

WEST

REGIONAL CULTURAL STRATEGY

2022-2027



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Forewords

Hon. Owen Bonnici

Minister for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government



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

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

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

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

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

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



Hon. Alison Zerafa Civelli

Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government

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

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

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

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

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

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

Albert Marshall,
Executive Chair, Arts Council Malta



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

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

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

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

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

Natalino Attard,
Director General, Local Government



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Sandro Azzopardi,
President, Western Regional Council



Reġjun Punent was formed in January 2022 under Act No. XIV of 2019, following the Local Government reform process. It encompasses 10 localities, found on the western area of the main island of Malta - Mdina, Siġġiewi, Haż-Żebbuġ, Haġ-Dingli, Rabat, Haġ Kirkop, Imqabba, Qrendi, Haġ Safi and Żurrieq. With a history spanning over 6000 years, two UNESCO world heritage sites, a historic capital city and over 100 sites of historical importance, the Western Region covers around one-fourth of the total surface area of the Maltese Islands with a population of around 60,000 people.

Our culture determines who and what we are; it shapes how we behave, think, and communicate. It is everywhere in and around us, individual and unique. Culture is the vital force that propels people and communities forward. For these reasons, we wanted to make sure that our cultural strategy defines the uniqueness of our communities and identifies our cultural priorities that reflect the needs and wants of our local communities, region and country.

The aim of the cultural strategy being presented, is to connect and nurture the cultural aspects and landscapes across all ten Local Councils. Research and consultation sessions with all Local Councils involved were conducted to ensure that this strategy reflects the needs and wants of each locality. The consultation sessions included the local councils, a cultural advisor and representatives from the Western Region. Furthermore, this was also informed by our national cultural conversation.

The strategy is underpinned by actions to support the sector, build new partnerships and help communities develop and celebrate their own culture. It aims to maximise and increase efficiency

and resources, increase opportunities for various cultural activities and put a more accessible culture at the centre of each locality. Overall, we have ensured that this strategy invests in the Western Region's cultural, social and economic success by strengthening the whole region's cultural heritage.

The investment from the Ministry for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government in engaging a Regional Cultural Manager will help the Western Region in enhancing each Local Council's cultural product. The regional manager will fit with our mission statement to manage the Regional and Local Councils' resources wisely and work effectively to provide a professional cultural service.

Through the synergy of the ten Local Councils and the different spectrum of organisations in the Region, we can achieve this and more in the coming five years. By building relationships with all stakeholders and other regional councils, we seek to look at issues with a 360-degree view through consultation sessions and learn from best practices. Through collaboration and action, we can make a difference for the better in the lives of the residents in our communities and bring about a stronger Malta.

Overview

Size of Region

83.2km² (26%)
320km² (National)

Population

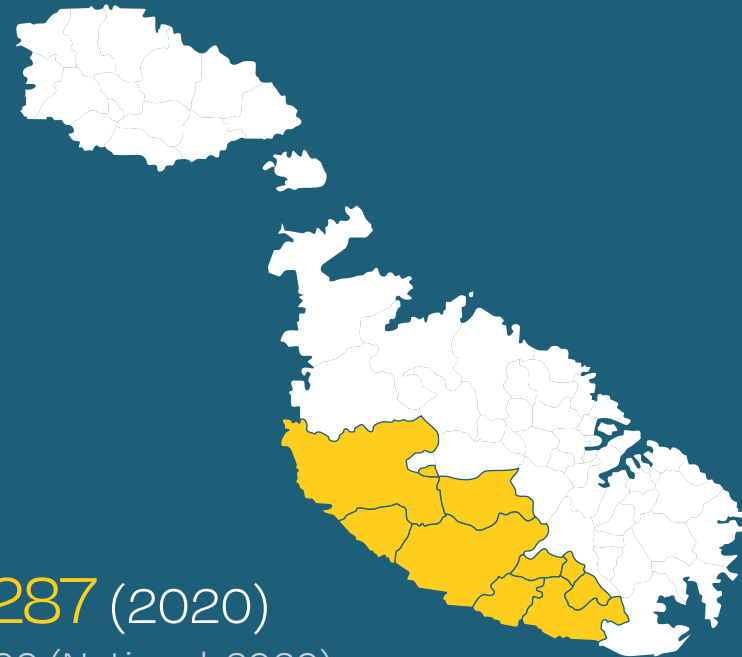
54,530 (2008) — 59,287 (2020)
410,926 (National, 2008) 516,100 (National, 2020)

Population Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)

