

# From V.18 to V.500



David Felice

## From V.18 to V.500

The announcement of the verdict regarding whether Valletta would become the European Capital of Culture in 2018 was made on 12 October 2012. *The Times* had described how this announcement was made in front of Caravaggio's *Beheading of St John* and that the tension in the room could be cut with a knife. 'At the end of this discussion the jury came to a unanimous decision,' said Manfred Gaulhofer, chairman of the Selection Panel. The suspense was palpable.<sup>1</sup>

'The Selection Panel has been persuaded by the V.18 team that there is the will, the drive, the ambition and the growing and strongly needed increase in self-esteem needed by the V.18 team to make Valletta 2018 the European Capital of Culture, an extraordinary endeavor that will be up to the expectations.'<sup>2</sup>

Ann Branch, from the European Commission explained how the title is awarded to a city for a yearlong cultural programme developed specifically for the year which must have a strong European dimension, the strong involvement of its citizens and foster the long term cultural and social development of the city.

'The title brings real prestige and many cities before have benefitted tremendously from it.

It is a truly unique opportunity for a city to transform itself, to position itself internationally, and to improve the wellbeing of the people living there. It is also intended to help Europeans understand each other better, and to bring people together through the power of culture. Please make sure that you make the most of this unique opportunity for yourselves, your citizens, for Malta and for the European Union. '<sup>3</sup> Branch concluded by saying that the most successful cities are those that embed the event as part of a long-term strategy for the development of their city.

The story of the European Capitals of Culture is a relatively recent one. It was an idea born at Athens Airport in January 1985. Sitting in the lounge waiting for their planes were former actress Melina Mercouri, then Minister of Culture

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Manfred Gaulhofer announcing Valletta as European Capital of Culture for 2018 during a press conference held at St. John's Co Cathedral (2012). Reprinted with permission of the Valletta 2018 Foundation. Photographer: Unknown

1 Kristina Chetcuti, *Valletta is named Europe's Capital of Culture 2018 in The Times* (13 October 2012), 1.

2 *Valletta is named European Capital of Culture. On YouTube* (7 November 2012).

3 *Valletta, YouTube* (2012).

for Greece, and her French counterpart, the charismatic Jack Lang. As they killed time with lively conversation, Mercouri suggested launching a series of yearly events that would put the spotlight on cities around Europe and their role in the development of European culture. More than thirty years later and the European Capital of Culture is now Europe's most ambitious cultural project both in scope and scale.

Valletta's success as European Capital of Culture will be measured by its ability to grasp the opportunity to transform and regenerate its cultural landscape. One of Malta's challenges is to integrate its cultural objectives within its wider social and economic aspirations. The aims of this strategy will be reached by providing an integrated programme of cultural infrastructure and incentives for arts and culture, together with the increased participation of artists and the public at large. Hosting a European Capital of Culture requires the wholehearted involvement and ownership of both the government and the people. Malta needs a culture-led (as opposed to building-led) regeneration project to make the benefits of the European Capital of Culture last well beyond the scope of 2018.

The urban and economic potential of European Capitals of Culture and the role they play in promoting social cohesion is undeniable. The criteria for obtaining the title have become more demanding, with the European agenda and the long-term effects increasingly emphasised. A key challenge for any European Capital of Culture is to ensure that the project forms part of a long term political commitment and strategy to develop into - and to remain - a creative city, through culture.<sup>4</sup>

'Being awarded the designation will not only necessitate considerable capital investment but also meticulous preparation and planning. It will require a strong central organisation and direction to bring together the disparate and, very often, competing players in the Maltese cultural field. In handling this exciting project, only the best will do.'<sup>5</sup>

### The Bordeaux Manifesto for European Cities

In 2008, The European Forum for Architectural Policies (EFAP) published the Bordeaux Manifesto for European Cities. It described the European city as a place for social, economic, cultural and political exchange. Cities have cultural values shared by all countries and the large majority of European citizens.

'The city is a fundamental and universal human creation. It is a unique centre for social life as well as individual and collective fulfilment. The frantic, irreversible

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<sup>4</sup> On the road leading to 2018, *Talking Point*. In *The Times* (16 December 2010), 48.

<sup>5</sup> *Show Window of Cultural and Artistic Assets, Editorial*. In *The Times* (8 February 2011).



Mélina Mercouri and Jack Lang (1981) Source: © ROCHETF1SIPA.

Grace u Rofflu, the rubber bodies collective, 2010. From the National Culture Policy Malta, 2011. Reprinted with permission. (Photographer: Alex Attard).

urban growth that societies throughout the world have experienced over the past few decades has caused a transformation of cities and agglomerations, which do not always correspond to inhabitants' legitimate needs, expectations or aspirations.<sup>6</sup>

The European city is both the symbol and melting pot of European identity and culture where social mix is an essential condition to guarantee the richness and the perpetuity of these exchanges. To this end, each of our cities should offer a quality environment relevant to their available resources, to their way of life and their needs. European cities are the pride of their inhabitants and, if this is not the case, they should become so. The citizen should be both a provider and a beneficiary. In this way cities will increase their competitiveness and sustainability, whilst remaining an essential component of our cultural wealth.

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The Manifesto called upon us to 'rebuild' cities to reconcile rather than divide and to enable their response to the aspirations of our time and those of future generations. Finally, it called for the creation of united, innovative and beautiful cities. The reference of such a call to the leaders of 'cities' in Malta begs one

obvious and hard question; do cities in Malta exist? And if so, what sort of life do they offer to their communities?

In introducing the Basic Principles set out in the final bid-book, the formal application for the title of European Capital of Culture 2018 in Malta by the Valletta 2018 Foundation, named Imagine 18, the V.18 team had invited one of its best-known residents, Sir Cameron Mackintosh, to depict his view of the city.

'...what an outstanding and unique City it is. One of my particular memories is walking down the steps from the Cathedral in the mid-1990's to suddenly come upon St. Barbara Bastions to see one of the greatest and certainly most beautiful harbours in the world, which banished forever my childhood memories of dust, weeds, tumbledown walls and tacky package holidays. It was like glimpsing Sleeping Beauty through the briars. Here was a complete historic City that had miraculously survived turbulent sieges and considerable war damage with its elegance intact, healed by the golden balm of Maltese stone, which almost instantly bridges the centuries so that an ancient Palace sits by a modern re-invention in perfect honeyed harmony.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *The Bordeaux Manifesto for European Cities, European Forum for Architectural Policies* (10 October 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Sir Cameron Mackintosh, *Basic Principles, Imagine 18, Final Application for the Title of European Capital of Culture 2018 in Malta, Valletta 2018 Foundation*, 2012, 8.



Barrakka Lift, AP Valletta, Valletta. (Photographer: Luis Rodriguez Lopez).



Bartolomeo Genga, Map of Valletta, 1558. Private collection. From: (and state author and name of book, publisher and year of publication.) Reprinted with permission.

## An environment of exchange

Work on the possibility of Valletta bidding for the title of European Capital of Culture began in 2009. Not long after, the team working on the bid evolved a vision that was aimed at setting into motion a process of culture-led regeneration which Valletta could engage in through a creative evolution which is forward-looking and within the context of broader European and Mediterranean dimensions.

