcomed in the short term and generate deep concerns in the longer term. However, with the rapid changes to Valletta’s social fabric, it may still come as a surprise that the concept of Valletta as “home”, which was referred to earlier, has proven to be resilient to these processes of commercialisation and displacement.

Various factors have contributed to the way in which the communal aspect of Valletta has managed to outlast so many difficulties, including: the fact that property owners and residents in public-owned rental properties and social housing enjoy more protection from displacement; the symbolic negotiation of identity through social activities such as parish feasts, Carnival and football; the retention of family and communal networks; and memory and nostalgia, which are often deployed to retain a sense of belonging.

This sense of belonging can be particularly strong - one respondent, who lived outside Valletta for a number of years and has since returned, said: “You only make a mistake once – since I returned to live in Valletta, I will only be taken out of here when I’m dead.” The same respondent reflected about how certain projects in Valletta have made the city more liveable, not less. These include the opening up and pedestrianisation of open spaces such as St George Square and Merchants Street.

Another observation was that while respondents conceded that criticism towards projects was often justified, at times the positive points are overlooked. Specifically, it was noted that: “The Covered Market, for instance, opens on Sunday, when most other shops don’t – prices are what they are, but at least there is the option. The old Market, as I remember it, had died – we tend to romanticise it a lot and we use nostalgia in a very shrewd manner. In reality, many *Beltin* had stopped buying from the Market. It couldn’t have remained the way it was – perhaps there have been unwise excesses in the project, but sometimes we also gripe excessively too. Likewise, some people are nostalgic about the *Bičċerija*, where the Valletta Design Cluster is in progress. However, residents were asking for something to be done given that the area had become completely derelict and there were problems with garbage collection, vermin and bugs.” (Resident *Beltija*, 34, female)

Finally, difficulties are offset to some extent at least by the sense of resilience and adaptability that Valletta residents themselves often display:

¹⁹The researcher in question is one of the contributors to this report.

"Valletta is liveable because, at the end of the day people cope, we develop adaptation mechanisms."
(Resident *Beltija*, 41, female)

"You learn to live with the difficulties, especially because there are a lot of things that one can enjoy about living in Valletta. We know how lucky we are to live here, and often we do not admit it and this is because we feel this city belongs to us, so we tend to fear that it is being taken away from us." (Resident *Beltija*, 34, female)

The comments by many of the respondents, particularly those from *Beltin*, voice the need to preserve the social fabric of Valletta. Although often tinged with the rhetoric of nostalgia, these concerns cannot be reduced to mere romanticism when threats to liveability have become tangible. Furthermore, voicing a need to safeguard the communal aspect of Valletta is not an argument against the improvement of the city's infrastructure, and none of the respondents, even those most concerned about the impacts of gentrification and monumentalisation, have been dismissive of regeneration projects in themselves. As per Bauman (2001, 149), "we all need to gain control over the conditions under which we struggle with the challenges of life – but for most of us such control can be gained only *collectively*." What is being proposed, therefore, is that these voices challenge us to make urban regeneration more community-friendly, sustainable and ultimately aimed at making Valletta not just a more culturally and commercially vibrant city, but also a more liveable one.

Valletta resident author Josephine Burden, in the presentation referred to earlier, mentions two practices that "enable the aim of enabling citizens to live well. First, good neighbourliness, the extent to which design and action take account of people. And second, the extent to which public space, the streets, squares, parks, enables human interaction." Particularly in light of the fact that Valletta tends to be seen as caught between the twin cogwheels of monumentalisation by the state on the one hand and real estate speculation by private landowners on the other, it is crucial that any strategic action taken in the city takes into consideration that social life in public spaces is a fundamental contributor towards individual and social quality of life, and that the will "to create spaces that work for people" makes "a tremendous difference ... to the life of a city" (Whyte 1980, 15). These, together with the adaptability and pride that *Beltin* and other residents display towards their city, remain a precious, but underutilised resource in making Valletta a more liveable city.

Awareness and accessibility of the Valletta 2018 Programme

The awareness and accessibility of the Valletta 2018 Programme was a theme that was an important component of this research project from the start. This subsection details the mapping of fluctuations of respondents' knowledge about the cultural programme of Valletta 2018, its objectives, and the individual events and projects that comprised it throughout the period 2015 to 2018.

In the baseline study conducted in 2015, respondents from across all the community groups showed a very good level of awareness that the title of European Capital of Culture for 2018 had been awarded to Valletta. *Beltin* particularly welcomed this title as 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. Particularly, the respondent noted that: "Valletta is now the capital of Europe – bow down your head in respect!"²⁰

²⁰ "Valletta l-Belt Kapitali tal-Ewropa. Baxxi rasek!"

