

EAST

REGIONAL CULTURAL STRATEGY

2022-2027



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Forewords

Hon. Owen Bonnici

Minister for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government



The project *Provision of Cultural Strategy Development and Implementation to Local Councils and Regional Councils* led by Arts Council Malta in collaboration with the Local Government Division and the Local Councils' Association is another milestone for cultural development in Malta. I am proud to note that this project was successfully implemented as part of the project *Create 2020* with an investment of EUR1 million in cultural and creative capacity skills in Malta's public sector, through the *European Structural and Investment Funds 2014 – 2020*.

The Regional Cultural Strategies are another step towards the government's commitment to further decentralise cultural activity and empower more local communities to lead cultural development. They also build on the outstanding collaboration between institutions within the Ministry for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government, with the valid contributions of cultural experts and hundreds of stakeholders who participated in the process.

Culture is an important and legally binding remit for both Local and Regional Councils, and this was reinforced further in the recent 2019 reform. Designed hand in hand with Local and Regional Councils, both the process leading up to the formulation of these Regional Cultural Strategies and the tools in place for their implementation are tangible examples of participatory governance. As a result, the Regional Councils are now able to identify cultural priorities which are evidence-based and adapted to the unique cultural identities on a local, regional and national level.

These Regional Cultural Strategies will also facilitate and improve the resource management

of local cultural infrastructure, thereby increasing opportunities for the cultural and creative sectors, and making them more accessible. I am confident that the training given to all Local Councils and Regional Councils will support the administrative structures of Local Government to implement the Regional Cultural Strategies. This government remains committed to support Regional Councils and their collaborators to implement these strategies as we firmly believe that culture is an essential component for the wellbeing of our communities.

I encourage the Regional Councils to collaborate wholeheartedly with Arts Council Malta and translate this strategy into tangible, effective and sustainable actions that positively impact Local Councils, NGOs, creative practitioners and other stakeholders involved in the cultural and creative sectors. The wealth of our cultural heritage, the diversity of our communities and the exceptional talent of our people are assets for the sustainability of our Regions. Together, we can ensure that talent development, audience development and heritage innovation, established as the three transversal themes of these strategies, will lead to more collaborative and community-led cultural development in Malta and Gozo.



Hon. Alison Zerafa Civelli

Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government

Despite our diminutive size, Malta has a lot to offer its residents and visitors. Our towns and villages are truly unique as they are rich in culture and heritage and surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea. This is why our Regional and Local Councils are acutely aware of the importance we must place on protecting and nurturing our local culture, heritage and traditions as together they make up the heart of our cities and villages, our environment, and our entire archipelago.

In adding value to Malta's localities, we want to optimise and elevate our local expertise and encourage our Local Councils to use their talents and knowledge to reinforce our local history, traditions and customs. In this manner, we can preserve what makes us Maltese and pass it on to future generations for years to come.

Our Local Councils are a great source of regional knowledge, which is why they form an integral part of the National Cultural Policy. Only with their participation can we adapt to the everyday realities of Malta's six regions to integrate communities, the church, committees, organisations, artists, creatives, local clubs and residents to jointly promote and stimulate our shared culture, traditions and history.

For this reason, I am delighted to announce that Malta's Ministry for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government is investing in Regional Managers within our Regional Councils as a vital human resource. What's more, they are also collaborating closely with the Regional Cultural Coordinator from Arts Council Malta.

I look ahead with excitement at the thought of witnessing local cultural activities and initiatives of

high quality, facilitated by our Local Councils. Most of all, I encourage our residents and communities to participate and take the opportunity to learn from such experiences and embrace our local talent and the history and heritage that make us truly Maltese.

Albert Marshall,
Executive Chair, Arts Council Malta



It has been quite an insightful process for Arts Council Malta (ACM), to be leading this project towards developing Regional Cultural Strategies (RCS) while collaborating and thereby exchanging knowledge with representatives from regional and local government, various organisations, creative practitioners and other stakeholders.

This reflects a participatory approach to policy implementation as well as a strategic focus on the diverse communities that make up Malta's cultural and creative ecology. ACM's vision and strategy will remain fully committed to embrace the implementation of the RCS, endorsing their importance through the integration of specifically related strategic objectives within the recently launched ACM Strategy 2025. The consultation process was instrumental in the way the Council aims to localise the priorities set out in the National Cultural Policy. The policy is based on the principles of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Culture plays a central role in building stronger, healthier and more cohesive communities while being integral to urban and rural societies and a catalyst for sustainable development. This resonates with a number of Sustainable Development Goals such as Goal 11, which makes reference to creating inclusive public spaces and protecting cultural heritage and practices. It is within this context that ACM has strived towards the design of these RCS and the overall strategic approach to supporting the cultural and creative sectors at local and regional levels.

Community and cultural exchange is one of the main pillars which ACM has been supporting and facilitating through various strategic and funding initiatives. Work is continuously in progress to create possibilities for local cultural spaces to serve as locations of cultural exchange. The need to do more in harnessing the distinctive and diverse cultural asset base of each region in Malta through the launch of these strategies is being acknowledged.

In the coming years, ACM intends to further develop and invest in these strategic areas, and others such as cultural entrepreneurship, research, internationalisation, education and development. Overlaps with other sectors such as health, environment and social aspects will be given more prominence responding to international urgencies. One ought to recognise that a nuanced understanding of local cultural assets is key to success in extending ACM's reach and exploring new territory. In light of this, one looks forward to seeing these strategies being transformed into action in tandem with the realisation of ACM's strategic aim of supporting the cultural wellbeing of Malta's regions in the coming years.

Natalino Attard,
Director General, Local Government



Following the last Local Government Reform Process and the legislative amendments to the Local Government legislation, the Regional Councils, have had their legal basis strengthened and have been given more important responsibilities, inter alia the inclusion of a set of defined functions in the Local Government Act. Culture sits firmly within this new legal remit, empowering Regional Councils to be instrumental in regional cultural development.

The Regional Cultural Strategies are envisaged to leave a positive impact on community-led cultural initiatives and programmes that address ambitious objectives to enable all citizens living in Malta and Gozo to participate actively in culture. Whilst safeguarding and promoting our rich cultural heritage we must also ensure that creative expression is enabled and celebrated across our diverse communities.

These strategies will serve as a framework for Regional Councils to collaborate with Arts Council Malta and implement an ambitious plan that strengthens existing programmes and creates new initiatives. They seek to improve coordination between different Local Councils for cultural initiatives and facilitate the creation of opportunities for new collaborations with artists, NGOs, cultural institutions and other stakeholders.

I congratulate the Regional Councils for their commitment to develop these cultural strategies and thank Arts Council Malta for initiating this process with us. We remain committed to support the implementation of the Regional Cultural Strategies through various means, but also through our existing Cultural Activities Scheme and other resources that will be allocated by the government in the coming years.

