

**The role of cultural events in promoting community cohesion: the case of two
socially deprived areas in the Maltese Islands**

JosAnn Cutajar, University of Malta

Abstract

Patron saint feasts in the Maltese Islands help localities reiterate their idiosyncratic and that is why they are still popular in spite of the encroaching effect of secularization. This paper sets out to find out whether these types of cultural events promote social cohesion in two localities in the South of Malta, namely Bormla and Birgu. For this purpose, data was elicited through the use of ethnographic research coupled with interviews with community leaders as well as key contacts. The data elicited from primary and secondary data was analyzed through the use of social capital theory. Social cohesion is said to be facilitated by civic participation. Civic participation in the organisations dealing with feast preparation was used as a litmus test to find out the level of civic participation, the type of social capital utilized in both localities, and how successful these were in bringing about community cohesion. The participants concluded that feasts might not help to socially integrate disparate groups within the community. The leaders in Birgu realized that they needed to come up with alternative cultural events and involve rival social groups in their preparation. These events proved to be successful on two fronts: they helped create a more inclusive communal identity and in the process, helped in the regeneration of Birgu. Birgu came out as a high trust society, where the diffusion of innovation was facilitated by evidence of both bridging and linking social capital. Poverty and deprivation served to limit formal and informal interactions in Bormla, and seemed to affect the community leader's capacity to act.

Key words

Social capital, deprivation, community regeneration, civic participation

1.0 Introduction

The focus of this paper concerns the role that cultural events play in eliciting community cohesion in two neighbouring localities in the Maltese Islands, namely Bormla and Birgu. Patron saint feasts are popular events in the majority of localities in the Maltese Islands since they help reiterate the idiosyncratic identity of a locality (Muscat 2008). The Maltese Islands are predominantly Catholic, with around 90 per cent of the population following this religion, although 52.6 per cent tend to be practicing Catholics according to the 2005 census (Discern 2005).

1.1 Feasts and voluntary participation

Feasts tend to occur in the majority of Maltese and Gozitan communities. Although the main intention is to celebrate the life of a particular saint, this event also helps make people feel that they belong to a group (Muscat 2008). Feasts can therefore be considered as events that promote social cohesion. For the purposes of this paper, social cohesion is taken to occur in instances where “people’s sense of community, their sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, caring about the people who live there, and believing that people who live there care about them (Portney & Berry 2001, p. 71).

The organisation of feasts involves a number of people who start preparing for it months prior to the event. According to Maltese National Statistics Office, 6.1 per cent of the population are involved in these preparations, predominantly men (Council of Europe 2008). These religious festivals, which are a permanent feature of the Maltese cultural calendar, tend to attract around 6000 secular participants from

within and without the community (ibid). The latter group may consist of Maltese or foreign visitors.

Maloney et al. (2008) maintain that associational universes are located in specific cultural, economic and political contexts which shape, and structure how they operate. For the purposes of this paper, associational membership in voluntary groups dealing with the preparation of feasts was studied. Putnam (2000) and Hussain (2008) underline the importance of religious associations or organisations linked with faith communities that bring together volunteers who work together for issues which concern them collectively.

Participation in associations often serves to generate civic skills (Maloney et al. 2008, p. 267). Van Schaik (2002, p. 7) adds that the more socially involved people are, the greater the possibility is that they build reciprocal relationships that help generate interpersonal trust. Social networks, according to Van Schaik, help build social capital, and social capital enables actors to secure benefits on an individual or collective basis.

Maloney et al. (2008, p. 261) use level of voluntary association and levels of associational membership in particular communities as a litmus test to measure the health of society's stock of social capital. Participation in the voluntary organisations dealing with feast preparation was used here, to find the level and type of civic association available in the two communities. The level and type of association was believed to impact on the quality of the cultural events.

Association in voluntary organisations help generate both internal effects on the member who participate, such as habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness (Maloney et al. 2008, p. 285) as well as external effects on society. As van Schaik (2002) points out, the level and type of social capital found within particular localities, impact on the well-being of communities, and this observation was kept in mind when the research was being conducted. Fieldhouse (2008, p. 22) argues that places with dense social networks or higher levels of social trust enjoy better, social and economic outcomes.