At the time, there was, nevertheless, a poor level of awareness generally speaking of the aims of the European Capital of Culture and what events have been or are being organised. A minority of interviewees were aware that beyond the holding of cultural events culminating in 2018, the ultimate aim was to leave a long-term impact. Many others, however, saw the role of Valletta 2018 primarily as being a means of enhancing the tourism and entertainment offer. 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 at least some but were unable to identify whether they were related to Valletta 2018 or not. *Notte Bianca*, an annual night-time arts festival that is an established part of the cultural calendar, 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. The participation of persons with a disability in cultural activities was markedly low, especially those occurring in Valletta. Whilst these respondents often voiced a lack of interest in such activities, it was clear that problems of access, discussed in detail earlier, constituted a barrier to participation in cultural events.

Valletta residents 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 ECoC project may result in the "Disneyfication" (Zukin, 1995) and gentrification of Valletta with the attendant loss of social diversity. The respondents in the Inner Harbour area were also concerned that Valletta and its many economically disadvantaged residents will not be the ultimate beneficiaries of Valletta 2018, and rather that it will be aggressively business oriented, concerns which were also expressed by some *Beltin* and which have been discussed in depth earlier.

In 2016, respondents generally demonstrated an increased awareness of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme throughout the various cohorts interviewed in comparison to the previous year. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that in most cases, respondents were more keenly aware of individual events and less of the Valletta 2018 Programme as a cohesive initiative. In fact, during the semi-structured interviews held in 2016, interviewees were initially asked a general question as to whether they attended any events forming part of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme, followed by prompting if they could identify any specific events themselves. In most cases, it transpired that this prompting was necessary as respondents had generally attended more than one event, but were unsure or unaware that they were part of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme. One respondent who is a *Beltija* and lives in Valletta said that she was unaware of what the Cultural Programme entailed, but upon further questioning what emerged was that she had attended a good number of Valletta 2018 events, such as events at Pjazza Teatru Rjal, *Notte Bianca* and *Žiguzajg*, an annual children's festival. Furthermore, she had frequented the establishments in Strait Street and was keenly aware of the Covered Market project.

Initiatives of a more public and collective nature, such as the *Notte Bianca* and the Valletta Green Festival, were understandably more widely known than projects which either had limited visibility, such as the

Valletta Design Cluster project which was still in early stages of development, or those which target a specific audience, such as Orpheus in the Underworld. Indeed, most of the respondents from the various cohorts recounted vivid memories of specific events, such as the *Notte Bianca*, Valletta Pageant of the Seas, Science in the City, the Valletta Film Festival and the Baroque Festival. Other less prominent venues and projects were also mentioned, including Blitz, Fragmenta, *l-Ikla t-Tajba* and *Il-Warda tar-Riĥ*.

The respondents' uncertainty or lack of awareness that these events formed part of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme suggests that although individual events were being well publicised and attended, Valletta 2018 had less visibility as a cohesive project and brand. Indeed, many respondents specifically expressed that they felt the Cultural Programme needed to be more visible, and showed a keen interest in knowing more, with some respondents requesting a copy of the Programme from the interviewers. One respondent, a *Belti* who does not live in Valletta but commutes on a daily basis because of work, was particularly critical of the lack of visibility, stating that: "I might have missed media coverage, but I do not know what the role of the Valletta 2018 Foundation is. Are they publicising enough? Are they getting Maltese people involved? So far all I have seen is a brochure with minimal, generic knowledge, and I have yet to see a programme of events. Somehow, they are not generating enough of a marketing buzz and perception is key. The message is just not getting out there."

In 2016, all cohorts acknowledged that leaving a legacy is one of the main indicators of the success of the Valletta 2018 Programme. In fact, one of the respondents who is a non-resident *Belti* was highly concerned as to what will happen after 2018, asking: "Are the businesses that are being set up in Valletta sustainable? Will the city be left to decay again? If entertainment and nightlife move somewhere else, as has happened in the past, will the government continue to throw money at Valletta?" Other respondents suggested that work with children and the involvement of local communities should be considered as focal points to ensure an organic continuity after the year of the European Capital of Culture.

In 2017, the level of awareness about Valletta 2018 was high. Respondents, particularly *Beltin*, expressed once again a strong sense of pride in general related to Valletta 2018, often mentioning this as an opportunity of increasing tourism and having Valletta showcased across Europe. There was also a stronger than ever sense of anticipation and even enthusiasm, with various respondents stating that they look forward to the opening festivities and to other events in the Programme. One respondent, for instance, said:

"I'm looking forward to ... the opening of Valletta 2018. I am also looking forward to this year's Carnival. Although I am not a Carnival enthusiast, I am planning to attend Carnival after having missed this for about 20 years. I am also looking forward to the Carnival happening in the Cottonera. The Pageant of Seas in June is another event which I am also looking forward to." (Respondent with a disability, 31, male)

