

SOUTH

# 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*.

**T**he 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.

**I**n 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.

**T**he 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.

Jesmond Aquilina,  
President, Southern Regional Council



As the President of Malta's Southern Regional Council, I am thrilled to be writing this foreword, particularly after having welcomed new Local Councils in January 2022, which changed and elevated our cultural portfolio and demographics.

**M**alta's Southern Region is home to two cities and ten villages, each bursting with unique yet similar cultural characteristics. The region is inseparable from Malta's southern coast, which is replete with scenic bays and vibrant nature, and it is through our stunning natural heritage that our cultural traditions and historical sites emerged. From archaeological and architectural spots like Għar Dalam and rural chapels to the quaint fishing village of Marsaxlokk and other touristic sites, we have a lot to be proud of.

For this reason, we are embracing Malta's Regional Cultural Strategy and promise to collaborate on its implementation by facilitating progress, providing support and assistance, and boosting required resources.

As the Southern Region, our goal has always been to bolster our Local Councils, cultural organisations and the rest of our community. We are guided by our mission to manage resources efficiently and work effectively in our provision of professional services to our Local Councils and other active cultural stakeholders. Now, fully aligned with the Regional Cultural Strategy, we press ahead towards enhanced success and exciting opportunities to further support and nourish our arts and culture.

# Overview

## Size of Region

50.1km<sup>2</sup> (26%)  
320km<sup>2</sup> (National)

## Population

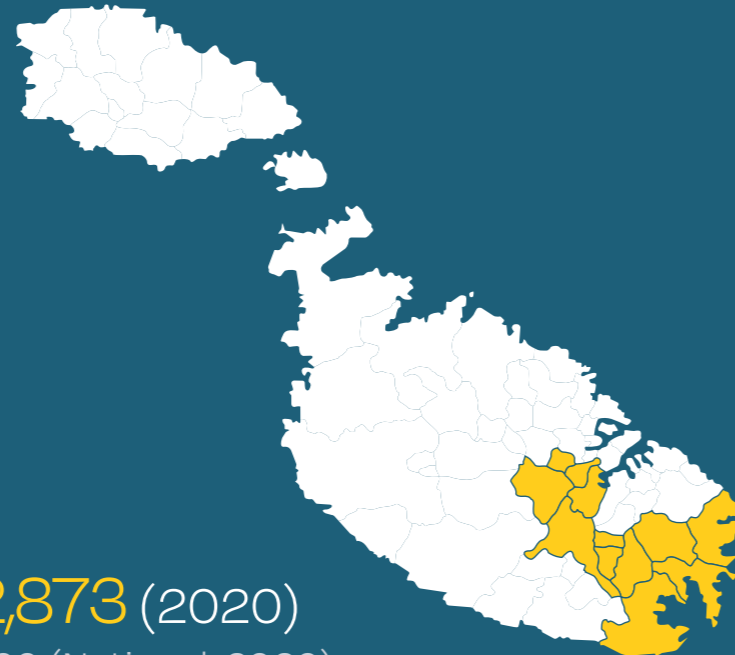
88,076 (2008) — 102,873 (2020)  
410,926 (National, 2008) 516,100 (National, 2020)

