

GOZO

# 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.

Dr Samuel Azzopardi,  
President, Gozo Regional Council



Gozo and culture are synonymous with each other. They have walked together throughout time, hand in hand. In Gozo, culture is the atmosphere we wake up to each morning. It is our breath of fresh air.

**W**hile Gozo is indeed part of Malta, the island has its own cultural identity, which welcomes both local and international audiences. This is why, for the first time in our history, we have developed a regionally focused Cultural Strategy that truly meets the needs of Gozo as an island distinct from other regions in Malta.

Our strategy represents our vision for the coming years; yet, we are all too aware that its success relies on widescale endorsement and commitment. Only then will we witness Gozo's arts and culture flourish in a sustainable manner.

We are approaching the implementation of our Cultural Strategy holistically, with the tools of sustainability and collaboration firm in our grasp. To this end, I encourage our Mayors, Councillors, Gozitan cultural organisations, artists and fellow residents to adopt and learn more about our strategy since, as our research shows, its success rests on our shoulders combined. Our vision has evolved to align with yours, so we urge you to put your own spin on it. Make it your own, both on a personal and community level.

The future I envision is one where Gozo thrives as a national and international hub for cultural activity, so let us kickstart this journey together.

# Overview

## Size of Region

67km<sup>2</sup> (21%)  
320km<sup>2</sup> (National)

## Population

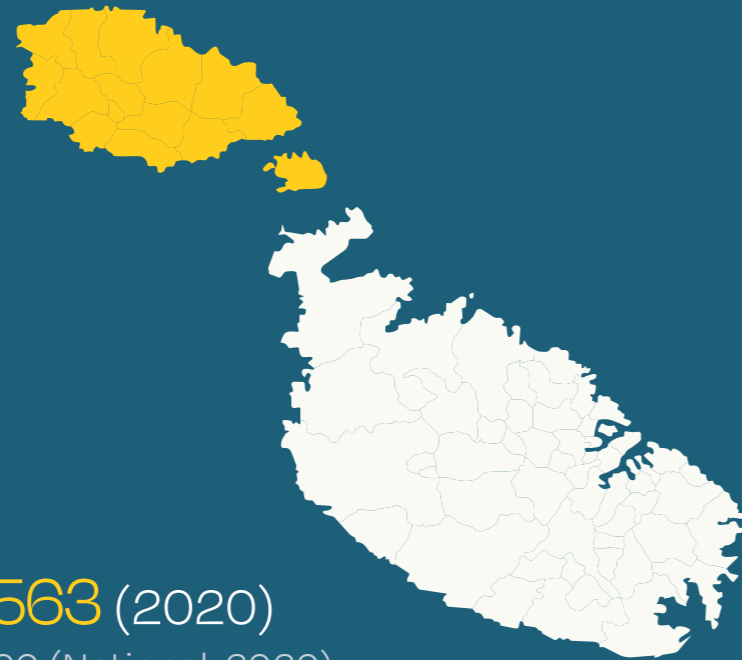
31,178 (2008) — 34,563 (2020)  
410,926 (National, 2008) 516,100 (National, 2020)