Mary Ann Cauchi,
Director Funding & Strategy, Arts Council Malta



Regional and local cultural development is at the forefront of Arts Council Malta's priorities to further incentivise and enable the valorisation of distinct forms of cultural and creative expression.

The six Regional Cultural Strategies (RCS) encapsulate significant overlapping and other distinct strategic objectives and provide for recognised frameworks for the collaborators, including ACM, to sustain and facilitate these relationships. They also enable it to further prioritise and stimulate the cultural and creative vitality of Malta's regions and localities, including their communities, practices, resources and infrastructure, amongst others.

Over the next years, ACM is committed to supporting and engaging with the Regional Councils through collaborations with Local Councils, organisations, creative practitioners and other stakeholders, enabling initiatives led by communities for communities. Through strategic direction, facilitation and support, ACM's commitment is reflected in increasing efficiency, maximising and increasing resources and mobilising processes to further valorise the importance of arts and culture in everyone's daily lives. The collaborators involved in this process are committed to nourish, protect and promote the diversity of cultural expression, increase accessibility and incentivise active participation.

Significant work has already been carried out to lay out the preparatory groundwork in the final stages ahead of their launch and subsequent implementation. Amongst others, these include the setting up of flexible roles and structures to facilitate understanding of the foundation required

to sustain a participatory approach. Following the exhaustive work by all those involved in the formulation of these strategies, an ongoing intensive familiarisation process has enabled ACM to identify a number of generic strategic objectives. These are primarily related to knowledge building, research, enhancement of cultural infrastructure, facilitation of local and regional cultural programming and governance, and development of ongoing evaluation and monitoring structures. Initiatives related to creative placemaking, social innovation, liveability and urban design will be prioritised and incentivised. Likewise, one can draw attention to and elevate community assets and cultural infrastructure; envision new possibilities for places; connect communities; and create and reinforce opportunities for partnerships.

The implementation of these strategies is entirely dependent on the willingness and motivation of all the stakeholders to work hand in hand, to understand different priorities and objectives, to collaborate and to support or be supported. The formulation of six unique strategies is an important step in the realisation that every region is distinct and diverse and that the initial familiarisation processes are key to understanding the uniqueness of communities, their challenges and resources. The journey which lies ahead is exciting as much as it is challenging, yet ACM will strive to continue to listen, understand and work collaboratively to reinforce the position of arts and culture within communities and places.

Anthony Chircop,
President, Eastern Regional Council



Malta's Eastern Region is home to a curious mix of localities. Among them are some long-established ones with rural roots steeped in history, folklore and tradition, like Birkirkara, Lija and Għargħur. Then, there are our more recent towns, such as Msida with its blend of seaside and fishing customs, and St Julian's with its fishing village heart.

Many decades ago, towns like Sliema, Gżira, Pietà and Pembroke emerged thanks to Malta's geostrategic importance to Great Britain, whose military and naval presence on the island led to expanded defensive facilities as well as residential and commercial developments to house and serve their personnel. In fact, Pembroke was specifically created to meet Great Britain's needs as a spot detached, guarded and fenced off from the rest of Malta.

Then there is Ta' Xbiex, which started as a high-end locality replete with villas affordable only to rich Maltese families. The town developed at a time when Valletta and the Three Cities across the Grand Harbour were heavily ravaged by war, which limited the amount of decent housing available. And, not to be forgotten, Sliema – and 'The Front' in particular – also benefitted from this shift of focus away from the capital city. Unfortunately, though, most of the beautiful properties that were developed in Sliema in the early 1900s have since been demolished and replaced.

We also have Swieqi and Iklin, which were previously farmland with hamlets of some half-a-dozen farmhouses. In the mid-1960s, both villages offered superb development opportunities in the building boom that followed Malta's independence from Great Britain.

It is precisely this diverse mix of town histories and traditions in Malta's Eastern Region that our strategic approach to art and culture celebrates. We aim to enhance and build on our traditions, while nurturing an appreciation and passion for the arts that both recognises our contemporary lifestyle and honours our values.

Our eye-catching theatres and even religious spaces that double up as entertainment halls used to be an absolute hive of activity across Malta. Local talent would be cultivated within those walls and the chance to perform in front of energetic audiences was very present. Today, such opportunities are few and far between.

While this may be so, hope is flourishing. Our aim as a Regional Council is to restore the mindset that once was and to reignite our cultural responsibilities as the Eastern Region.

We are fully geared towards encouraging and supporting our local talent. We believe that our professional approach to nurturing arts and culture across localities will also serve to deepen our sense of community – and this is crucial at a time when we are welcoming people from across the globe to our shores, our culture and our society.

Overview

Size of Region

20.3km² (6%)
320km² (National)

Population

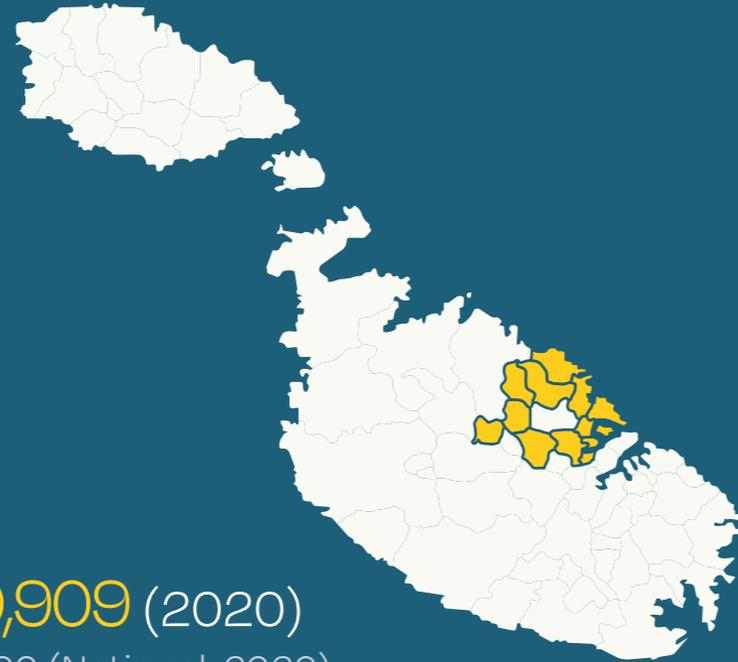
83,684 (2008) — 130,909 (2020)
410,926 (National, 2008) 516,100 (National, 2020)

Population Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)