### The guiding principle of V.18 – the working title of the bid - was that exchange is linked to environments.

The intention was to create within Valletta an environment of exchange; one that allows for ideas, dialogue and creativity to flow freely. The guiding principle of V.18 – the working title of the bid - was that exchange is linked to environments. Environments create the conditions conducive to different types of exchange, ranging from conventional economic transactions within and across borders and communities

to ritual exchanges and ceremonial life.<sup>8</sup>

Much of this initial vision was synthesised by Paul Sant Cassia<sup>9</sup> and this provided the necessary platform for Valletta's bid to move forward. It formed part of the newly formed Valletta 2018 Foundation's first formal submission to the Selection Panel appointed by the European Commission, entitled *An Environment of Exchange*. Sant Cassia introduced the proposal as follows:

'There is one common theme that is constant throughout the history of Valletta and indeed of all Mediterranean cities, but particularly of Valletta, and it is one that poses new challenges. It is an environment of exchange. It is not a marketplace, although it has that, but it is more than that. Capitals of Culture and the Culture of 'Capital' (widely interpreted to include not just material but symbolic capital) are built on exchange, intensive exchange – not just of goods, but of people, ideas, resistance, acceptance, theft. We do not see exchange on its own, but as linked to environments in a dynamic process: exchange creates specific environments, but environments create specific exchanges...

This city is distinct. It was never the centre of a large empire, no nerve centre of a large, sprawling, dominating agro-literate un-integrated poly-ethnic civilisation. An experiment it certainly was, but of a city-state. So inextricably is Valletta tied to the history of the Island Polity, that it is possible to assert the formula: 'No Valletta, No Malta' without contradiction. It was this city that urbanised the countryside, modernised it, identified it, fortified it, literacised it, gentrified it, monumentalised it, commercialised its hinterland. It was the only interface between local society and the world - its eyes, its brains, its locomotory dynamism. But it did so perhaps so effectively and pervasively that it has long been a victim of its own success and it is one that we hope to address in our bid

<sup>8</sup> *In Brief, Proposed Application for the Title of European Capital of Culture - An Environment of Exchange, Valletta 2018 Foundation, 2010, 11.*

<sup>9</sup> Paul Sant Cassia was a Governor of the Valletta 2018 Foundation from 2010 to 2012.

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to present Valletta as the European Capital of Culture for 2018. In the process we hope to grapple with some fundamental questions regarding the place of 'Capitals of Culture': does 'Culture' have a geographical 'Capital', are Cultures, 'Capitalisable', and if so in what way? At issue here is how heritage and culture in both their strict material sense and as a series of actions and dispositions can be 'capitalised' in the sense of being generative and socialisable. We are guided in these reflective challenges because Valletta has long provoked a series of basic conundrums that a nomination as a European Capital of Culture can assist us in engaging with. And these conundrums are the following:

- Valletta is Malta's Parthenon: a symbol of its past glory and, if the truth be said, a rather complex one. Yet, in contrast to its Greek analogue, it is a living city - but ever since World War II (when it was the recipient of intensive bombardment which initiated a mass exodus), a declining one in terms of population and dynamism. The dominant local model of heritage conservation is an architectural one. Yet it has become increasingly clear that the revitalisation of cities cannot be pursued solely through top-down 'mega-culture' cultural projects important though they are, but rather equally through public engagement at the grassroots.
- Valletta is therefore as much a sign, a representation, a symbol, as an actually geographically defined city. Indeed one can go further: almost every local interaction on the personal and collective level with the city is not so much an engagement with a simple place, but with a representation that is wounded by the intrusive messiness of phenomenological observables. Or to put it more simply: local people interact with the city through the projection of the past. They always see the city in terms of how it could be and how it could be is often how they think it was.
- This is an extraordinary state of affairs and almost the exact opposite of Los Angeles whose only identity and reference point is what it can become through erasure. And it poses an enormous challenge, not so much in the chimerical recapturing of the past and its re-presentation (the 'Heritage Industry'), but rather in its creation of its present. For Valletta is a city that has a past, exists in and through its past, but it has little autonomous present. And that is the real challenge that we perceive the European Capital of Culture poses for us: not to package the past as in some recreation of some culinary recipes, but to create new dishes through our current experiences.
- To give Valletta a present is to give it a future. Its present (and future) cannot be a recreation (or more precisely, a re-enactment) of its past, which is merely part of the inexorable contemporary production of lieux de memoire, necessitated by the equally inexorable production of 'non-places' of the contemporary world. That is the challenge facing us, and Valletta. It is the challenge to conjure a present that has not yet been discovered, in spite of all well-meaning attempts to the contrary.<sup>10</sup>

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10 Paul Sant Cassia, *Proposed Application for the Title of European Capital of Culture - An*

## A New Dialogue on Urbanism

In order to translate this evolving vision and to create true environments of exchange that are transformative, V.18's initial cultural programme followed eight complementary thematic areas. One of these was intended to encourage a new debate on urbanism in Malta, inspired, as Le Corbusier was when together with a group of international architects he briefly visited Malta and Gozo; 'In the heat of the summer of 1933 we launched ourselves into the ancient waters of the Mediterranean, like Ulysses on his odyssey.'<sup>11</sup>

The C.I.A.M. (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) was founded in Switzerland in 1928 by a group of architects in pursuit of modernism and internationalism. C.I.A.M. was intent on changing the course of architectural history to serve the best interests of society. Its members included some of the best-known architects of the time, all interested in evolving philosophies on how to shape the urban environment in a rapidly changing world.<sup>12</sup>

According to Henry D. Fernandez, a Grand Tour sponsored by the C.I.A.M. left Marseilles on 29 July 1933, on an adventure through the Mediterranean aboard the SS Pâtris II, visiting Athens and a variety of ancient sites including several Neolithic ruins at Malta, Gozo, Khirokitia, and the Cycladic Islands. While the Pâtris II may have been short on space, the close contact between the C.I.A.M.'s participants made for an engaging meeting environment, recalled by Le Corbusier:

*That cruise ship was turned into meeting rooms, committee rooms, and secretarial offices.*

'That cruise ship was turned into meeting rooms, committee rooms, and secretarial offices. There was only one sound: the hissing and splashing of water along the hull; there was only one atmosphere: youthfulness, trust, modesty, and professional conscience. After those two weeks of fervent work, a precious result: The Athens Charter.'<sup>13</sup>

The National Culture Policy 2011 had called for the creation of a Centre of Architecture and the Built Environment - one of the principal measures that was also proposed in the cultural infrastructural programme forming part of Valletta's bid for the title. Supported by these objectives and the Resolution by the Council of the European Union in February 2000 on architectural quality in urban and rural environments, the Centre's main remit was to foster better understanding of our built heritage and to promote more sustainable development in future years. It was to assist in raising the awareness of the importance of good design and quality in

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*Environment of Exchange, Valletta 2018 Foundation (2010), 7-9.*

<sup>11</sup> Henry D. Fernandez, *Le Corbusier: Towards the Origins of Architecture*. Presented in a conference, *'The Founding Myths of Architecture'*, Malta (2010).

<sup>12</sup> For a description of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne, founded on 28 June 1928, see Mumford, Eric Paul, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism 1928-1960* (Cambridge: 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter*, translated into English by Anthony Eardley (New York: 1973), 25.