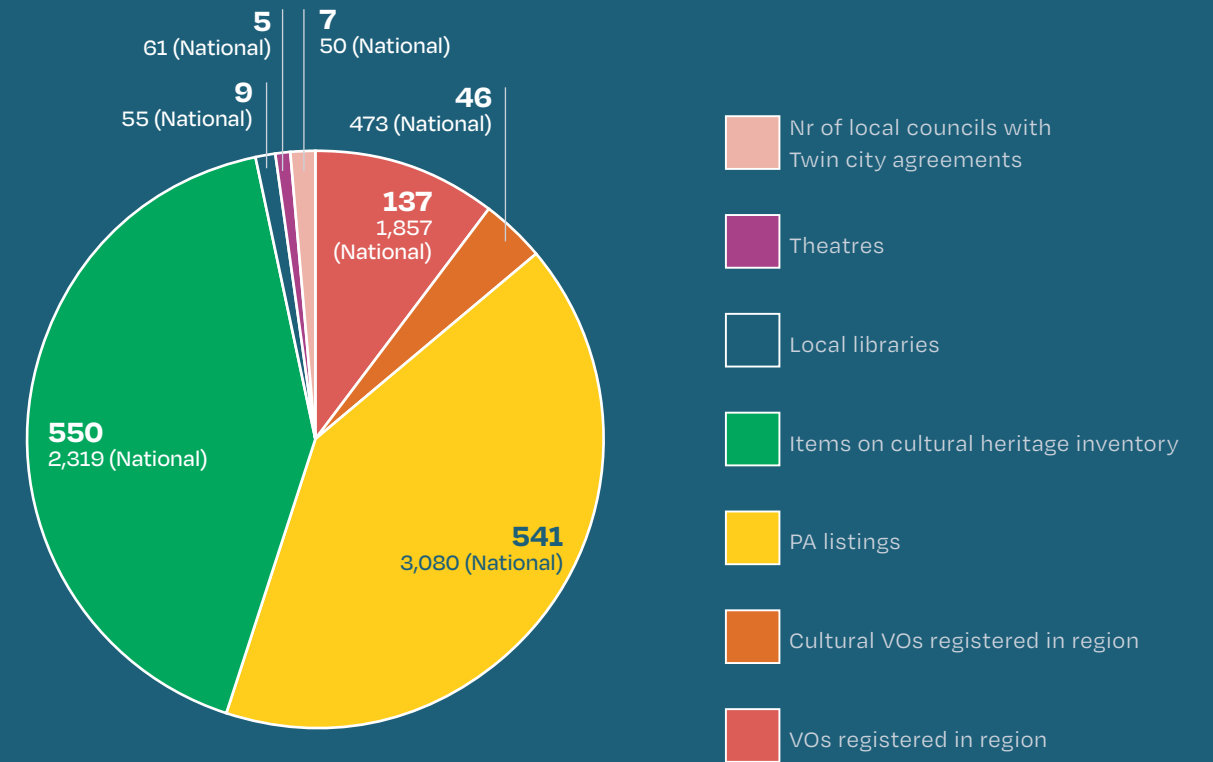
7.00%

Localities with Significant Changes

Mdina -0.5%



Cultural Resources



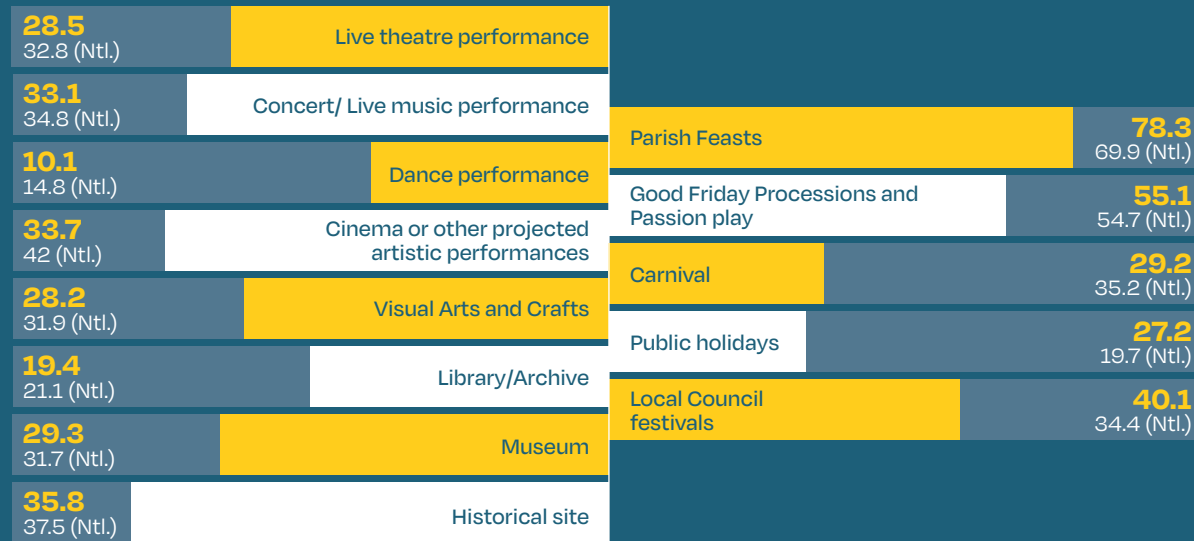
Regional Libraries

Regional Libraries: 1 | Location: Rabat

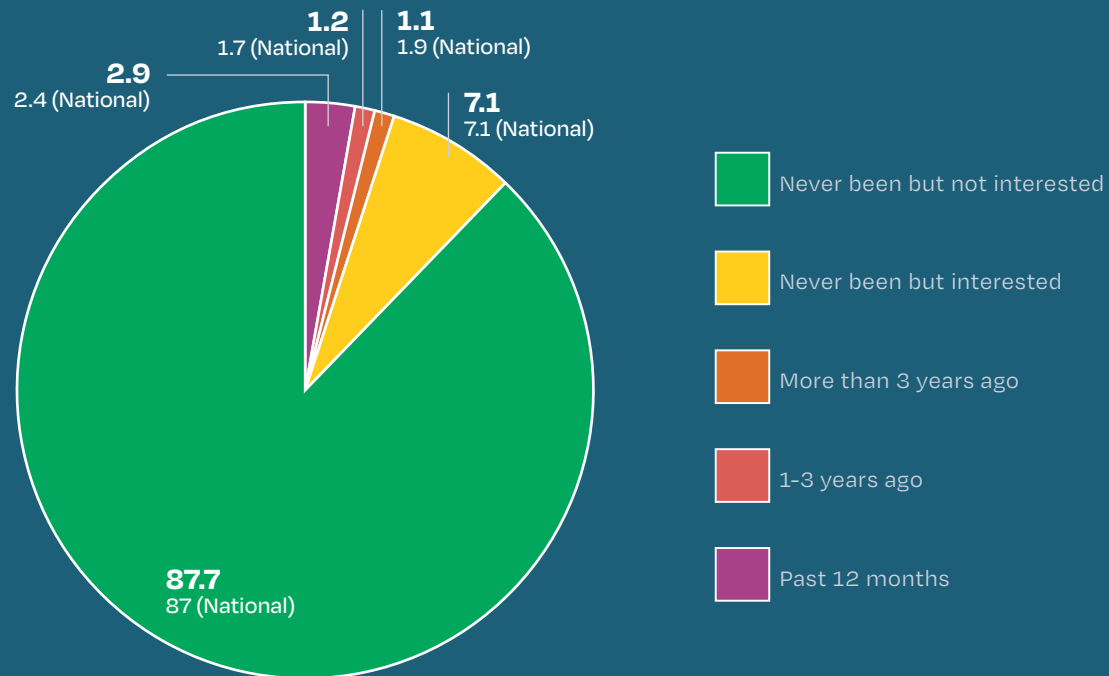
Books Loaned: 110,268
1,031,868 (National, 2019)

Cultural Participation

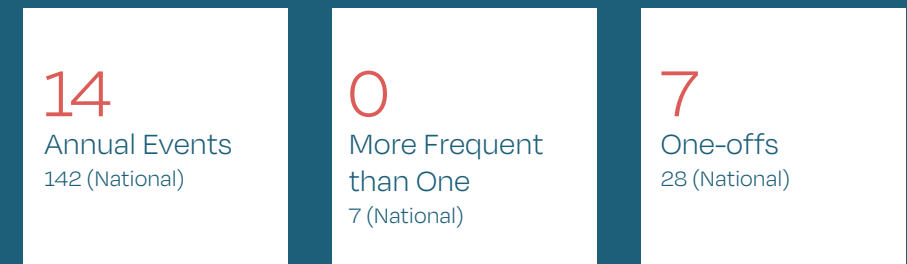
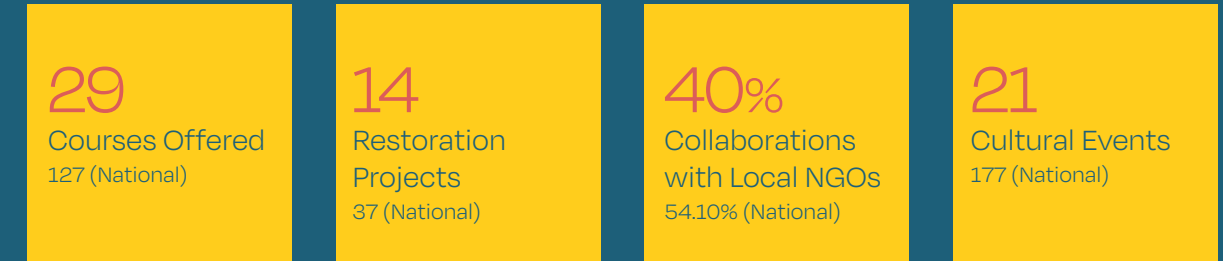
% of population attending



% of population actively involved in Local Council festivities



Local Council activities in region (2018)



1. Introduction

The cultural strategy for the Western 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 Western Region includes the following localities: Mdina, Siġġiewi, Haż-Żebbuġ, Haġ-Dingli, Rabat (Malta), Haġ Kirkop, Imqabba, Qrendi, Haġ Safi and Żurrieq.