## Population Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)

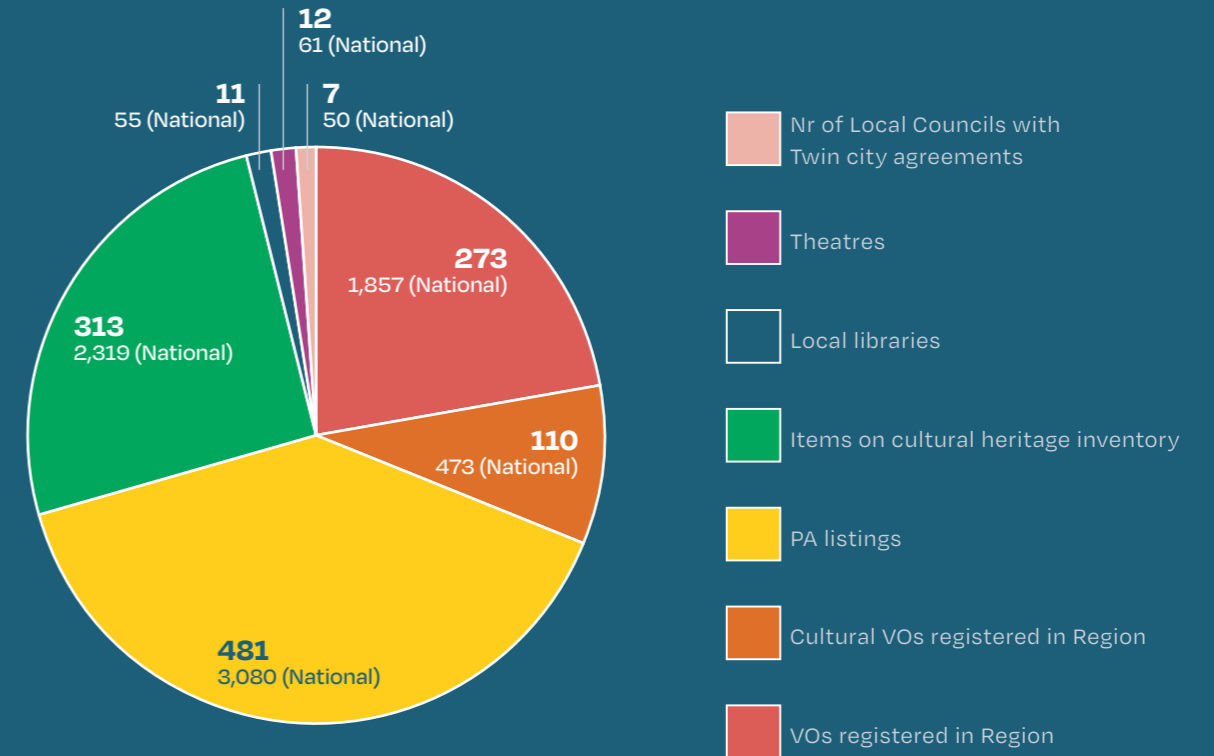
0.90%

## Localities with Significant Changes

Żebbuġ 3.4% Munxar 2%



# Cultural Resources



## Regional Libraries

Regional Libraries: 1 | Location: Rabat

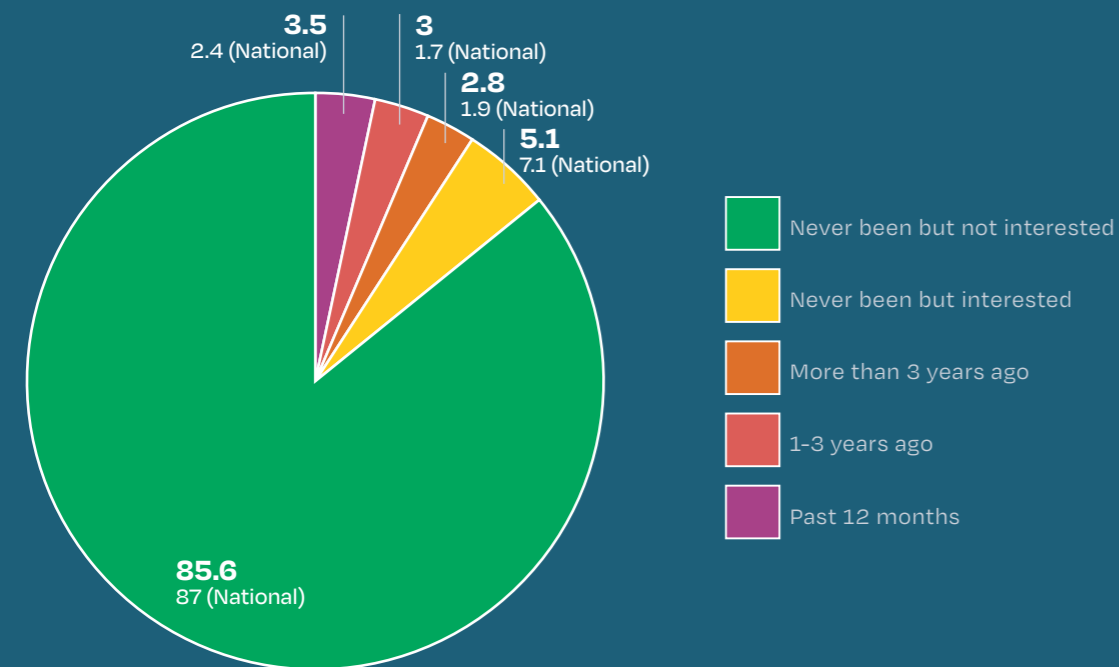
Books Loaned: 128,211  
1,031,868 (National, 2019)

