



A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE VALLETTA 2018 CULTURAL PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

The 2018 report focuses on the delivery of the Cultural Programme and builds on the previous reports that examined the development of the programme from the early stages. The main aim is to understand the experience of programmers and main contributors in terms of delivering a programme that includes a balanced cultural offer, citizen engagement and European collaboration.

The study examines the Cultural Programme strategies and processes through an analysis of Valletta 2018 documentation, over 10 interviews with programmers and an online survey with participants involved in a range of 2018 projects.

On the cultural offer, the study finds that the development of programme content was characterised by ongoing changes and reworking of themes and projects. The programme included activities across main art forms with music and visual arts being the most represented genres. Overall the programme included a varied cultural offer and mixture of projects ranging from mass events to niche community-based projects with different and often contrasting objectives.

The study also looks at the diverse forms of engagement varying from mere attendance to co-creation and active collaboration with specific target groups. Mixed methods were used to promote projects, but the extensive range of events meant that projects were also competing for limited resources and audiences.

About the European dimension, generally, respondents felt that their project themes were relevant to international audiences and that their projects had export potential. The island theme and Malta's geographical position was interpreted as an opportunity to create meaningful international connections. However, the findings show that the Foundation also experienced difficulties in working with international collaborators.

The study concludes that the experience gained by the programming team and producers should be exploited to improve future cultural aspirations and programming in Malta and to reflect on the next phase of legacy development.

INTRODUCTION

The Valletta 2018 European Capital Cultural Programme opening was held on the 20th of January 2018, launching a programme of around 120 projects spread over one year. The study aims to analyse the development and delivery of the programme led by the Valletta 2018 Foundation's programming team and requiring the involvement of over 1000 Maltese and international project coordinators, artists, performers, producers and volunteers.

The study's primary objective is to analyse the programme in three specific areas namely the cultural offer, audience participation and European collaboration as experienced on the ground by programmers and producers. The study analyses the Cultural Programme experience including objectives set, problems faced and results achieved throughout the implementation phase.

The previous studies (2015-2017) focused on the planning and development stages while this report concentrates on the actualisation of the programme throughout the European Capital of Culture year.

METHODOLOGY

This study takes a qualitative approach using primary data information gathered through interviews and consultation meetings with key informants responsible for programming and relevant stakeholders. The participants' knowledge and experiences were used to gain an in-depth understanding of how the programme unfolded throughout the year.

An online survey was conducted with coordinators, producers and creators leading individual projects or programme strands. Monthly project visits and observations were carried out to gain an overall understanding of particular events and workshops. The information gathered was transcribed and coded according to the main themes being analysed.

Secondary data sources, which include the programme of events, marketing materials, the Valletta 2018 website and the working documents as supplied by the Foundation, were also used to understand the programme range and content.

The research needed to ensure that the data updates were frequent and that the methodology was flexible because of the variety of projects and events as well as ongoing changes throughout the year. The methodology was adequate to gain detailed and in-depth perspectives. However, as previous studies have argued, interviews have limitations because of the reliance on respondents' recollections, perceptions and biases (ECORYS, 2014); (Garcia & Cox, 2013). To address these difficulties, the research attempts to gather data from a variety of sources to widen its scope and present a more comprehensive analysis.

It should also be emphasised that given the resources available, this study is limited to the experience of those working directly on the programme and/or projects and does not include the perception of the wider audience and of those cultural operators who were not participating in the programme. Moreover, governance and finance are also directly related to the outcomes of the programme, but these elements are not included within the scope of this study.

FINDINGS

Cultural Offer and Programming Balance

In analysing the Cultural Programme offer, there are various elements and approaches that need to be considered as identified in various ECoC evaluation studies (Garcia and Cox, 2013; Palmer/Rae, 2014;). These include the chosen themes, seasonal programme, art forms and genres, type of events and programming balance.

