

# **World Heritage Sites: The Role of the Local Communities**

## **The drafting of the UNESCO Management Plan for the World Heritage City of Valletta**

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**Purpose:** To devise effective collaboration within an environment of civil and social dialogue, towards the drafting of a management system; and taking into account the challenges posed by a multitude of stakeholders within a city that is simultaneously an administrative, commercial and residential centre with a strong cultural sector.

**Methods:** Following in the footsteps of participatory democracy within the European Union, collaboration was founded on consensus building sessions that emphasised the need for social inclusion, entrepreneurship and rehabilitation.

**Conclusions:** The consultation methodology maximised stakeholder involvement and influenced the Management Plan in a meaningful manner, ensuring its legitimacy by reflecting the views of the different communities within the city.

### **Keywords:**

Sustainable communities,  
Participatory democracy,  
Community planning,  
Stakeholder management,  
Management system,  
Social entrepreneurship,  
Valletta.

## **1. An introduction to the UNESCO World Heritage City of Valletta**

Forming the focal area of a dense conurbation around the Grand Harbour, Valletta is the southernmost capital city of Europe. When it was built, in 1565, it was considered a fortified outpost and indeed an essential base of operations in the war against Ottoman invasions from the Mediterranean. Valletta was also a hub of activity in the commercial, administrative and residential sectors. It still is to this day, despite drastic demographic changes and fluctuating commercial environments.

Valletta was conceived as an intrinsically European city, designed in the most advanced town planning techniques of the day by the foremost engineers on the continent. The city was built to house the Knights of St. John in an attempt at to create a 'ghetto' for themselves that was never fully established as such. Social mix was inevitable in such a dense environment, coupled with the essential needs of the Knights, especially in terms of human resources to maintain their lifestyle within the large edifices where they were housed.

Indeed, the role of the local population was ever-present as the foundation on which the Knights depended. The demand for housing was very high and soon after its foundation, the face of Valletta changed drastically as formerly industrial buildings were converted into housing units. The population of Valletta has changed with the times. At its peak, Valletta had a population of close to 23,000 -7,491 individuals/km<sup>2</sup>, often packed into small spaces with very unsanitary conditions.

Valletta continued to change, its outwards appearance adhering to the stylistic tastes of the Baroque period during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The British placed their mark on the city by building large edifices such as the Law Courts, the covered market and the Royal Opera House, as well as edifices backing onto the bastions along the port. Housing blocks too were built, and although this was not a new phenomenon in the city, the austere architecture used in the Camerata singled them out from the surrounding fabric.

During the Second World War, many people left the harbour area to safer zones to the north and south of Malta. Much of Valletta was affected by war damage and the city underwent an extensive rebuilding program. Slum-clearance projects of the 1970s made way for large social housing blocks especially towards the outskirts of the city, directly facing the harbours. This agglomeration of deprived households exacerbated the social divide in the city and created an ever more obvious distance between the central administrative, commercial zones and the outlying residential areas.

The city now houses around 6,000 people and is experiencing incremental gentrification. Many are aware of the attractive potential that real estate in Valletta has, and investing in these properties. This is in tandem with a greater awareness of the potential to organize cultural events and invest in leisure and catering facilities throughout the city. It seems that the perception that many Maltese may have of their capital city as solely a visiting place is changing to a living-place. A city attractive to shoppers and employers is now being seen also a residence for people from all walks of life.

## **2. The UNESCO Management Plan**

### **2.1. Drafting a management system for Valletta**

Following the publication of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2005), the Maltese authorities started the process to comply with the requirement for a documented management system for every World Heritage Site in Malta. Valletta had been inscribed on the World Heritage List as a city in its entirety in 1980 but had no Management Plan as this had not been required at the time. Today, all World Heritage sites “must have an adequate protection and management system to ensure its safeguarding” (UNESCO, 2005).

The project to write the Management Plan was therefore embarked upon by the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs, who appointed the International Institute for Baroque Studies as authors, with the aid of the Valletta Rehabilitation Projects Office (VRPO) from within the same Ministry. A drive to create a heritage inventory for the city was initiated, and in particular to document each building in terms of its approximate age and distinctive features

on the façade. Simultaneously, studies were carried out to fully understand the historical development of the city.