## Population Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)

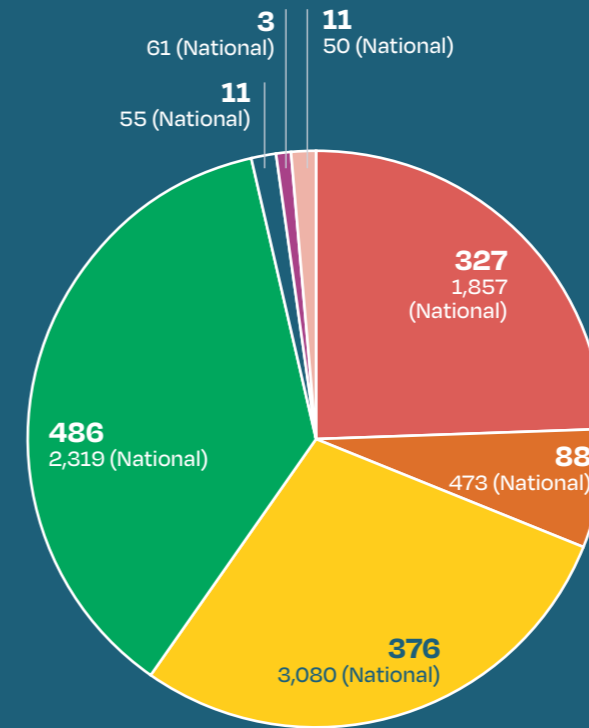
1.30%

## Localities with Significant Changes

Santa Luċija -0.3%      Birżebbuġa 2.9%  
Marsaskala 3.6%



# Cultural Resources



- Nr of local councils with Twin city agreements
- Theatres
- Local libraries
- Items on cultural heritage inventory
- PA listings
- Cultural VOs registered in region
- VOs registered in region

## Regional Libraries

Regional Libraries: 2 | Location: Luqa, Qormi

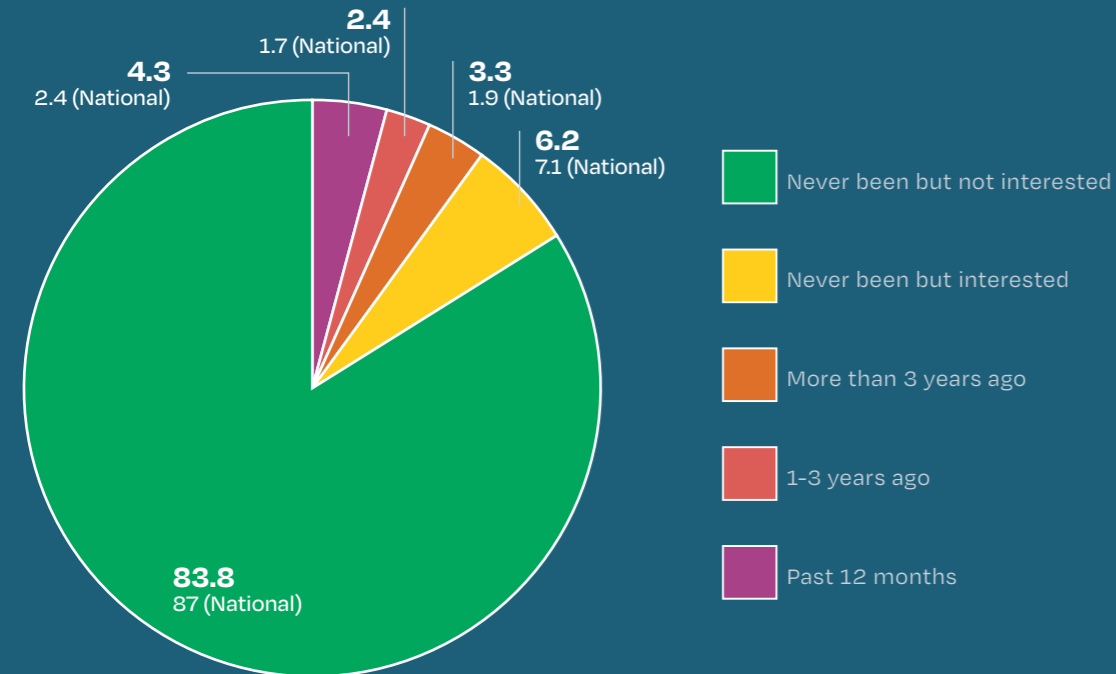
Books Loaned: 309,915  
1,031,868 (National, 2019)