Themes and overall programme structure

Back in 2012, the Valletta 2018 bid-book presented four themes and orientations, namely “generations”, “cities”, “routes” and “islands”. The themes were matched to four areas - education, skills, community and events. At the development stage and later during the implementation phase, respondents from the foundation’s programming team said that the themes were interpreted as flexible and the approach was not one of strict adherence to the original themes. This finding is consistent with ECORYS post evaluation studies (2014, 2015, 2016) that observe how the themes are mostly useful for internal organisation and communication. In the words of the Cultural Programme coordinator “rather than linking individual performances to a particular theme”, the themes were used as a narrative across the full programme with some of the projects having a more obvious link to the themes than others. Nonetheless, the themes were also mentioned in the external communication of programmes as part of the Foundation’s aspirational vision.

In 2018, the Capital of Culture Programme was described as a celebration of “an island-wide festa”, and the programme themes were identified as “island stories”, “future baroque” and “voyages”. These themes had been communicated publically in 2017 in the Cultural Programme Preview. The overall “island” theme featured prominently with no less than 80 mentions in the official programme. Some words also stand out as being part of the Valletta 2018 Programme and project discourse including community (59 mentions), the Mediterranean (39 mentions) as well as diversity and migration (33 mentions).

Since 2012, apart from evolving themes, the projects listed at bid stage were also reworked. The only project title that remained unchanged and made it to the final programme list was *L-Ikla t-Tajba*. Over four years, the projects were either developed further, altered or even abandoned. Contributors and creatives working on the programme also changed. The most impactful changes occurred at Foundation level with changes in the artistic direction, top management and programming teams directly influencing programme content.

Large events versus small community projects

One feature particular to Valletta 2018 was the distinction made between large events led by the Artistic Director Mario Azzopardi and the rest of the programme managed by the programming team. The big events were mainly the opening ceremony *Erba’ Pjazez*, the Pageant of the Seas and the opera *Aħna Refuġjati* all targeting mass audiences.

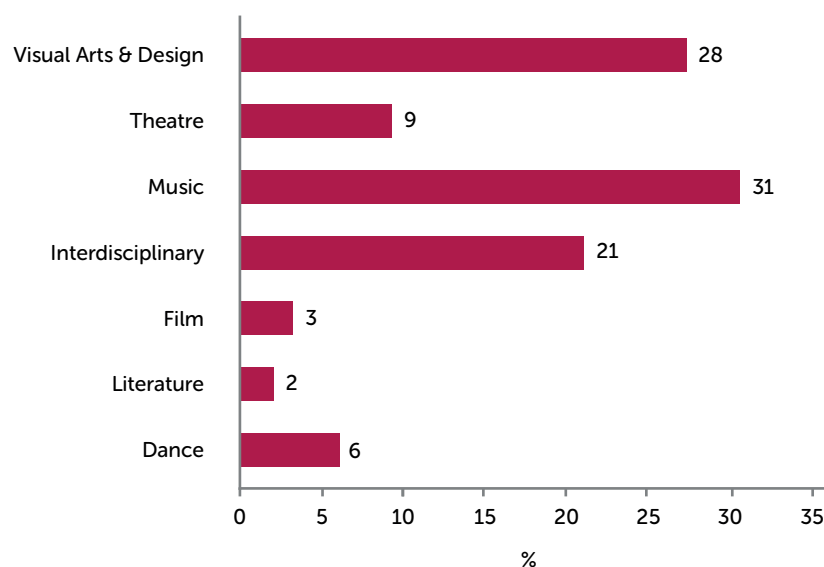
The Cultural Programme also included 15 festivals, both public and private, including the Malta International Arts Festival, ŽiguŽajg Children’s festival, the Jazz festival and Earth Garden as part of its offer. These festivals either widened their offer or included special events in 2018. Beyond these big-hitting events and festivals, the programme was characterised by a significant number of small, grassroots projects and initiatives happening throughout the year and across different locations. Some of these smaller projects like *Darba Waħda*, *Naqsma il-Muża* and *Fragmenta* are the result of a process-led approach and had been piloted in the previous years. These projects led by Maltese or Malta-based creatives stood the test of time and made it to the ECoC final programme.