The purpose of this paper was therefore to find out whether voluntary participation in organisations linked with feast preparation provided 'safe' space where contact and negotiation (Thomas 2007, p. 17) was facilitated, helping generate integration and cohesion within communities. Cattle (2008, p. 13) maintains that shared spaces facilitate the propagation of mutual knowledge, understanding and trust.

1.2 Types of social capital

For the purposes of this research, three types of social capital were analysed. These consist of bonding, bridging and linking social capital. The definitions used here were those used by Woolcock (2001) and Putnam (2004). Both define bonding social capital as the relations between people in similar situations, whether these are kin, family and/or neighbours. Bridging social capital on the other hand, is envisaged by Woolcock (2001) as relations with persons who are not so close to the person in question. These might involve colleagues, workmates and/or people living within the community. While Woolcock regards linking social capital as another type of social capital, one which involves networks that connect actors of different institutional power, and thus encompasses people across social divides, Putnam

(2004) incorporates it within bridging networks. In this paper, Woolcock's categorisation will be utilised.

2.0 Bormla and Birgu

Birgu (Vittoriosa) and Bormla (Cospicua) are two of the Three Cities within the Cottonera area. The third city is Isla (Senglea) which for the purposes of this paper will not be taken into consideration. The area is also known as Cottonera because it is encircled by two networks of fortifications known as the Margherita and Cottonera lines built during the reign of the Knights of St. John to protect these cities from Ottoman incursions in the 16th and 17th century.

The Cottonera area is a densely populated residential and industrial expanse harbouring dockyards and other maritime related activities (Development Brief, 1997, p. 4). It was a British military base until 1979. The dockyard and shipbuilding industries in the locality started losing their strategic importance in the local economy in the late 1950s when the British decided to relinquish their hold on some of their colonies (Vella 1994). The dockyard suffered a further set back in 1973 when Mintoff, the prime minister of the time, declared Malta a republic and decided to civilianize the dockyard (Boswell 1994). This and subsequent attempts initiated in the 1990s to privatise the dockyards and ship building industry have enervated a crucial industry in the economy of the Maltese Islands, leading to the loss of jobs and the deskilling of a good portion of the population which helped undermine trade union power. All these changes had a concomitant effect on the people living in the surrounding communities, a good number of which were employed in these industries.

During World War II the Three Cities suffered intensive bombing. A number of residents from Cottonera sought shelter from the bombs in safer areas in the Maltese Islands. Some of these refugees never returned after the war. The post-war era saw massive reconstruction programmes in the area. A number of social housing projects built in the area were not in keeping with the historic characteristics of the area. The new housing project conducted between 1948 and 1957 attracted “a poorer and socially more depressed working-class population than it had before its elite moved out” (Boswell 1994, p. 135). In spite of this in migration, the cities within the Cottonera area continued to suffer from a decline in population (NSO, 2007). According to the 2005 census (NSO 2007, p. 3) there were around 5657 people living in Bormla, while Birgu consisted of 2701 individuals, when in 1901 the population in these cities had amounted to 6093 in Birgu and 12148 in Bormla.

In spite of this population reversal, the Cottonera area is relatively speaking one of the areas with a high residential density coupled with a lack of open spaces. Sub-standard housing found in the area attracts socially deprived groups since such accommodation is cheaper to rent. Squatting of old dilapidated buildings, some of historic interest is not infrequent (see Cutajar & Vella 2008). In an area where school absenteeism tends to be high, it is no wonder that the population tends to have low educational attainment. This might explain the high level of unemployment found in the area, which limits choice where work opportunities are concerned (Cutajar & Vella 2008). Nowadays Cottonera is an urban area associated with social deprivation, high unemployment and dependence on social benefits.