# Cultural Participation

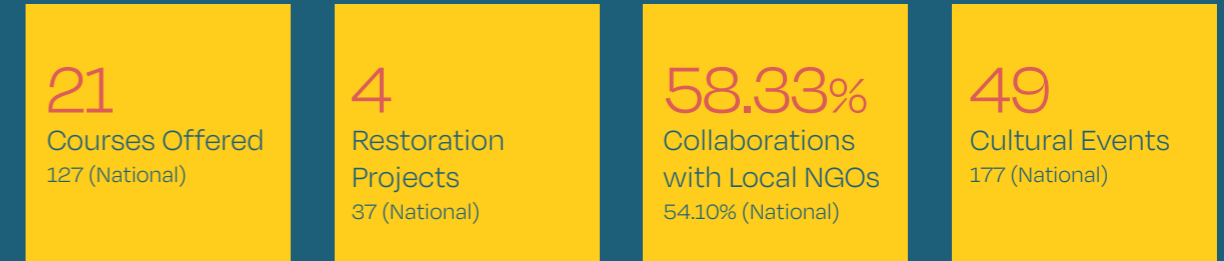
## % of population attending



## % of population actively involved in Local Council festivities



# Local Council activities in region (2018)



# 1. Introduction

The cultural strategy for the Gozo 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 Gozo Region includes the following localities: Fontana, Għajnsielem, Għarb, Għasri, Ta' Kerċem, Munxar, Nadur, Qala, Victoria, San Lawrenz, Ta' Sannaġ, Xagħra, Xewkija and Żebbuġ.

**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 Gozo 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.



Dances for Gozo - A Double Bill by ŻFINMALTA. Victoria, 2021. Photo by CVC Media courtesy for the Ministry of Gozo

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>



International Kite and Wind Festival. Għarb. Photo by Daniel Cilla

## 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.



Leone Goes Pop. Aurora Opera House, 2022. Photo by David Agius from Hush Studios

### 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.

*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 Gozo Region

### 4.1. Profile

Research suggests that the main priority for the Gozo Region is to enhance connectivity. With 7% of the population of the Maltese Islands living and working in Gozo, and many more crossing between the two islands as part of their working day, this priority is a significant one and has an impact on the Maltese economy, including on the sectors related to heritage, culture and tourism. The serious fallout experienced during the COVID-19 induced crisis exacerbated the situation.

As described by various participants in the research carried out prior to the drawing up of this strategy, the concept of connectivity goes beyond the mere physical aspect of connecting Malta and Gozo (Esprimi, 2019). Additionally, there are also psychological implications. Gozo possesses overlapping but also unique historical narratives and has, thus, forged its own political and social identity that is rooted in seminal events. Given the role Gozo played in the overcoming of many colonial attacks such as those by the Arabs, Ottomans and, notably, the French, it is recommended that the Gozo Region consider capitalising on the French interlude in local history and all of its dissonant memories and conflictual heritage. This can be done by teaming up with the Napoleonic Route, a cultural route of excellence recognised by the Council of Europe, that is currently not represented in the Maltese Islands in spite of the tourism appeal it has had in other Mediterranean localities, including islands.

Gozitans do not simply want to be an annex to Malta. They want to establish their own cultural, social and political credentials. The representatives of civil society organisations participating in the consultation processes noted how the 85 registered voluntary organisations, including 36 cultural organisations, present an important case of why this bond of mutuality and symbiotic exchange is necessary in order for the two islands to nurture cultural development and mature in tandem. Once again, the challenges presented by the COVID-19

crisis have shown how further decentralisation through a process of empowerment at regional level, that is more civil society-based, may support the regrowth of the cultural and creative sector in Gozo. This would release resources of knowledge and people who know their territory well and can facilitate connectivity through flexibility and innovation.

The participants of the research who shared their experience over the past years with different people working within and for the Gozo Region indicated that there are two levels that need to be addressed by the strategy:

**The national level**, reflected in calls to have the Victoria / Rabat theatres, namely Aurora and Astra, recognised as national theatres on par with the Teatru Manoel in Malta. The fact that a total of 12 theatres / theatre spaces are registered in Gozo (Cremona, 2017) suggests that the notion of creating a regional theatre hub and community is achievable on an inclusive and long-term basis. The above-national average, albeit still low, level of cultural participation in Gozo at live theatre and music performances provides scope for a strategic approach to audience engagement (Arts Council Malta, 2017). It is highly recommended that a regional status be given to cultural NGOs and venues that can deliver a regional cultural remit as part of the implementation of this strategy.