Other projects like *Story Works*, *Qatt ma’ Ninsa*, *Windrose Project* and *Pjazza fi Pjazza* were abandoned and came to a close before the capital of culture year. On the other hand, some initiatives like *Il-Festa l-Kbira* and *Habbilni ħa Nirbaħ* were not listed on the official programme but were then inserted as part of the programming later in the year.

Art forms

The Cultural Programme included activities across main art forms as shown in Figure 1. Music (31%) and visual arts (28%) stand out as being the most represented genres. The music strand included 7 foundation events and 17 Open Call events collectively presenting performances from the worlds of jazz, folk, electronica, rock, metal, indie, classical, traditional, reggae, hip-hop and ethnic music. Theatre, dance and literature were less prominent. However, a substantial number of projects adopted an interdisciplinary approach (21%) with different art forms included, suggesting broader definitions and approaches. The cross-art form approach makes it difficult to categorise all projects. In fact, in its internal documents and website, the Foundation uses multiple tags to categorise individual projects as follows: community, visual arts, design, children and young people, performance, opera, music and film.

Chart 1: Culture program art forms



Seasonal Programming

Following the opening event in Valletta, the first quarter of the year included a focus on musical events showcasing work by international groups and artists like the Other Europeans and Ida Kelarova Jazz Famelja. The second and third quarter saw an increase in the number and frequency of performances as well as outdoor events as is expected since this timing also coincides with arts festivals like Għana Fest, Valletta Film Festival, the Malta International Jazz festival and the Malta International Arts Festival. The September and October months can be said to have been the opera season with *Aħna Refuġjati*, *Aida*, *Corto Maltese* and *Tosca* all happening within the span of a few weeks.

Concerning planning and distribution of projects, the concentration of big events during one season, as in the case of opera, created difficulties and pressure for the organisers. In the words of the programme coordinator, "This meant that performances were competing for the same venues, talent, technical resources and audiences. The number of events happening in the last quarter created a strain on the limited resources available". Various respondents working on the programme emphasised that the unprecedented increase in the culture offer created pressure on resources and coordination of activities.

Space and Location

From the outset, the Foundation announced that Valletta 2018 projects and events would be performed across various localities and not only in Valletta. The Valletta title is described as "an award shared among

all localities on our Islands” (Cultural Programme 2018, p.3). The five regional coordinators worked with the programming team to broker the Cultural Programme in Valletta, Gozo, the North, Centre, South and South East regions and to engage residents across different localities.

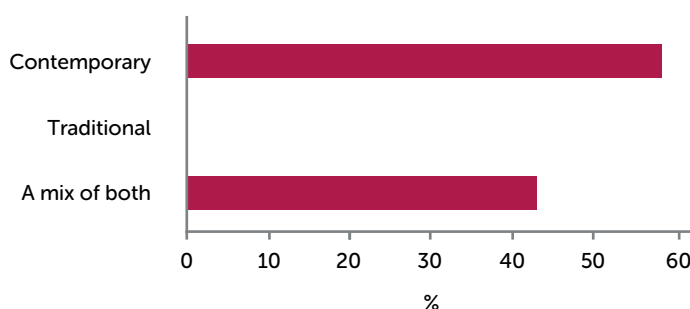
Both public and private spaces were used to host various events, but respondents commented that private venues were found to have fewer facilities and equipment. Interestingly the Foundation in collaboration with Arts Council Malta published the theatre-audit *Spazji Teatrali, A Catalogue of Theatres in Malta and Gozo* which lists 78 theatre spaces, 90% of which are outside Valletta. The venues varied considerably from public theatres to private spaces including private homes.

Use of public space also presented some challenges. Outdoor events like the *Pageant of the Seas* and the *Orfeo and Majnun* parade required substantial work on logistics and lengthy processes to acquire permits from various entities.

