



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

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# ABSTRACT

This study examines whether Valletta 2018, the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programme, affects the feelings of European identity of people in Malta, to what extent and among what segments of the population. It employs a mixed-method and whole-country approach spread over a four-year period (2015-2018). During the first year of the study (2015), extensive desktop research was conducted in order to determine the baseline scenario on the definitions of European Identity, Cultural Participation and Valletta 2018 exposure, together with data on several socio-economic descriptors of people in Malta. In the second year of the study (2016), a large-scale survey was undertaken, employing computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) on individuals aged over 18 years residing in private households. The survey returned around 850 responses which revealed interesting behavioural patterns in cultural attendance and participation. Given the complexity of the notion of European Identity, two focus group discussions were carried out in 2017 to obtain qualitative insights. A second large-scale survey was conducted in 2018 to yield a panel of observations, thus allowing a comparison between pre- and post-ECoC findings. This report illustrates the results of the 2018 wave of interviews which were completed on 20 November 2018.

# INTRODUCTION

In October 2012, Valletta was selected to be the 2018 European Capital of Culture (ECoC). Participation of Maltese and European citizens was considered to be an integral goal of the initiative. Indeed, the cultural programme envisaged considerable community and outreach components all around the Maltese Islands. The European dimension is also a key aspect of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programme. ECoC programmes aim to foster cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities from different Member States, to highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe and to bring the common aspects of European cultures to the fore (European Parliament, 2006).

However, while the development of a European (cultural) identity is a goal of ECoC programmes, there are few studies which provide evidence of this. Consistent, accessible and comparable research and evaluation directly linked to culture is one of the requirements of hosting a ECoC (Garcia and Cox, 2013). In light of this, the present study examines the extent to which European identity in Malta may have been affected by the Valletta 2018 ECoC programme, to what extent and among what segments of the population.

# METHODOLOGY

Against the backdrop of the literature (provided in 2015 report), the study tests three hypotheses, namely H1. The impact of Valletta 2018 on the European-ness of Malta's society is conditional on the definition or dimensions of European-ness - the affective dimensions of European-ness are least likely to change; H2.

The impact of Valletta 2018 on the European-ness of Malta's society responds positively to participation and involvement in ECoC; H3. The impact of Valletta 2018 on the European-ness of Malta's society is influenced by controls and demographics.

The study employs a mixed-method approach spread over a four-year period (2015-2018), with people in the entire country of Malta as the focus. In the first year of the study (2015), extensive desktop research was undertaken to obtain the baseline scenario on the definitions of European Identity, Cultural Participation and Valletta 2018 exposure, alongside data on several socio-economic descriptors of people in Malta. During the second year of the study (2016), a large-scale cross-sectional survey was carried out, employing computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) on individuals aged over 18 years residing in private households. The survey returned 850 responses which revealed interesting behavioural patterns in cultural attendance and participation that echoed the findings of the Malta cultural participation survey.

Given the complexity of the notion of European Identity, a focus group study was carried out in 2017.

A second large-scale survey was conducted in 2018 to yield a panel of observations. The present report illustrates the findings of the 2018 wave of interviews finalised on 20 November 2018.

The survey interview was designed specifically for this study to tap the relevant dimensions of both the dependent variable (European-ness) and the possible explanatory variables, of which ECoC participation is the key variable of interest. In defining identity, reference was made to recent, authoritative, large-scale comparative research (Bellucci and Sanders, 2012), which define European-ness as a complex construct composed of (i) Identity, or the feeling of belonging to the EU; (ii) Representation, or the extent to which people see their interests represented in the EU and (iii) Scope, or the degree to which actors would like the EU to have jurisdiction on a wider (or narrower) range of policies. In designing indicators of cultural participation, reference was made to similar work conducted in Malta (Briguglio and Sultana, 2015). The questions also draw on those included in standard Eurobarometer, European Social Survey and the World Value Survey.

The final survey (as described in the 2015 report) included questions on degree of attachment to their town or village, region, country, Europe; nationality and the meaning assigned to having that nationality; being European and what it means to be European; feeling European and extent of voting in European elections; perceived consequences of Europe on people; knowledge of EU members; perceived benefit for Malta and its citizens of being in the EU; views on integration and responsibility of the EU in various domains; awareness of Valletta 2018; ability to name Valletta 2018 events; participation of and attendance in any Valletta 2018 events.<sup>1</sup>

The second wave survey benefitted from the insights of in-depth discussions conducted as part of the focus groups held in 2017, insights drawn from the response rates in the first wave and discussion in a number of scholarly conferences where the first wave results were presented. In particular, there was the removal of a question (related to detailed policy fields) which respondents seemed to find difficult to

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<sup>1</sup>The final survey also included questions on cultural participation including internet use and participation as audience or producer of cultural activities. Further questions included those on age, gender, locality of residence, number of persons and children in the household, educational level, labour status, marital status and income. Other questions related to self-assessed health, well-being, level of socialising and religious affiliation and frequency of religious service attendance. Respondents were also asked about institutional trust, political interest, whether they have ever resided abroad for a continuous period of at least 12 months or visited another EU country in the last 12 months.

answer and which was not particularly relevant to the question at hand. There was also the inclusion of a question on the sense of “Mediterranean” identity.