Le Corbusier with his colleagues aboard the Patris II during CIAM 4 (1933). Source: <https://archhistdaily.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/corb-1933.jpg>

our built environment from both an economic and environmental point of view. In this manner, the cultural programme was placed firmly within an architectural and urban environment framework, as a tangible art form that is experienced in every-day living, set within the European dimension required of a European Capital of Culture. What city do we live in and why? V.18 would revisit the story of the Grand Tour of the Mediterranean of 1933, and explore the debate on quality of life in the European City.

### A vision in evolution - Valletta as a creative city

From the first bid-book to the second and final version, the V.18 team nurtured the vision to become a catalyst for a long-term, culture-led regeneration that saw cultural activity as the most dynamic facet of Valletta and all Malta's socio-economic life. 'Through culture, we will find new voices that can bridge our divides: personal, local and across frontiers.'<sup>14</sup>

Valletta's claim for the title was not based on any perceived right for recognition on the international platform. Instead it was founded on the real need for the city to become the generator of a renewed agenda for the arts and culture and for Malta's fledgling creative economy. While known for its rich heritage and attractiveness both in its buildings and its festivals, Valletta required regeneration to serve contemporary society – Malta's citizens, residents and visitors. The title would provide a timely opportunity to promote Valletta's potential to be present in and contribute to the international cultural scene through its artists, curators, media experts, authors, designers and creative workers.

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The three aspects of regeneration – social, economic and cultural – were targeted in this objective which was aimed at enhancing the well-being of the community Valletta serves as a capital. V.18 put our local cultural events and aspirations on a bigger stage; not by giving them a label, but by placing them under critical interest.<sup>15</sup>

### Making Valletta a great city

Having secured the title for the city, the V.18 team then moved on to consolidating its plan for the preparatory years – there were still five years to go before the city would present itself to its wider European audience. The strategic plan for the run-up period of 2013-2015 saw the overall vision concentrated in a single short but daring statement – that of making Valletta a great city.

The definition of what constitutes 'a great city' is of course, subjective. For sure,

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<sup>14</sup> *Basic Principles, Imagine 18, Final Application for the Title of European Capital of Culture 2018 in Malta, Valletta 2018 Foundation (2012), 11.*

<sup>15</sup> *Basic Principles, Imagine 18, Final Application for the Title of European Capital of Culture 2018 in Malta, Valletta 2018 Foundation (2012), 18.*



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In Pursuit of Dreams, AP's Sappers Street Party within Malta Design Week (2014). AP Valletta. Reprinted with permission. Photographer: Seb Tanti Burlo



as Aristotle said, 'A great city is not to be confounded with a populous one.'<sup>16</sup> In the context of the strategic plan, the use of the term 'great' was consciously provocative: a challenge to Maltese citizens to embrace the European designation as an opportunity to transform the capital into a city that is creative, current and dynamic.

Valletta is a city of contradictions. It has city status, though small. It was, and is still, a European cultural capital, though on the edge of Europe, its southernmost Capital of Culture, further south than Tunisia's northernmost tip. It became a strategic theatre of war by its geography and history, not from its own wanting. Built as a fortress, it could survive only by being open to the outside world. Connected historically by shipping, it is connected today by broadband.

Valletta's title as a European Capital of Culture in 2018 may give some contemporary meaning to these age-old contradictions. It looks not just north, but also south and east as it rekindles cultural ties with old protagonists in its history. Valletta has gone back to its future.<sup>17</sup>

## Culture was to become the overriding force in the city's transformation into a great city.

Due to its geography and locus, Malta has for centuries been an important place for exchange and a playground for European ideas. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Valletta was adorned with fine cultural expressions from Italy, France, Spain as well as Northern Europe. British traveler Patrick Brydone generously described Malta as being 'An epitome of all Europe'. The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the Order of the Knights of St John develop the Greater Valletta area, which established

the island firmly on the Southern European cultural map. Various accounts of artists and dignitaries in this era travelling the Mediterranean or en route to the Orient gave testament to the great cultural capital that Valletta had become.

Re-discovering Valletta as a place for exchange and a laboratory for the fusion of diverse European ideas is an exciting prospect for V.18.<sup>18</sup> Culture was to become the overriding force in the city's transformation into a great city. 'The European Capital of Culture is an opportunity to experience our cultural identity afresh in new contexts that push the boundaries and allow for ideas, dialogue, creativity and innovation on what constitutes a great city.'<sup>19</sup> However, for this to happen, a better understanding of the inherent qualities of the city and its historical capacity for change and renewal is required. Is the city able to remain contemporary? In this sense, Emma Mattei and Jon Banthorpe render a positive outlook for the future:

'Contemporary Malta is at once both outward looking, yet steadfastly resilient.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Politics, Book Seven, Part 4* (350 B.C.,).

<sup>17</sup> Valletta, *Back to its Future, Candidate European Capital of Culture, 2018*. Magazine distributed with the Sunday Times, London, celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Capital of Culture (2010), 12-14.

<sup>18</sup> *Basic Principles, Proposed Application for the Title of European Capital of Culture - An Environment of Exchange*, Valletta 2018 Foundation (2012), 55.

<sup>19</sup> *Valletta 2018 Strategic Plan 2013-2015*, Valletta 2018 Foundation (2013), 36.



Awaiting the Good Friday procession on St. John Street. In Jon Banthorpe, Emma Mattei, *Uncommon Malta*. Miranda Books, Malta. 2011. Reprinted with permission. Photographer: David Pisani.



Valletta Market, Interior. In David Pisani, Konrad Buhagiar, David Felice, *Vanishing Valletta*. Midsea Books, Malta. 2000. Reprinted with permission. Photographer: David Pisani.

It is a nation that looks fiercely to its past and clings to its cultural pillars, whilst seeking modernity, architectural reinvention, social liberation and rapid economic growth. It is a heady cocktail of tradition, politics, religion and the dream of a comfortable home, all under a bright sun.”<sup>20</sup>

### Having always been modern

The area of Valletta known as *L-Arcipierku* provides a good illustration of this context and a setting for buildings of wide reaching and differentiated expression. The construction of a church dedicated to St. Paul was to become a national monument and a fitting tribute to the love and devotion of all Maltese towards St. Paul. The apostle Paul was believed to be the instrument chosen by Divine Providence to preach the work of God and to found the Church in Malta, twenty centuries ago.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, only meters away, stands the back façade of the mid-nineteenth century market building, a masonry and iron structure, one of the first of its kind, reminiscent of the Crystal Palace in London, but especially of Les Halles in Paris. Hector Zimelli, then Superintendent of Public Works, was entrusted with the project. The influence of Charles Fox, who was involved in the 1851 Exhibition at the Crystal Palace and who Zimelli met, and the recently completed and large Les Halles Centralles Complex (Zimelli carried out an exhaustive study into modern market needs and the use of cast-iron by Baltard) are evident throughout the project.<sup>22</sup>

The 1850s saw a wave of new building projects in Malta and particularly in Valletta. A new architecture was emerging that reflected its time in history and that is best understood through a wider appreciation of the European context within which it is set. The Royal Opera House, St. Paul’s Cathedral, the market building and the Borsa rose to challenge the historic fabric of the city. Yet again, Valletta stood at the cutting edge of architecture, in tension with its roots as a Renaissance city having the best of Baroque buildings. This was the beginning of a new narrative that would unfold over the next two centuries. However, in truth, Valletta was not new to this extraordinary cyclical event.<sup>23</sup>

This urban tension between buildings and their architecture is reflected in the topographical nature of this area of Valletta and its concept is best described by the name attributed to it. Temi Zammit had written in his *Valletta – An Historical*

**The 1850s saw a wave of new building projects in Malta and particularly in Valletta.**

<sup>20</sup> Emma Mattei and Jon Banthorpe, *Uncommon: Malta + Gozo* (2011).