Traditional and Contemporary

The focus on contemporary art and bringing “contemporary culture to our capital city” (Cultural Programme p.15) was a priority articulated by interviewees responsible for programming. The programme however also describes a suspension between traditional and contemporary. Similarly, 57% of the project leads responding to the online survey described their project as contemporary while 43% described their activities as including elements of both traditional and contemporary.

Chart 2: Type of approach, contemporary vs traditional



Overall the Cultural Programme included a varied cultural offer and a mixture of projects ranging from mass events to niche projects with different and often contrasting objectives. Such variety necessitated diverse forms of engagement with audiences varying from mere attendance to co-creation and active collaboration as will be discussed in the next section.

Audience Participation Strategies

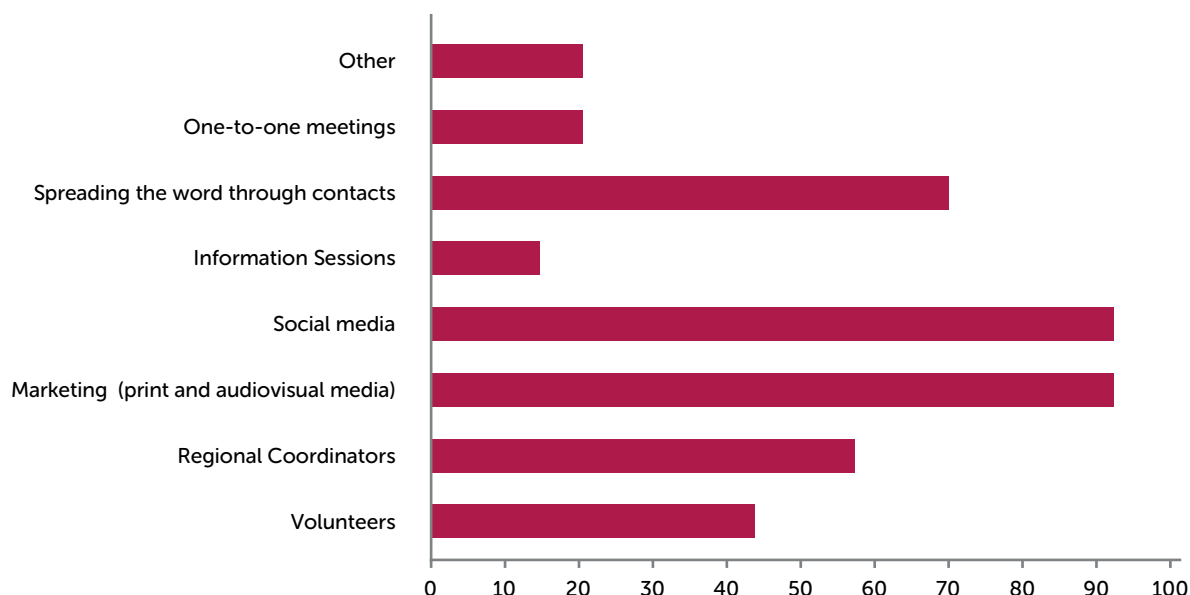
Participation, community engagement and inclusion are the main objectives of ECoC particularly with its emphasis on the “City and Citizen” element. From the bidding stage to the delivery phase, Valletta 2018 placed a strong focus on the need to eliminate societal barriers to participation. The Cultural Programme preview published in 2017, announced that “inclusivity, accessibility and participation are at the core of our Cultural Programme. All our community and participation-focused events are an open invitation to a celebration that begins in the symbolic heart of our programme (...)” (p.15).

Approaches and methods for participation

Beyond the rhetoric on public engagement, there is a need to identify how creators of the programme set out to involve citizens. As identified in the 2017 questionnaire, the foundation and project leaders

used mixed methods to reach out to audiences. This was also emphasised in the qualitative analysis with the project leaders as they agreed that marketing needed to vary according to the particular needs of individual projects and reflect the eclectic nature of the programme. The various methods used are listed in Figure 3 which also shows the predominant use of social media.