The 2018 wave of the identity survey was conducted on the same sample interviewed in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Considering the natural decay rate of repeated surveys, the 2018 wave aimed at obtaining a final representative sample of at least 400 respondents from across the Maltese Islands by 20 November 2018. The final sample includes responses from 435 respondents (35 extra interviews were held as a safeguard for defaulting interviews) and was completed on 12 November 2018. As in Wave 1, a considerable number of extra calls were made. Surveyors were issued with a primary set of 400 combined numbers and subsequently another three backup lists, resulting in circa 1600 calls being commissioned. Surveyors stated that the period of completion of the interview ranged from 10 minutes to 50 minutes. The Margin of Error of the resultant 435 completed surveys is that of 4.7%. The data has a confidence interval of 95% as based on a population of 425,000. Where new persons were identified due to loss of the original respondents, such were elicited from the same street as those dropping out.

## FINDINGS

Following tests for representativeness, a first layer of analysis was undertaken to examine each of the variables, their means, distribution and the extent to which sample (2018) data corroborated findings from the sample (2016) data and desktop research collated in 2015.

The results are summarised below, while full details are included in Appendix 1.

### Identity variables

- i. **Degree of Attachment:** 72.9% of those surveyed responded that they are ‘very attached’ to their own country while 20.5% answered that they are ‘somewhat attached’. 5.3% answered that they are ‘not very attached’ while 1.1% responded that they are ‘not at all attached’ to their own country. In contrast, 38.2% of those surveyed responded that they are ‘very attached’ to Europe while 27.8% answered that they are ‘somewhat attached’. 19.3% answered that they are ‘not very attached’ while 12.9% responded that they are ‘not at all attached’ to Europe. 1.8% either did not know or were non-responsive.
- ii. **The effect of Europe on how you feel about yourself in everyday life:** 33.3% and 36.8% answered ‘a lot’ and ‘somewhat’, respectively on the effect Europe has on how people feel in their everyday lives. 17.0% and 3.9% answered ‘not very much’ and ‘not at all’, respectively. The remaining 9.0% either did not know the answer or were non-responsive.

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<sup>2</sup> The April 2016 Electoral Register for the Maltese Islands was used to create a simple random sample of respondents aged over 18, with replacements. The respondents were then identified and telephone numbers acquired. Early terminations were not included in the final dataset to ensure consistency and limit missing data. In line with requirements from the Data Protection Commission, the dataset was duly anonymised, and each case was given a unique code. The data set was then checked for inputting errors. The sample is representative of the Maltese population in terms of both spread (across the different localities as per sequential random sampling as sorted by locality and street name). Females are over-represented (mean of 0.6) and skewed towards older age groups (higher frequency in the 50+ age categories when compared to Census data with a mean age of 55.4) which is expected in CATI.

- iii. **Did Malta benefit or not from being a member of the EU?** – 80.9% gave a positive answer while 3.9% answered that it did not. The remaining 15.2% either did not provide an answer, were unresponsive or did not find an answer in the suggested possible list of answers.
- iv. **Have people benefited from Malta's membership of the EU?** – 64.4% gave a positive answer while 16.3% answered that it did not. The remaining 19.3% either did not provide an answer, were unresponsive or did not find an answer in the suggested possible list of answers.
- v. **Impact of event in Europe on people's lives:** 33.3% and 36.8% answered that the events in Europe are 'very important' and 'somewhat important' (respectively) in shaping people's lives. 17.0% and 3.9% answered that they are 'not very important' and 'not important', respectively. The remaining 9.0% either did not provide an answer, were unresponsive or did not find an answer in the suggested possible list of answers.
- vi. **Ranking of European Unification where 0 means unification has gone too far and 10 means unification should be strengthened:** 11.5% think that European integration has already gone too far and gave a ranking between 0 and 3. 36.6% think that European unification should be strengthened and thus gave a ranking between 7 and 10. Nearly 29.9% gave an answer between 4 and 6. The mean for this answer was 6.3 with a relatively large standard deviation (3.0) highlighting the vast range of answers provided for this question. 22.1% either did not know or were non-responsive.
- vii. **Does being a European affect your everyday life?** – 18.4% and 39.8% answered that being European matters 'a lot' and 'somewhat' (respectively) on how they affect their everyday life. 17.7% and 12.9% answered 'not very much' and 'not at all'. 11.3% either did not know or were non-responsive.

#### Exposure variables<sup>3</sup>

- viii. **Awareness of Valletta 2018: Overall, 91% of respondents declared to be aware of Valletta 2018:** The majority of the respondents (43.7%) heard about Valletta 2018 through the TV. Nearly 25% heard about Valletta 2018 from the radio. 6.0% of the respondents heard about Valletta 2018 through newspapers/magazines while another 5.1% of the respondents were made aware of Valletta 2018 online. 12.2% of the respondents were made aware of Valletta 2018 through other media sources. **Valletta 2018 website:** 80.7% of the respondents replied that they did not visit the Valletta 2018 website in the last year.
- ix. **Active participation in any Valletta European Capital of Culture event:** 94.0% of the respondents did not actively participate in any Valletta 2018 cultural events while 5.3% responded that they did participate.
- x. **Attended any Valletta European Capital of Culture event:** 40.7% of the respondents answered affirmatively while 52.9% of the respondents did not attend any Valletta European Capital of Culture event. 6.4% either did not know or were non-responsive.