<sup>21</sup> Ciarlo J., *The Hidden Gem* and Ferres, Achille, *Descrizioni Storica Delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta, 1866, Facsimile Edition (Malta: Midsea books, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> David Drago, *Building Technology in the nineteenth Century; Early Uses of Iron in Malta*, University of Malta, unpublished thesis (1993).

<sup>23</sup> David Felice, *Modernity and Exchange*. In *La Borsa - The People, The Building, The History* (Malta: Guttenberg Press, 2013), 42.



The Greater Valletta, aerial view. Reprinted with permission. Photographer: Roberto Benetti

*Sketch*, that, 'Strada Pozzi, behind the old Military Hospital, is popularly known as 'L-Arcipierku' (the archipelago), probably because (of) the many lanes which break up the place into numerous islands of small houses.'<sup>24</sup>

The predominant and high density residential zones on the periphery of Valletta intertwined with the more commercial central zone on one side while, on the other, they faced the abrupt perimeter fixed by the bastions that lined the edge of the city. Not all commended the quality of this network of parapets – the inner face of the fortifications. Quentin Hughes wrote in *The Architectural Review* in 1969, that, 'It can be seen that slum property later grew up on the site of the abandoned Manderaggio and on the periphery of the street pattern where Laparelli seemed at a loss to know how to terminate his city plots where they lay adjacent to the irregular perimeter of the city's fortifications.'<sup>25</sup>

Density and borders, tradition and modernity, being Maltese and European, are all factors which shape the urban fabric and the community that lives within it.

### The Greater Valletta

The walls of Valletta are static but its boundaries are constantly changing. The separation between the fortified towns around the harbours and the villages that dotted the Maltese landscape, is no more. Indeed, the opportunity that presents itself today is to interpret the current physical situation as one of a Historical Valletta in close liaison with a Greater Valletta, made up of the relatively vast urban area that has developed and grown around the fortified capital.

Does this mean anything? It certainly does. It would exploit the as yet untapped potential of a new vision for Valletta and extend the influence of a cultural city beyond the physical barriers of its network of walls. This would stimulate other

urban areas outside Valletta, within a contemporary built environment that parallels that within the existing historic fabric, equivalent in quality if not in style.

**The walls of Valletta are static but its boundaries are constantly changing.**

This is a process which has already happened in history; what a great event it must have been to see the first buildings erected outside the walls of Valletta in the eighteenth century, to meet the economic challenges of the time, once the city moved from being a military

machine to an important trading post in the Mediterranean. How important it is that one of the first processes of contemporary regeneration of the Grand Harbour should have been the Valletta Waterfront outside the walls of Floriana.

<sup>24</sup> Zammit, Sir Temi, *Valletta – An Historical Sketch*, (Malta: 1929). Although the area known as L-Arcipierku includes a series of streets within its confines, the first street to be described as such was Strada Pozzi, now better known as Triq L-Ibjar. The whole area is described in greater detail in Alfred Debattista's *L-Arcipierku, Niesu u l-Madwar*, First Edition (Malta: PEG, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Quentin Hughes J., *City of the Knights*. In *The Architectural Review*, No.869 (London: 1969) 70; Hughes makes clear reference to L-Arcipierku in the plans which accompanied his article.

# ‘Do Europeanisation and Modernisation threaten ‘traditional’ life?’

Any discussion of Valletta, inevitably refers to Malta. The city and the state are inseparable. But can a micro island state, in the Mediterranean, have cities at all? Standing in Valletta’s Upper Barrakka Gardens, jostling with tourists taking pictures of the Grand Harbour and observing the urban arc that manifests itself before one’s eyes, one cannot but appreciate that Valletta’s influence has always reached far beyond its own bastions. Today, the city is a living magnet attracting up to 50,000 commuters a day, yet it has a population of only 6,500 residents, Europe’s smallest capital city. However, once its satellite towns and suburbs are included, the population of this urban ‘Greater Valletta’ swells to approximately 275,000, well over half that of the Maltese Islands.

This vision for a Greater Valletta led all the Local Councils of Malta and Gozo to sign a Charter which came into force on 17 December 2010. In this Charter, the Local Councils of Malta and Gozo had agreed to support the application of Valletta to become the European Capital of Culture in 2018. In turn, Valletta and V.18, committed to collaborate and deliver a Capital of Culture that will strive to develop and improve cultural life in Valletta and in all localities of Malta and Gozo and to transform Malta and Gozo into a Mediterranean and international cultural island.<sup>26</sup>

The influence that Valletta 2018 may leave on the rest of Malta is best described by Mark-Anthony Falzon’s piece in the *Sunday Times of Malta* called ‘Good news for our city’:

‘It is said that Marcel Duchamp used to carry around a vial of Parisian air wherever he went, just in case his artistic inspiration ran out. We may be spared the trouble. Given their small size, it shouldn’t be too difficult for the fresh air of Valletta to drift around the islands.’<sup>27</sup>

## Tradition and Modernity

The capacity to renew themselves and to change according to new realities is one aspect of cities and their citizens that has remained constant throughout time. Jon Mitchell asked the question, ‘Do Europeanisation and Modernisation threaten ‘traditional’ life?’ An urban anthropologist, Mitchell examined the implications of living on the fringes of Europe. He did this by looking at the potency of ritual to show how such events are used as a means for resolving and expressing anxieties about ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. He studied the pervasive nostalgia that characterises contemporary Malta, and especially Valletta. He identified a profound ambivalence towards Europe and the key processes of ‘modernisation’ and traced this tendency through different areas of social life - gender, family, politics, religion, but especially community. Mitchell wrote that living on a monument is not easy:

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<sup>26</sup> Proposed Application for the Title of European Capital of Culture - An Environment of Exchange, Valletta 2018 Foundation (2010), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Mark-Anthony Falzon, The Sunday Times of Malta, 30 January, 2011. Good News for our City.