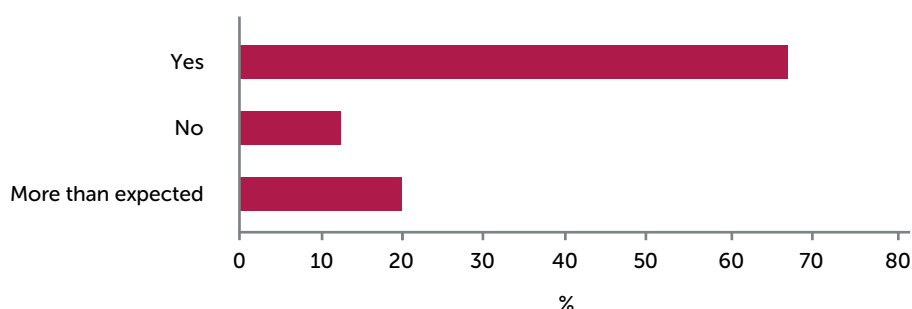
Chart 3: Methods used to reach audiences



Overall the programming team observed unpredictable trends in participation. Some events which were initially thought of as trying to sell were eventually sold out whereas other performances registered lower turn-outs than those projected. The programming coordinator mentioned the dance party *Malta Calls* done in collaboration with *ŻfinMalta* as having unusually low attendance notwithstanding marketing efforts. Respondents also commented on influencing factors like location, weather and the world-cup football. For example, the *Ida Kelarova* performance and its venue in Gozo were mentioned as an example of not reaching the desired attendance because of the choice of location.

Conversely, the producers of the *Solar Cinema* travelling open-air cinema festival commented on the positive trends in participation which were “bigger and better than expected”. The producers used various methods including collaborating with regional coordinators. The varied and often unexpected trends of participation by producers are also illustrated in the figure below showing different levels of satisfaction in the numbers reached and with the majority stating that the desired outcome was achieved.

Chart 3: Did you reach the desired audience numbers?



The Foundation's programming and communications teams needed to work continuously at awareness raising level and repeated efforts were needed to engage different groups of citizens. As observed by the programming coordinator, for some events and workshops the Foundation would issue calls several times in an attempt to encourage more take-up. For example, in the case of *Bodies in Urban Spaces* calls were issued twice and "there was a need to knock on doors, to engage one on one" with the residents in Mellieħa. Similarly, the animal building workshops, which were part of the Creative Europe project *Orfeo Majnun*, were initially challenging to promote. However, in the end, the Foundation received numerous requests for participation, some of which they turned down because of the overwhelming demand.

The event *Il-Festa l-Kbira* also seemed to have struck a chord with local audiences by bringing together different communities to join the much-loved festa celebration. The initiative attracted the participation of band clubs, 'rival' festa committees, local councils and community groups.

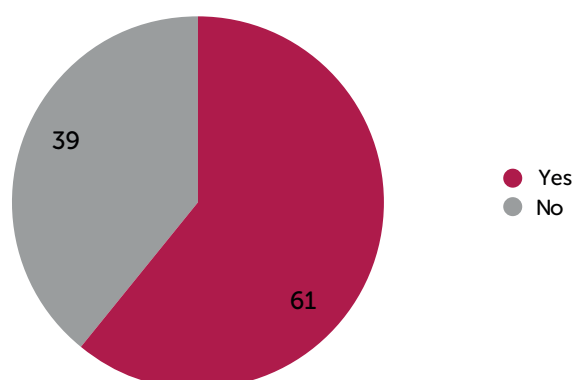
Other trends were observed by the programming team such as the difficulty of attracting participation by creative professionals to commit to a week-long workshop led by top artists. On the other hand, short, one-off workshops targeting younger audiences were more popular.