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

This strategy:

- Explores and measures the asset base for culture in the Western 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.



Saint Leonard Feast. Haġ Kirkop, 2016. Photo by Pierre Balzia courtesy of St Leonard Band Club AD1858 Haġ Kirkop

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

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

accessing talent that is more diverse and more representative of the region.

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

2. Strategic Rationale for Culture

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

UNESCO asserts that:

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

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

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

A New Narrative for Europe (EESC, 2013)

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

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

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



Medieval Feast. Mdina. Photo by Ray Attard

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.



Medieval Feast. Mdina. Photo by Ray Attard

2.1.1. The role of Regional and Local Councils

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Key Transversal Themes for Culture across the Maltese Islands

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

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

Theme 1: Talent development

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

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

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

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

Theme 2: Audience engagement

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

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 Western Region

4.1. Profile

4.1.1. Demographic profile

The localities in the Western region altogether have a population of 59,287 (National Statistics Office, 2020), which makes up 11% of the total population of Malta and Gozo. The region occupies 83.2km², which is 26% of the size of Malta. This is equivalent to the size of the Northern region, but the Western region is only half as densely populated.

The last decade saw an average increase in population growth of 0.7%, one of the lowest in Malta, with the locality of Mdina registering further decline in its population.

4.1.2. Cultural profile

The Western region has a rich community-led culture, linked directly to deep-rooted religious festivities and celebrations that shape the identity of its small villages. *Hal Safi* and *Hal Kirkop* are the smallest towns in the region. *Hal Kirkop's* motto *Parva non Ivers*, which means *small but not idle*, aptly describes life in the quaint villages of the region. The region offers a unique rural environment and distinct picturesque landscapes (*Għar Lapsi*, *Fawwara* and *Girgenti*), with localities that are known for their deep-rooted traditions related to agriculture (*Had-Dingli* and *Qrendi*) and fishing (*Żurrieq*). Its intangible heritage is marked by diverse local dialects and accents that are especially found in *Rabat* (Malta) and *Haż-Żebbuġ*, while other aural traditions are transmitted from generation to generation. Local knowledge of masonry craftsmanship emerges as a result of the number of quarries in the region. The region is known for activities related to the creation of pyrotechnic displays, particularly for the villages of *Mqabba* and *Qrendi*.

Heritage sites of *Hagar Qim* and *Mnajdra Temples* in *Qrendi* and *Mdina* which encompass 4000 years of history. Its rural heritage includes wayside chapels such as the chapel of *Mtaħleb* in *Rabat*, the *Mintna catacombs* in *Mqabba*, *St. Paul's Catacombs* in *Rabat* and the *Xarolla windmill* in *Żurrieq*. The region has the highest concentration of listed archaeological sites in Malta – 93 out of a total of 235 (Planning Authority, 2022) and the highest number of items on the national cultural heritage inventory – 550 out of a total of 2319 (Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, 2022).

Cultural assets in the region also include nine libraries, with the one in *Rabat* (Malta) serving as the regional library. The region also hosts five theatres, as documented in the *Spazji Teatrali Catalogue* (Cremona et al., 2016), namely: the *Hal Safi Primary School*; the *Sigġiewi Parish Hall*; the *Archbishop's Seminary* in *Rabat* (Malta); the *Dun Karm Lia Hall* and the *St Agatha Auditorium*, both in *Rabat* (Malta). The Western region demonstrates strong participation in community-led cultural activities such as parish feasts (78%), Good Friday processions and passion plays (55%) (Arts Council Malta, 2017).

The Western region is the custodian of world class cultural heritage sites including the UNESCO World

The participation rate in such activities is the second highest out of the six regions. Participation by citizens in Local Council festivities in the region stands at 2.9%, slightly above the national average of 2.4%. The Western Region registers below national average cultural participation in activities such as live theatre performances (28.5%); concert / live music performances (33.1%); dance performances (10.1%); cinema (33.7%); art exhibitions (28.2%); library use (19.4%) and visits to museums (29.3%) and historical sites (35.8%).

The 2019 Esprimi research on cultural initiatives by Local Councils in the region indicates that the localities registered the highest number of restoration projects – 14 out of the 37 across the six regions. 29 courses were offered by Local Councils to its residents. In terms of cultural events, the Local Councils organised 21 events out of a total of 177 across the regions. Most of the events in the region are held on an annual basis and are mainly classified as agrarian feasts and commemoration days. The total expenditure on cultural events by Local Councils in the region for events in 2018 was EUR116,868; equivalent to 11% of total expenditure on cultural events by the six regions.