Carnival in Valletta, 2016. From <http://www.cladglobal.com/CLADnews/architecture-design/Renzo-Piano-Malta-carnival-Maltese-Carnival-Valletta-architecture-design-Lent/321543?source=news>.  
Photographer: Jonathan Borg

*living on a monument is not easy:*

These ambiguities...are inherent in modernity itself, which can be identified by a tendency to divide the world into 'modern' and 'traditional'. By this reckoning, the invocation of ritual-as-tradition can be seen in itself as a 'modern' act – one which attempts to resolve or mediate the dilemmas and ambiguities of 'modernity'.<sup>28</sup>

This is a particularly relevant discussion from a purely architectural perspective. As part of Malta's remit in hosting the Presidency of the European Union in 2017, The Forum for Architectural Policies (EFAP) held its meeting for the first part of 2017 in Malta. The conference forming part of the programme was entitled, 'The new in the old - contemporary architecture in a historic context'.<sup>29</sup>

One session of the conference was dedicated in its entirety to Valletta and I was asked to make a presentation of AP's work in Valletta over the last twenty-five years. It also presented an opportunity to comment on the future direction of our work and especially that of the city. The conference also provided the context for the presentation to cover an important aspect of the work, that where practice and research are brought together, connecting academics and academic research (the research project) with architectural practice and design research (the design project).

Both types of research have their own paths, which typically do not cross. However, it is evident that the deliberate effort to engage in research based design practice can yield interesting results and projects especially where enlightened and properly informed clients are concerned. This intersection of 'researchers' across multiple fields where the practical and the theoretical can overlap to shape attitudes and influence the future of design practice as well as the impact of academic research is a relatively new area of activity that will impact the future of cities and their content.

The paper was entitled: 'Urban tension: Valletta, a laboratory for new ideas', and it covered a series of research projects that stemmed from design projects founded in Valletta and its immediate environment. However, I cannot but share the image that kept coming to mind of one particular float displayed in the Valletta carnival of 2016.

The float consisted of huge effigies of Girolamo Cassar, holding a plan while sitting by a model of St. John's Co-Cathedral; and Renzo Piano, also seated, looking at a model of his controversial design for the new gate to the city. They sat back to back, otherwise sharing a bench, dressed in their contemporary attire, on a mobile float clad with billboards advertising a wide range of eateries in the city, reminding me also of Paul Sant Cassia's earlier words about old culinary recipes and new dishes.

<sup>28</sup> Jon P. Mitchell, *Ambivalent Europeans – Ritual, Memory and the Public Sphere in Malta* (London: Routledge, 2002) 2.

<sup>29</sup> The conference of the European Forum for Architecture Polices (EFAP) was held on 23-24 March 2017 at the Aula Magna of the University of Malta – Valletta Campus, in St. Paul's Street Valletta, Malta.

## 'Architecture Has A Serious Problem Today'

Before describing this series of five research projects, it would be a good idea to start by referring to the recent thoughts of Rem Koolhaas the Pritzker Prize-winning Dutch architect, theorist, and provocateur. He is the Founder of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), the international design practice with the clearest agenda and leaders on the overlap between design practice and research, through their parallel firm, AMO.

Koolhaas was speaking with Mohsen Mostafavi, Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, in the closing keynote for the 2016 American Institute of Architecture (AIA) convention. Koolhaas candidly spoke about the profession's shortcomings, how it could adapt to the changing social and technical climates of today, and how its rare ability to do 'ballet-like stretches' holds the key to the future.

**'Architecture stands with one leg in a world that's 3,000 years old and another leg in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.'**

- 'Architecture is a profession that takes an enormous amount of time. The least architectural effort takes at least four or five or six years, and that speed is really too slow for the revolutions that are taking place.'
- 'Architecture stands with one leg in a world that's 3,000 years old and another leg in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This almost ballet-like stretch makes our profession surprisingly deep. You could say that we're the last profession that has a memory, or the last profession whose roots go back 3,000 years and still demonstrates the relevance of those long roads today. Initially, I thought we were actually misplaced to deal with the present, but what we offer the present is memory.'
- 'We've tried to discover domains and areas in architecture which are not a simple vulgar multiplication of uninspired global projects. Recently, we have looked at preservation. The beautiful thing about preservation is you begin with something that already exists and therefore is already local. By definition, a preservation project is an homage to earlier cultures and mentalities to which you can add a new dimension, a new function, a new beauty or appeal. Almost every impulse signals that globalisation needs rethinking or adjustment.'
- 'In the last 30 years, architecture has been deeply influenced by the conversion of things: Thatcher and Reagan, moving from a welfare state to a market economy. Architects used to be connected to good intentions, notionally at least. With the market economy, we've slowly found ourselves supporting, at best, individual ambitions and, at worst, pure profit motives. In that sense, every crisis perhaps presents an opportunity.'<sup>30</sup>

30 Diane Budds, *Architecture has a serious problem today*, interview with Rem Koolhaas, from



Rem Koolhaas in conversation with Mohsen Mostafavi at the AIA Convention, 2016. From "Architecture has a serious problem today" in Fastocodesign.com. Reprinted with permission, courtesy of the AIA. Photographer: Carl Bower.

- I'm sure that in 50 years, traffic will be better. I'm sure that the car will no longer be petrol-driven. I'm also expecting that there will be a smoother and less onerous form of infrastructure, because with infrastructure the problem is it's either completely absent or incredibly heavy-handed, and there's nothing in between. I think that that is one very crucial thing that needs to be invented, a kind of light infrastructure.<sup>31</sup>

### Novelletta<sup>32</sup>

'Novelletta - Hysterical Symptoms of a City in Old Age', was presented at the London Festival of Architecture's 2010 International Architectural Showcase. However, AP originally developed the theme for Novelletta back in 2006, when it was conceived as a printed manifesto. It was later developed into a full-fledged exhibition, a three-dimensional experience reflecting AP's ambitions for the city, its activities and its theoretical, academic and educational interests. The exhibits, tangible manifestations of the original concept, featured projects which AP has worked on in connection with the city and around it, including the Marks & Spencer bridge in Strait Street, the Maritime Authority Trade Centre, Q-Bar and the Barrakka Lift, amongst others.

The purpose of Novelletta was to encourage the exploration of a visionary prospect and outlook on architecture and urban context which is unrestricted by pragmatism. An imaginary and radical approach such as Novelletta can instill discussion and discourse. This in turn fertilises the design process of real projects and opens new pathways and viewpoints on actual problems.