The significant amount of events and the limited size of audiences was mentioned by respondents as an ongoing challenge. In the words of one of the strand coordinators, "The reason we did not reach the desired audience numbers in all of the foundation events is that there were perhaps too many events on the go, often clashing, which automatically results in a dilution of potential attendees". Similar concerns on the programme activities competing for same audiences were expressed by another project coordinator. In particular, it was noted that:

The project was very successful in terms of satisfaction of artists, participants and audience members. The only hiccup that we had was that another last-minute event was planned on the same day as the concert, which severely hampered audience numbers.

Commenting on the Foundation's efforts to attract audiences, 61% of the project leads responding to the questionnaire said that enough was done while 39% were not satisfied, more specifically one respondent commented that there was no marketing strategy for the individual project and others commented on stretched resources. An international contributor commented that audience engagement strategies were done by the Foundation, but they were not aware of what methods were used.

Chart 5: Did the Valeta 2018 Foundation contribute enough to encourage audience participation?



Targeting specific groups

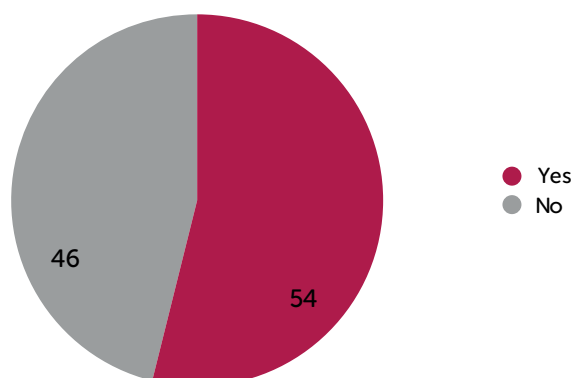
The Foundation categorised over 15 projects as 'Community Projects'. These included process-led projects like *Subjective Maps*, *Altofest*, *Rulina*, *Latitude 36*, *Exiled Homes*, *Gewwa Barra*, *Rima*, *Shake It*, *Darba Waħda* and *Magna Żmien*. The emphasis of this kind of programming was not on the quantity of the persons participating but on the quality and type of engagement.

Projects like *Gewwa Barra* and *Altofest* were designed to include active participation and co-creation from early stages where creatives worked directly with residents over a longer period of time. In these activities, the approach was to engage groups like the Valletta residents in the creation process. The use of space for such projects is also part of the participatory element, and in *Altofest* local residents hosted events inside their private homes and community spaces. Valletta 2018 offered a unique opportunity to develop these long-term projects which would probably not have been developed and sustained were it not for ECoC and its focus on community.

Other projects like *Cabinets of the Future* worked with experts and citizens through communal workshops. It created opportunities for participants to share aspirations and concerns that explore visions of the local future. Similarly, the initiative *Utopian Nights* encouraged the public to engage on societal issues.

While larger events focused on mass audiences, such projects strategically focused on working or appealing to niche groups. 54% of survey respondents said that they targeted specific groups.

Chart 6: Did you have any specific target groups?



Migrant groups and the Maltese diaspora were the specific target group of projects like *Exiled Homes*, *Rima*, *Utopian Nights* and *Latitude 36*. Producers of *Exiled Homes* described the openness of the Filipino community to work collaboratively and enthusiastically.

Children and youth were another target, and at least 11 projects were designed to target younger audiences like the performances *Años Luz* and *Hush*. Programmes like *Sounds Out Loud*, *Gaħan18*, *Ohloq Kultura*, *The Box* and *Taf x'Naf* were delivered within school settings and created opportunities for children to co-create and explore different art forms.

Vulnerable groups were another target group identified by programmers. Young people with different abilities and their carers worked on the *Sounds Out Loud* project. The visual arts exhibition *Tactile* targeted the visually impaired community. The group *Opening Doors* participated in the programme and worked with persons with different intellectual abilities as well as volunteers, artists and other practitioners. The group's performance *(In)Visibility* is one of the final events of the 2018 programme.