5. Region-specific Themes and Priorities

5.1. Region-specific priorities

The Western Region has a set of distinct strategic priorities that are linked to each of the three transversal themes and additional themes that are unique to the region.

Linked to Transversal Theme 1 – Talent development. Indigenous knowledge transfer and traditional practices:

Cultural traditions are passed from generation to generation. Certain traditions, such as traditions related to agriculture and gastronomy, are handed down from parent to child, while others are initiated by the community (such as village feasts which are set up by voluntary organisations with the contribution of local band clubs and firework factories). This strategy seeks to establish systems to document, promote, and disseminate indigenous knowledge of local traditions and practices within the region to ensure that the voluntary organisations with the region continue to be supported for the benefit of the local communities. The actions proposed in this strategy take into consideration the intergenerational aspects of knowledge transfer and can be implemented in collaboration with local NGOs, community leaders and cultural research centres.

Example of Good Practice

Sharing memories and storytelling

Darba Waħda was a 10-week project led by applied arts practitioner Anna Formosa forming part of the Valletta 2018 Foundation programme. It was held in various localities, including Ħal Kirkop and Siġġiewi, and brought together the young and the elderly in a joint experience. This facilitated the sharing of memories and the creation of new ones through varied creative

and often unconventional forms of storytelling and other creative techniques including drama, improvisation, painting and puppet-making. The practitioner worked with Local Councils, schools, day centres and other community groups who used traditional stories, legends, popular verse and folk tales told by the participants themselves.

Linked to Transversal Theme 1 – Talent development. Connecting the arts with natural and cultural heritage:

The region has a wealth of natural and cultural heritage and is primarily characterised by traditional communities and a rural environment. This strategy also acknowledges the value of the arts as a connector between the past and the future. Throughout Europe, arts festivals are gaining popularity. Such events are often linked to sustainable arts practices. By facilitating initiatives that bring the talent and work of artists within the region to the forefront, this strategy seeks to position the region as a territory that values and celebrates its past and, yet, is reinvigorated by the creativity and innovation of contemporary artistic practice. In terms of engaging international artists, this strategy prioritises ‘slow and green arts mobility’ with process-led initiatives such as residency programmes that encourage them to create and present work in the region over a longer period.

Example of Good Practice

New arts festival linked to heritage

Kwarta Tajba was launched in 2021 by Justin Formosa as a brand new artistic festival that brought together culture and heritage through music. The first edition was held across two different sites in Ғaž-Żebbuġ. The public was

invited to participate in an innovative spectacle featuring six unique performances while they roamed around the beautiful city of Ғaḏ-Ḑebbuḡ. Guests had the opportunity to explore the city's heritage in between each performance.

Linked to Transversal Theme 2 – Audience engagement. Cultural events and programmes:

Whereas current data indicates low regional participation in specific types of cultural activities (the arts and heritage-linked activities), the region enjoys high participation in community-led celebrations (feasts). The arts and cultural programmes within the region are mainly organised by the Local Councils in collaboration with local NGOs, such as band clubs, and institutions such as Heritage Malta. Research suggests the need to improve accessibility to the arts for residents as part of a more diverse and ongoing cultural offering within the region. It is envisaged that the focus on sustainability will lead to the organisation of medium-scale green arts programmes and festivals, designed and delivered by artists and arts

organisations from both within and outside the region, that undertake sustainable practices such as using locally sourced products and materials.

Example of Good Practice

Concerts in historical wayside chapels

Award winning sister-duo The New Victorians presented the **Christmas Chapel Hop**, a series of hour-long concerts, held in chapels, including ones in the Western Region. The concerts comprised of reimagined hymns and carols, performed in a different chapel every night over nine evenings. Venues included the Mtaħleb Chapel in Rabat (Malta) and Il-Maqluba in Qrendi.

Linked to Transversal Theme 2 – Audience engagement. Regional 'route tourism':

The Western region attracts thousands of visitors to its cultural tourism hot spots – Mdina, Rabat, Mnajdra, Ғaḡar Qim and Wied iż-Ḑurrieq. However, the region has other cultural assets that remain

relatively untapped and which can contribute to more sustainable practices and quality-driven experiences. The pandemic left a devastating impact on tourism, disrupting the operations of historical sites and museums and the employment of local tourism operators.

Pre-pandemic data reveals important observations that this strategy will seek to address in the process of post-COVID recovery, with specific attention being given to independent travel and the creation of authentic experiences. These shall include experiences related to gastronomy, arts and festivals, pilgrimages, and nature.