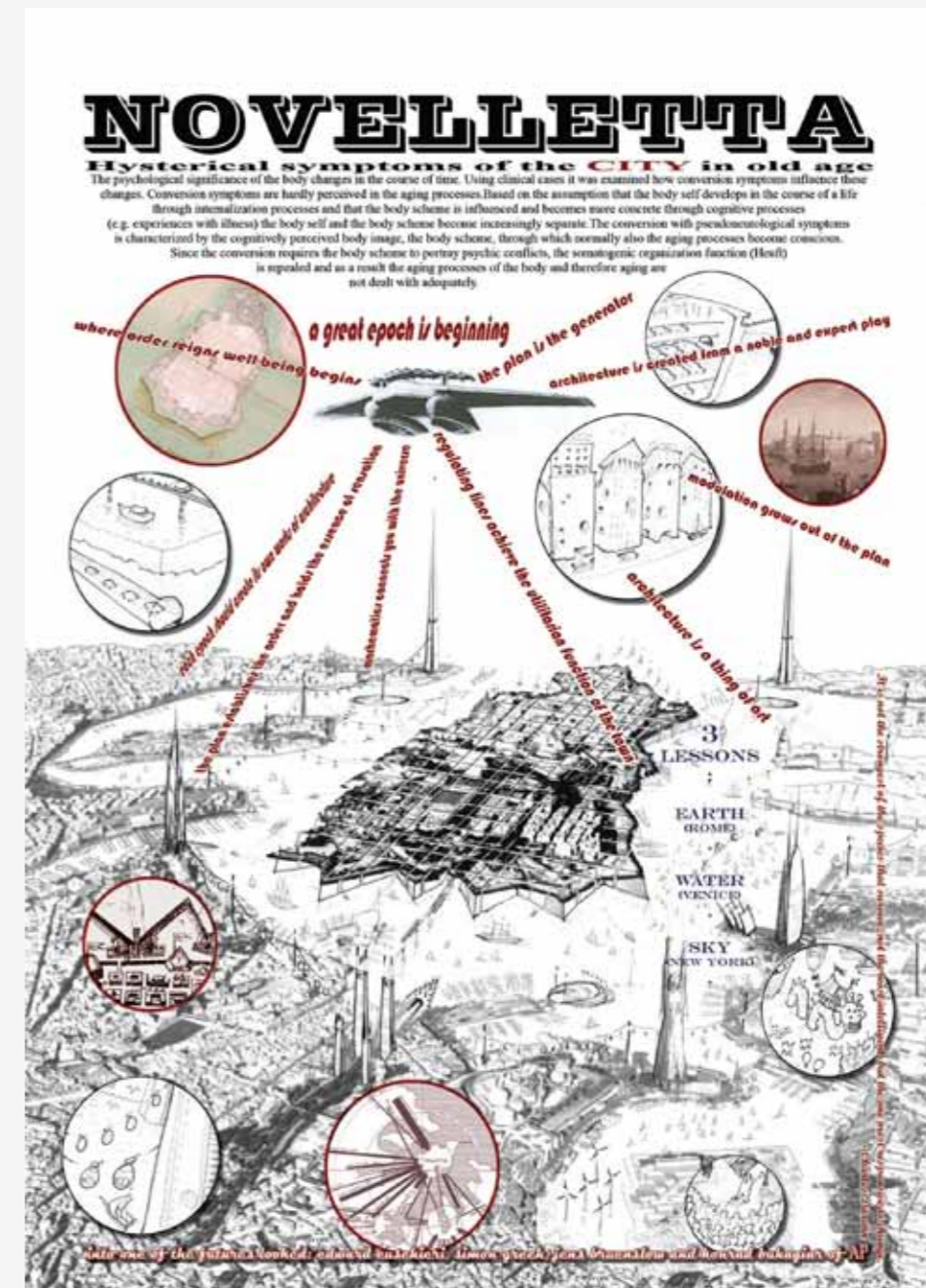
The installation initially consisted of a large-scale physical model of Novelletta, the original printed manifesto, and a selection of twelve visuals (photos, sketches and three-dimensional visualisations), illustrating projects, both conceptual and realised. The installation was supplemented by project models to further develop the resonance between contemporary architectural presence and utopia.

The purpose of Novelletta was to encourage the exploration of a visionary prospect and outlook on architecture.

<https://www.fastcodesign.com/3060135/innovation-by-design/rem-koolhaas-architecture-has-a-serious-problem-today> (2016).

<sup>31</sup> Gary Hustwit, *There's Been Very Little Rethinking Of What Cities Can Be*, interview with Rem Koolhaas, from <https://www.fastcodesign.com/3044008/rem-koolhaas-theres-been-very-little-rethinking-of-what-cities-can-be> (2015).

<sup>32</sup> *Novelletta*, a manifesto for the city launched in 2006, was developed into an exhibition for the London Festival of Architecture at the Building Centre, London, between June and July, 2010.



Novelletta, Exhibition Poster, London Design Week, 2010. AP Valletta. Reprinted with permission.

### Reasonable Dreams<sup>33</sup>

A thread between reality and fiction, utopian pasts and possible futures, theories and realisations, AP presented a curated exploration of Valletta's rich architectural spirit. 'Reasonable Dreams' represented the identification of an architectural practice with the visions and inspirations that fed the most influential architectural projects in Valletta. Set in Paris in 2013-14, the exhibition was a thoughtful journey through the city's transformation, linking past and future seamlessly around three main axes: historical dreams, realised dreams, and the fragmentation of time and space through artistic dreams. Changes to the urban fabric of Valletta as a capital city were revealed through an empathy with the origins of capital projects that have contributed to the transformation of Valletta from its Renaissance beginnings to its current revival through projects such as the City Gate project in collaboration with the Renzo Piano Building Workshop and the Barrakka Lift by AP.

### Year 2225 - a triptych<sup>34</sup>

'Symmetry demands an actual + virtual future...We imagine how next week, next year or 2225 will shape up—a virtual future, constructed by wishes, prophecies + daydreams. This virtual future may influence the actual future, as in a self-fulfilling prophecy, but the actual future will eclipse our virtual one as surely as tomorrow eclipses today. Like Utopia, the actual future + the actual past exist only in the hazy distance, where they are no good to anyone.' David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*.<sup>35</sup>

AP's multi-disciplinary piece, *Year 2225 - a triptych*, explored the investigation of space through various forms of expression and in response to the theme of the 2014 edition of the Venice Biennale, *Fundamentals*, curated by Rem Koolhaas. The piece revolved around the transitory moments of architecture, the ephemeral moments between the erecting and demolishing of a building, when the building is utilised not in its intended manner, but rather in the most unorthodox of ways.

AP commissioned and curated a series of films and paintings to portray three completed projects: The Barrakka Lift and the double-helix staircase of a property in St. Barbara Bastion, both in Valletta; and the Super-Furniture of Stanhope Gardens in London. The films recorded the existence of lives that unfolded in the shadow of these projects which, invariably, hail from the past: chance encounters, missed opportunities, routine displacements. The small

<sup>33</sup> *Reasonable Dreams* was an exhibition held at La Galerie d'Architecture, Paris, from December, 2013 to January 2014.

<sup>34</sup> *Year 2225—a triptych*, formed part of *Time Space Existence*, a collateral event to the Venice Biennale of Architecture, from June to November 2014 at Palazzo Mora, Venice, in collaboration with Bettina Hutschek, Francis Ghersci, Kyveli Anastasiadi and Darren Tanti. Organised by the Dutch non-profit Global Art Affairs Foundation.

<sup>35</sup> David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2004). 338.



Reasonable Dreams, La Galerie d'Architecture, Paris, 2013. AP Valletta. Reprinted with permission.



oil paintings, on the other hand, became objects stemming from the life of the buildings that they depict, extending into domestic interiors and depositories of memory.

The lessons learnt because of witnessing of the passage of time on buildings have been instrumental in putting this vision to the test. Wholly aware of the social and cultural underpinnings of an architecture that acknowledges the future as well as respects the past, the intention has been to assure continuity, but also to embrace diversity and encourage complexity and ambiguity. It is in this way that a necessary amount of destabilisation can be triggered that admits and encourages future and unpredictable re-interpretation.

Through film, writing and photography, the narratives generated by works of architecture are recorded, endowing it with new, ever-changing identities. Even as virtual futures disappear into actual pasts, nothing counts more than the pursuit of a dream.