# Cultural Participation

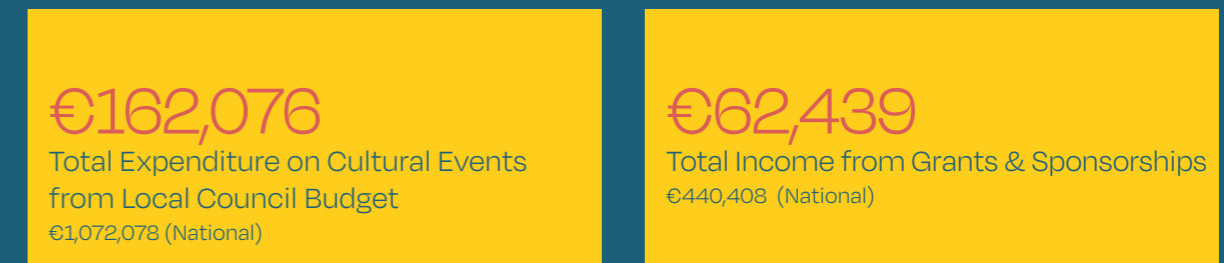
## % of population attending



## % of population actively involved in Local Council festivities



# Local Council activities in region (2018)



# 1. Introduction

The cultural strategy for the Southern 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 Southern Region includes the following localities: Ғal Qormi, Ғejtun, Birżebbuġa, Ғal Għaxaq, Santa Venera, Marsaskala, Marsaxlokk, Santa Luċija, Gudja, Ғamrun, Ғal Luqa, Marsa.

**T**he 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 Southern 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.

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)<sup>1</sup> 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 Commission<sup>2</sup> 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>



L-Irroxt, Żejtun, 2022. Photo by Johann Camilleri

## 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.



Kwarta Tajba Various, 2021. Photo by Daryl Cauchi courtesy of the Southern Regional Council

### 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.

**O**n 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.

#### 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,

*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.*

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 Southern Region

### 4.1. Cultural profile

The Southern region is home to one-fifth of the total population of the Maltese Islands (National Statistics Office, 2020). According to previous records, the population within the region has increased by 1.3%, which is slightly less than the national average (1.9%) with Birżebbuġa (2.9%) and Marsasala (3.6%) registering the highest increases and Santa Luċija registering a slight decrease of 0.3%.

The total number of registered voluntary organisations that are active within the region is 327, that is, one-fifth of all registered non-governmental organisations. 88 (26.9%) are culture organisations, making this the second-highest concentration of voluntary organisations working in arts and culture out of all the six regions. The region also has the highest number of Local Council twinnings (11, same as the Eastern region), making one-fifth of the total number of Local Council twinnings in all regions.

The region has one of the lowest numbers of scheduled buildings and properties scheduled by the Planning Authority (376), adding up to roughly 12% of the total number of scheduled sites (Planning Authority, 2022). These are categorised as follows: architecture (268 sites, 10.6% of all architectural sites registered), engineering (50 sites, 17.3% of all engineering sites registered) and archaeology (25, 12.8% of all archaeological sites registered sites). There is also a relatively higher percentage of cultural heritage property registered on the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage Inventory (486, 21%).

The region has 11 local libraries and 2 regional libraries located in Luqa and Qormi. Altogether, the libraries have processed 309,915 book loans, which represents the highest number of loans registered

by any region. The Southern region has the highest percentage of library and archive users out of all the regions except the Northern Region which has the same statistics (23.3%, or 1.6% higher than the national average).

The region scored low in terms of cultural participation in 2016 (Arts Council Malta, 2017). Participation in theatre performances was 10% lower than the national average (33.2%); concert-going was 4% lower than the national average (34.9%); attendance at dance shows was the second lowest registered participation out of all the six regions at 2% lower than the national average (14.4%); and attendance to art exhibitions and galleries was 2.6% lower than the national average (32.1%). Cultural Participation Survey statistics relating to cinema attendance show that this is also 2.6% lower than the national average (43.6%).

In terms of visits to historical sites, the region stands at 0.5% over the national average (36.8%) while visits to museums also registered a nominal 0.5% increase over the national average (31.1%). Participation in village feasts is at par with the national average (67.4%) while participation in Good Friday processions is a nominal 0.7% higher than the national average (51.6%).

