

The Impact of the European Union on Cultural Policy in Malta

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Abstract

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This paper will address the impact of the European Union (EU) on cultural policy development in Malta. The attention paid by the EU to globalising matters through culture, particularly i) citizenship participation in relation to social integration, ii) economic revival through urban regeneration, and iii) cultural diplomacy with regard to internationalisation efforts, is acknowledged and assessed through a focus on recent Maltese cultural practice. Impact will be assessed in relation to a) policy as well as legislation, b) funding structures and incentives, and c) implementation measures through initiatives taken by Maltese public cultural institutions. Convergences and divergences in comparison with key EU strategic actions will be discussed, with reference made to major legislative documents, funding programmes, and cultural projects undertaken by Maltese authorities and other cultural stakeholders in response or in relation to European developments.

Introduction

The role of the European Union (EU) in addressing cultural matters on a global level is intertwined with the relationship between cultural policy at the EU level and at the Member State (MS) level, in observance of the subsidiarity principle.¹ The impact of the EU on cultural policy in Malta has been experienced, and may be assessed, in relation to the enlargement process of 2004. This paper will address this impact with reference to three areas closely related to policy-making, namely a) legislation, b) funding, and c) cultural initiatives that are directly related to EU membership. Furthermore, it will look at how these areas have addressed topics of importance to EU cultural policy, namely i) citizenship participation and particularly social integration, ii) urban regeneration with a special emphasis on the economic value of the enterprise in relation to heritage and tourism, and iii) efforts at engaging with an international diplomatic agenda. To conclude, the influence of the EU on Maltese policy areas that lie outside culture, yet are close to it, will be briefly addressed. These outlying yet related areas include education, social affairs, international affairs, and agricultural/fisheries concerns.

The EU agenda on a global level

The role of the EU with regard to culture extends to policy areas that bring together neo-liberal economic priorities with social concerns. This role cuts across different territorial levels, including trans-national, national and intra-national levels, while developing a regional reality of its own. The EU adopts contrasting measures and rhetoric in favour of the free market while concerning itself with poverty and other aspects of social inequality and disaggregation. These contradictions lead to an underlying tension between EU economic and social policy.

¹ The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality are established by Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Protocol (No 2). A detailed discussion of the relevance of these principles to cultural matters is provided below. The text of the article reads as follows:
'Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level.
The institutions of the Union shall apply the principle of subsidiarity as laid down in the Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. National Parliaments ensure compliance with the principle of subsidiarity in accordance with the procedure set out in that Protocol.'

This tension travels across different geographic zones, both internal as well as external to the EU (Cafruny 2016: 9-27). The European political block has adopted a very hard-nosed agenda towards its economic, financial and political survival (Marsili and Varoufakis 2017: 14-17). This may be witnessed in a number of situations. These include the approach adopted by the EU to the European populations more seriously affected by the 2008 economic and financial crisis in its insistence on austerity rather than solidarity; a growing number of economic bilateral trade agreements promoting free trade with third countries,² including the scuppered Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) attempted with the US; and the drive towards securing and securitising neighbouring territories to the east and south of Europe through economic, intelligence and military means.

Within this context, cultural initiatives on a global, as well as a European, scale shed light on an inherent contradiction in the guiding philosophy adopted by the EU. Over the past years, the EU agenda for culture in a globalising world has attempted to portray the enlightened aspect of the Union and project a collaborative dimension based on humanity, tolerance, innovation, and creativity.³ The appreciation of difference and acceptance of cultural diversity outside as well as within the EU have been presented as the keystones for all future relations within the EU. The most visible level of recognition for these efforts came in the form of the granting of the Nobel Prize for Peace to the EU in 2012 for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights, albeit restricted to the European territory. The promotion of a strategy for global engagement on a cultural basis, as part of a series of efforts by the EU that encompass different policy areas seeking to achieve various ends, particularly the economic ones set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth and jobs, has become a mainstay of the European approach.⁴ These include the tools of 'soft power' that are themselves means of building trust and

² For a full list of such agreements, consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/> [accessed 6 October 2017].