**The international level**, where Gozo can be recognised on the global stage as being culturally and socially different from Malta on the basis of its festivals, such as the Nadur Carnival (and the carnivals held elsewhere), its food (the Gozitan ftira), the Ċittadella (which, together with Mdina, is on the UNESCO World Heritage Convention List and at the forefront of being proposed for insertion in the upstream process to grant the UNESCO title for World Heritage sites) among other elements.

However, there is a contradiction that is reflected in Gozitan thinking - how can Gozo be international without being national? How can it go from being an annex to being a nation to going global? The significant number of heritage resources - 499 scheduled buildings and 283 elements on the cultural heritage inventory - attests to its richness and the diversity of tangible heritage that supports the expression of intangible heritage.

The relatively sluggish rates of cultural participation (Arts Council Malta, 2017) in live performances (23.7% for dance, 34.3% for theatre, 37.9% for concerts) and site visits (41.3% for museums and 46.7% for historical sites), even when compared to the national means, suggest that strategies should capitalise on crossing audiences and approach the arts using a blended approach. Diversifying art forms, for instance, blending contemporary performances with heritage settings, may encourage different audience segments to explore other forms of cultural activity.

Feast of Saint George. La Stella Philharmonic Society, Victoria, 2019. Photo from the archives of the La Stella Philharmonic Society

## 4.2. Summary of main findings and observations for Gozo

<b>Gozo</b>  <b>A distinctive island region with strong traditions and outstanding cultural qualities</b>	Striking a balance between economic growth and quality of life with a focus on environment and intangible heritage  Connectivity yet distinctiveness  Governance: Gozo vs Malta  Mobility and access issues	Contributing to a strategy that prioritises balance and sustainability that stems from the community level and reaches up to engage with public and private sectors (bringing together Government especially the Ministry for Gozo, Local Councils, and businesses)
	Relatively distinguishable regional identity that supports strong community presence  Centralisation in Victoria – which is good for capacity but means the sector lacks connectivity across the island	Main challenges and opportunities centre on immediate future plans for improving transport and commercial (including tourism) connectivity to Malta and making better use of ECoC 2031 as a long-term strategic development opportunity

## 4.3. The main players and stakeholders

Gozo is in an excellent position to self-organise and deliver on this strategy with the support of the national government and the Arts Council Malta.

Key partners locally include:

- The Ministry for Gozo
- The Gozo Regional Council
- Gozo Business Chamber
- Local Councils
- Theatres and opera houses
- Tourism operators
- Heritage organisations
- Creative businesses
- Gozo Tourism Association
- NGOs

## 5. Region-specific Themes and Priorities

In addition to the transversal themes, Gozo has a set of region-specific strategic development themes that play a progressive and sustainable role in the future of the region. These are:

### Theme A: Enhancing cultural connectivity and dialogue

Priorities for Theme A:

#### Accessibility

Existing resources and developing ones are to be channelled to enable greater levels of accessibility to cultural activity and expression. The levels of participation over the past (recorded) years in this region are already the highest of all the rates of participation across Malta and Gozo. However, one

cannot rest on past and current trends. There is a need to boost access and facilitate a more open and engaging cultural system for Gozo. This will include a focus on enhancing skills to better enable local organisations and practitioners to reach, engage and inspire their audiences.



Brilli. Gharb, 2019. Photo by George Abdilla

#### Democratisation

A higher level of accessibility may lead to more equal access to tools and resources that may be cultural, social and economic in import. Gozo is moving towards the vision of itself as an autonomous island-region within a larger island-national reality, synergising local contexts with international

dimensions. A more sustained flow of goods, services and people in and around Gozo, with Malta and within the international context, may contribute to a stronger sense of ownership and an overall more open and democratised cultural system.

### Theme B: Culture for internationalisation

Priorities for Theme B:

#### Expressing interest in bidding for the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2031

This can be a catalyst and driver for culture-led development and a game-changer for the profile, confidence and capacity of the cultural system not only for the region but for all of the Maltese Islands. Gozo should base its international strategy on this ECoC process to maximise its global appeal

by connecting local narratives to international storylines and trends in the market of cultural tourism and heritage experience. This commitment will require all stakeholders in Gozo to identify an efficient and effective organisational structure to manage this process.