#### **Cabinet of Curiosities<sup>36</sup>**

The Architecture Biennale was first set up in 1975, relatively recent when compared to the Venice Biennale's century-long history. Today, the Venice Biennale captures a multitude of interest from around the globe and attracts over 370,000 international visitors. Under the directorship of the Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena, and entitled 'Reporting from the front', the 15<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition dealt with focusing and learning from architectures that, through intelligence, intuition or both at the same time, escape the status quo.

AP's proposal reflected its interest in investigating the phases that lead to that architecture by focusing on memories. 'Memory is the only hell we are condemned to in complete innocence,' Godard said in *Nouvelle Vague*. What are those memories that architects pursue often unknowingly and which feed the meanders of an arcane architectural process?

The installation, conceived as a 'cabinet of curiosities' recollecting objects and images from AP's 25-year-old memory, allowed for a viewing – not of AP Vallettas – of 'the coming-into-being' of multiple social narratives particular to its projects. The installation reported on the transformational capacities implicit to architectural practice where each project evolved from and towards the construction of a social space. It emphasised the need for the architect to become a modern-day alchemist who must search for the secret of turning lead into gold.

Experimental processes are emphasised to encourage interaction and appropriation by the viewer. The confines of an island-state are defined but the potential is limitless both in its reach for excellence and in its destructive

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<sup>36</sup> *Cabinet of Curiosities* formed part of *Time Space Existence*, a collateral event to the Venice Biennale of Architecture, from May to November 2016 at Palazzo Mora, Venice, in collaboration with Aaron Bezzina, Alex Attard, Aude Franjou and Madeleine Gera. Organised by the Dutch non-profit Global Art Affairs Foundation.



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Year 2225. A triptych Installation within the collective exhibition *Time Space Existence*, Biennale di Architettura di Venezia, 2014. AP Valletta. Reprinted with permission. Photographer: Guillaume Dreyfuss

power. On an island that has embraced (over) development, the consequence of a thriving modern economy, architecture should very often be on the frontline, standing against speculation and uncouth construction.

Locally, therefore, architecture is in need of a (re-)think, an exploration of its expressions and innate interrogations, its manifold shadows. Not a soul searching or a somewhat post-mortem justification, but more a laboratory, a field of experimentation and research, an unlimited inquiry into the contemporary paradigms that lay claim on the discipline from time to time. Architecture needs consciousness to maintain its specificity as social art. Architecture is, finally, confrontation, of itself with its context, a curated impromptu between a structured rendition and a poetic metaphor.

### Waterfront<sup>37</sup>

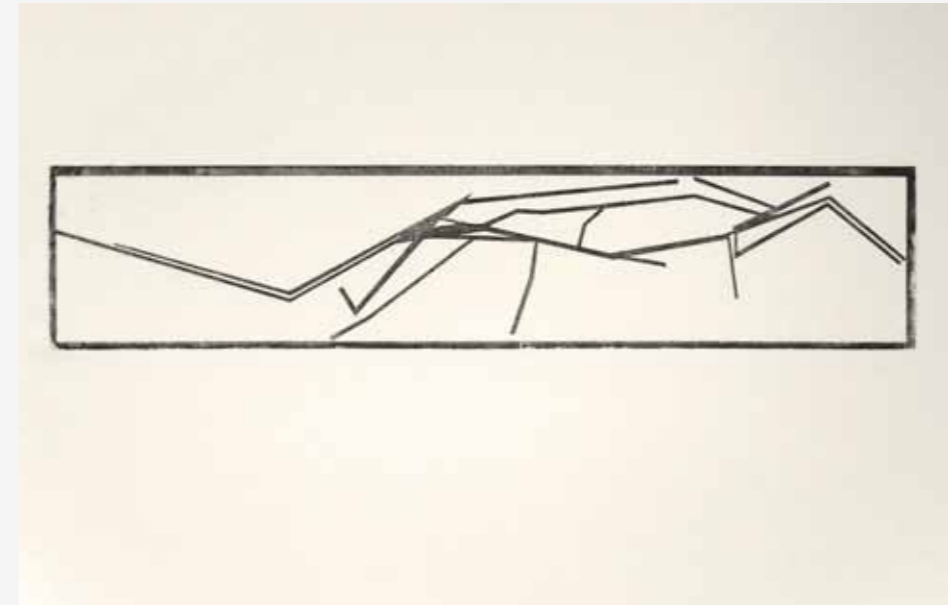
'Waterfront' is a lino print based on digital drawing. It formed part of the exhibition, 'Free Spaces - 13 words to represent architecture' and was a collaborative research project, establishing collections of architectural drawings for publication as limited editions. With this second round, La Galerie d'Architecture pursued a study of the representation of architecture begun with a boxed set of drawings by Álvaro Siza. The project focuses on the raw material of architecture, namely space. Each architect is given a specific word, inspiring an original artwork. Through this collaborative effort, the gallery sought to actively engage the 'free space that is architecture'.

AP's submission consisted of a work called 'Waterfront' on the theme 'Espace Parcours', an experiment on the marriage of cutting edge digital technologies and traditional techniques. The drawing is an abstraction of the Valletta Waterfront masterplan and it builds on the flux of people movement studies. The Waterfront was chosen as a symbolic representation of the Espace Parcours because of the parcours and the urban regeneration that it triggered – other projects like Barrakka Lift and Dock1 became possible also thanks to the regeneration of the Valletta Waterfront. The Waterfront drawing represents the flux générateur that made possible new parcours in the space.

### Lille 3000

We have not even got to the year 2018 and already we are talking about what legacy the European Capital of Culture project will leave and what will happen next. This is a good thing, though it is a discussion held when there is still some lack of clarity as to whether the implementation of the anticipated programme for cultural infrastructure will be completed in time and, if not, whether it will continue after the year is over, when inevitably funds and focus will be less available. So, it may be a good moment to look at models of the way in which other cities successfully put words into action and embarked on a strategy for long term culture-led regeneration.

<sup>37</sup> Waterfront formed part of a collaborative exhibition, '[Espaces Libres - 13 mots pour représenter l'architecture](#)' at La Galerie d'Architecture, in Paris, in November 2016.



Espace Parcours, AP Valletta's contribution to the collective exhibition Espaces Libres, La Galerie d'Architecture, Paris, 2016. AP Valletta. Reprinted with permission. Photographer: Erica Giusta

Lille3000, Parade d'ouverture, 2015. From <https://www.renaissance-lille.com/>

In 2004, Lille became European Capital of Culture. lille2004 drew upon the strengths of its artists and its community and the city underwent a successful transformation. The event changed the image of the city of Lille for good. lille2004 had helped release the tremendous creative energy of its territory.

2004 was so successful that the city developed a new programme after the year itself, called lille3000<sup>38</sup>. This new organisation facilitates the continuity of the cultural programme developed for 2004 and gives its citizens a new gateway to the future. lille3000 explores the richness and the complexities of the world of tomorrow by questioning the ways of its development.

What is important is not whether the legacy is a festival, or a biennial, or a new organisation to build long term strategy like lille3000. The benefits of a capital of culture year need to catalyse this new discourse on the future such that the city, any city, becomes a part of this development. Lille prides itself through this new venture – now more than 10 years old – to be an open city, inviting both locals and visitors to discover new cultures, through contemporary artistic and cultural activity and by sharing its manifestations with the largest number of people possible. lille3000 is now exploring a series of wide-ranging themes including the economy and new technologies, the art of living in the city and the building of the city of tomorrow.