Another respondent who is proud of being a *Beltija* from the *Bicċerija* area stated that:

"God willing, I hope to enjoy all the events. I always come for Carnival, when the Valletta Football Team win, *Notte Bianca*. ... I visit museums, Auberge de Castille. When we were children, we didn't used to see these things." (Non-resident *Beltija*, 67, female)

One respondent who is himself involved in the arts scene, however, cautioned about this sense of pride, saying: "Pride is there alright, but culture often gets forgotten." This respondent was particularly

aware of the Programme's contents, but was critical of the fact that many of the events that were scheduled (such as Carnival, the Malta Arts Festival, *Notte Bianca* and the Book Festival) had been going on already, and this to him meant that Valletta 2018 was not being exploited to its maximum potential.

"I expected a year of continuous activity that can mobilise people and allow anybody entering Valletta to find something going on." (Non-resident *Belti*, 38, male)

Respondents who have attained a high level of academic education tended to be critical of initiatives in which culture was perceived as something that is being introduced to the local community from an external source.

"I regret that Valletta 2018 means that culture has to be imposed on Valletta from above as if Valletta doesn't already have its own culture." (expatriate Valletta resident, 33, female)

Another Valletta resident has said that as a resident he feels like a prop ("*qisni pastur*") in a stage set for tourist attention, while another respondent who is an academic, stated that:

"Valletta 2018 could have become a real cultural hub – but I fear there will not be enough legacy, despite numerous activities, because it is not leading towards a cultural foundation." (visitor to Valletta, 60, female)

Another respondent who has a strong academic background felt that the Programme seems to be geared towards putting a gloss over Valletta's wounds (such as poverty, problems faced by the elderly, minorities etc.), but it is better to expose them and start the healing process than to cover them up.

"Projects should be more political in the real sense of the word, even if it could be embarrassing."²¹ (*Belti* resident, 35, male)

Notte Bianca, as in previous years, remained the best-known event, although many respondents were not aware that this had been incorporated into the Valletta 2018 Programme. The Valletta Design Cluster project, on the other hand, was the project that was least well known by respondents. Many, in fact, drew a blank when asked about it, with notable exceptions being, for instance, a respondent involved in the art scene, who said that information has been limited and people in the area are only aware that buildings are being restored, and another respondent who is a resident of the *Bicċerija* area where the project will be based, who was also only aware that building restoration was taking place.

Starting with the official opening on 20 January 2018, the Valletta 2018 Programme included a collection of over 140 projects and 400 events, and all respondents interviewed this year could readily mention at least one or two Valletta 2018 events that they attended. Although often critical, many respondents claimed to find some events to be fun, interesting or even moving.

As expected, the large-scale events such as the Valletta 2018 Opening and *Notte Bianca* were the most frequently mentioned. The Opening was seen by many to be an impressive logistical feat, where about

²¹ As an example, this respondent stated: "To me the most interesting piece of art in Valletta right now is the memorial to Daphne Caruana Galizia", going on to discuss how it would have been difficult for this to be included in a cultural programme such as that pertaining to Valletta 2018 not least because of the strongly polarised views that the issue evokes. The memorial in question is a spontaneous collection of flowers, candles and photographs laid at the foot of the Great Siege monument in memory of slain journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, and has been a matter of controversy being repeatedly removed by individuals and Government authorities and replaced by activists.

110,000 people visited Valletta. The event was largely felt to be good, highly spectacular, inspired pride and was largely accessible, although some said they expected more originality. *Notte Bianca* was also considered primarily an opportunity to explore spaces in Valletta that are not usually open to the public, indicating that Valletta itself as a city is to be considered part of the cultural offer, an idea which will be explored in further detail in the next subsection of this report. On the other hand, smaller events were occasionally mentioned by a few respondents, usually those of a higher educational background who were already frequently attending cultural performances prior to the European Capital of Culture. It is to be said, however, that these events had the possibility of reaching specific audiences and generating dialogue, as in the case of “Tactile”, which presented concealed sculptures “intended to be never seen”, thus neutralising differences between people with visual impairments and those without (Valletta 2018 Foundation 2018). This project was mentioned favourably by some of the respondents with a disability.