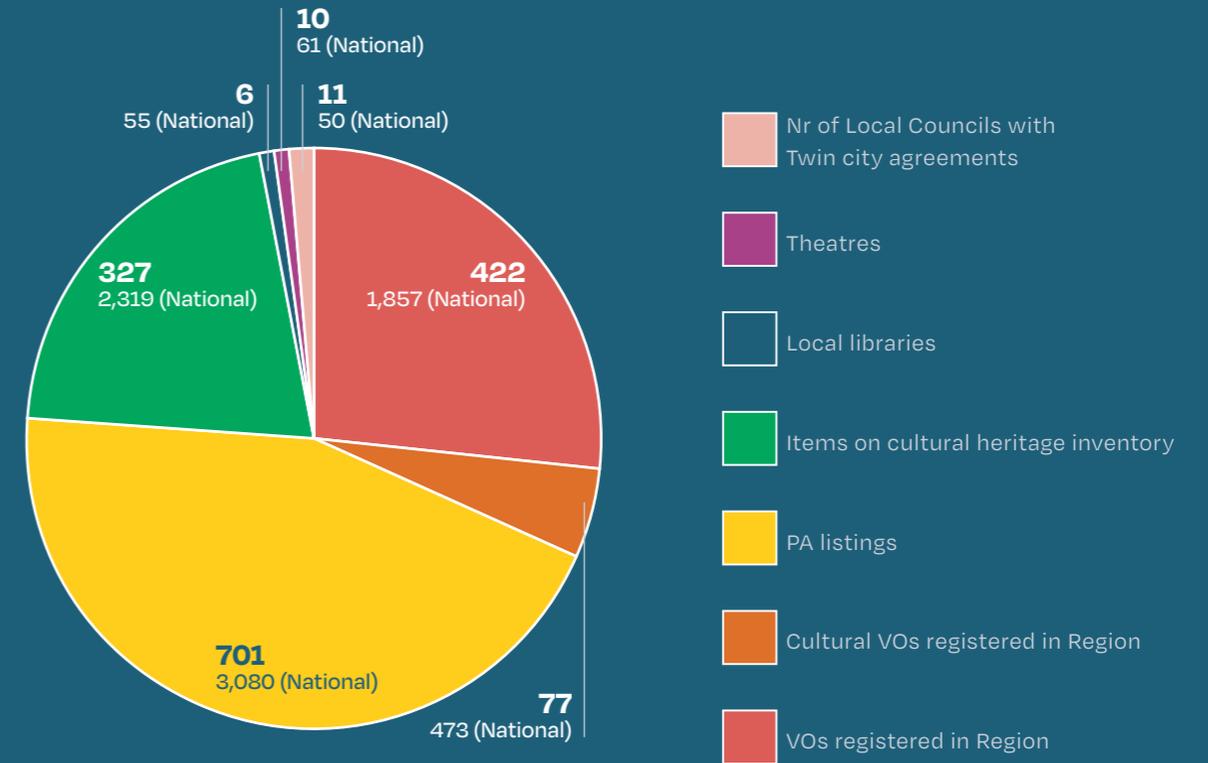
3.80%

Localities with Significant Changes

Ta' Xbiex 2.1%	Tal-Pietà 2.5%
Tas-Sliema 5.1%	Gżira 5.2%
Swieqi 5.4%	St Julian's 5.5%



Cultural Resources



Regional Libraries

Regional Libraries: 1 | Location: Birkirkara

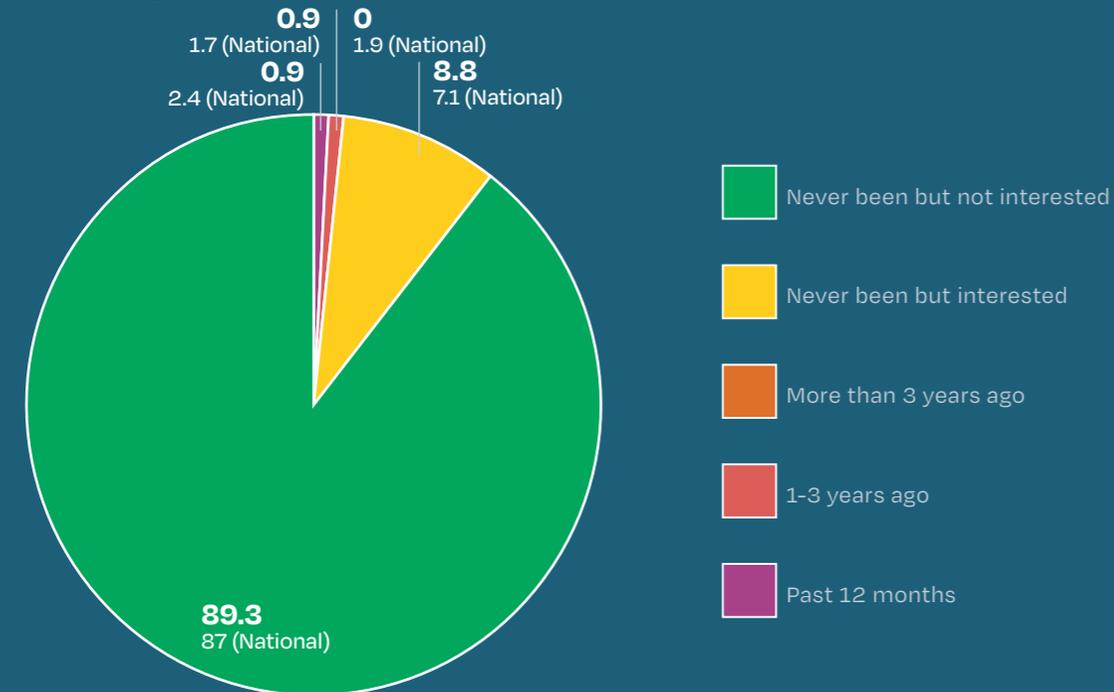
Books Loaned: 150,740
1,031,868 (National, 2019)

Cultural Participation

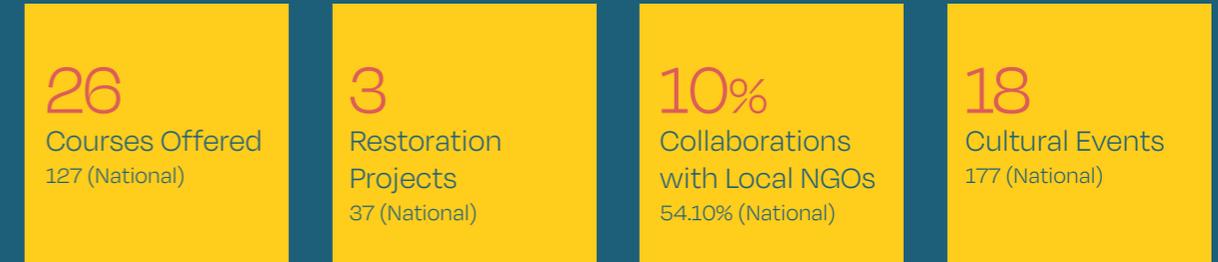
% of population attending



% of population actively involved in Local Council festivities



Local Council activities in region (2018)



1. Introduction

The cultural strategy for the Eastern Region outlines the overarching cultural themes and priorities for the region from 2022 onwards. This cultural strategy, a first for the region, was developed with the Regional Council, Local Councils, non-governmental cultural organisations, Public Cultural Organisations, creative practitioners and residents of the localities. The Eastern Region includes the following localities: Ғal Lija, Tas-Sliema, St Julian’s, Gżira, Tal-Pietà, Msida, Ta’ Xbiex, Iklin, Ғal Għargħur, Pembroke, Swieqi and Birkirkara.