3.0 Methods used

The data for this study was elicited from an ethnographic study of the communities under question which took place between 2006 and 2008. This involved interaction

with people from the local communities on a day to day basis as well as participation in the cultural events under study. This study was coupled with intensive interviews with community leaders in the communities in question. Purposive sampling was used for the purposes of this research. The persons involved in the supervision and authorisation of the preparations were interviewed. For the purposes of this paper, community leaders included the three spiritual leaders who supervised and helped celebrate the three religious events, band club representatives as well as the mayors of the two localities. The participants involved were contacted via e-mail, by phone or in person. After contact was made, a time and place convenient to the participants was chosen. The participants were informed of the purposes of the research. The semi-structured interviews which occurred were all taped after permission was asked and later transcribed and analysed using social capital theory. These interviews lasted between three quarters of an hour to around two hours, depending on the level of helpfulness of the informant in question. The information given was then corroborated and/or augmented upon through further interviews with key informants who were conversant with the preparations involved in the feasts in question, as well as through the perusal of literature related to the feasts in question, some found on-line and others provided by some of the participants.

4.0 The feasts celebrated in the localities

Three main feasts are celebrated in the two localities under discussion: one in Bormla and two in Birgu. The people of Bormla celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception on the 8th of December. This is one of the few feasts celebrated in winter since the majority of the feasts are celebrated in summer. This locality does not have to compete with other venues therefore to attract the attention of tourists visiting the Maltese Islands in winter. Since feasts are religious

events, the preparations for the feast in question fall under the auspices of the archpriest or religious leader of the church where the titular saint is 'housed'.

The feasts of St. Domenic and St. Lawrence are celebrated in Birgu, the former in the last week of August and the latter in the first week of August. The community leaders and key contacts who participated in this study pointed out that a fourth of the Birgu population, '*tan-naha ta' fuq*' (the upper part of Birgu) celebrate this feast with the help of the Dominican religious community which has a convent and church in Birgu. St. Lawrence's parish celebrates St. Lawrence's feast.

The rivalry between the two sets of supporters in Birgu is very keen. At the same time, there is also rivalry between the two communities, Birgu and Bormla. This rivalry is also evident in other evident such as the '*regatta*' races (boat races) which are celebrated on the 8th of September and other sport and cultural events.

4.1 Organisations involved in feast preparation

Figure 1. Organisations involved in feast preparation

The religious leaders, in this case the archpriests of Bormla and Birgu parish churches plus the prior of the Dominican convent in Birgu were helped in their preparation for their respective feasts by a number of volunteers who formed committees and sub-committees in charge of different aspects of the feast. The main organising committees were those linked with internal and external events.

According to the participants involved in this research, and the research conducted by Muscat (2008) who corroborates these findings, the committee organising internal events is involved with the events that take place within the church. For

these events to take place, a number of sub-committees were involved in the cleaning, decoration and lighting of the church from within. There were also sub-committees involved in the preparation of the liturgical events. These consist of the Triduum, high mass, panegyric culminating in the procession which takes place on the day dedicated to a particular saint (8th December in the case of the feast of the Immaculate Conception) or the Sunday assigned by the Maltese Curia (Muscat 2008). To prepare for these events, the committees had to enlist the help of musicians, choirs, as well as preachers: the latter had to deliver an oration on the saint's life. People, services and material which were not delivered by volunteers, had to be paid for, so the committee involved in the organisation of internal events tended to have sub-committees entrusted with the generation of funds.

The committee dealing with external events were also made up of various sub-committees. These were involved in the assembling and dismantling of decorations in the surrounding streets and/or exterior of the church as well as their lighting. Other sub-committees were involved in the preparation and/or buying of aerial and fixed fireworks. Some feasts also had sub-committees which were in charge of street animation during the band marches.