This response may indeed be reflective of the content of the Programme in itself, as was observed by a respondent who had followed the cultural offer very thoroughly. Particularly, it was noted that:

“There may have been too much of a focus on visible mega-events – and spectacle is important as it engages people in large numbers, but this is not enough. Then, on the other hand, there were many niche events which attracted the usual audiences who were already engaged with the cultural scene. The marketing of the Programme could have been done in a more targeted manner, and beyond that, there could have also been more involvement of the local community.” (Resident *Beltija*, 34, female)

One related trend in the research carried out in 2017 was the emergence of highly polarised perceptions of the Cultural Programme. Indeed, in that cycle of research, two respondents, both highly educated with a strong engagement in Valletta, gave opposite descriptions of what they expect Valletta 2018 to be. One of these respondents, a professional coming from a lower-middle-class background, who is not *Belti* but works in Valletta and spends much of his leisure time there, said: “There has been too much emphasis on creating a high cultural Valletta 2018 programme. There is too much hype.” On the other hand, a respondent who is a *Belti* coming from a bourgeois background was concerned that the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme may tend towards populism and events that are only catered for the masses, without giving any real options to people who enjoy quality performances.

Whilst noting that it is not being suggested that these polarised views reflect the general outlook of respondents, this extreme difference sheds light on the fact that marketing Valletta 2018 was being done in a context where the public has grown accustomed to being critical of national programmes. Nevertheless, it can also be said to be reflective of the structure of the Programme, which was characterised by mass spectacles on the one hand and niche events on the other.

The potential of community-based projects had been highlighted previously through this research project in 2017, where it was argued that the fact that there was an opportunity for rethinking the several ways in which Valletta 2018 could present itself to the public. Indeed, in 2017, one respondent who participated directly in the *Ġewwa Barra* project was aware, of course, of Valletta 2018 but had little knowledge beyond what she was exposed to through her direct involvement. While this may have been considered a problem from the perspective of branding, there is a sense in which this example shows the power of a community-based project such as *Ġewwa Barra* to have a high degree of social penetration, reaching people who for various reasons may not have found the Programme, in general,

to be accessible or interesting. Such a perspective would have meant that there was room for a more grassroots approach which could be carried out especially through community-based projects.

The direct involvement of Valletta communities, however, was limited primarily to two projects namely *Il-Festa l-Kbira*, which brought together the four parish feasts in Valletta for the first time, and *il-Hasla*, which was the culmination of the Ġewwa Barra project led by Victor Jacono and consisted of “a theatrical performance created and performed by the residents of Valletta, to share what it means to be a “Belti” with the audience” (Valletta 2018 Foundation 2018).

In 2018, a respondent who is a non-resident *Belti* and is involved in the arts explained his disappointment, and that of others in the artistic community, that not many artists from Valletta were involved in the Programme. Regarding *il-Hasla*, this respondent said: “Oh yes! That was certainly an event that gave a voice to Valletta, but it felt like a voice in the wilderness as there were no other similar things going on.”

The underlying notion for *Il-Festa l-Kbira* had been expressed by the same respondent in the baseline study of 2015, where he had noted how *festi* tend to separate, while football tends to unite. This led the respondent at the time to suggest that the four parish feasts in the city are brought together 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.”²²

Il-Festa l-Kbira received some criticism, especially by people who are part of the religious organisations who normally preside over the organisation of the *fešta*. Some of these saw this event as converting religious feasts into a spectacle. One person, who is not a *Belti* but is connected through one of the parishes and was actively participating in this event said:

“I actually don’t like what’s going on. These are feasts that have their place in the Catholic liturgical calendar. To remove them from their rightful place and turn this into a touristic spectacle is wrong – but I am here carrying the statue out of devotion to the saint.”
(Respondent, 35, male)

However, while the core of the *fešta* is tied to religious devotion, these celebrations also have a strong social element, often negotiating the symbolic belonging of people to a locality and forming a strong part of their identity (Boissevain 2013, Mitchell 2002). In fact, this event was largely acclaimed as a successful event and most respondents saw this as an interesting idea and, in the case of respondents who are *Beltin*, a show of civic unity and a celebration of the communities within Valletta. Specifically, the respondent noted that:

“*Il-Festa l-Kbira* is something positive because, for the first time in Malta, feasts which are normally divisive have become a show of unity. The narrative has been changed.” (Non-resident *Belti*, 42, male)

“*Il-Festa l-Kbira* draws on tradition – almost everybody loves feasts, and although a lot of people say we fight over parish rivalries, we proved them wrong and we showed how Valletta can be completely united.” (Resident *Belti*, 45, male)

The Covered Market (*Is-Suq tal-Belt*), discussed in some detail earlier, stands as the single project that triggered the most varied reactions throughout the years. Although most respondents acknowledged

²² “...tkun l-ikbar rebħa li nkunu għamilna għax inkunu urejna lil kulhadd li la l-festi u lanqas il-politika m’ħuma se jifirduna, li aħna Beltin qabel kollox”.

that the Market had been very run-down and largely abandoned and needed regeneration, there was a variety of opinions about the final product. Some looked at it as a tasteful revival of a historical building, while others saw the imposition of a supermarket model and a food court to be stifling and misguided. Others complained about the aesthetics, the take-up of public space, and the disturbance the Market causes to the surrounding areas due to delivery trucks, the generation of garbage and other annoyances.