'Route tourism' has been recognised as a potential way to secure sustainability within the tourism industry and travel management (Ruritage, 2022). Rediscovering local cultural and natural heritage along religious, historical, ecological or gastronomic routes provides great opportunities for less explored areas to be explored.

The 2019 Heritage Malta Annual Report (2019) reveals that the World Heritage sites located in the region recorded an average decrease of 14.15% visitors over the previous year, with Ғaḡar Qim reporting the lowest figures (with 25,000 fewer visitors over the year). In 2019 Ғaḡar Qim registered 161,698 paying visitors and Mnajdra registered 111, 178 visitors. When compared to 2018 figures, both sites registered the largest percentage increase in paying admissions in the months of October and December.

In 2019, St Paul's Catacombs in Rabat and the National Museum of Natural History in Mdina logged positive results, while the Roman Domus suffered a minor loss of visitors when compared to the figures in 2018. The catacombs recorded the most notable increase of visitors exceeding 10,000 visitors in 2019.

The average 1.5 million visitors that visit Mdina continue to present numerous pressures on the city's management and on its small declining population of the 244 residents registered in 2020 (National Statistics Office, 2020). Theuma et al. (2015) analysed the impact of tourism on residents

and events organised in the city. The study recalls how, back in 1993, researchers had already indicated that the residents felt that they were being obliged to sacrifice their privacy and tranquillity for the national good without compensation from either government or tour operators (Boissevain, 1996). In the study, Theuma et al. (2015, p 36) argue that "despite the strong role that tourism has in Mdina, the locality does not have a tourism sustainability plan." 41% of residents claimed they have a role or are involved in the planning of tourism activities within the city. The researchers claim that the fact that members of the community feel that they are participating indicates that the locality is forward-looking and understands that unless there is full endorsement by the community, very little can be done.

In 1998, Mdina was inscribed to the World Heritage List of tentative sites that may be considered for nomination. Progress on its nomination will require significant attention to the impacts imposed by tourism and other events in the city and how these will affect its UNESCO status and the World Heritage Outstanding Universal Values that Mdina will be bound to protect.

The Western Region's cultural strategy will work closely with Local Councils, NGOs, cultural practitioners and other private and public stakeholders in tourism and national authorities to:

- Promote the region as a distinctive sustainable tourism destination based on unique and authentic experiences emerging from the stories of the communities within the region and its localities.
- Diversify the cultural tourism offering within the region through the promotion of gastronomic, adventure and religious tourism, the natural environment, and arts experiences within the natural and historical landscapes of the region.



F'Ғakka t'Ғħajn. Siḡḡiewi. Photo by Bjorn Bonello

Example of Good Practice

Pilgrimage routes

Il-Mixgħela tas-Salib tal-Għolja is organised by the Siġġiewi Local Council together with the St Nicholas Band Club. Thousands of candles and traditional torches light the winding footpath leading to Is-Salib tal-Għolja (The Laferla Cross) Siġġiewi, as hundreds of Catholic pilgrims make the annual walk up the hill in prayer. This tradition has been taking place for over 20 years on Maundy Thursday and every year attracts a growing number of people. The parvis of San Nikola Church in the Siġġiewi village square also hosts a stunning spectacle of rows of lanterns and candles, creating a spiritual and serene environment.

Linked to Transversal Theme 3 – Heritage innovation.

Promote local cultural assets: Although very few cultural heritage sites in the region fall under the direct remit of the Local Councils, the localities do their utmost to promote and safeguard their cultural heritage, especially when such assets are under threat. The definition of cultural heritage within this strategy encapsulates both tangible and intangible assets, with a specific focus on the natural cultural landscape and traditional practices. The region will facilitate collaboration between inter/intra-regional stakeholders and NGOs to encourage synergies and minimise fragmentation in asset management. Further knowledge of local heritage assets will also facilitate the objectives outlined in this strategy to diversify cultural content and increase accessibility to arts and culture.

It will also serve as a catalyst for the development of innovative projects that link cultural heritage with new areas of technological innovation and research such as artificial intelligence and augmented and virtual reality.

Example of Good Practice

Museum experience in augmented reality

Visitors to Palazzo Falson in Mdina can become fully immersed in the historic atmosphere of the building with an interactive application which allows them to unlock the mysteries surrounding the death of the game's lead protagonist Lady Caterina. Greek author, Eleni Papadopoulou, wrote a dark love story set in the medieval era and, together with the local game development company Mighty Box, designed an app that engages the player to follow the different characters of the game and solve a mystery using augmented reality on a mobile or tablet device and making use of the Palazzo's environment. The application is based on AR (Augmented Reality), which means that visitors can interact with their surroundings through their mobile devices, with the real objects in the Palazzo's collection given a different interpretation and perspective through AR.