The Provision of Cultural Strategy Development and Implementation to Local Councils and Regional Councils project is led by Arts Council Malta in collaboration with the Local Government Division and the Local Councils Association. It forms part of the ESF.04.079 project titled *Create 2020: Investing in Cultural and Creative Capacity Skills in Malta’s Public Sector* that is financed through the European Social Fund, Operational Programme II – European Structural and Investment Funds 2014 – 2020 *Investing in Human Capital to Create More Opportunities and Promote the Well-Being of Society*. The co-financing rate of the project is 80% EU funds and 20% national funds.

This strategy:

- Explores and measures the asset base for culture in the Eastern region.
- Provides an overview of the key cultural assets of the region, the distinctive role played by culture, a gap analysis, and recommendations for building capacity and leveraging strengths so that culture can play a key strategic role in the development of the region.
- Makes the strategic case for culture – as a vital ingredient for civil society, for inclusive growth, and sustainable approaches to community and place.
- Provides opportunities for collaboration and benchmarking with regions across Europe – so that the Region can be both a pathfinder and a partner to best practice culture-led development.

The research which underpins this strategy involved extensive qualitative consultation to map and understand the cultural assets of the region. It included a desk-based analysis of cultural assets, a survey, and a period of critical discussion and consultation which provided a set of fresh perspectives on the role that culture can play in shaping the regions of the Maltese Islands. The strategy recognises the valuable contribution that culture already makes to the different regions, but also highlights the potential for a far wider engagement and development that would deliver a better future for all.

The overall aim of this strategy is to make the six regions of the Maltese Islands more dynamic, more open, more distinctive, and more enjoyable places, harnessing the power of culture to build stronger, healthier and more cohesive communities, to diversify and strengthen the economy, to revitalise Maltese heritage and to help address the social and economic challenges that the Maltese Islands face. For the purposes of this strategy, culture is being defined in its widest sense to embrace our identities and communities, our heritage, museums, local music halls, theatres, libraries, festivals, feasts, events, and cultural practitioners – artists, makers, performers, musicians, writers and the wider creative talent pool.



Suitable Citizens by Raphael Vella and Suitable Citizens participants. Msida, 2021. Photo by Elisa von Brockdorff courtesy of AMASS (Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture) led in Malta by the Department of Arts, Open Communities, and Adult Education, Faculty of Education in collaboration with the Jesuit Refugee Service

To help maximise the value and influence of culture across Malta and Gozo and to ensure that the power of culture is harnessed to meet the regions’ social and economic challenges, this strategy aims to:

- Foster better awareness of the role and value of culture, building on existing strengths and championing emergent ones.
- Promote equitable cultural investment so that everyone benefits from and has access to culture, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity and other elements of diversity.
- Spearhead an active revitalisation of heritage assets – both building-based and ‘intangible’ – including the churches, band clubs, feasts and festivals.
- Invest in more engaged, more active, healthier and happier communities where active participation by young and old in diverse cultural activities is the norm.
- Promote and support a culture of healthy living and well-being within our communities.
- Facilitate the professional growth and sustainability of artists, creative businesses and

cultural organisations growing in capacity to reach new and larger audiences and markets and accessing talent that is more diverse and more representative of the region.

- Strengthen the cultural economy so that it adds value to the overall economy by contributing to the creative industries, tourism, the digital sector and science.
- Enhance regional identity and experience, making them even more dynamic, open, distinctive and enjoyable places to be.

2. Strategic Rationale for Culture

UNESCO (2005)¹ argues that placing culture at the heart of our strategies is both the condition for enabling sustainable development and a powerful driving factor for its achievement.

UNESCO asserts that:

- Culture, encompassing both heritage (tangible and intangible) and the creative industries, plays a critical role in urban and rural societies and is integral to their identity while underpinning their dynamism.
- Cultural and creative industries can be vital catalysts of development and renewal as they provide access to employment, introduce contemporary vibrancy, enhance a society's identity and help create more attractive places where to live, work, invest and visit.
- A heritage-driven urban and cultural policy also contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change, as conserving the existing fabric (built with traditional techniques and local materials and skills) is more environmentally friendly than demolishing and reconstructing it.

Similarly, the European Commission² sets out the vital role culture plays in local development, not least in 'closing the opportunity gap' between different parts of Europe. The European Union is:

Fundamentally a political and cultural project based on strong humanist values. The fact is that the tapestry of European history, the rich diversity of European culture and Europe's reserves of creativity are some of the strongest cards we hold when it comes to building a prosperous European future. It is with new ideas, new concepts and new projects that we will rise to the challenges facing us to make our future a reality. And that's why the European Commission defends a Europe that invests in culture, in education, in research and innovation. These are investments in future growth, jobs and social cohesion.

A New Narrative for Europe (EESC, 2013)

Each region of the Maltese Islands has a distinctive and diverse cultural asset base. All the regions have a strong heritage landscape, often conceptualised in terms of historic buildings, feasts, band clubs and traditional approaches to music, crafts, agriculture and cuisine. These cultures are often linked to specific places – villages, towns, even neighbourhoods. Each region has a fascinating and, in some cases, dynamic contemporary cultural landscape – through the talent base of the people, the energy of the communities and through the fresh perspectives an increasingly diverse population brings. The opportunity now is to recognise and celebrate these cultural assets, to be frank and open about gaps and challenges, and to develop a strategic process where culture can play a starring role in the social, economic and environmental futures of the regions of the Maltese Islands.

1 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of a Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, 2005). See full text at: <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/convention>.