The comparison between the findings of the waves of surveys will form part of the final impact report. However, we can highlight some key comparative findings here:

- We find very similar demographics, including the higher number of respondents aged over 50 relative to the national population (typical of CATI).

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<sup>3</sup>These questions were only asked to the sub-sample of respondents that had already acknowledged awareness of Valletta 2018. As a consequence, the resulting data may differ significantly from surveys asking the question to the entire sample. Although different, however, the data should be consistent with regards to the two key findings, namely : a relatively low exposure, and the TV as the main medium.

- Overall, we find patterns similar to those found in cultural participation surveys by the National Statistics Office and the Eurobarometer.
- As expected, awareness, active participation and attendance of Valletta 2018 events are on average higher in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1.
- We also find somewhat higher levels of attachment to the EU but also to own country and to own town/village. There are more respondents who think that we need stronger European Unification when compared to Wave 1 results.
- Over 80% of our respondents think that Malta has benefitted from EU membership while the EU average based on our baseline study was 68%. The benefits of EU membership seem to be uncontroversial in Malta.

Appendix 2 presents some key correlations between indicators of European Identity and other variables (H1) and between ECoC exposure and other demographics and control variables (H2). Our preliminary data indicate that:

- **Identity** (with attachment to town/village, own country and to Europe and feeling of being European used as proxies) is positively correlated with the degree of trust in people, political interest, assigning importance to what happens in Europe, views on European integration, voting at EU elections and the extent to which the EU is perceived as a source of benefits.
- The belief that the EU provides **Representation** of the respondents' interests is positively correlated with feelings of being European (0.42), views on European unification (0.26), perception of the EU as a source of benefits (0.25), attachment to Europe (0.19), extent of trust in people (0.19), feelings of nationality (0.18) and the extent to which respondents see themselves as National or European (0.18).
- The desired (broad or narrow) **Scope** of the EU's policy responsibility correlates positively with the perception of the EU as beneficial to Malta (0.38) and to people (0.31), the feeling of being European (0.28), consequences of what happens in Europe (0.26) and political interest (0.21).

In terms of correlations between the ECoC exposure variables and other variables, our preliminary findings can be summarised as follows:

- Attending any of the events organised by Valletta 2018 is strongly and positively correlated with labour status, marital status and age.
- The perception of the EU as a source of benefit for people is strongly and positively correlated with attending any of the events organised by Valletta 2018.

In general, concerning our general hypotheses on the relationship between exposure to Valletta 2018 and European Identity we find that:

- The correlation between European-ness and ECoC exposure is positive and relatively strong. Correlation analysis seems to indicate that Valletta 2018 does indeed relate to European identity even when controlling for the effect of other variables.
- The relationship depends strongly on how "European-ness" is defined. A positive correlation exists for the identity (affective) and representation (instrumental) sub-components.
- European-ness is influenced by a number of other factors related to demographic and control variables. Among these, political interest, labour status, marital status and age stand out.

## CONCLUSION

This study examines whether the Valletta 2018 ECoC programme affects the European sense of identity of people in Malta. ECoC exposure in 2016 was indeed associated with a stronger sense of European Identity (H2) and this did depend on how Identity was defined. The identity (affective) and representation (instrumental) dimensions of European identity exhibited higher correlation. Other factors (such as education, self-assessed health status, social life, religious affiliation, age, place of residence and having resided abroad) were also correlated with European-ness. In line with expectations, a positive correlation between awareness of the ECoC and active participation in a Valletta 2018 event was found. ECoC exposure in 2016 was itself also associated with factors like education, interest in politics, age, and trust, all of which were among the correlates with a stronger sense of European Identity.

Findings from the 2018 wave of the survey seem to confirm and reinforce the findings of the first wave. As anticipated, awareness, active participation and attendance of Valletta 2018 events are on average higher in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1. We find somewhat higher levels of attachment to the EU, but also to own country and to own town/village. Respondents attending events of Valletta 2018 as a European Capital of Culture tend to be those who are employed, perceive the European Union as beneficial, married and of older age. Correlation analysis seems to indicate that Valletta 2018 does indeed relate to European identity even when controlling for the effect of other variables. The relationship depends strongly on how European-ness is defined. On this score, a positive correlation still exists for the identity (affective) and representation (instrumental) sub-components. Among other correlates to European-ness, interest in politics, labour status, marital status and age stand out.

## WAY FORWARD

Work is now underway on the impact report. This will compare results in 2018 to those of the 2016 wave of the survey with a view to eliciting causal implications through panel data analysis. The qualitative focus-group study carried out in 2017 will provide further insights with a view to discussing the broader implications of the findings in light of the hypotheses informing the study.