#### Gastronomy as a unique selling point for internationalisation

To celebrate a distinctive Gozo heritage in cuisine, farming, seafood and the rituals associated with

gastronomy. This might include a bid for the European Region of Gastronomy title.

#### Local to global artists-in-residence scheme

To facilitate intercultural dialogue and position Gozo as a hub for creative expression and artistic development. Gozo can become a vital nurturing environment as a creative and inspiring place for the international arts community. This could be the third strand in a three-

pronged approach to establishing a strong international appeal for Gozo and to establishing a long-term and attractive market for artists, creatives, cultural operators and researchers to enable them to interact with Gozo and its people.

#### Support professional high-profile arts events including annual festivals and biennials

Despite its size, Gozo is home to numerous international artists. International artists and cultural professionals residing in Gozo are important stakeholders in the development of an international cooperation strategy for Gozo. In order to raise Gozo's cultural profile on the international level, high-profile art events, including annual festivals and biennials, especially in the areas of visual arts, film and literature, must be given the professional support they need to rise to the contemporary narrative required for international bids such as the European Capital of Culture. Such programmes should also build on the potential of cultural NGOs to

work in collaboration with national and international partners, prioritising international cooperation and artistic excellence.

## Theme C: Innovation in cultural tourism and the overall 'cultural offer'

### Priorities for Theme C:

#### Awarding the title of a regional cultural space

Awarding such a title to regional theatres, museums, galleries and spaces run by NGOs which address the regional agenda and aspects of the Regional Cultural Strategy. This can unlock new funding to

build capacity and enable a portfolio of key cultural organisations to drive sector development across Gozo, connecting contemporary cultural production to cultural heritage.

#### Development of three key cultural routes

As recognised by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, routes could be planned in a way that highlights, among other things, religious / spiritual tangible heritage, gastronomy and seafaring. Integrating these elements in the strategic development of a route with spiritual and ritual dimensions may encourage culture, tourism and spatial planning authorities to consider establishing such initiatives within already existing networks, such as the Culture of Europe-recognised Cultural Routes of Excellence. Particular reference is made to historical and religious routes such as The Phoenicians' Route that is already represented and promoted in Malta by the NGO Inizjamed in collaboration with Heritage Malta. Other routes could be established that focus on:

- **Gastronomy** – to position Gozo as a centre for sustainable gastronomy – from farm to fork, encompassing all aspects of gastronomic development and connecting historic approaches to contemporary innovation.
- **Sea travel (boats)** – for instance, by promoting greater and improved use of sea travel as part of the cultural experience of Gozo. Routes may be functional and simultaneously part of a cultural and social experience if transportation services also incorporate the elements of tradition, folklore and storytelling.

#### Knowledge development and excellence

Investing in existing international fora and action groups that address heritage innovation through research, academic excellence, project management and collaboration with local and international organisations. The key should lie in supporting research and action by local and international professionals that will raise Gozo's international profile in heritage interpretation, experience and innovation in structures headed by the EU, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

## Theme D: Improving regional cultural governance

### Priorities for Theme D:

#### Establish a Regional Cultural Committee

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

#### Co-develop reliable and accessible data collection and sharing (e.g. online resources)

To circulate information efficiently and enable knowledge and exploitation of know-how databases for the benefit of the cultural community in Gozo and to support international links.

#### Increase the number of collaborations between Local Councils and local cultural NGOs

Also increase opportunities for interregional cooperation – the region's role here may be to facilitate networking between local NGOs and international partners.

## Theme E: Engaging more citizens in culture and arts

### Priorities for Theme E:

#### A diversity of cultural expressions

Ensure that cultural events organised by Local Councils present a diversity of cultural expressions. Wherever possible, a system of participatory curation should be put in place to reach out to newer

communities and connect on an international level. An intercultural and intergenerational approach is vital to the continued vitality and relevance of Gozo.

#### Talent retention / support

Gozo faces the issue of young people leaving the island and only returning for the weekend. This strategy should consider supporting young artists and young people on the weekends by, for instance, making spaces available in schools or Local Council halls for cultural participation and production. Most of the Local Councils have a town hall and manage

or co-manage a library and 91% of Local Councils co-manage or manage recreational spaces. This resource can be unlocked and used more effectively. In practice, such an action could help young artists, band club musicians, chefs, researchers, carnival and traditional feasts people continue to practice their craft in Gozo as well as Malta.