It was immediately noted that a Management Plan for Valletta could not be written by a single body of authors. Consultation and collaborative techniques were therefore essential to the process and the legitimacy of the final document. Coordinating the issues to be dealt with in a city raised many questions, especially as Valletta is a capital city and an administrative, commercial, cultural and residential centre. These multiple roles create a wide variety of stakeholders, foremost amongst them the Local Council, which deals with administrative issues and champions the city as a hub of activity.

In parallel, a number of ministries have an influence on the administration of the city by virtue of the major projects currently happening in the city. The project at City Gate is under the aegis of the Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation within the Ministry for Infrastructure, Transport and Communications. Also under the same Ministry, Transport Malta coordinates all paving works in Valletta. Under the Ministry for Tourism, Environment and Culture; the Malta Tourism Authority deals with issues such as visitor management and outdoor catering. The Office of the Prime Minister also has an interest through strategic policy and overall direction.

In addition to the above hierarchy of administrative structures, Valletta must ultimately retain that which defines its World Heritage status – its Outstanding Universal Value. The critical elements of the city in this respect are deemed to be its skyline and natural form, the urban form, the monuments and public spaces; and its function. To this end, a Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value is included in the introduction to the Management Plan and subsequent recommendations are built upon it.

## **2.2. The vision underlying the VMP**

The VRPO was set up by the Minister for Resources and Rural Affairs to coordinate projects in places where ‘the built fabric and environment is of such a unique architectural and historic importance that the locality deserves conservation and rehabilitation in view of its unique national importance’ (Guidelines for the Establishment of Rehabilitation Projects, 1999)

The VRPO has its origin in the Valletta Urban Renewal Program of 1986-87, and it started to function in August 1987. It was established as the Government Body entrusted with the conservation and rehabilitation of Valletta as a World Heritage City and is also responsible for the city of Floriana. Its remit is the rehabilitation and management of the City of Valletta on matters which do not pertain to the duties and responsibilities of the Valletta Local Council as established under the Local Council Act. It also sometimes acts as consultant or coordinator for projects which fall under the direct responsibility of other governmental agencies or entities.

The VRPO was initially a unit, within the Public Works Department, with very close ties with the Antiquities Section (now replaced by the Restoration Directorate). After 1992, the VRPO became a unit within the Department of Building and Engineering, in 1995 formed part of the Estates Department, and since 2010 was absorbed as a unit within the Restoration Directorate. At this time, the name given to the office of the VRPO was changed to that of the Rehabilitation Projects Office (RPO). Besides the VRPO, the RPO also manages other Rehabilitation Projects, which were later set up, namely the Mdina Rehabilitation Project and the Cottonera Rehabilitation Project.

The RPO's vision for Valletta as outlined in the VMP is based on the definition of sustainable development put forward in *Our Common Future: The Report of the Commission on Environment and Development* (1987), more commonly known as the Brundtland Report. Social, economic and environmental sustainability were therefore addressed in equal measure. To achieve this however required discussions with stakeholders on the meaning of heritage and the approach towards community-led regeneration within the existing built environment - a primary element of the brief set out by UNESCO to devise a legitimate management system.

Social Inclusion is one of the three pillars of the VMP, together with Entrepreneurship and Urban Rehabilitation. The decision to address social inclusion reflects the view that it is essential to conduct community-led regeneration in order to influence both economic and environmental regeneration. With regards to short term goals, the first is to foster an awareness of the different communities in Valletta – local, national and international. The second goal recognises the importance of local cultural events and promotes their long-term survival through recognition, funding and other support.

In the medium term, the VMP points out the need for bottom-up regeneration through community planning in order to resolve any conflicts possibly arising from the increasing gentrification in certain parts of the city. Another medium-term goal is to document the city's intangible heritage, this serving to give further recognition to the traditions of existing residential communities and thereby assist in their longevity even in the scenario of a changing society. The long term goal is to ensure increased social inclusion and a balanced social mix in cultural events. This will act as evidence of the success of the short and medium term goals, and assist in the formation of sustainable communities and increased social inclusion.