³ For further detail, one may refer to the following, recent publications by the European Commission: Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, *Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations*, Brussels 8 June 2016; and Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *On a European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World*, Brussels 10 May 2007. Both texts can be found at: https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/strategic-framework_en [accessed 6 October 2017].

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy_en [accessed 6 October 2017].

goodwill for further economic ends (Nye 2004). The ratification of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions very soon after its publication in 2005 further cemented this global vision, adhering to the respect of cultural diversity as a means of enabling the targeted and strategic development of international trade protocols on cultural terms in ways that are advantageous to the EU (UNESCO 2015).

Cultural policy in Europe

On an intra-European level, the EU has also had a tough balancing act to manage, and it did so with varying results. It is important to note that from a strictly technical perspective, the EU does not have a cultural policy, as it has in other areas where its competencies reach further into national jurisdiction.⁵ Rather, the principle of subsidiarity prevails since 'national cultures [...] have, of course, been the primary frame of reference in which cultural policy agendas have been elaborated in modern Europe' (Meinhof and Triandafyllidou 2006: 3). In areas in which the EU does not have exclusive competence, such as culture, subsidiarity seeks to safeguard the ability of the MS to make decisions and take action. The reference to the principle in the EU Treaties (TEU) is aimed at ensuring that powers are exercised as close to the citizen as possible, in accordance with the proximity principle referred to in Article 10(3) of the TEU.

Decisions by the different EU bodies, including the Council of the EU, on cultural matters respect the competences of MS in this area on the basis of national identity and sensitivities related to national cultural expressions. When drafting, debating, and approving documents that set policy guidelines, funding cultural programmes, and promoting the engagement of citizens through particular actions, attention is given by the relevant authorities to allow the necessary leeway for MS to implement and monitor progress in ways that respect national competencies. While laudable in its intention, the subsidiarity principle is open to misuse and enables MS to shape guidelines and funding, as well as the mobilisation of resources on a national level but within an EU framework, to achieve arguably nationalistic aims. The results may thus only partially match

⁵ One such area is the Digital Single Market. Interestingly, legal tools such as the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, regularly revised in light of ongoing technological developments, do regulate a key area of cultural expression and consumption, with significant economic import.

expectations established at the outset at best and justify national or nationalistic action that contradicts original aims and values through European mechanisms and funds at worst.⁶

On the level of initiatives, funding schemes encouraging intra-European collaboration have accompanied and supported the steps undertaken by the EU towards enlargement and integration since the late 1970s. In 1992, a supranational competence on culture was included in the TEU signed in Maastricht, then amended in Amsterdam in 1997. A specific title on culture led to the Kaleidoscope programme on cultural cooperation, Raphael on cultural heritage and Ariane on publishing and reading, while Culture 2000 effectively reorganised these programmes while establishing a new structure for new programmes (Sassatelli 2006: 28).

Creative Europe is the most recent framework programme managed by the European Commission aiming to support the culture and audio-visual sectors. This programme follows on from the Culture Programme and the MEDIA programme with a budget of €1.46 billion, or 9% higher than its predecessors.⁷ It is worth noting that further support has stemmed from outside the cultural funding programmes of the EU, chiefly structural funds.

The success of MS in making the best use of funds to date differs for various reasons. Geographical factors include centrality, contiguity with other neighbouring countries, size, and topography. Similarly important factors are the levels of infrastructure, communications, and transport within and with other MS. Related to these factors are the demographics, including the size, diversity, skill sets, and education levels of the population. Differences on the basis of membership years of the EU are not consistent: since the 2004 enlargement, central and eastern European countries, as well as Croatia most recently, have outstripped Cyprus and Malta, who suffer from further peripherality and literal isolation, and have caught up with older MS with whom they have also developed good networks and co-productions.⁸

Since 1985, the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) has developed into arguably the flagship cultural programme of

⁶ An account of how the European Capital of Culture process in Malta reflects such mutations is given below.