One other commonly mentioned Valletta 2018 infrastructural project was the regeneration of Strait Street. As discussed earlier, the tables outside created some concerns about reducing physical accessibility in an area where the terrain already poses problems to persons with mobility issues. Likewise, some respondents, generally Valletta residents, expressed concern about the impact of noise on people living in the area, as has been described in the previous subsection. However, on the other hand, several respondents also said that now they feel safe passing through Strait Street, and therefore the regeneration of this street has also made this area more accessible in a social sense.

One response, by Valletta artist Alfred Camilleri, is being quoted at length because of its depth and it provides a challenge to ensure that the Strait Street revival is not only about commercial activity, but that it also regenerates the memory of the social history of the place, especially its contribution to the arts scene in Malta.

“George Cini has documented the collective memory of Strait Street in his excellent books. And yet, although we say we revived this street by promoting new establishments, there is no place that has been dedicated to remembering these memories. After all, what is Strait Street? Who are those spirits that move here? Who used to open and close these doors? This is not artificial nostalgia – it is our cultural identity. Valletta is the stone from which it is built, its people and the souls of those who came before and left something for those who would come after them.”

The least visible of the infrastructural projects related to Valletta 2018 were the Valletta Design Cluster, which is still a work in progress and is furthermore situated in an area that is not frequently visited; and MUŻA, which only opened after the interviews for this research project were conducted. These have been dealt with in some detail in the previous subsection. However, the most salient points regarding MUŻA was that there was a strong hope, especially amongst respondents with a disability, that this project would be a beacon of accessibility. As was described earlier, accessibility was indeed taken into consideration as a primary concern in the design of both the museum space itself as well as the content and its presentation.

Many respondents felt that regeneration of the Old Abattoir area (related to the Valletta Design Cluster) was sorely needed – however, comments were limited because most did not have a clear idea of what this project entailed. In one case, a respondent who was originally from the Old Abattoir area, but has lived outside Valletta for about 40 years, said that the Valletta Design Cluster will be occupying a site that is part of Valletta’s history and that the project has not been planned to contribute anything specifically to Valletta-based organisations. This demonstrates to some extent the tension that may occur between Valletta’s role as a national capital and as a place of local identity and memory. Nevertheless, it is noted that in this case, the Valletta Design Cluster project is designed to be a national project, whilst working “in collaboration with the neighbouring community, by providing a platform for a Local Action agenda that empowers action directly by the community members to improve the quality of life in its shared common spaces” (Valletta 2018 Foundation 2015).

Indeed, in the aforementioned presentation, Josephine Burden selected the Valletta Design Cluster as a good example of both good neighbourliness and taking people into account. Specifically, she noted that: "I also know from my experience of the process that door-knocking, artist and resident workshops, street meetings, site interventions and tours have featured prominently over the years since the project was announced. A genuine effort has been made to resettle the squatters who had set up home in the sometimes precarious building and to counter the inevitable gentrification of the area. Unlike *Is-Suq*, immediate neighbours appear to be on-side and look forward to the proposed open access roof garden and the possibility of finding artists on their doorsteps."

To conclude this subsection, it is important to note that while all respondents attended at least one Valletta 2018 event, only a few participated directly as active participants or through community consultation. In the cases where this occurred, respondents spoke of the Valletta 2018 project with considerably higher enthusiasm and pride. Conversely, when respondents were not involved, this frequently elicited a strong response of disappointment and exclusion. In Burden's words: "I have felt engaged and happy with the process and consider community consultation as one of the legacies along with the establishment of spaces for artists to co-create." The interviews conducted for this report fully support this sentiment and therefore it is strongly recommended that any future cultural initiatives in Valletta or elsewhere consider community involvement not as an afterthought or as a fringe element, but as a touchstone of legacy generation.

The legacy of Valletta 2018

It is perhaps ambitious to look into the future and attempt to anticipate what the legacy of Valletta 2018 will be, especially before the year is over. However, legacy is one of the primary concerns of every European Capital of Culture and was furthermore the theme of the fifth Valletta 2018 Foundation's annual international conference, held in October 2018 with the title of "Sharing the Legacy". In view of this, in the final cycle of research coinciding with the year of the ECoC, respondents were asked what sort of legacy they anticipate, or perhaps even wish for.

It needs to be clarified at the outset that there was no absolute consensus that there will be a legacy at all, or that one is even needed. One respondent from the Inner Harbour replied:

"Let's not get over ourselves here. Valletta 2018 is not like Independence Day or anything similar! There will be some legacy in terms of this year helping Valletta push for more commercial activity - albeit commerce and the uplift that Valletta has experienced did not emanate specifically from Valletta 2018, but from the government's pro-business policies." (Respondent from the Inner Harbour area, 38, male)

Other respondents claimed that in their opinion there will not be a legacy at all, or that they just cannot know if there will be one.