### **3. Sustainable communities**

#### **3.1. Inclusion towards a sustainable community**

When addressing the issue of social inclusion, it is fundamental to understand the significance of places, events and traditions to the communities involved. This is many a time the starting point on which community planning is founded and its permeance into all aspects of the dialogue is essential to the continued topicality and legitimacy of the process. The continuous valorisation of heritage by people assigning different degrees of significance to aspects of it takes place sometimes unconsciously by people's everyday decisions, both tangible and intangible. Conflicts may however arise when valorisation differs between communities within a single place.

In Valletta, this is a very real situation, arising from the divergent communities present. The consultation process revealed that land-use is a much contested issue, and that compatibility of use is currently being discussed at policy level with a shift towards the promotion of mixed-use places to act as a catalyst for regeneration. This however brings about a change in the indigenous socio-cultural values with the consequent matter of whether this is an erosion of authenticity or simply the next phase in the population's natural evolution.

In this sense, Low's definition of social sustainability (2001) is particularly relevant. It states that 'social sustainability is a subset of cultural sustainability; it includes the maintenance and preservation of social relations and meanings that reinforce cultural systems'. Pearce (2000), writing on the transmission of cultural heritage notes that this must be done holistically in

order to retain the original significance, phrasing it as “a wrongful slicing up of the seamless garment of culture”. Cultural eco-systems are therefore of particular importance in policy and decision-making.

‘Creative Collaboration’ is a term used to describe consultation between different communities, using innovative and highly participatory techniques. The methodology is used in situations where people from very different backgrounds are brought together to work as a team towards a solution that seems obscure at the outset. Pre-conceived notions often inhibit effective consultation, but techniques of creative collaboration place participants on an equal footing. Often, multiple sessions are needed for participants to reach a level of comfort with one another – a very effective way of ensuring a sustainable relationship between them.

### **3.2. Understanding the various communities**

Due to the fact that communities in Valletta are many and often unknown, an issue that arose in the consultation exercise for the VMP was the realisation that comprehensive consultation was very difficult to achieve. Each meeting throughout the consultation exercise brought to light other stakeholders. It was felt that certain communities were being effectively consulted whilst others were harder to reach.

A basic knowledge of the demographics of the city will result in the identification of the resident, resident, business, working and visiting communities. This segmentation is however much too broad and disregards the role of emergent communities in the city. Indeed creative enterprises and social entrepreneurs are two such communities that are changing Valletta from within, and giving rise to new confidence in the mixed-use character intrinsic to Valletta.

Creative Industries, as building blocks of the creative economy, vary widely but fall under the general view of human creativity as an economic resource (Florida, 2002). The recently published draft of the National Strategy for the Cultural and Creative Industries strives to form better chances for creative individuals and to promote Malta as an attractive creative hub within the wider Mediterranean region. Indeed, surveys show that there are already many cultural initiatives within Malta’s towns and villages. A survey carried out in 2009 shows that there are forty-eight registered theatres and museums that are community-based,

giving an encouraging outlook to the emergence of a creative hub that is closely tied to local populations (Creative Economy Working Group, 2012).

These initiatives are encouraged by schemes such as the ‘Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività’ – The Presidents Prize for Creativity. Also, it is telling that the National Statistics Office (NSO) considers the gathering of data on culture of prime importance, going so far as to classify the community as a main aspect of their work with regards to culture. The NSO are aiming to gather statistics on the use of Band Clubs, Parish Feasts and Local Councils amongst others. In Valletta, one can add the Carnival community to the list, a major source of creative activity throughout the year.

The above data shows that the creative community is not as emergent as one may think. There is however a need to diversify the current creative field in the city so as to further ensure its sustainability. The CREATE scheme by Malta Enterprise aims to do this through its designation of the whole city as a creative zone. Under this scheme, it is hoped that creatives make use of the tax credit awarded towards different areas of expertise including the visual area, crafts, film & video, music, performing arts, literary works, design and digital media (Malta Enterprise, 2012).