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/about_en [accessed 6 October 2017].

⁸ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/selection-results_en [accessed 24 October 2017].

the EU.⁹ This is because it requests an ever-growing number of candidate cities to address economic and urban regeneration on the one hand, and social inclusion through civic participation on the other, thus addressing at least two of the main targets of EU Strategy 2020. As argued by several researchers studying the impact of capitals of culture throughout Europe, and as per the overall tensions experienced by the EU in trying to pursue social goals while engaging in neo-liberal economic practices as outlined above, achieving these twin goals often proves contradictory for participating cities.¹⁰

Other initiatives that have contributed to generating a greater sense of European belonging and engagement, albeit with less popular appeal than capitals of culture, include the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Prize and the European Union Prize for Literature. It is hoped that their impact on addressing the European sense of malaise and disaffection that has spread throughout the Union may become more than a token contribution. Rather than gaining visibility and funding to further the aims of the projects, they should be supported in such a way that they filter down to and help shape education systems across the MS. As discussed at the European Cultural Forum in Milan in 2017 on the occasion of the official launch of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, if tangible and intangible heritage are 'the beating heart of Europe', it may be worth paying more attention to the value of these areas of identity and how they can contribute to a better understanding of citizenship in Europe today.¹¹

It is worth noting that being 'classified within those domains where the Community has only complementary competence', initiatives supported and funded by the EU are 'still rather limited' (Sassatelli 2006: 27-28). It may be further noted that the 'iron rule of unanimity at the same time testifies to the reticence of member states to delegate even small portions of sovereignty, and has the effect of slowing down every initiative' (Sassatelli 2006: 27). This, together with the relatively small budget directly dedicated to culture, reinforces MS efforts at keeping funding

⁹ The relative popularity of the process has inspired similar, simplified ones in Asia, South America and among Arab countries.

¹⁰ See: Immler, N. L. and Sakkers, H., 2014. (Re)Programming Europe: European Capitals of Culture: rethinking the role of culture, *Journal of European Studies*, 44 (1): 3-29; Lähdesmäki, T. 2013. Cultural activism as a counter-discourse to the European Capital of Culture programme: The case of Turku 2011, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16 (5): 598-619; O'Callaghan, C., 2012. Urban anxieties and creative tensions in the European Capital of Culture 2005: 'It couldn't just be about Cork, like', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 18 (2): 185-204.

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/culture/event/forum-2017_en [accessed 6 October 2017].

for cultural initiatives separate from other funding streams and mainstream policy areas where the EU can intervene more directly, to the benefit of more national control over culture.

Maltese cultural relations with Europe

The political context that has implicitly and explicitly shaped the nation's understanding of and approach towards cultural policy is a colonial one. The British colonial experience formed the civil service and government structures before and after Independence and still acts as a strong reference point. On the other hand, the longer cultural tradition lies with Italy, part of the Axis forces fighting the British in World War II, which saw Malta as a strategic Allied stronghold in the Mediterranean (Frendo 2012).

Relations between Malta and the EU preceded preparation for the accession to the *acquis communautaire* at the start of the new millennium. Throughout its years in Opposition in the early years of the 1980s, the Christian democrat, conservative *Partit Nazzjonalista* (Nationalist Party), of Italianate inspiration, set out joining the European Economic Community (EEC) as a political goal with strong cultural undertones, in opposition to the British-inspired socialist Malta Labour Party government's policy to antagonise the West and build closer links with the Gaddafi regime and other political allies distrusted by the US (The Today Public Policy Institute 2014; McFadden 2012).

