

Community Inclusion and Accessibility in Valletta 2018



Michael Deguara
Sociology

Research Questions

- What are some of the factors affecting **participation** by various **community groups** related to the Valletta 2018 project?
- What are the elements that promote or hinder **inclusion of a diverse audience**, and **accessibility** (including physical, geographical, financial, linguistic, and intellectual accessibility)?

Community Groups identified

- Valletta residents (who identify as *Beltin*)
- Valletta residents (who do not identify as *Beltin*)
- Persons who identify as *Beltin* but are not Valletta residents
- Residents of Inner Harbour/Greater Valletta
- Maltese persons in general – commuters to Valletta
- Persons with disability

Previous research on ECoC

- Palmer Report (2004)
 - Profile raising and improving the city's image has often taken precedence over social questions.
 - Local involvement and taking the context into account were two of the common success factors.
- Garcia and Cox (2013)
 - Engagement of local communities and the city's public considered important and an indicator of potential success in delivery.
 - Very little evidence of social impact beyond increase in attendance.

The notion of “culture”

- Williams (1983) – three definitions of culture:
 - Culture as an abstract process of development;
 - Culture as the way of life of a group;
 - Culture as music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film
- Bourdieu (1984) –
 - Very close relationship linking cultural practices to educational capital and secondarily to social origin
- Valletta 2018 definition of culture primarily rooted in third definition but straddles the second one too.

Valletta (and Malta) through the lens of the social sciences

- Mitchell –
 - Valletta as capital of nation state but also one where the population at large has a relatively high degree of interaction with.
 - Glory, decline and rehabilitation – nostalgia.
- Boissevain – The revitalisation of ritual
- Giddens – Detraditionalisation and reflexivity
- Herzfeld –
 - imposition of state intervention (Rethemnos); and
 - gentrification and “the inexorable power of the market to define the course of events” (Rome).

Valletta as a space and place

- Valletta is a space which has multiple layers of meaning to people from different backgrounds.
- *Beltin* tended to emphasise:
 - the intimate aspect of Valletta as a place of community and local history, often with a sense of nostalgia.
 - a concern with the death of history, memory and continuity.
 - Valletta as “home”.
 - segmentary identities trumped by a unitary identity – “kugin”, “it-tfal tal-Belt”.
 - football unites, *festi* divide.

Valletta as a space and place

- Non-*Beltin* tended to emphasise the historical, architectural, administrative and commercial importance of Valletta.
- Persons with a disability had problems with access and as a result developed little sense of engagement with Valletta as a place.

Developments

- Boutique hotels and nightlife entertainment elicited most mixed responses.
 - *Non-Beltin:*
 - See boutique hotels as a positive trend
 - Had mixed reactions to nightlife entertainment
 - *Beltin:*
 - Some viewed boutique hotels as “giving life” to the city
 - Concern with increasing property prices and gentrification
 - On the whole, property is seen as an investment by most Valletta landowners.
 - Nightlife also was seen as “giving life” to the city.

Nightlife and Valletta's character

- Highly divergent views from *Beltin*:
 - One interviewee said: “What we are seeing is just the standard nightlife model transferred onto Valletta... the restaurants that promote genuine stuff, and the old bars, are being forgotten.”
 - Another interviewee called for an expansion of nightlife establishments – “*Jekk il-Belt irridu nagħtuha l-ħajja, għandna bżonn in-nightlife u mhux biss nirrangaw it-toroq. It-turist ta' lllum huwa flok il-baħri tal-bieraħ.*”

Level of engagement

- Good awareness of ECoC title, taken with pride especially by *Beltin*.
- Need to increase awareness of the Valletta 2018 aims and events.
- Persons with a disability noted a lack of participation in cultural activities.
- Residents who are not *Beltin* expressed a fear of the “Disneyfication” and/or gentrification.
- Natural skepticism regarding the trickle-down effect of infrastructural developments

Accessibility

- Concerns regarding transportation across both public and private transport:
 - Parking
 - Congestion
 - Traffic flow
- Concern over residents' accessibility during large-scale events (e.g. *Notte Bianca*)
- Positive comments on the improvements within the ferry service.

Impact of accessibility on engagement with Valletta

- Recognition of Valletta's intrinsic problems in terms of topography and built environment.
 - Persons with physical disabilities rarely accessed Valletta proper
 - Need for more facilities (e.g. public convenience, reserved parking etc.)
 - Need for greater sensitivity to disability within cultural spaces (e.g. museums)
- End result was that this cohort was particularly disengaged from Valletta and from cultural activities.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Attention needs to be given to the social context;
- Continuous consultation and direct involvement (as has been done with the MUŻA project) is of paramount importance;
- The need to develop a social strategy;
- Need to increase visibility of Valletta 2018 activities
- Need to improve accessibility, where possible;
- Ensure a balance of activities that include family-oriented events which are free or low cost.
- Keeping gentrification and monumentalisation in check



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