2 A New Narrative for Europe - The EESC resolution on the Conference on the Future of Europe (European Economic and Social Committee, 2021). See full text at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/new-narrative-europe-eesc-resolution-conference-future-europe>

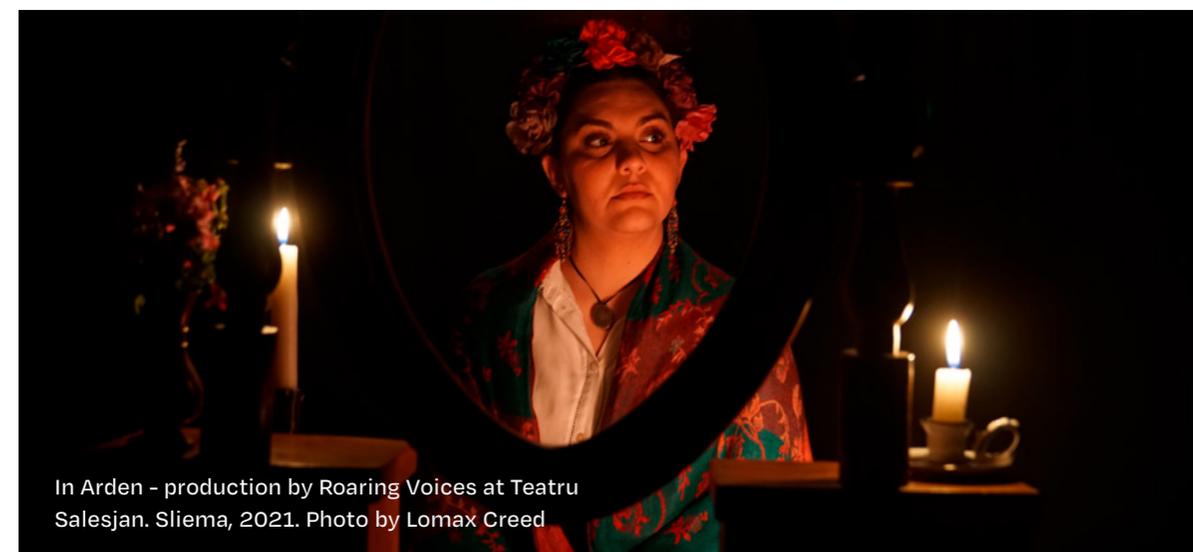


Nimxu Mixja - a project by Raffaella Zammit and Kristina Borg, in collaboration with the Gabriel Caruana Foundation and Kullegġ St Theresa College Birkirkara Primary, Birkirkara, 2019. Photo by Elisa von Brockdorff

2.1. Legal functions and strategic outcomes

This strategy reflects the functions of the Regional Councils as outlined in the Local Government Act (ACT No. XIV of 2019).

Legal function	Overall strategic outcome in the field of culture identified in the strategy
The social aspect, that includes research on and evaluation of social impact. This report shall be made within the first year of each legislature.	This strategy is based on evidence collected from the extensive qualitative and quantitative research conducted as part of the process. Monitoring and evaluation is integrated as an outcome of the strategy.
The provision of assistance to Local Councils within the region, which assistance includes the provision of professional services relating to the environmental, social, cultural, touristic and information technology sectors.	Assistance by the region in the field of culture is outlined in the deliverables of the strategy, prioritising the role of the region as a facilitator of cultural development.
The provision of assistance to Local Councils within the region to help them benefit from European Union funds and successfully manage programmes which are funded by the European Union.	The objectives put forward in this document can serve as a strategic base for the identification of cultural projects that may be co-funded through programmes of the European Union.
The coordination with Local Councils of sports and physical activities and initiatives, including those relating to welfare.	Culture as an incentive for physical activity and the well-being of citizens has been embedded in the strategy as a deliverable.
The coordination with ministries, departments and Government entities to facilitate the work of Local Councils.	The strategy calls for close collaboration with the ministry responsible for culture, the Arts Council Malta and Public Cultural Organisations to ensure successful delivery.
To give an opinion regarding the Local Plan that will be attached to the report submitted to the House.	Urban and rural sustainability through culture and the protection of cultural heritage are identified as major strategic components that impact Local Plans.
The preparation of an annual Work Plan that identifies the financial and human resources needs of the region.	The delivery of the strategy is attached to yearly Action Plans delivered by the region and the Local Councils within the region.



In Arden – production by Roaring Voices at Teatru Salesjan. Sliema, 2021. Photo by Lomax Creed

2.1.1. The role of Regional and Local Councils

The strategy considers the legal obligation of the Regional Councils to provide Local Councils with assistance to address their cultural functions as outlined in the Local Government Act, namely to:

- Provide for the establishment, upkeep and maintenance of cultural centres.
- Administer local libraries as part of a national scheme and ensure that they are as accessible as possible to all persons.
- Safeguard the local identity and take the necessary measures to safeguard the local historical and cultural heritage, traditions and folklore.
- Extend assistance to artists within their locality to help them develop their talents.
- Organise cultural activities that promote the locality in every possible way.
- Promote the concept of lifelong learning with all residents, particularly with adults and the elderly, by providing lifelong learning opportunities within the locality.

As wellbeing, sustainability and decentralisation become more visible in *Malta's National Cultural Policy 2021* (Ministry for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government, 2021), the leading role of Regional and Local Councils in this process will become even more important.

The NCP 2021 states that the cultural remit of Regional and Local Councils will be widened to include improved resource management for local cultural infrastructure and cultural heritage and initiatives for cultural innovation and community engagement (Ministry for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government, 2021). It recognises the need to implement Regional Cultural Strategies by introducing coherent administrative procedures for the management and co-management of cultural events and educational programmes. These include lifelong learning programmes which will reflect the needs of the community, taking into consideration shifts in demographics and population in different regions in the last few years. Specifically, in regions with a high concentration of non-Maltese residents, the Regional Councils shall design programmes that

are tailor-made for this shift with the objective of integrating all residents within the regions.

Notwithstanding the distinctive characteristics of regions, the NCP 2021 also supports measures for collaboration and networking of regions in their design of their cultural programmes, their management of cultural heritage, their input in the restoration of facades and their efforts for the sustainable management of the cultural environment.

By addressing strategic measures that tackle the specific challenges, but also identify the strengths and unique selling propositions, of localities within the region, this strategy builds on national priorities that include improving the cultural access and participation of citizens, supporting cultural diversity and integration and building new partnerships between public cultural institutions, regions and cultural NGOs. The policy also reflects on how culture and the arts can leverage, support and sustain specific activity in local tourism, education, economy and health.

The regions can, with a coordinated and ambitious approach to partnership and investment, be much enriched by building on their cultural assets, strengthening partnerships, developing capacity in knowledge and skills, planning projects over the long-term, and encouraging new types of culture to flourish so that tradition and innovation can stand side by side.

Inspired by the insights and experiences of people who work tirelessly for the localities and the strong evidence-base generated by the research, the Regional Councils are entrusted with enabling the cultural development in the region using this strategic framework and other resources that may be leveraged at both the national and the European level.

This strategy draws on three transversal themes that are common to all the regions. It also introduces priorities for each region.

3. Key Transversal Themes for Culture across the Maltese Islands

This strategy draws on three transversal themes that are common to all the regions and introduces specific priorities for this region.

On analysing the cultural assets, opportunities and challenges of each of the six regions, which form this overarching research programme, a set of three shared, or 'transversal', themes became clearly apparent. The themes reflect a shared cultural development reality for the Maltese Islands as a relatively small nation with an incredibly rich heritage offer and significant capacity, partnership and investment challenges. The themes are introduced below.