Political links with Europe have been long-standing, both preceding and immediately following Independence from Great Britain in 1964. Bilateral agreements with the UK and Italy included cultural and educational provisions that assisted young professionals within particular administrations to invest in capacity-building exercises, particularly with regard to curatorship, heritage, conservation, and the performing arts (British Council Malta 2017; Cremona 2008; Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion 2017). Prior to that, the rule of the Knights of St John, also known as the Knights of Malta, and Napoleonic France between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, brought sovereignty and governance matters close to cultural development in the fields of architecture, sacred art, music, and other forms addressing cultural diplomacy and the ostentation of power.¹²

¹² <https://www.stjohnscocathedral.com/history-of-st-johns/> [accessed 9 October 2017].

The cultural milieu in preparation for enlargement

A few years prior to the commencement of preparations for enlargement, the capital city of Malta, Valletta, participated in a special edition of the celebration of the cities of culture in Europe. In 1990, the Culture Ministers of the EEC created the European Cultural Month initiative, 'intended to respond to the widespread interest in the European Cities of Culture initiative, especially in cities outside the Community, taking into account the political changes in eastern and central Europe (Resolution 90/C 162/01)' (Palmer-Rae Associates 2004: 158). As will be shown, Valletta's efforts 'to develop a broad programme with wide appeal' with an emphasis on improving infrastructure, while still running into various bureaucratic and mismanagement mishaps, seems to have acted as a preview of the European Capital of Culture year in 2018 (Palmer-Rae Associates 2004: 158).

This brief yet telling episode was followed by a long series of policy, legal, and funding developments which one can argue were directly linked, and in direct response to, upcoming EU membership. While it is true that cultural matters of a national kind, like policy, belong to the practice of the state, it was a small group of inspired academics, researchers, and government officials who, over the years, realised and worked on the notion of the importance of developing the basis of a framework necessary to ensure that cultural management in Malta would comply with European practices and stand a greater chance of accessing the opportunities, including funding, to be made available. The support of European expertise in this field was sought, most notably with the guidance of Cultural Committee of the Council of Europe.¹³

In 2002, two key pieces of legislation were put in place. The first was the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts Act, establishing for the first time a cultural agency at arm's length from the government to set policy and manage cultural funds while developing an international agenda for cultural participation. The second was the Cultural Heritage Act, whereby the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage was set up in a way that was autonomous from government and with the ability to monitor and safeguard national heritage. Alongside the Superintendence, the national agency for the management

¹³ The Malta entry to the *Compendium: Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*, authored by Toni Attard, formerly Director of Strategy at Arts Council Malta, provides an extensive and exhaustive review of aspects of cultural policy history and practice in Malta: <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/malta.php?aid=1> [accessed 8 October 2017].

of heritage sites was created: Heritage Malta was responsible for modernising the approach previously adopted by the Museums Department, a government structure, by seeking private partnerships to augment funding, popularise and maintain its sites, and encourage local as well as international visitors to engage with them.¹⁴

The first steps following EU membership

Once membership of the EU was affected and the inter-relation and exchange of best practice became a reality among a very competitive union of twenty-seven Members States, following the entry of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, Malta was in a position to engage in and contribute to the rate at which the development of policy, legislation, and funding structures accelerated. In 2006, the Creative Economy Working Group, albeit consisting only of four officials, two of whom were cultural professionals, was established within the remit of the ministry responsible for finance to effectively set up a national infrastructure with which to support the development of the private sector as a key stakeholder in cultural development. Prior to this date, most cultural activity related to heritage and tourism, and the relatively limited number of visual and performing arts expressions of an independent, innovative type, were dwarfed and out-funded by exhibitions, festivals, and concerts organised and/or funded by government or church authorities. The closing of the first decade of the twenty-first century saw, for the first time, Malta address in terms of policy, legislation, and funding its nascent cultural and creative industries.

It is no coincidence that in 2011, this drive towards a closer bond with EU policies aimed at the development of a stronger single market in relation to its cultural industries resulted in the overdue publication of Malta's first national cultural policy. While prioritising the economic value of culture and creativity, the small group of competent and experienced professionals responsible for the drafting of the policy also highlighted civic participation, access to the arts, cultural education, the professionalization of the sector and the internationalisation of arts from Malta (Parliamentary Secretariat for Tourism, the Environment and Culture 2011). The echoes between EU policy in this area, and that of Malta, are clear and intended.