Nevertheless, two major themes were common in respondents' replies, namely the increase in commercial activity and the regeneration of Valletta as a space. In fact, as has been discussed, virtually all respondents readily recognised that Valletta 2018, together with other factors, has generated a significant commercial buzz. However, more than in any other year, there appeared to be a common sentiment amongst most respondents that this business-oriented approach needs to be checked by a concern for local communities and retaining the character and liveability of the city.

The notions of “character” and history in this final year were mostly resorted to by people who are not from Valletta, such as one respondent who said:

“I hope it keeps going on like this, but we should not commercialise the place too much. The historical elements of Valletta must be preserved. There are spaces where these hotels and guesthouses can thrive, but we should steer away from over-commercializing the place.” (Respondent with a disability, 33, male)

Some visitors to Valletta were concerned about overpricing in the city.

“This will impact me negatively. Essentially, with more foot traffic going to Valletta, and more restaurants and bars and cafés opening, and prices going up due to good business periods, this will have a negative impact on me as a frequent visitor of Valletta, as I will have to pay more when I visit.” (Respondent from the Inner Harbour area, 38, male)

Others, however, saw this increased commercial activity as making the city more interesting.

“Basically, Valletta is getting much more foot traffic, and you see a plethora of activity happening in Valletta. Valletta 2018 contributed to making Valletta a place to be. There is more diversity as to where to spend time socially. This is a lasting change for sure that if not brought about wholly by Valletta 2018 was certainly supported by the effort and the events.” (Respondent with a disability, 28, male)

Another respondent stated:

“Valletta is buzzing, it is getting more foot-traffic, and more tourists will hit our capital city like never before. It is a capital city with a mix of business, history, culture and entertainment. In such a small place, you get a microcosm of bigger cities so to speak. The dynamics, the layers are there. You get people from every stratum of society, it is quite heterogeneous. You get different hues and diverse backgrounds.” (Respondent with a disability, 42, male)

Valletta residents had mixed views on this intensification of commercial activity. Some, such as one respondent who has close relatives who face having to seek relocation outside Valletta because the increased rent is no longer affordable, were understandably cynical, stating that:

“Valletta has become poorer in terms of demographics, and now we have the boutique hotels. Is this the legacy we want from Valletta 2018?” (Non-resident *Belti*, 42, male)

Others, such as a business owner from Valletta, welcome the activity that Valletta is attracting but are cautious about the long-term future, saying:

“I don’t know what will happen after 2018. I hope things either keep going the way they are or get even better. However, I am concerned about what will happen if tourism slows down drastically and we are stuck with a lot of vacant boutique hotels and tourist accommodation.” (Resident *Belti*, 45, male)

Other respondents have emphasised that continuity must be maintained.

“The promotion of the city needs to keep happening after Valletta 2018 is over. We need to keep pushing so that we get more tourists and promote spaces and places, like MUŻA and Castile Place. We cannot stop - we need to keep riding the wave, building anticipation and making sure we maximise the opportunities that we achieved through Valletta 2018.”
(Respondent with a disability, 33, male)

Regarding the cultural offer, sentiments were generally positive about the possibility that these will maintain the desired continuity. This is illustrated by the following quote from a respondent with a disability.

“Yes, there will be a legacy as most of the activities were a success and I do believe that people will be willing to attend such activities in the future, as has happened with *Notte Bianca*, where people who enjoyed this event kept attending regularly.” (Respondent with a disability, 28, male)

Valletta residents and non-resident *Beltin* tended to place great value on the concept of legacy and prioritise the impact on urban space more highly than the cultural programme. One respondent from Valletta said:

“While I see many ways in which the Programme could have been better, the way in which Valletta’s spaces have changed is an achievement in itself. For Valletta as a platform, the result was overall positive.” (Resident *Beltija*, 34, female)

Some other respondents also echoed this sentiment, including a respondent from the Inner Harbour area who said: “The regeneration in itself is part of the legacy. We need to keep taking care of Valletta.” Another respondent who visits Valletta said that people are more prone to remember the projects related to restoration “simply for the beauty of the restoration rather than for its inclusion in the Valletta 2018 Programme, which I do not believe had any impact on the cultural mentality of the population.”

Two respondents, both non-resident *Beltin*, individually used the same metaphor drawn from the context of the Maltese traditional *festi* to explain this need to prioritise the city infrastructure. The analogy invoked was that of the bandstand or *pjanċier*. In Maltese *festi*, local brass bands give concerts on bandstands that are elaborate works of art, often including sculpture, metalwork and painting. Prior to sitting down for the band’s repertoire, it is common for people to take time to also appreciate the beauty of the *pjanċier* as a work of art in itself. Both respondents felt that the city, in its role as the platform for a cultural offer, requires more investment so that much like the *pjanċier*, it could provide an enduring legacy that goes beyond the ephemerality of a programme of events.