Theme 1: Talent development

The regions of the Maltese Islands are rife with cultural and creative talent, with people being the main cultural resource for the nation. For example, there is real expertise in a range of traditional cultural forms, including the art and performance related to carnival, band clubs, and an enormous range of festivals and events. There are distinctive cultural memories, rites and rituals, which spark the popular imagination and mobilise a wide variety of cultural activities.

Furthermore, each region has a blend of unique cultural strengths expressed in the skills, activities and aspirations of the people. However, we are not yet maximising the full potential of the cultural talent pool. Too many people find it hard to build sustainable careers in culture. There are serious capacity limits for cultural organisations, with many struggling to make ends meet and grow sustainably. Emergent communities from different parts of the world have not yet found the platform to express their culture and contribute to an increasingly compelling mix of cultural traditions across the regions.

This theme is about building capacity, skills and partnerships within the cultural talent base. Its intention is to mobilise a cultural workforce where more people are active making culture – both professionally and as a key part of their lives. It

seeks to ensure that the cultural sector is open to all and maximises the ideas, aspirations, energies and skills of an increasingly diverse population. It prioritises the development of programmes and infrastructure that provide the conditions for talent to flourish. This includes the introduction of cultural and arts education; the development of specialist cultural skills, management and entrepreneurship support; and, the coordination of cultural hubs, networks and partnership activities which build visibility, voice and confidence across the cultural sector.

Theme 2: Audience engagement

Culture is a way of life for the people of the Maltese Islands. In comparison with many parts of Europe, the level of participation in cultural events, such as feasts and carnival celebrations, is high. For many, participation in cultural events (and their preparation) is part of their way of life. However, outside of a relatively narrow range of cultural activities, audiences are still emergent. There is a general lack of active participation in cultural activities such as in instances where women feel excluded from events predominantly led by men. Ethnic minority communities and people with disabilities experience a more general sense of exclusion from active participation in all cultural forms. Much more can be done to build active audiences that are intercultural and intergenerational and who feel able to contribute to the way culture is presented, promoted and programmed.

This theme focuses on strengthening active and diverse audiences for a variety of cultural forms across every region. The theme prioritises social inclusion as a principle for a dynamic and responsible cultural system. It encourages cultural organisations and NGOs to work in partnership to open up the cultural offer, to avoid clashes in cultural programming and to encourage a coordination of programmes and their communication. It supports convening activities, such as shared promotion and ticketing systems, coordinated approaches to audience engagement for communities that are not adequately involved and targeted interventions which encourage cultural tourism, where the tourist is an active member of the audience rather than an onlooker on the margins of the activity.

Theme 3: Heritage innovation

The regions of the Maltese Islands have a layered history, each layer having been shaped by the people living on the islands at the time, each creating a distinct sense of identity and place. The heritage of the Maltese Islands encompasses an astonishing array of tangible and intangible cultural assets: a wealth of ancient temples, citadels, churches and cathedrals, second world war shelters, beautiful streets and vibrant squares that are animated by festivals, music and memory building events. Much of the energy, resources and priorities for culture have focused on the protection and refurbishment of the tangible heritage assets, which is vital if the country is to remain a jewel in the Mediterranean. It should be ensured that overdevelopment does not compromise Malta's heritage strengths and cultural tourism is harnessed so that it can play a role in the preservation and sustainability of the heritage offer. However, the focus on protection has,

in some instances, limited the potential of heritage innovation – where heritage assets are revitalised and re-imagined as spaces, platforms or forms for contemporary use and where different narratives are formulated which posit the future as a departure from the past.

This theme focuses on heritage as a resource for contemporary cultural development and innovation. This is where cultural organisations and their audiences and partners play an active role in engaging with the past and nurturing possibilities for the future. This is where new partnerships are developed to conserve and re-purpose heritage through the active production of new types of cultural activity from a changing population. And this is where cultural tourism and the creative industries can help generate new income which can be re-invested in heritage development.

For each of the three transversal themes, the region has a set of distinct strategic priorities. These are introduced in the next section.

3.1. Shared priorities for culture across the six regions

Each transversal theme is linked by five overarching priorities:

Connecting rural communities and smaller towns

Connecting rural communities and smaller towns to build stronger cultural links and bring the countryside to the city and the city to the countryside. It is vital that communities are both internally and externally connected, with

opportunities for the members of the communities to participate in a range of cultural activities and to exchange and co-create new cultures which enhance well-being and facilitate a stronger sense of place.

Building capacity

Building capacity in cultural infrastructure and for cultural organisations with a commitment to supporting emergent cultural organisations as a vital component of ongoing cultural and creative renewal. This also means the development of good

governance practice in the selection of events, the utilisation of available resources, the methods of community engagement and the documentation and analysis of outcomes.

Invigorating partnership and diversifying investment

Invigorating partnership and diversifying investment across Malta and Gozo. Existing partnerships require consolidation, strengthening and innovation. Partners within and between each region need to re-frame their approach to investment in culture, also placing it at the heart of education, planning, health and well-being. This will require synergy between the

various strategic stakeholders to develop a common cultural plan. The formation of a Regional Cultural Committee, with the participation of Local Councils, NGOs and creative practitioners, will facilitate more participatory decision-making. On the other hand, the Regional Cultural Officer supports the implementation of the Regional Cultural Strategy.

The European dimension and beyond

The Maltese Islands are a hub with strong historic links to many countries but efforts must be made to counteract a growing tendency towards insularity.

The region can be better connected to the rest of the world and would benefit from cultural exchange and partnerships with international partners.

Evaluation and evidence

The outcomes of the cultural strategy must be measured to assist partners to identify ways to improve delivery and ensure that the vision and themes of the strategy are impactful over the long term. This would help the implementers of the

strategy to gain a better understanding of the assets of each locality within the region and gain valuable regional data about underutilised venues and how to better engage resident artists and NGOs based in the area.

4. Cultural Profile of the Eastern Region

4.1. Demographic profile

The localities in the Eastern Region have a combined population of 130,909 (National Statistics Office, 2020), making up 25% of the total population of Malta and Gozo. The region occupies 20.3km², which is equivalent to 8% of the total size of Malta. It is geographically one of the smallest regions in the Maltese Islands and the most densely populated. 90% of the survey participants consider urban development as a threat to the culture of the region.

The last decade saw an average increase in population growth of 3.8%, with localities such as Msida (6%), St Julian's (5%) and Gżira (5%) experiencing the highest increase. This resulted in the internationalisation of communities through economic migration, which provides new opportunities for cultural exchange and different types of cultural development.

4.2. Economic profile

The region is home to Malta's primary tourism and leisure area, having a promenade that runs from Tal-Pietà to Msida, Ta' Xbiex, Gżira, Tas-Sliema, St Julian's, Pembroke and Swieqi.

In comparison to the national average, this region has a low rate of poverty and has relatively high property market prices. The most pertinent social problems observed in this region are neglect of elderly persons and of persons with mental health issues (ESC, Central Region, 2016).