¹⁴ <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/countries-profiles-structure.php> [accessed 6 October 2017].

In the field of funding, in 2015, the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts was rebranded as Arts Council Malta (ACM) following the election of the *Partit Laburista* (Labour Party) on the basis of a political manifesto promoting further access to culture and a strong social equality agenda. This change spearheaded further investment. This led to a shift in emphasis on the development of further funding streams for local as well as international artists engaged in artistic activity stressing quality, accessibility, professionalisation, international collaboration and export. This shift once again reflected the growing importance of culture in the EU's own internal hierarchy.

During this period, the profile of cultural matters across EU policy areas grew for a number of reasons. These included culture being recognised as a relatively new and under-utilised vector for economic regeneration, particularly in the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis of 2008. Furthermore, the cultural sector was seen to develop inherently closer links with the three key areas mentioned above, namely: i) economic growth and the development of the jobs market through digitalisation, innovation and information technology; ii) the social agenda, including the promotion of intercultural dialogue among different people within and outside the EU, the integration of migrants and the addressing of social ills such as poverty and exclusion; and iii) cultural diplomacy.

The following sections will look at these three areas of cultural interest in detail. They will attempt to draw out connections between national and European strategic objectives and assess the way they have been addressed through the three key tools of a) policy and legislation, b) strategic funding, and c) initiatives, with particular reference to the ECoc project.

Policy and legislation

As noted above, Malta published its national cultural policy in 2011. The process had started in the early 1990s, and a close reading of different drafts shows a growing concern with a number of areas of importance to the EU. The main areas of concern that featured across different drafts were those reflecting an understandable concern with the protection of national cultural traits, including language and folkloristic means of expression, in the face of an increasingly globalising world (Ministry of Education 2001). However, later versions and

the policy itself reflect a will to engage with the challenges posed by globalisation and seek to place Malta on the international cultural map. In so doing, culture was intended to open other doors, particularly economic and diplomatic ones (Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport 2010).

Together with these concerns that resonate with EU priorities, one can also observe a growing realisation of the need to engage with wider, more diverse audiences for various reasons. Therefore, the priority of policy makers to increase audiences, diversify cultural content, make it accessible and encourage citizenship participation in order to justify financial investment in the cultural sector, seemed to match a larger concern at EU level. This consisted of keeping culture relevant through popular, meaningful and innovative ways, also through the more effective use of the media and technological tools (Council of the European Union 2014).

A more subtle instrumental use of cultural policy was visible in the social agenda that Maltese cultural policy, like EU efforts, aimed towards. Matters of diversity, inclusion, and even integration of migrant communities make an appearance, and funding in culture, like in other MS, including the UK which, to date, Maltese policy in various areas still follows closely, was justified less for intrinsic, artistic purposes and more for any social contribution it could provide (Hewison 2014). As with EU policy, one could start to witness the beginning of the growing tension between assessing the cultural impact by setting social goals on the one hand, and measuring economic targets through the cultural and creative industries and economic output and jobs on the other.

One more point worth mentioning is the progressive and liberal agenda adopted by the Maltese government since 2013 that has extended to cultural matters and particularly the repeal of censorship laws (Bondin 2015).¹⁵ The abolishment of censorship has led to an environment that has encouraged personal expression, including artists, without the risk of running into criminal charges for the vilification of religion or other aspects of morality, which remain important in everyday cultural life. This agenda mirrors efforts elsewhere in the EU, although not everywhere, encouraging a freer form of expression and fewer restrictions on what may or may not be said. It is interesting to note that on the other hand, the financially and politically pervasive role of government in

¹⁵ However, the proposed new media law somewhat reintroduces elements of censorship, as reported in Camilleri 2017.

the production of cultural and audio-visual material has effectively silenced into complacency many artists who may otherwise challenge public mores, thus creating a level of false serenity and control in the public sphere in less drastic and yet more devious ways (Leone Ganado 2017).