The celebrations that take place outside of the church involve the brass band marches, fireworks, and the procession: the latter takes place on the last day of the feast. Boissevain (1999) considers these as the ludic side of the celebrations. This is because there is more leeway for play, especially during the band march held on Sunday or Saturday morning (depending on the locality) where dancing, clowning and teasing occurs. Songs and limericks are invented and used to tease and taunt supporters of other saints/band clubs and/or residents of other communities. This

taunting tends to take place in Birgu when the two feasts are celebrated. In Bormla, *il-partitarji* (supporters) usually taunt the inhabitants of the other two cities when the band march reaches the vicinity of either locality.

The committees in charge of the internal and external festivities are answerable to the religious leader in question since this is a religious event. Band clubs however are not answerable to the religious leader. They might choose to work in collaboration with the religious leader, or not, depending on the people involved. Band clubs are musical societies independent of the church. Their role is to promote the love and teaching of music within a particular community, and they play during a feast if they choose to and/or are if they are hired by the organisers in question. The tendency is that each feast committee works in relation with one or more band clubs within the locality. The role of the band club is to play band marches in the streets of the locality during the days of the feast, following a route established by the band in question after discussions with the religious leader and police. They need to attain police permission before they can play in the streets of a locality.

Figure 2 - St. Lawrence Musical Society Band Club, Birgu

The local council is not directly involved in the preparations but needs to be consulted and its permission attained for certain events to take place. Some local councils facilitate the preparation of feasts. For example the Birgu local council maintains the holes in the ground used for poles used for street decorations. This mitigates the occurrence of accidents and lessens tension between the supporters of the two feasts which both utilize them. The local council also has to apply for the extra supplies of electricity needed to light the streets and church facade; ask for

extra police presence to manage crowds and vehicles, as well as assign space to street vendors. The main role of the local council is however to ensure that the streets in the locality are clean during and after the feast.

Other entities involved in the preparation of feasts include the police, the media and tour operators. Their contribution will not be discussed in this paper due to space limitations.

4.2 Rate of participation in feast preparation

The community leaders who participated in this research agreed on the fact that they have witnessed a decrease in the rate of participation among those who volunteer in the preparation of feasts, in the running of band clubs and other voluntary organisations within the community in which they are located. They maintained that this decrease might be due to the fact that one salary was not enough to help maintain a family in a post-industrial, consumer society. The higher standard of living households aspire for together with the inflation of prices have not been counterbalanced by an increase in salaries. This has pushed male breadwinners to hold more than one job; or pushed the female spouse into the labour market. Whichever solution was opted for has encroached on the availability of time needed by both genders for voluntary participation. Band club representatives added that while the supply of '*bandisti*' (band players) had gone down, the number of cultural events revolving around the participation of band clubs have increased.

There was also evidence that the rate of participation differed, depending on which feast was being studied. On the whole, the Birgu community leaders dealing with

the feast of St. Lawrence were satisfied with the level of participation involved in feast preparation. They concluded that when things needed to be done, volunteers deriving from different social backgrounds came forth, each contributing according to their capacity. Some of the community leaders felt that it was the inhabitant's duty and privilege to involve themselves in the activities that took place at community level, since in the end they stood to benefit. One of the participants felt that the role of community leaders was to facilitate and co-ordinate voluntary participation.

The Bormla community leaders and those participants linked with the feast preparations of St. Dominic in Birgu, echoed each other when they said that the level of voluntary participants was low. The reasons given though were different. While the respondents dealing with the feast of St. Dominic pointed out that this was due to the limited pool of people who were *partitarji* (around 400 families supported this feast according to the calculations of one of the respondents), this was not the case in Bormla since the population stood around six thousand. Community leaders felt that although the Bormla people loved the Immaculate Conception and espoused to be proud of the locality in which they lived, when it came to participating in the preparation for the feast and/or the band, few were the volunteers.

4.3 Access to funds

A lot of money is needed to organise a feast. One of the Bormla community leaders mentioned a sum of around Lm15, 000 (approximately £28651). The different committees involved in the preparation of feasts, needed to generate the necessary funds needed to finance the different aspects of the feast.