Artistic murals at Ġnien Tfulija by the Right 2 smile organisation in collaboration with Arts Council Malta. Żebbuġ, 2021. Photo courtesy of the Żebbuġ Local Council

5.2. Region-specific themes

Theme A: Nature

The Western Region is of significant size, covering 26% of the territory of the Maltese Islands. It encompasses beautiful natural landscapes and seascapes which distinctively mark the rural characteristics of its localities. The localities also include local cultural heritage sites, such as wayside chapels and remains of abandoned hamlets. As stated by the European project *RURITAGE: Rural regeneration through systemic heritage-led strategies*, “the cultural and natural heritage are crucial parts of rural development and regeneration

processes, and thus to smart specialisation. When identifying local strengths and building strategies to tap these, cultural and natural heritage cannot be overlooked as potentially unique and impactful forces for development” (Ruritage, 2022). By connecting the region’s unique natural assets to cultural and social development, this strategy prioritises environmental sustainability, ecological diversity and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle as part of its cultural agenda.

Theme B: Cultural heritage

The Western Region contains 40% of all national listings in the Archaeology category of the Malta Scheduled Property Register. The regional wealth in cultural heritage ranges from the megalithic temple complex of *Haġar Qim* in Qrendi, which is also listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to centuries-old heritage in Mdina and Rabat (Malta) that dates back more than 4000 years. While this strategic priority is directly linked to the overall theme of Heritage Innovation, the regional cultural strategy also seeks

to increase the valorisation of cultural heritage assets by the resident population and visitors. It is also an opportunity for various stakeholders across different sectors in cultural heritage management, education, tourism and planning to work closer with the region to improve accessibility, secure sustainable cultural tourism practices and ensure the protection and promotion of cultural heritage within the region.

Theme C: Traditions and communities

The localities within the Western Region are deeply rooted in traditional culture and employ high levels of active participation in local traditions and feasts, possibly due to the residents’ strong sense of belonging. The 2016 Cultural Participation Survey (Arts Council Malta, 2017) indicates that the region registered the highest participation, after Gozo, in parish feasts, Good Friday processions and passion plays. The Western Region also features award-winning fireworks displays created by fireworks factories which are managed by voluntary organisations and are associated with religious feasts in most of the localities of the region.

Gastronomy is also an important cultural element which reflects the rural and agrarian specificities of the region. From the annual *Irkotta Fest* in *Hal Kirkop*, *Festa Hut* in *Żurrieq* and *Festa tal-Patata* in Qrendi to *Had-Dingli’s* agricultural and traditional festival and *Festa Għeneb* in *Siggiewi*, the numerous localities within the region collectively contribute to the cultural narrative of the territory. Local traditions, led by the communities, provide the region with exceptional potential to integrate gastronomy, agricultural practices, local history, and traditions with cultural sustainability and eco and religious tourism. “Food serves as a strong connection between nature and human society bringing

together land, heritage and the people. It is a diverse and dynamic channel for sharing stories, forming relationships and building communities. Emphasising a landscape with edible experiences creates an authentic “taste of place” (Ruritage 2022).

Cultural traditions are kept alive by the communities that celebrate them, the transferability of local knowledge and the adaptability of skills to contemporary practice. This strategy is an important point of departure for the region. It will aid in the development of cultural actions that promote and protect the intangible heritage of the region, which can then act as catalysts for talent development, audience engagement and heritage innovation.

The Western Region proposes to implement this strategy by mobilising these tools for the Local Councils, organisations and residents in the region:

- **Regional Cultural Officer:** The Regional Cultural Officers (RCOs) across all regions shall serve as a close and ongoing liaison between the Local Councils, NGOs and creative practitioners to facilitate the coordination of cultural activities within and across localities of the region. Together with the Regional Cultural Coordinator (RCC), they facilitate the implementation of the Regional Cultural Strategies which support the development of initiatives on the basis of live research aimed at continuously promoting the unique cultural traditions and unique heritage of localities. They further assist in the development of cultural networks, both locally (inter-regional collaborations) and internationally, prioritising social inclusion, cultural diversity, economic benefit and sustainability.
- **Establish a Regional Cultural Committee:** The Region will establish a committee for regional cultural development that will include representatives of Local Councils, local cultural NGOs, cultural practitioners and other stakeholders from various sectors such as cultural heritage, tourism and the arts.
- **Facilitate regional cultural initiatives:** The Region will address its cultural priorities through various initiatives that have a regional impact. These can be developed with the Local Councils, creative practitioners and NGOs within the

region and might require national and European investment. They can seek to address regional cultural initiatives such as capacity building and knowledge transfer programmes and investment in cultural infrastructure.