The Foundation also set out to facilitate the participation of vulnerable or hard to reach groups by working with active ageing centres, schools and hospitals. Another strategy was to provide specialised transport to those communities that required it such as mental health patients at Mount Carmel Hospital who visited the *Orfeo Majnun Parade* and the Toi Toi performance *Down Memory Lane*. The programme coordinator spoke about ongoing work to make venues more accessible to persons with disabilities but in her own words, “definitely more could be done”.

Volunteering is a common element for public engagement adopted by previous ECoCs (Garcia, 2013). This strategy was also used by the Foundation to encourage active citizenship through the *Tal-Kultura Volunteer Scheme* done in collaboration with the organisation SOS Malta. The aim was that of fostering a sense of active citizenship through the volunteering experience. The take-up for this scheme by non-Maltese residents was significant. However, their role in engaging audiences was mostly limited to offering assistance to usher guests and distribute materials during events.

European and International Collaboration

In line with ECoC objectives, the European dimension in the form of transnational collaboration and cultural diversity is a priority in the design of cultural programmes. The pervasive island theme and Malta’s geographical position was interpreted as an opportunity to create meaningful links between Europe and Africa.

The vast majority (92%) of respondents responsible for individual projects viewed their work as relevant to European audiences while 69% believed their project could be exported in the future.

Chart 7: Relevance of Project to European Audiences

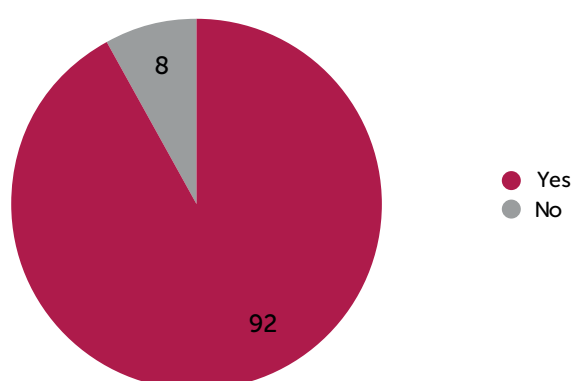
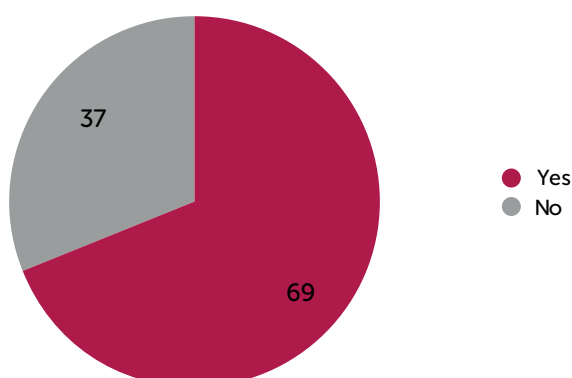


Chart 8: Do you believe that this project will have a life outside of Malta in the future?



While the content and rhetoric of external communication includes European-speak and stresses the importance of making connections beyond island-life, it is essential to understand how creators set out to collaborate with European artists in practice.

Throughout the entire programme, the European and/or international dimension was present either through the themes tackled or through the participation of international artists and communities. The migration strand, in particular, focused on creating connections, representing minorities and working on the themes of departure, exile and stories of minority groups. The programming team also commented that foreign artists associated Malta with migration and this seemed to be the most common thematic interest for international collaborators.

The artist residencies also had the objective of improving international networking with a focus on the Euro-Mediterranean region. Artists from different countries including Jordan and Australia were hosted and encouraged to share their work through these residency initiatives.

The exchange with the EU-Japan Fest Committee also allowed for international exchanges. The *Valletta Design Cluster*, the *Tactile* exhibition and *Modern Music* days all benefitted from this collaboration. The island theme also made this collaboration further relevant as shown in the project *Island Lights* highlighting aspects within both Maltese and Japanese cultural experiences as islands.