## **4. A process of civil dialogue**

### **4.1. Good practice and the VMP**

The consultation process for the VMP is backed by a history of national and international initiatives towards stakeholder management. At a European level, participatory democracy was first practiced in the 1990s to bring together the views of academics and civil servants, and therefore the essentiality of thorough academic research with the practical challenges of policy-makers. Decision-making was thus based on technical expertise, with the benefit of greater transparency much valued by the European Parliament. Declaration 23 of the Maastricht Treaty was central to the development of participatory democracy especially in the fields of social policy – including social exclusion, youth, gender equality and racism (Saurugger, 2010).

Referred to as ‘good governance’, participatory democracy gained further recognition through the Commission White Paper on European Governance (2001). A few more years of

debate followed, in which the definition of civil society was defined and the role of participatory democracy entrenched into the EU Constitutional Treaty (1-47) in 2004. The Lisbon Treaty was ratified four years later in 2008 and endorses the concept of participatory democracy (Article 11) without specifically mentioning it (Abels, 2009).

The Guidelines for Consultation Exercises with Stakeholders (Directive no.6) was published in 2011 by the Office of the Principal Permanent Secretary (Malta). A primary aim is to “entrench consultation as an inherent part of policy formation” within the public sector. Civil dialogue is therefore central to this process, as defined in the complimentary publication – The Better Regulation Strategy 2008-2010 (Management Efficiency Unit). To achieve these objectives, the RPO is now focusing its efforts on building relationships between entities and stakeholders of Valletta. The consultation program for the VMP followed Directive no.6 and was carried out with people from the civil sector with the aim to transform the document from a Master Plan into a Management Plan.

Central to the Directive is the need for proper preparation; and research is therefore essential prior to the community planning event. Stakeholder involvement depends very much on externalities such as time, location and personnel. Initial contact with stakeholders usually took the form of a one-to-one meeting, followed by an invitation to participate in a seminar organised by the coordinators. Indeed, the information gleaned from these preliminary meetings proved vital to the success of the seminars. The coordinator was in a position to steer the discussion into channels that addressed the areas of expertise of the attendees.

During an initial seminar with stakeholders, it was decided that the three broad themes of Social Inclusion, Entrepreneurship and Urban Rehabilitation would be intercepted with ‘horizontal’ themes that had to be tackled throughout the document, such as social policy, transport and the creative economy. Having identified this matrix underlying the document, the team had to list the stakeholders involved. This proved a challenge due to the sheer volume of such stakeholders in Valletta as mentioned above.

The following seminars tackled five critical topics of the plan. Firstly, a group of stakeholders were invited to determine the key vertical and horizontal issues. Once these were set, each issue was discussed in a round-table format. The four remaining seminars were titled Listening to Community Ambassadors (in collaboration with the Valletta 2018 Foundation), Creative Economy in the City, Commerce and Enterprise; and Management and Maintenance. Each seminar brought to light new points of view and different stakeholders,

as well as the realisation of overlapping issues to be prioritised. Above all, the method reaped the benefits of personal contact whilst encouraging collaboration with a wider pool of stakeholders.

Follow-up following the seminar was just as important. Feedback on particular topics was asked for from certain individuals following the seminar. The Guidelines affirm this strategy, stating that communication channels must be kept open and that mechanisms for feedback must be put in place, ensuring that all responses are acknowledged. The VMP gained much legitimacy through this process, and stakeholder feedback was incorporated with much relevance especially when setting out guidelines for management practices within the city.

A divide exists between Civil and Social Dialogue when carrying out consultation. During the consultations carried out for the VMP, civil dialogue was relatively straightforward. It entailed conversations between the authors of the VMP and people in the public service, debating a particular area of interest in the light of specific policies. In tandem with the above process, social dialogue was promoted through outreach, networking and conversations with interested people.

A possible strategy in order to gain a holistic consultation relating to a particular topic or policy is to have complimentary events that emphasize the different roles of the participating stakeholders. In the Maltese scenario, it would not be advisable to ignore social dialogue. Much value is indeed placed on informal 'meetings' where people discuss ideas and form opinions of issues that resonate throughout the group of participants. Incidentally, the priorities identified through civil dialogue were then affirmed through more informal social dialogue, resulting in a more thorough democratisation of the final document.