Cultural participation in Carnival is 6.1% over the national average (32.4%), marking it the second-highest cultural participation level out of all the regions. Participation in festivals organised by the Local Councils is a staggering 9% over the national average (33.2) and just 2.3% behind the level of cultural participation registered in Gozo. The region also registered a high percentage of cultural participation in Local Council activities (4.3%) in the twelve months prior to the Cultural Participation Survey by Arts Council Malta published in 2017, making it 1.9% higher than the national average (2.9%). The level of participation in Local Council activities is consistently higher than the national average in all of the previous three years (0.8% over the national average of 1.6% three years previously and 0.7% higher than the national average of 2.6% subsequently). This level of interest is also corroborated by the data showing that the percentage of people who were not in any way interested in Local Council festivities was 2.6% lower than the national average (86.4%). To a certain extent, the statistics obtained pertaining to the 12 months prior to the Cultural Participation Survey (Arts Council Malta, 2017) suggest a substantial increase in participation, although this is set to reach saturation point given that only 6.2% (against a national average of 7.7%) have never participated but would still be interested in doing so. Local Councils within the region have offered 24 courses out of a total of 127, which represents 19% of the total number of courses offered by all Local Councils in Malta and Gozo. Collaborations with local NGOs stand at 55%, meaning that Local Councils are actively collaborating with roughly half of local NGOs within the region, which is in line with the national average (54.1%).

Marsa is the community that stands out in the region, given that its geographical location is the most distant and least related to the rest of the region which has one of the longest continuous shorelines on the South-Eastern coastline of the island. This community has experienced a significant influx of migrants since the establishment of the Open Centre in Marsa in 2002. This has led to the establishment of a resident migrant community with its own retail and community facilities. While this reality presents ample opportunity for a new form of

cultural dialogue, cultural practice and innovation, it also presents a number of challenges. These are generally presented as xenophobic sentiments, a lack of openness and acceptance and a sense of insecurity, felt by both the migrant communities and by the locals. There is a general lack of opportunity for intercultural exchange and dialogue that exacerbates such sentiments. Marsa's designation of the Locality of Culture for 2022 may serve as a catalyst to the challenges that this community is facing. Programming made public so far, however, only refers to events in line with those organised from time to time by Local Councils.

## 4.2. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ A culturally homogeneous region with common interests in traditional cultural activities such as the local religious festivities.</li> <li>→ Strong above-average cultural participation at festivals organised by Local Councils. Traditional cultural events, such as village feasts and Good Friday processions, are highly successful as an intra-/inter-regional local tourism product.</li> <li>→ The region's communities are keen library users, registering one of the highest percentages of cultural participation on a national level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Relatively low cultural participation with regards to live theatre performances, concerts and dance performances.</li> <li>→ The cultural diversity within the region is not reflected in the overall cultural programming of the region.</li> <li>→ The dominant traditional culture within the region does not give space for innovation and diverse approaches in overall cultural development.</li> <li>→ A lack of detailed and consistent data on cultural and heritage assets.</li> <li>→ Access to funding at regional level.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ To connect regional assets to national and European collaboration and funding opportunities.</li> <li>→ To develop an integrated cultural tourism product, particularly in connection with Carnival and traditional festivities.</li> <li>→ To build on the strengths of the establishment of the Region as a platform to enable synergies and joint management of regional and local assets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Further escalation in tensions between local communities and resident migrant communities due to uneven strategically-led social cohesion and integration programmes organised at local and regional level.</li> </ul>

## 5. Region-Specific Themes and Priorities

In addition to the transversal themes and priorities introduced above, research and consultation have helped identify a set of distinct and tailored strategic priorities for the Southern Region. These are introduced below.

### Theme A: Cultural participation

The level of cultural participation in the Southern Region is high. The region also scores highly in terms of cultural production in some sectors and slightly less than the national average in others. The more traditional manifestations score well against the national average. The less traditional manifestations score below average.