#### Supporting cultural heritage management

58% of Local Councils manage or co-manage cultural heritage sites. The region may help coordinate and support partnerships with NGOs in the running of these spaces. These spaces may also be added to

the list of cultural assets that artists may use to establish a stronger relationship between cultural heritage and the arts.



Infiorata for the occasion of the Visitation of Our Lady to St Elizabeth Feast. Għarb, 2019. Photo by Daniel Cilia courtesy of Għarb Local Council in collaboration with Assoċjazzjoni Maltija EspressjonArti

Aurora Youth Choir. Aurora Opera House, 2022. Photo by Anthony Grech



Medinea Session Gozo (Intercultural Musical Residency). Għarb, 2022. Photo by Inigo Taylor courtesy of ARC Research & Consultancy



Il Trovatore. Teatru Astra, 2019. Photo by Joe Attard, courtesy of Soċjetà Filarmonika La Stella/Teatru Astra

Għaqda Kumittiva Għawdex - haġarna, a project by Victor Agius. Xagħra, 2019. Photo by Samuel Masini





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

Theme (in addition to transversal themes for the Maltese Islands)	Priority area	Indicative actions	Short term (<1 year) or Medium term (2-4 years) or Long term (5 years +)
<b>Theme A. Connectivity</b>	Flow of goods, services and people	Establish a clear showcase structure for Gozo talent and directory for skills	Short to medium term
		Support the development of a network and or cluster for independently run visual arts spaces	Medium term
<b>Theme B. Internationalisation</b>	Bids of international calibre	Become a candidate and prepare a bid for the European Capital of Culture 2031	Medium to long term
		Bid for the title of European Region of Gastronomy	Medium term
	Internationally oriented artist in residency programme	In collaboration with cultural NGOs, artists and national institutions, establish strategic partnerships to promote Gozo as a creative space for artistic residencies	Long term
	Support for professional high-profile arts events, including annual festivals and biennials	With relevant stakeholders establish international cultural events and/or biennials that will create a unique selling proposition for the Region of Gozo, bridging the specificities of the region, the artistic excellence required for international relevance and the community engagement - niche cultural tourism can provide a positive spill over on the development, diversification and economic impact of high-end visitors	Short to medium term
<b>Theme C. Innovation in the cultural offer</b>	Cultural routes maximising cultural heritage	Development of three key cultural routes as recognised by the Council of Europe and UNESCO addressing religious / spiritual tangible heritage, gastronomy and seafaring routes	Medium term
<b>Theme D. Cultural governance</b>	Governance through coordination	Co-establish a coordination platform for Local Councils, NGOs and cultural practitioners through the Region, in collaboration with other regions - this mechanism will provide all the stakeholders with the necessary support to ensure that the events, programmes and initiatives reflect the priorities of this strategy	Medium term
<b>Theme E. Cultural engagement</b>	Engagement with local cultural assets	Incentivise young creative practitioners to operate in and with Gozo	Short term
		Facilitate the provision of local cultural assets managed, co-managed by Local Councils to local artists, visiting artists and cultural NGOs	Medium term
		Develop an audience development strategy that is to be implemented for events organised by Local Councils, with specific attention to young people and minority groups	Long term

## 7. Conclusion

This strategy looks towards the following priorities, in line with the themes and actions addressed above, in order to build cultural capacity, innovate, and maximise the potential of Gozo and the Gozitan people, namely through:

- Addressing the divergence between the perception of Gozo as a region as opposed to other regions (island, insular) and Gozo as an insular island annexed to Malta.
- Striking a balance between economic growth and quality of life, with a focus on environment and intangible heritage and connectivity versus distinctiveness.
- Governance: Enabling strong cultural governance that is local, regional, national and international. This relatively distinguishable regional identity should also be developed in a way that supports a strong community presence.
- Mobility and access: Contributing to a strategy that prioritises balance and sustainability that stems from the community level and reaches out to engage with public and private sectors (i.e., Government, Ministry for Gozo, local authorities and businesses).
- Assess degree of (de)centralisation in / around Victoria: Main challenges and opportunities centre on immediate future plans for improving transport and commercial (including tourism) connectivity to Malta and making better use of ECOC 2030 than Malta seems to have done to date.

Overall, this strategy calls for a sustainable approach to cultural development in Gozo based on inclusion, participation and the nurturing of a shared vision.

# 8. Appendices

## Acknowledgements

This strategy was designed with the contributions of:

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