4.3. Cultural profile

The 2019 Esprimi research on cultural initiatives by Local Councils in the region indicates that, in 2018, the Eastern Region had the lowest number of cultural events organised by Local Councils (18 events), making up just 16% of all the events organised by Local Councils in Malta and Gozo. Most of these events were celebrations of the commemoration day of a locality or organised cultural visits. The strategy survey revealed that 30% of the Local Council representatives in the Eastern Region did not agree with the statement that the

citizens in their locality participated actively in cultural events organised by the Local Council.

A noteworthy finding of the survey that preceded the drawing up of this strategy was that 30% of the Local Council representatives in the Eastern Region do not believe that the Local Council is empowered to address the cultural priorities of the locality – this is significantly higher than the 14.8% of Local Council representatives from all of Malta and Gozo who also do not believe this. This finding indicates that the



Local Council representatives do not feel empowered to (co-)manage the heritage sites in the region.

The participants of the strategy survey stated that 30% of the heritage sites are not within the remit of the Local Councils. The Local Council Act (Chapter 363 of the Laws of Malta) lists the safeguarding of local identity (including local historical and cultural heritage, traditions and folklore) among the core functions of a Local Council but the definition of what constitutes cultural heritage is unclear within the legal framework. The Cultural Heritage Act (Chapter 445 of the Laws of Malta) defines cultural heritage but the legislation covering local and regional councils makes sparse reference to it.

Daily Bread - a project by Margerita Pulè and Letta Shtohryn. The Mill - Birkirkara, 2018. Photo by Elisa von Brockdorff, courtesy of Unfinished Art Space and What Do We Do Now? in collaboration with the Gabriel Caruana Foundation

5. Region-specific Priorities and Themes

5.1. Region-specific priorities

The Eastern Region has a set of distinct strategic priorities that are linked to each of the three transversal themes mentioned above and an additional five themes that are unique to the region. The additional themes for the Eastern Region are:

Linked to Transversal Theme 1 – Talent development Cultural events for all

Ensure that all residents, irrespective of their heritage, are offered the opportunity to participate in cultural events and dialogue, particularly in view of the growing diversity of the population and the low rate of cultural participation.

Linked to Transversal Theme 2 – Audience development Strengthening Cultural Infrastructure

Improve access to public libraries within the region and implement the mobile library project. Additionally, further learning programmes, including

language courses, shall be organised by the Local Councils and facilitated by the Region to meet the needs of various residents.

Linked to Transversal Theme 3 – Heritage innovation Promote local assets and their management

Ensure collaboration between inter-/intra-regional stakeholders, NGOs and creative practitioners. This could encourage synergies and minimise fragmentation, especially in relation to resource asset management such as the management of cultural heritage subsequently promoting cultural tourism.

Two additional cross-cutting priorities for the Eastern Region:

Co-develop a regional system

A regional one-stop shop that would serve as an information exchange and simplify procurement processes and facilitate programming and capacity building initiatives. This would improve the Region's operational arm in relation to cultural programmes and increase accountability for the Region.

The regional system would provide the Regional Council and the Local Councils with:

- **Internal access to permits issued by Local Councils for cultural events.** This would help reduce bureaucracy for event organisers holding the same or a similar event in different localities of the region. This will also reduce the Local Councils' administrative burden of processing permits for multiple events.
- **A live database with information on cultural practitioners, historical sites, libraries and cultural NGOs in the region.** This may be used by Local Councils as a reference point to increase the diversity of cultural content in their events. Such information may also be made available to the public.

- **Shared technical knowledge and resources** to support the procurement process of events organised by Local Councils.
- **A calendar of events** that captures all cultural activities, courses and initiatives available within the region.

Maximise funding

It is imperative to tap into diverse funding sources, including the private sector and European and international funding programmes. This could effectively attract public investment for culture; through funding opportunities targeted specifically for culture, or indirectly through funds available for regenerational, social and infrastructural projects, or otherwise.

5.2. Region-specific themes

Theme A: Collaboration in the organisation of cultural events

A distinctive characteristic of the Eastern Region is the high cultural participation in concert/live performances, yet low attendance in local annual cultural events such as the village feast (51.9%), Good Friday related activities (38.9%) and Carnival (25.6%) (Arts Council Malta, 2017).

Another factor worth noting is the large number of NGOs registered in the Eastern Region (422, of which 77 are cultural VOs). In view of this, this strategy recommends that the region provide an administrative platform to help different social groups and NGOs organise creative and innovative cultural events.

Priorities for Theme A:

Inter/intra-regional collaboration

The Region shall cultivate a relationship with local NGOs, creative practitioners and other stakeholders with the ultimate goal of building a stronger creative ecology and fostering synergies with various NGOs and Local Councils. The region shall enhance its communication with Local Councils and the sharing of skills and equipment and encourage co-organisation of cultural events by different Local Councils.

Regional Cultural Officer

The Regional Cultural Officers (RCO) across all regions shall serve as a close and ongoing liaison between the Local Councils, NGOs and creative practitioners to facilitate the coordination of cultural activities within and across localities of the region. Together with the Regional Cultural Coordinator (RCC), they shall facilitate the implementation of the Regional Cultural Strategies which support

the development of initiatives on the basis of live research aimed at continuously promoting the unique cultural traditions and unique heritage of localities. They shall further assist in the development of cultural networks, both locally (inter-regional collaborations) and internationally, prioritising social inclusion, cultural diversity, economic benefit and sustainability.

Theme B: Cultural infrastructure - courses and public libraries

The survey that informed this Cultural Strategy for the Eastern Region revealed that half (50%) of the Local Council representatives consulted do not think that the cultural infrastructure in the locality, such as the library, the town hall and the theatre, are providing sufficient resources for citizens to engage in the arts and culture.

A total of 26 courses were offered to the public in the Eastern Region in 2018. The most popular courses were in crafts, media literacy and information technology. Only two language courses were organised in the region. The teaching of Maltese as a foreign language, needs to be given prominence in the programme of courses offered as a working knowledge of the Maltese language facilitates integration into the community.

The low level of participation in annual traditional cultural events (village feasts, Good Friday events,

Carnival) when compared to other regions reflects the heterogeneity of the cultural infrastructure of the Eastern Region. In localities such as Swieqi, Pembroke, Ta' Xbiex and Iklin there are no band clubs. This contrasts heavily with the number of band clubs which make part of the cultural infrastructure in towns such as Birkirkara, Hal Għargħur, Tas-Sliema and St Julian's. Homogeneous cultural infrastructure and participation can be noted in localities such as Hal Għargħur and Hal Lija where the residents are predominantly local.

The increasing number of international residents, particularly in Gżira, Msida, Tas-Sliema, St Julian's, Pembroke and Swieqi, contributes to the emergence of diverse communities within the Eastern Region. Integrative cultural opportunities need to be in place to promote voluntary participation for international residents who would like to be actively involved in their locality.