Respondents with a disability almost unanimously expressed that their hopes that Valletta 2018 would make the city more accessible have not been fulfilled. Despite proving to be highly optimistic in previous years, the fact that most commercial establishments and many public buildings remain inaccessible has proven to be disappointing.

“Most activities were not accessible. Accessibility was not taken seriously enough. The activities that were indeed accessible were so just because they happened to be

outside. Very little effort was made to ensure that these events, with all the programme brimming with activities, would in effect be available for people like me." (Respondent with a disability, 28, male)

Respondents with a disability also stated the following:

"They did not pay attention to the feedback we gave them through the channel of CRPD, or perhaps they did not give it too much weight. Of course, this is only my opinion, and it could be that attempts were made to make the events accessible. However, the end result is that most of the activities that were held indoors, as well as activities in Strait Street, were not accessible." (Respondent with a disability, 28, male)

"There is still a lot that needs to be done. We get resistance when we ask for buildings to be made accessible - which is utter nonsense. We all ought to have equal opportunities to enjoy Valletta. Museums should all be equipped with scale models and replicas for us to be able to have a tactile experience. Also, information should be made accessible to all forms of disability, including simplified information for those who are intellectually challenged." (Respondent with a disability, 42, male)

Finally, respondents have demonstrated hope that a newly set up foundation which intends to continue the work of the Valletta 2018 Foundation can help to maintain a legacy and cultivate the networks that have been formed.

"The Foundation that is being set up is a good thing for continuity because there will be no gap for another couple of years. ... I don't think the current vibe will die down over the next year or two, but it all depends on the activity of the new foundation. If things are all left to the private sector, it will be more difficult." (Visitor to Valletta, 42, male)

"I also hope that the agency that is being set up to take over from Valletta 2018 will maintain and nourish the networks that have been developed with the cultural sector and also that they will continue to involve people." (Expatriate Valletta resident, 71, female)

One respondent who attended some of the workshops organised by the Monitoring and Evaluation Team also emphasised the importance of consultation and involvement, saying:

"At workshops held earlier this year we discussed several important topics, and we also all agreed that what happens beyond 2018 is important. How are we going to keep the momentum? How can we keep promoting such a dynamic place and all that Valletta has come to signify? We have to keep promoting innovation and accessibility." (Respondent with a disability, 42, male)

To conclude this reflection upon the legacy that Valletta 2018 may have, it is being emphasised that this moment needs to be seen as an opportunity. As one respondent put it: "The seed has been sown" (*iż-żerriegħa nżerghat*). To nurture it means to keep momentum, enhancing Valletta not only as a platform for both cultural and commercial activity but also ensuring that the capital remains both a liveable and lived-in city and fostering networking, research, consultation and dialogue.

CONCLUSIONS & WAY FORWARD

This research project has opted to take a polyvocal approach, allowing the voices of respondents to be heard and speak for themselves. The use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews not only allows for but actively encourages openness and enables a wide variety of perspectives, perceptions and opinions to be documented and compared. That there is such a diversity of views and experiences, however, including the sheer amount of criticism that has been encountered, can be welcomed as a sign of engagement or, at the very least, interest in Valletta and in Valletta 2018.

Valletta is a socially-constructed place that is rich with meaning and memory, ranging from the national to the personal. Although all too often, the national, monumental aspects of Valletta have been privileged by policy, many concerns were in fact local, ranging from everyday issues such as garbage collection and street maintenance, to more complex social issues such as community involvement and rapid changes to the social fabric of the city.

One of the overarching concerns of this research project was the accessibility of Valletta as a space. At the beginning of this study, of the people interviewed, those with a disability were the only ones to be disengaged from Valletta. The direct and indirect impacts of Valletta 2018 were seen to have encouraged a higher degree of involvement with the city and the programme, and indeed there was significant optimism displayed by this group. Nevertheless, Valletta remains largely inaccessible to people with a disability, especially those with mobility issues, and more needs to be done to ensure that the city is a welcoming place for everybody. The recently opened MUŻA can be seen as setting a new standard in ensuring not only that physical infrastructure is accessible, but also that the cultural offer is presented in a way that is inclusive for a diverse audience.

The commercial activity which has been catalysed, at least in part, by Valletta 2018 has been largely welcomed, especially by small business owners in Valletta. However, this has created a disturbance to Valletta residents. Another concern for residents, especially those in private rental accommodation, is the pressure to move out of the city. The newly launched White Paper on the rental market brings some hope to addressing this situation, but may not prevent people being uprooted from their own communities. If residents are being forced to move out, this has a negative impact on their personal lives and on the vibrancy and social fabric of the city.