#### Priorities for Theme A:

##### Sustain and improve cultural participation

The Region considers youth and senior citizens as priority target groups for its cultural strategy over the next five years. A concerted effort at regional level should empower both youths and senior citizens to engage more actively in the cultural life of the region. This will be done by promoting bespoke cultural programming for youths and senior citizens to empower both talent and audience development.

Creativity is not age-bound and intergenerational dialogue should be prioritised.

##### Improve the region's cultural offering

Increase focus on intra- /inter-regional cultural tourism through bespoke audience development products and experiences offered jointly with the Local Councils, NGOs and creative practitioners.



Festa Nar. Various, 2021. Photo by Angelo Caruana courtesy of the Southern Regional Council

### Theme B: Heritage valorisation and cultural infrastructure

As is evident in the national inventories and databases, the region has a significant number of cultural heritage assets. This creates a complex situation regarding their management and use. The region does not have the resources to manage what is currently within its remit and generally relies on central government funding to carry out the necessary upkeep, restoration and maintenance works.

#### Priorities for Theme B:

##### Co-create an inventory of national, regional and local heritage sites

Draw up collaboration agreements with national entities for the better use of national heritage assets by the region's communities.

##### Document and develop the region's cultural infrastructure

Document and develop the region's cultural infrastructure for the purpose of hosting concerts, events and other activities for the region's communities.

##### Explore better use and access of cultural heritage property

Although the region has already undertaken such initiatives in the last few years, a more structured approach can transform this offering into a sustainable tourism resource.

##### Empower Local Councils

Empower Local Councils within the region to set up sustainable cultural tourism initiatives that connect communities across the region.

### Theme C: Regional coordination and synergies

The region's cultural strengths and the response to heritage valorisation could be maximised through enhanced co-ordination and sustained synergies. The aim is to have a well-promoted and more accessible cultural offering. Further effort needs to be made to facilitate accessibility to heritage assets and prioritise their sustainable conservation and rehabilitation.

#### Priorities for Theme C:

##### Promote greater synergies

Promote greater synergies and networking among the Local Councils, NGOs and creative practitioners within the region.

##### Contribute towards setting up a centralised system

Contribute towards setting up a centralised system that promotes intra-/inter-regional cultural programmes, an inventory of sites and venues and a database of NGOs, creative practitioners and other cultural entities.

### Theme D: Sustainable funding models

The COVID-19 pandemic created a need for more and better-value engagement with culture as a source of well-being and community, but also placed significant pressure on financial resources previously allocated to heritage valorisation and cultural programming. The region often faces difficulties due to an uneven stream of funding to support its cultural programming.

National resources and EU funds are still required to implement a recovery and revitalisation programme which puts culture at the heart of social cohesion and sustainable development.

#### Priorities for Theme D:

##### **Create a sustainable funding model**

Create a sustainable funding model that includes a diversified portfolio of national and other funds to be operated by the region.

##### **Explore funding opportunities**

Explore funding opportunities other than national funding programmes, including European and international funding programmes.

##### **Contribute to the setting up of a platform**

Contribute to the setting up of a platform and an interface mechanism to present funding opportunities to Local Councils, NGOs and creative practitioners and coordinate the distribution of funds through calls and best practices between the Regional Councils and national partners.

##### **Draw up a three-year business plan**

Draw up a three-year business plan covering the region's cultural programme, including financial and logistical aspects.

##### **Facilitate the development of regular training courses**

Facilitate the development of regular training courses on various sources of income that Local Councils, NGOs and creative practitioners can tap into.