Innovative cities are the ones which understand their roots, but are not afraid to reimagine their future.

It is important not to just try to turn back the clock, but to recognise that growth is going to happen in new ways and that this is not a bad thing. Innovation is not something that you just pull out of the air. Innovation needs to be built on what already exists.

Another important factor is the culture of the organisation, in this case the one, if any, that will replace V.18 if it will have any legacy of sorts from 2019, and the type of organisation and its mode of governance. This culture – and organisation – will need to be open to new ideas and question habit. That does not mean all habits are bad, but it does mean a habit is bad if it can't be explained or justified in terms of 'we've always done it this way.' Sometimes the old way is great. But if that is true, we should be able to explain and justify it. Some cities have been hugely successful in this to the great benefit of their communities, and not necessarily limited to the ones which have held the title of European Capital of Culture. Barcelona is probably the best example.

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38 See <http://www.lille3000.eu/portail/>.



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Students working at fablabvalletta during the EASA workshop 2015. fablabvalletta. Reprinted with permission.



fablabvalletta. Reprinted with permission.

## Fablabs are the future

Tomás Diez, director of Fab Lab Barcelona, explained that their idea is to make Barcelona a Fab City. The current urban success of Barcelona can be seen as a product of major events like the 1992 Olympics and the Universal Forum of Cultures in 2004. For the future of Barcelona, Vincente Guallart (former director of the Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC) and chief architect of Barcelona), and Antoni Vives (deputy mayor in charge of urban planning and information and technology) aim to build Barcelona 5.0.

This proposal consists of a Fab City made up of an interconnected community of neighborhood Fab Labs. Their goals would be to encourage entrepreneurship and interest in innovation that have already been present in Barcelona throughout centuries. As they see it, bringing manufacturing back to cities will lead us through a new industrial revolution where production methods and

social bonds will be transformed. To set the project up they have developed a new brand – Fab City. The goal is to set up a Fab Lab in each neighborhood to produce devices and products for the local community. Fab Labs would eventually be managed by purposely trained residents in the neighborhood.

**Neighborhoods will be production clusters, as they were in the medieval age, we are on our way to a high tech medieval age.**

In parallel, another important project growing in Barcelona is seeking to make it a ‘smarter’ city. Guallart’s team has been developing a model to define the anatomy of cities, using a set of common parameters, that could be used worldwide to characterise each city. It is called

City Protocol and it aims to be a kind of unique ‘city ID card’. City Protocol is a certification based system that aims to offer a unique fingerprint for each city, based on a series of parameters like information, water, energy, mobility and production. As Neil Gershenfeld sees it, cities would become truly self-sufficient by developing these projects. He describes this scenario as, ‘a solution to avoid the economic and ecological disaster of the current global production system’.

‘Neighborhoods will be production clusters, as they were in the medieval age, we are on our way to a high tech medieval age, not only concentrated into the technocrat point of view, but with a high load of humanism and local needs perspective.’

Diez believes that ICT technologies will help us to find cheaper, healthier and more beautiful and sustainable solutions for cities. Technology is helping promote people’s participation and engagement in bottom-up projects to raise awareness on specific local problems. Diez hopes the Fab City project will promote the participation and engagement of people in this transformative process of the city.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Sarah A Ivarellos, interviewing Tomás Diez 4/4 *Fabbing & cities: Barcelona Fab City*, from <http://complexity.com/english/44-fabbing-cities-barcelona-fab-city/#.WOPDQy1s2w> (2012).

## Make (almost) anything

A Fab Lab is a technical prototyping platform for education, innovation and invention. To be a Fab Lab means connecting to a global community of learners, educators, technologists, researchers, makers and innovators, a knowledge sharing network that already spans 50 countries and 24 time zones. Because all Fab Labs share common tools and processes, the programme is building a global network, a distributed laboratory for research and invention.

Fablabvalletta is part of the Fab Foundation network. It is a mini lab in Valletta and launched in 2015 to provide a platform for the European Architecture Students Assembly (EASA) held in Valletta and involving the participation of 500 architecture students for a series of workshops lasting two weeks. A Fab Lab (or fabrication laboratory) is a workshop for personal digital fabrication, equipped with an array of flexible computer controlled tools and various materials, with the aim to 'make almost anything', the mantra of this MIT-led new digital fabrication revolution.<sup>40</sup>

## Urban tension: Valletta, a laboratory for new ideas

Gershenfeld first floated the parallel between personal computing and personal fabrication in the beginning of this century. His intent was to study the boundary between computer science and physical science in a facility set up to make and measure things that are as small as atoms and as big as buildings. He taught a small group of research students how to use the tools at hand but was overwhelmed by the demand from students who just wanted to make things and become inventors. But the roots of the revolution date back to 1952, when researchers at MIT<sup>41</sup> wired an early digital computer to a milling machine, creating the first numerically controlled machine tool. Local demand has pulled Fab Labs worldwide. All the labs share the same minimum core capabilities and this allows projects to be shared and people to travel from one lab to another. The project promoted the call to 'Think globally, fabricate locally'.<sup>42</sup>

This is the very essence of the European Capital of Culture project and what it could mean for Valletta. The title granted to the city calls for a meaningful process for the citizens of the city, of Malta and of Europe to connect and improve. During the selection process in 2011, Mark-Anthony Falzon had written in the Sunday Times of Malta that, 'Valletta 2018 serves up a wonderful opportunity to locate ourselves within currents rather than stagnant ponds. The point is not some airy-fairy notion of 'multiculturalism' or 'celebrating diversity', but rather one that understands locality in terms of connections.'<sup>43</sup>

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40 See <http://fablabvalletta.org>

41 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)'s Fab Lab Network was set up by Neil Gershenfeld and the MIT Centre for Bits and Atoms.

42 Neil Gershenfeld, *How to make almost anything: The digital fabrication revolution*. In 'Foreign Affairs', 91, No.6 (2012), 42-57.

43 Falzon, Good News for our City.

**Think globally,  
fabricate locally.<sup>42</sup>**

Earlier In 2008, I had interviewed then Prime Minister, Lawrence Gonzi, about the future of Valletta. He had said that, 'Malta has always been, despite its size, a fascinating laboratory for new experiences... In a sense, Malta, but especially Valletta, was then an experiment of that which would eventually bring Europe together. These experiences, in the city of Valletta but within the context of the capital of the Order were the beginning of a time of great change in Europe, from division to the rediscovery of its roots. The architecture of Valletta relates this story.'<sup>44</sup>

The European Capital of Culture is a continuous project. Soon after the end of Valletta's period of tenure, Malta will need to start preparing for the next time it will host the event. A Maltese locality will next be Capital of Culture in 2031 and at least six years of preparation will be necessary. Moreover, on 28 March 2066, Valletta will be celebrating its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Then we will know what sort of legacy V.18 will have left.

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44 David Felice, *The stuff that dreams are made of*. In ME Design Magazine (2008). 28-30.



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Novelletta model, London Festival of Architecture 2010. AP Valletta. Reprinted with permission. Photographer: Guillaume Dreyfuss