With regards to the committees involved with the inner festivities, the funds derived mainly from donations made by individual persons or groups, door-to-door money collection, lotteries, coffee mornings, cultural outings and activities such as *Lejla Maltija* (Maltese Night) in the case of Bormla, Birgu by Candlelight in that of Birgu. While money was not an issue for those dealing with the preparation of feasts in Birgu, money was an issue for the Bormla community leaders. Reasons mentioned for this state of affairs included the fact that a number of the families living in Bormla did not derive from the locality and might not culturally and psychologically identify with the cultural event being celebrated. Relative poverty was also brought up, maybe due to the higher rate of unemployment in this locality (Cutajar & Vella 2008). Values prevalent within the community might also have had a bearing on this: the Birgu people were described by one of the participants as '*jaqalawha u jiekluha*' (they consumed what they earned).

There were rich benefactors living in both communities, but the Birgu inhabitants were more likely to invest in the cultural events and organisations found within their community. This could be attested by the donation of one fourth of a million euro (£205000) by a local businessman to the St. Lawrence band club. This money was used to build a new band stand. Some of the Birgu business persons also came up with lucrative business projects which helped cover recurrent expenditure. For example, the president of the Prince of Wales Band Club decided to lease the basement of this club as a wine club. All band clubs lease out the club's bar, and this was another source of income for all the band clubs under consideration, as was the percentage of the intake made by the lotto booth these clubs manned.

One of the mayors involved in this research came up with ideas that helped the committees involved in feast preparation in Birgu amass the money needed to

celebrate their feast. The Birgu mayor organised cultural events within the locality that involved both band clubs and feast committees dealing with external events in their preparation. The skills acquired during feast celebration, were utilised to organise these non-religious events. Participation in these cultural events however enabled these committees to collect money. Mr. Boxall, the mayor of Birgu, explained that Birgu by Candlelight helped the two band clubs in the locality amass half of their annual recurrent expenditure. Another Birgu respondent said that the local mayor promoted the Birgu feast committees and band clubs to national or international entities which organized cultural events on a national basis. Participation in these cultural activities was another source of income for both the individuals and community organisations concerned.

5.0 The capacity of feasts to bring about social cohesion

Bormla has one feast, so the perception among the respondents was that this cultural event served to help bond the community in this locality. When the data was analysed though, one could note that the community leaders were continually differentiating between 'us' and 'them'. The 'us' was used to refer to people who had lived in Bormla prior to World War II. The 'them' was used to refer to people who had migrated to Bormla after the war. There were also a number of allusions made to the fact that Bormla was used by the social services to 'dump' social cases in the myriad social housing units spread around this locality.

Insert Figure 3 – San Gwann t'Ghuxa Housing Estate, Bormla

Bormla has a number of social housing complexes. A number of those living in these social housing units do not derive from Bormla, and might not culturally identify with the locality. The respondents also mentioned a number of squatters who were living

in this area. Some of these had set up residence in run down and dilapidated buildings, some of which had historical value. These were the 'outsiders' the respondents referred to. One also mentioned the fact that African migrants were finding lodging in the area, although the number was still low when compared to other localities in the Maltese Islands.

A number of these 'outsiders' had been living in Bormla for two or more generations when this research was conducted. The community leaders, some of which did not derive from Bormla, felt that these groups did not belong to the community. They were blamed for some of the social problems found within this locality, such as poverty, delinquent behaviour among the young, illegal rubbish dumping, prostitution, drug trafficking as well as other forms of misdemeanour.

A number of initiatives were taken by some of the Bormla community leaders to try to integrate these groups within the community. The archpriest, Canon Mifsud, mentioned the time when he tried to persuade the committee dealing with internal festivities with the need to incorporate outlying social housing estates within the community by taking the statue of the Immaculate Conception there. The committee insisted that the traditional route should be kept to, and the issue was dropped for fear of alienating the few voluntary participants involved in the year long feast preparations. The local band also came up with ideas of tapping into this source of human potential. In summer 2008 they tried to encourage young people, especially those from deprived backgrounds, to take up musical training by offering them the free use of instruments as well as free tuition.