Programming has received largely positive reviews, but the amount of community-based events was limited. It is hoped that the success of the projects that directly involved the Valletta community, namely *il-Festa l-Kbira* and *Gewwa Barra*, as well as MUŻA which included in-depth consultation as part of its preparatory process, should prove encouraging to stronger investment in similar initiatives.

Finally, there is potential for Valletta 2018 to leave an enduring legacy. However, a focus on programming alone cannot achieve this and an important part of creating such a legacy needs to be fulfilled by enhancing urban infrastructure and liveability, as well as fostering networking, research, consultation and dialogue.

WAY FORWARD

The closing of the European Capital of Culture year brings with it the question of what policy actions need to be in place to ensure that the best possible impact is left on Valletta and maintain the momentum of actions that make the city a more vibrant cultural space, but also a liveable and lived-in city. This section will deal with a number of policy considerations which it is recommended may foster a legacy that supports Valletta as a thriving city.

It is being proposed that the concept of “home”, so often invoked by *Beltin* and Valletta residents to express the intrinsic linkages between place, community and personal and social well-being, is to be a concept that is taken seriously and incorporated in any policy dealing with urban regeneration, not least the policies that directly affect liveability of the city. In tangible terms, means need to be found to ensure that reasonable checks are made to minimise and mitigate the negative impact of commercial activity on the social continuity of Valletta communities as well as the quality of life of its individual residents.

This would include, amongst other things:

- Improved consultation with local communities regarding any policies affecting Valletta and its liveability;
- Improved regulation of construction work to minimise disturbance to residents;
- Improved regulation of parking, especially in areas in which parked vehicles may obstruct access for residents;
- Addressing local concerns, particularly delays in refuse collection, maintenance needs regarding street infrastructure and facilitating the maintenance and restoration of dwellings;
- Encouraging affordability in housing especially amongst the existing resident population;
- Encouraging people-based policies in urban planning, including fostering walking routes around Valletta, such as those that pass through public buildings which connect different areas of the city, as has been done in MUŽA;
- Encouraging the use of public spaces in the city and safeguarding these against occupation by private enterprise, especially when this creates an obstacle to accessibility;
- Monitoring the demand for tourist accommodation in Valletta to ensure that this is sustainable and ensuring there are contingency plans in case there is a significant drop in demand;
- Improved traffic control, especially of delivery trucks in all areas within Valletta;
- Improved regulation of noise pollution and the disturbance caused to residents.

Another aspect which has been shown by the findings of this research to be one in which further action is needed is that of enhancing the accessibility of Valletta. This includes, amongst other things:

- Rekindling and fostering the working relationship with the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD);
- Empowering persons with a disability and people in general to be engaged with Valletta and express their views regarding accessibility;
- Actions to make the city more friendly to people with mobility issues including persons with a disability, elderly persons and also parents of young children;

- Ensuring that public convenience locations are made available to compensate for the inaccessibility of facilities in most catering and entertainment establishments;
- Ensuring adequate transportation to and from Valletta, especially in the evenings. This is an important point as it encourages participation and attendance in evening and night-time events;
- Enhancing information given to prospective visitors to Valletta, allowing them to make informed choices regarding the accessibility of venues and services;
- Encouraging museums and historical sites to make their premises, as well as their collections, accessible to persons with mobility issues and sensory impairments;
- Facilitating initiatives by public and private establishments to make their premises more accessible;
- Ensuring that aesthetic choices in projects do not impinge on accessibility.

This report is also providing a number of recommendations regarding the cultural offer and infrastructure in Valletta and beyond. The point that emerges most strongly from this research is that the future cultural offer should avail itself more of the opportunities provided by community-based projects. Where these projects have been part of the programme, not only have they been very successful, but they also enrich the programme itself and its legacy through their wide participatory nature. Indeed it was noted that where people were active participants, and not only spectators, the level of satisfaction and engagement was much higher. There is also room for enhancing networking both between artists and between artists and local communities.

Given the above recommendations, it is noted that one of the challenges ahead for Valletta is to reconcile a current polarised situation, where on the one hand many developments in Valletta are primarily fuelled by the private sector and require governmental intervention to ensure that these are more resident-friendly, while the cultural offer is primarily developed through a top-down process and would be improved through more involvement by communities. The Foundation that will be entrusted with continuing the momentum set by Valletta 2018 has the potential of encouraging a more balanced approach in both cases.

In conclusion, one essential part of the legacy of Valletta 2018 is the networks, research capabilities and the dialogue that it has generated and fostered. These are invaluable resources that could only be built over time and at great cost and are vital to keeping the momentum set by the European Capital of Culture – to nurture, as one of the respondents put it, the seed that has been sown.