The collaboration was also ongoing with the twin European of Capital Culture Leeuwarden-Fryslan. This included higher education student mobility programmes for MCAST and Friesland College students. The projects *Poetry in Potato bags*, *Taf X'Naf*, *Subterranean Matter*, *Kirana*, *Ohloq Kultura* and *Aida* also established direct links with the Dutch counterparts.

In 2016, the Foundation appointed Austrian director Airan Berg as its International Artistic Advisor. Berg who was Linz09's artistic director for the performing arts provided the foundation with international contacts and led the production team of the *Orfeo & Majnun* Creative Europe-funded project together with Martina Winkel. His contribution is also linked to the participation of Austrian artists across different projects including the group *Times Up*, the curator of multi-site exhibition *Dal-Baħar Madwarna* Maren Richter and the filmmaker Virgil Wildrich.

Beyond the diversity, exchange and Maltese culture export benefits, the programmers also reflected on the challenges in establishing meaningful international collaboration. The programming coordinator described the showcasing international acts in Malta as being relatively straightforward to manage when compared to devised and collaborative work with foreign artists.

Collaboration on original and commissioned work proved to be more difficult in practice. Specifically, the programming coordinator said that "the focus of some of the international artists was about bringing their art here and less so about collaborating with local artists". In the case of the performance *Każin Barokk*, the original idea was that of collaborating with local artists, but throughout the selection process, very few Maltese performers were included. In other auditions and calls for participation in internationally-led workshops, attracting the participation of Maltese creatives also proved to be challenging. In some cases, it was problematic to bring Maltese creatives on board to work on international projects that required a long-term commitment.

The contractual agreements drawn up by the Foundation, the rigid public procurement procedures and “bureaucratic processes” were also described by programmers and producers as a major challenge hindering relations with international artists. In some cases, international collaborators found it difficult to understand why lengthy administrative measures were being adopted at the detriment of artistic quality and requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

This study analyses the Cultural Programme from the creator’s perspective and reflects on strategies in place to offer varied projects, engage the public particularly in community-based projects and create European and international links.

It shows that organisational and managerial changes characterised the development and delivery of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme: revising and redefining objectives; reframing themes and pivoting direction. Programmers worked on identifying new target groups, developing ongoing projects, abandoning projects while negotiating new collaborations. Changes at an organisational level also shaped the programme at the delivery stage. Decisions taken at the planning stage particularly on the distribution of projects had a direct impact on the efficiency of delivery in 2018.

Devising and bringing together the programme was a continuous learning curve for those involved. Difficulties were experienced as the managers of the programme had to adapt to the flexibility needed by artists while abiding by and working within the restrictions of inflexible administrative procurement procedures.

Respondents’ concerns on lack of resources and flexibility show that the implementation of the programme needs to be seen in the broader context, such as the need for improvement of organisational strength in the Maltese creative sector and the need for overall capacity building at both public institution and cultural operator levels.

On this note, the programme coordinator responsible for the overall programme said the following:

“It was a journey of self-discovery for us, for Malta, on what we can and cannot do. A discovery of how things change, how people remain committed – from bid-book stage to later stages when you ask - are you still committed to this project?” (November 2018).

The valuable experience gained by the programming team and producers throughout these years should be used to improve future cultural aspirations and programming in Malta beyond 2018 in the next phase of legacy development. Most respondents particularly those leading community focus projects spoke of their ambition of carrying projects forward in years to come.

Concerning the restraints of this study, because this analysis has been undertaken just before the end of the ECoC, the overall reflection by programmers and producers may not yet be fully apparent and articulated. A further update in 2019 is recommended to allow the main programme contributors to have more detachment and time for hindsight reflection.

This report focuses on the perspectives of those directly involved in programme delivery. Further studies may also explore the attitudes of local creative practitioners who did not participate in the Cultural Programme. Such data could provide information on why creatives may be alienated and what barriers to participation they perceive.

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