When the community leaders were asked whether these socially excluded communities participated during the feast, the answer was that only a few did. So in

the end, an activity which was supposed to bring about community cohesion, helped consolidate community bonds among only a portion of that community.

There were so many social problems mentioned during the interviews with the Bormla community leaders that the topic of conversation during the interviews tended to veer in this direction. The community leaders felt swamped by the sheer number of these problems, and they lacked the funds, human resources and/or acumen to deal with them. These leaders felt that they were left to shoulder the responsibility when the problems needed to be addressed by the competent authorities, whether these concerned housing, policing, social work, education, and etcetera.

The community leaders also blamed the community for not being as pro-active as the situation and context demanded, the police for not making their presence and authority felt, the media and academia for not investigating pertinent issues, the social services for adding to the problem when they continued 'dumping' problem families/individuals and indifferent bureaucrats for the precarious situation in which Bormla was to be found. Some blamed the political parties which tended to promote individuals without the skills needed to bring about change during local council elections. As one of the respondents attested, "Bormla is a bomb ready to explode".

A sense of powerlessness and mistrust emerged from the interviews with the Bormla community leaders. This sense of powerlessness might have been due to the low status setting in which the participants were located, where crime, physical decay and social disorder tended to negatively affect formal and informal interactions within and without the community. Letki (2008) maintains that low status settings tend to lower interpersonal trust and had a detrimental effect on the sense of belonging one had towards a particular neighbourhood. In this research it was evident that low neighbourhood status had a detrimental effect on the organisational involvement of community members within Bormla.

The Birgu community leaders were unanimous in their conclusion – the feasts in Birgu did not help bring about community cohesion. The feast only helped to bond the '*partitarji*' (supporters) of a particular saint who forgot their political and social differences during the feast. Feasts were however used to demonstrate the rivalry between the supporters of the two feasts in Birgu. The statue of St. Domenic was for example daubed in red paint in the week prior to the feast in August 2008. These and similar acts could instigate conflict between the supporters. Community leaders met before each feast to exchange information and find ways of controlling the 'hot heads' within the community.

Some of the respondents believed that a certain amount of '*pika*' (rivalry) was productive. It pushed the volunteers to compete with each other when it came to '*armar*' (street decorations), fireworks and/or band marches. This *pika* helped to raise the standard of the cultural events held within the locality.

All in all, the three feasts under scrutiny helped provide internal solidarity for the supporters. Feasts however did not increase social connectedness among the disparate groups within the locality. They served to reinstate exclusive group identities. This division made it harder for individuals to transfer their in-group trust to other groups within and without the community. Participation within the organisations dealing with feast preparation did not help generate habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness on a community basis. This was achieved through the organisation of other forms of cultural activities in Birgu.

Social capital theorists maintain that social capital is influenced by both structural factors as well as the personal characteristics of community members. Kaur-Stubbs (2008, p. 34) argues that poverty in a community tends to limit integration, while promoting exclusion and alienation. While the socio-economic differences between the two locations were not that

pronounced, there were indications that demonstrated that on the whole, the standard of living enjoyed by Birgu residents was slightly better than that enjoyed by Bormla ones (see Cutajar & Vella 2008). Letki (2008, p. 105) adds that lack of trust of out-group members is caused by an individual's low socio-economic status. Cattle (2008, p. 14) also believes that inequalities create separation, which might be maintained when different social groups maintain different life chances and lifestyles. The supporters of the two feasts in Birgu and the insiders/outsideers in Bormla were doing this.

Structural factors might also impact on the cognitive make-up of community leaders. In the case of Birgu the individual cognitive make-up of the community leaders impacted positively on the community. As one of the respondents pointed out, there was a dire need for capable leader/s to promote the well-being of the Bormla community.