## **4.2. Challenges of community planning**

Further challenges face the consultation exercise for the VMP as the process towards its endorsement continues. Also, in view of its nature as an evolving management system, the document must be continuously evaluated – always in tandem with ongoing community consultation. Evaluating an experience in collaborative planning, Sarkissian (2010) observes that the longevity of the exercise is dependent on forming good working relationships within the team. She acknowledges that working relationships are difficult to form, and must be

founded on the realisation of the group's complimentary skills, individual strengths and continuous communication. It is also essential to create an environment where team members continue to feel secure enough to share life experiences, and to make good judgments when to keep or discard an idea.

Kaszynska et.al. (2012) explain how neighbourhood planning in the United Kingdom has taken place through Neighbourhood Forums. They argue that technical expertise is essential to form sustainable Neighbourhood Plans which are not simply a token to collaborative planning but a legitimate part of the policy-making process. In this way, links are formed between the community, the policy-maker, the technical expert and the developer that are feasible and long-lasting.

It must be accepted that it is sometimes hard to sustain the momentum of a participative workshop after a community planning event, or series of events. As people move to different employment positions and the topicality of issues changes, the momentum is lost. Also, physical materials used and created during the workshops are often perishable or difficult to maintain. Successful participatory planning events can however be recognised by the legacy of the power of collaboration that remains in each of the participants psyche (Sarkissian, 2010).

The legacy of such community planning events can also be quantified through the assessment of 'community wellbeing indicators' (Cox et.al, 2010). These indicators are also used as a health-check for the participatory system being employed by the policy makers and therefore the legitimacy of the policy being formed. In this way, more emphasis is placed on the outcomes of the exercise, as opposed to the exercise itself. The exercise is seen as a means to an end and not as the end, thereby better ensuring its legacy.

## **5. Conclusion**

A key outcome of community collaboration is ownership. Applied in different contexts, a sense of ownership by the community can be of great benefit during regeneration projects. As witnesses of the *status quo*, designers of the scheme and users of the new reality, communities are on the frontline of any project. It must be realised however that not all methods of community planning can be successfully transposed from one community to

another, especially when applied to greatly differing contexts. Initial research preceding stakeholder management, community planning and participatory democracy initiatives must be thorough enough to fit the participants, in order to reap the most benefits from the ensuing dialogue.

In this regard, the legacy of the initiative has a much greater chance of success as it is a continuation of a meaningful process of preparation, dialogue and feedback. The issue of legacy is fragile, with many dependencies such as changes in participant's levels of interest, employment and location of residence. Funding for the scheme and lack of deliverables are other issues that can affect the legacy of both the project and the collaborative process. Also, the original champions of the project are often highly enthusiastic about the project and eager to take part in civil dialogue, but it is difficult to keep up the enthusiasm when the members of the group change.

This is evidence of the importance attached to representation - the choice of community champions in the initial stage of the project. Recognition of all sectors of the community is essential, from established to emergent communities. Making use of the skills intrinsic to those in the creative sector can be very useful in such projects. At all stages, but especially during the community planning events and at later follow-up stages, skills in theatre and the arts will aid in adding diversity, interest and engagement, linking different sectors through the shared medium of creativity. Indeed, when the creative sector is entrenched into the community it is often a source of identity and creative collaboration, a factor that greatly increases the success of participatory projects.

Ultimately, community planning initiatives aim to build consensus amongst sectors of the community. Though this does not necessarily mean that all agree to the decisions taken, it does imply that all stakeholders agree that the option chosen is indeed the best option in the given circumstances. This goal has more chances of being reached through methods of creative collaboration, albeit only if well-prepared and tailored to the characteristics of that particular community. The collaborative nature of the VMP has shown that strong civil dialogue, supplemented with informal social dialogue has resulted in the permeance of the community's views throughout the plan and consequently greater legitimacy of this proposed management system.

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