- **Co-develop a shared regional cultural information system:** The co-development of an information exchange platform across regions will enable more effective coordination of programming and capacity building by Local Councils, NGOs and creative practitioners. The platform will also serve as a database with information on historical sites, public spaces and libraries in the region. This resource could be used by Local Councils as a reference point to increase the diversity of cultural content in their events.
- **Promote arts and culture at regional level:** The Region will actively promote a calendar of events through the shared Regional Cultural Information System that captures all cultural activities, training opportunities and initiatives available at regional level.
- **Maximise funding:** Leverage public, private, national and European funding to facilitate the design and implementation of programmes and initiatives outlined in this strategy and further support Local Councils in securing funds for projects and initiatives that align with this strategic plan.
- **Participate in European and international networks:** Secure regional representation in networks that align with the regional cultural priorities, particularly those in active in regional development, rural heritage and sustainable tourism.
- **Evaluate and monitor:** Establish a research plan to evaluate and monitor the actions, programmes and initiatives launched through the strategy.



Medieval Feast. Mdina. Photo by Ray Attard



Iċ-Ċombini. Dingli. Photo by Norbert Mintoff

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

Theme (in addition to the transversal themes)	Priority area	Indicative actions	Short term (<1 year) Medium term (2-4 years) Long term (5 years +)
Generic Cross-Cutting Themes	Regional Cultural Officer	Disseminate information on funding opportunities and facilitate collaboration between Local Councils on cultural programming and other initiatives. The officer will also facilitate dialogue with various NGOs and stakeholders on possible collaborations and ensure inclusion of and access for all residents.	Ongoing
	Regional Cultural Committee	Establish a committee for regional cultural development which will include representatives from Local Councils, local Cultural NGOs and other sectors such as cultural heritage, tourism and the arts.	
	Regional cultural projects	Facilitate regional cultural initiatives such as festivals and events, capacity building and knowledge transfer programmes and investment in cultural infrastructure.	
	Shared regional cultural information system	Co-Create an information exchange platform	
	Promoting arts and culture at regional level	Promote a calendar of events that captures all cultural activities, training opportunities and initiatives available at regional level.	
Transversal Theme 1 - Talent development	Maximise funding	Acquire insight into funding opportunities and lobby to leverage public, private, national and European funding to design and implement programmes and initiatives.	Medium term
	Participation in European and international networks	Identify key European and international networks that share the Region's cultural priorities and objectives.	Short to medium term
	Evaluation and monitoring	Develop a research plan to measure the impact of cultural actions.	Short to medium term
	Indigenous knowledge transfer and traditional practices	Develop a capacity building and knowledge transfer programme with specific attention to intergenerational learning.	Short to medium term
	Connecting the arts with natural and cultural heritage	<p>Broker connections between artists and arts organisations with local NGOs and Local Council to facilitate the role of the region as a territory for creation and co-creation through sustainable practices such as green arts production and the use of locally sourced products and materials.</p> <p>Through the Regional Cultural Officer, facilitate the dissemination of information on funding opportunities and support collaboration between Local Councils, NGOs and cultural practitioners on cultural programming and other initiatives. The Officer will also facilitate dialogue with various NGOs and stakeholders on possible collaborations and ensure inclusion of and access for all residents.</p>	Short to medium term

Theme (in addition to the transversal themes)	Priority area	Indicative actions	Short term (<1 year) Medium term (2-4 years) Long term (5 years +)
Transversal Theme 2 - Audience engagement		Identify key European and international networks that share the Region's cultural priorities and objectives.	Long term
	Participation in European and international networks Regional 'route' tourism	Promote the region as a distinctive sustainable tourism destination based on unique and authentic experiences emerging from the stories of the communities within the region and its localities. Diversify the cultural tourism offering within the region through the promotion of gastronomy, adventure, religious tourism, the natural environment and arts experiences within the natural and historical landscapes of the region.	Short to medium term
Transversal Theme 3 - Heritage innovation	Promotion of local cultural assets	<p>Support the management of local cultural assets and public spaces under the remit of Local Councils and coordinate initiatives to promote local assets managed by other organisations to maximise and facilitate their use.</p> <p>Actively pursue collaborations with national and international partners on research and activities that bridge cultural heritage with technology.</p>	Medium to long term



St Joseph Band Club Concert. Hal Kirkop, 2019. Photo by Sebjo Aquilina Audiovisual Productions courtesy of St Joseph's Musical Society Hal Kirkop

7. Conclusion

This strategy provides an important framework for the Western Region as part of its development as a new region. Culture within the region has been established as one of the important pillars for social and economic development.

It will also be key in establishing the region's brand and in securing closer collaborations among Local Councils, NGOs and cultural practitioners within the region. Above all, the implementation of cultural actions that address the priorities identified in this strategy will serve as an opportunity for communities to celebrate their local identity within a shared regional narrative. It will also unleash untapped potential and open new opportunities built on principles of sustainability, thus securing the region's potential to position itself as a leader in sustainable regional cultural development.

8. Appendices

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