Priorities for Theme B:

Maximisation of the use of town halls and theatres

The setting up of a centralised database to facilitate access to cultural sites to ensure that the region is better equipped to coordinate the use of such spaces.

A mobile library

There are only six libraries found in the 12 localities that make up the Eastern Region, including the regional library in Birkirkara. A mobile library would offer physical and digital access to all the localities.

Theme C: Local assets and their management

The region shall work to maximise the use of local cultural assets through intra-/inter-regional collaboration enhancing the sharing of public spaces and public centres. This requires

strengthening connections among stakeholders to encourage synergies and minimise fragmentation in asset management.

Priorities for Theme C:

Maximisation of the utilisation of open public spaces

An inter-regional centralised database is needed to maximise the utilisation of local assets and public places. Partners in the region should be encouraged

to coordinate with the various stakeholders in the localities on the management of such assets and spaces.

Open-air cultural venues

The Eastern Region is densely populated, with over 80% of the Local Council representatives stating that there are no open-air cultural venues. The Region

shall therefore identify and promote spaces that can be transformed for cultural events such as festivals, performances and workshops.

Civic centres

These spaces serve as important service hubs for communities and often host cultural activities. With over 70% of the localities lacking a civic centre, the Region has the potential to identify existing

spaces such as local theatres and halls at both local and regional level. Serving communities through local and regional cultural hubs can also improve community relations and engagement.

Cultural tourism - coordination of walking tours with nearby localities

Some localities within the region, such as St Julian's, Swieqi and Pembroke, share common historical and cultural aspects. Walking tours can be designed to promote these assets to residents and tourists.

There is also the potential of collaboration with other regions on initiatives such as the walking tours of the three towns of H'Attard, Hal Lija and Hal Balzan in the Eastern Region.

Theme D: A regional system and a Regional Cultural Committee

This cultural strategy encourages the provision of support in terms of knowledge-sharing and the development of skills and competences to facilitate cultural participation. Support shall be provided to all the stakeholders within the region through the creation of a single database and a Regional Cultural Hub, facilitating consultation and information services.

The Region shall facilitate inter-/intra-regional collaboration leading up to the organisation of cultural events. Public officials working within the Regional and Local Councils shall be equipped with resources to address their cultural priorities.

The formation of a Regional Cultural Committee shall facilitate participatory governance and ensure representation across various levels.

Priorities for Theme D:

Develop an online cultural platform

This strategy recommends the development of a centralised platform for various stakeholders. This will include a calendar of cultural events, a database

of cultural assets and resources, among others, facilitating intra-/ inter-regional collaborations and operations.

Capacity building for cultural administrators

An increase in human and technical resources is recommended to successfully implement this strategy.

Theme E: Maximise cultural investment

In recent years, the Eastern region has seen the lowest cultural expenditure out of the regions. It also had the lowest bid rate for funded cultural projects. This strategy recommends that diverse funding opportunities be sought for the development of cultural and creative initiatives, including the

creation of a mobile library. The Regional Cultural Officer shall facilitate possible collaborations with the private sector and explore funding opportunities through European and international funding programmes.

Priorities for Theme E:

Regional Cultural Officer

The work of the Regional Cultural Officer, in collaboration with the Regional Cultural Coordinator, is essential for regional development.

Capacity building

Local Council representatives, NGOs and creative practitioners shall have the opportunity to participate in capacity building initiatives facilitated by the region, or other entities, on several aspects related to cultural and artistic projects.



The Cement Truck Procession - a project by Margerita Pulè. Sliema, 2018. Photo by Elisa von Brockdorff

5.3. Examples of culture-led development good practice in the Eastern Region

Inter-/intra-regional collaboration and diversification of cultural events

Gżira

Collaboration: Universal Children's Day celebration; National Youth Conference on Integration (2017); National Grandparents Conference (2018) - all of these activities were held at the local primary school. The hall can be accessed without entering into the main school building. Two NGOs also use the school premises for their meetings. The Gżira Local Council has collaborated with the group Nanniet Malta and the government entity Sedqa in the organisation of events.

Events and courses: Various evening courses are run daily at school in the evenings, including keep-fit classes (5 sessions weekly), drama sessions, dance lessons and a social/crafts club.

Engaging diverse communities: Several festivals are held throughout the year in the school hall or adjacent rooms, particularly with the Bulgarian and Indian communities.

Msida

Collaboration: The Msida Local Council collaborates closely with government entities, such as LEAP and Sedqa, to organise integration and inclusion activities. One of the most successful events was the 'Breakfast in the Square' event where representatives of ten countries (including Malta) set up tables in front of the church on a Sunday morning and presented breakfast food items that are typical of their countries. There are also on-going activities organised by different ethnic groups in the locality, including activities by the Nepalese community.

Engaging diverse communities: The Msida Local Council uses the council buildings for regular meetings with groups and residents of different nationalities living in Msida and surrounding areas. Dialogue and contact are maintained with as many ethnic groups as possible and community participation is encouraged, for example, by the Indian diaspora, which has now established a competitive Cricket Club (The Msida Warriors).

Tas-Sliema

Collaboration: The Sliema International Arts Festival was organised by the Sliema Philharmonic Society in collaboration with several local and international artists and included music ranging from baroque to jazz and operetta. The festival provided a platform for the engagement of diverse age cohorts, including children, as well as different communities. Entrance to this festival was free.

6. Priority Actions for Culture-Led Development in the Eastern Region

Theme (in addition to the transversal themes)	Priority area	Indicative actions	Short-term (<1 year) Medium-term (2-4 years) Long-term (5 years +)
Collaboration in the organisation of cultural events	Inter-/ intra-regional collaboration	Initiate dialogue among different communities in localities with activities specifically designed for the elderly and intercultural programmes to reflect the diversity of the region.	Short to medium term
Cultural infrastructure - courses and public libraries	A mobile library	Set up a mobile library and library innovation programme to provide physical and digital access to residents in the region and to address the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region.	Long term
Local assets and their management	Utilisation of public spaces	The Regional Cultural Officer to coordinate the management of local assets and public spaces to maximise their use.	Long term
A regional system and a Regional Cultural Committee	An online cultural platform	Co-develop a digital platform for culture.	Medium to long term
Maximise cultural investment	Capacity building	The Regional Cultural Officer to facilitate participation in various initiatives by providing the necessary human and technical resources.	Medium to long term



7. Conclusion

This document provides the vision of the Cultural Strategy for the Eastern Region.

The aim of this strategy is to guide the Regional Council, Local Councils and relevant stakeholders (NGOs, creative practitioners and others) in the implementation of measures that will lead to a positive, tangible and long-lasting impact on the cultural activity within the region.

The measures and actions put forward in this strategy emerge from empirical research involving a wide-ranging consultation with interested stakeholders, Local Council representatives and mayors in the region.

8. Appendices

Acknowledgements

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