Good Friday. Żejtun, 2022.  
Photo by Stephen Gravina



Kwarta Tajba. Various, 2021. Photo by Daryl Cauchi courtesy of the Southern Regional Council

## 6. Priority Actions for Culture-led Development in the Southern Region

Theme (in addition to transversal themes)	Priority area	Indicative actions	Short term (<1 year) or Medium term (2-4 years) or Long term (5 years +)
<b>A. Cultural participation</b>	Sustainability	Invest in sustaining local cultural participation with a particular emphasis on youths and senior citizens	Medium to long term
<b>B. Valorisation and infrastructure</b>	Data and resource management	Contribute towards the setting up of a database of cultural heritage assets, NGOs and creative practitioners to facilitate the organisation of cultural events and more efficient resource management	Short to medium term
<b>C. Regional coordination and synergies</b>	Stronger networking	Invest in better networking and position the region as a benchmark for best practice	Short to medium term
<b>D. Sustainable funding models</b>	Funding opportunities	Endeavour to create the necessary infrastructure through EU funding and other mechanisms and training to create sustainable revenue streams	Medium to long term





Our Lady of Sorrows. Żejtun, 2022. Photo by Stephen Gravina

## 7. Conclusion

Over the years, the Region has shown resilience and commitment to developing its distinct regional cultural identity through culture.

**T**his shall serve as a strong and robust platform on which to build a more sustainable cultural infrastructure that engages much more with the local communities within the region and that meets the needs of a tourism industry, both internal and external, through which the region's economic growth can also benefit. Better knowledge of the resources available within the region is crucial for benchmarks to be upheld and quality to be promoted. Culture can be a catalyst for social development, enabling better ways of living and stronger communities.

# 8. Appendices

## Acknowledgements

This strategy was designed with the contributions of:

<b>Sandro Debono</b>	Lead Author of the Southern Regional Cultural Strategy	<b>Tom Fleming</b>	International Cultural Consultant
<b>Morgan Parnis</b>	Head of Project, Mdina International Ltd	<b>Valerie Visanich</b>	Head of Research
<b>Toni Attard</b>	Head of Strategy Team & Project Partner, Culture Venture	<b>Caldon Mercieca</b>	Researcher
		<b>Karsten Xuereb</b>	Researcher
		<b>Daniel Azzopardi</b>	Researcher
		<b>Anna Formosa</b>	Workshop Leader
<b>Arts Council Malta</b>			
<b>Albert Marshall</b>	Executive Chair	<b>Adrian Debattista</b>	Head of Strategy
<b>Mary Ann Cauchi</b>	Director Funding and Strategy	<b>Christopher Spiteri</b>	Executive EU Projects
<b>Eric Fenech Sevasta</b>	Director Corporate Affairs	<b>Simone Inguanez</b>	Executive Diversity and Communities
<b>Etienne Bonello</b>	Former Director of Corporate Affairs	<b>Elyse Tonna</b>	Regional Cultural Coordinator
<b>Region Cultural Strategy Working Group within the Southern Region</b>			
<b>Jesmond Aquilina</b>	Chairman	<b>Marija Sara Vella</b>	Local Councils' Representative
<b>David Michael Schembri</b>	Local Councils' Representative	<b>Philip Carabott</b>	Representing the Executive Secretaries
<b>Johan Mula</b>	Local Councils' Representative		
<b>Rita Grima</b>	Local Councils' Representative	<b>Max Farrugia</b>	Representing NGOs
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<b>Philip Carabott</b>	Executive Secretary		
<b>Tiffany Abela</b>	Regional Cultural Officer		
<b>Esprimi</b>			
<b>Stephanie Buhagiar</b>	Market Research Executive	<b>Local Government Division</b>	
		<b>Natalino Attard</b>	Director General
		<b>Christopher Galea</b>	Director Monitoring and Support
		<b>Marisa Pisani</b>	Director Strategy and Policy Implementation
		<b>Simon Agius</b>	Assistant Director Strategy and Policy Implementation

<b>Robert Tabone</b>	Head EU and International Affairs
<b>Dorianne Diacono</b>	Senior Manager Strategy and Policy Implementation

<b>Local Councils' Association</b>	
<b>Mario Fava</b>	President
<b>Lianne Cassar</b>	Executive Secretary

<b>National Statistics Office</b>	
<b>Etienne Caruana</b>	Director General
<b>Josianne Galea</b>	Head of Unit, Living Conditions and Culture Statistics

## Consultees

The individuals involved in the consultation phase of the formulation of this strategy include (but are not limited to):

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