5.2 Cultural events and community regeneration

The Birgu participants linked the regeneration of the locality with the establishment of the local councils in 1994, and/or the election of Mr. Boxall as mayor. The local council came up with ideas to help promote the needs and interests of the community. Some of the projects which helped in the socio-economic regeneration of this locality included a cleaning up and greening campaign, the rehabilitation and restoration of historic buildings within the locality with funds deriving from EU and Maltese entities, as well as the organisation of cultural events which helped establish this community as a cultural centre. These issues were discussed at length in a paper entitled "Community involvement and the revitalization of Birgu (Cutajar 2008).

All three projects involved the cooperation and collaboration of the myriad groups and individuals within this community, as well as the help and/or funds derived from entities from

without the community. These projects and events brought together different groups who worked together to reach a common goal - the promotion of the locality as a historical and cultural centre. This participation and the civic pride that ensued once these events/projects proved successful, and this helped generate a super-ordinate identity which helped attenuate in-group bias and promoted the inclusion of out-group members according to some of the participants.

The success of these projects was adjudicated mainly on the number of tourists and visitors attracted to the locality. National and international prizes given for the standard of cleanliness attained and the sustainable development of this locality also helped increase the community's pride in their locality. These projects and prizes helped generate the social, economic and cultural development of this locality. The more successful the events were in attracting outside attention, the higher the propensity it was for community members to cooperate in future events or projects. They were also in a better position to attract the help – financial or otherwise – of entities found outside the community.

6.0 Conclusion

Kaur-Stubbs (2008) maintains that the main barriers to integration are poverty, exclusion and alienation. Cattle (2008) agrees that inequalities, rather than diversity, cause separation and exclusion. Social inequality and deprivation leads to what Putnam (as cited by Fieldhouse 2008, p. 27) refers to as a 'hunkering down' of the different social groups. This hunkering down, Putnam maintains, occurs when community members trust only their own social group, and as a consequence, tend to withdraw from collective life. This was the case in Bormla.

Although some of the social issues raised were common to both Bormla and Birgu, this hunkering down was not so evident in Birgu. The community of Birgu was more willing to

collaborate in projects which promoted the community's well-being. This collective collaboration seemed to depend on their leaders' social capital. The social capital of the leaders also seemed to have some bearing on the socio-economic regeneration of the community in question, consequently affecting the structural factors mentioned.

Unfortunately there are different theories as to how social capital can be defined, measured and empirically assessed in social capital theory (van Schaik 2002, p. 8). Civic engagement in social networks seemed to generate trust and norms of generalized reciprocity within Birgu. The consequent social and economic benefits which seemed to accrue from collective participation also seemed to have some bearing on the type and level of social capital evident in this community. Social capital however tends to be multidimensional in nature and the exact relationship between components is not always clear.

Social capital in terms of active group membership did contribute to the regeneration of Birgu. As van Schaik (2002, p. 14) notes, social capital plays a crucial role in the reduction of poverty and the success of development programmes. The question lies as to how this social capital is generated. In the case of Birgu, collectively organised cultural events helped bring about community participation. The success of these events helped to generate a high sense of belonging, where diversity was more likely to be valued. There was also evidence that community participation was instigated and facilitated by some of the community leaders interviewed, who were actively involved in the facilitation and co-ordination of a number of projects that helped promote the development of the locality.

In this research project, Birgu came out as a high social capital area, where trust and social networks flourished. Bormla, on the other hand, came out as a low social capital area. The social actors there were unable to negotiate solutions to collective action without the need of

outside regulation. Letki (2008, p. 102) believes that trust, reciprocity and a sense of solidarity among community members helps reduce the costs of policy and rule implementation, since these values render citizens collectivist in orientation, hence increasing the predictability and reliability of economic and political transactions. An analysis of the data made it apparent that trust, reciprocity and/or a sense of solidarity in Bormla was less forthcoming.

To conclude, the main form of cultural activity within Bormla was of the bonding kind. Bonding enables a community 'get by'. Birgu community leaders were aware of the divisive nature of feasts, so they came up with alternative cultural events that helped bridge social, political and cultural differences. The success of these cultural events depended on the political, social and cultural contacts available at a local, national and supranational level. Birgu regeneration would have never been successful without the necessary horizontal and vertical interactions.

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