Strategy for growth

The ACM Create 2020 Strategy is the current policy-inspired text and framework that ties in closely with the EU cultural policy strategic framework as well as the economic and social goals the EU aims to achieve in the coming years. The document outlines a very ambitious set of goals to be achieved by 2020, overlapping with a number of key cultural events in Malta, particularly the hosting of the ECoC in 2018. The cultural development aimed for in relation to this event lies at the heart of the efforts towards legacy-setting and sustainability. As will be discussed below, the severe shortcomings in the ECoC project will hamper efforts to achieve these strategic goals, which however remain part of a key document and roadmap for further development in Malta that matches aims set out at the EU level (Arts Council Malta 2015).

Firstly, the Create 2020 Strategy aims to pay a great deal of importance to matters of economic development through the fostering of strong conditions for the growth of small creative businesses in a climate of innovation and robust cultural structures. In this, although not explicitly stated, the influence of EU policies to plug the cultural and creative industries into the European economy and jobs market is clear. To achieve this, ACM envisages investing in business development and mentoring, encouraging seeking alternative sources of funding to public money, enabling closer collaboration between creatives, the public sector, and the private sector, and fostering clustering and networking through public-private partnerships. Challenges that may limit the ambitions of ACM include lack of expertise, reticence by the private sector to dedicate resources to cultural matters, lack of political will, and – in a scenario of economic downturn that may follow the current expanding boom – a realignment of priorities and resources by state and private investors (Pace 2017).

Secondly, the strategy is also in tune with EU policy aims in favour of engaging wider sectors of the population in creative activity for social interaction and well-being, with an aim towards generating economic impact. This area poses one of

the main challenges to the implementation of cultural policy as populations are not static, but changing. They are also not passively waiting for engagement, but are generally occupied with other activities with which cultural activities may need to compete, rather than complement. One drawback of the strategy that is particularly evident in this area is the relatively wide remit in relation to the areas of engagement being envisaged, making targeted success difficult to achieve.

A third aspect worth highlighting is the aim of connecting Malta to the international artistic community. While goals are outlined and strategic routes are delineated, challenges to overcoming nationalistic and at times parochial expectations by government institutions, including public cultural organisations, whose leaders are appointed by the state itself to address local agendas, remain hard to overcome. As noted in the strategy, the participation of cultural organisations and individuals in international forums and festivals has increased. However, a clear plan to lead to the identification of the necessary resources to go beyond simple participation and become an active contributor and partner remains to be seen (Xuereb 2017b).

Cultural initiatives

The final section of this paper will look at how the areas of social integration, urban regeneration, and cultural diplomacy relate to the ECoC in Malta in 2018. The initiative was launched in 1985, before EU cultural competence was established, by the artist Melina Mercouri, who was Greek Minister for Culture at the time, and her French counterpart, Jack Lang (Sassatelli 2006: 33). A strong dimension of the project remains its appeal to candidates to be a 'European' city (Sassatelli 2006: 26), starting with the first phase when cities were assigned the title as a form of recognition of their cultural value, through the second phase realising the regenerative value of the initiative starting with Glasgow in 1990, and continuing with the current growing awareness of the value of exploiting ECoC as an opportunity to address citizenship and social issues. Arguably, such a vision is still a guiding principle for the European Commission, the monitoring panel appointed by the Commission, and participating cities: 'To *be* European means more than being in Europe for these cities, it means to *become* European in a more significant, auratic, and thus also less-defined sense. To be able to see and enhance one's own Europeanness is a sign

of distinction, of a high cultural capital, to put it *à la Bourdieu'* (Sassatelli 2006: 26).

Cities bidding for the title still seem to reflect this ambition at the candidacy stage, as can be witnessed by their submitted bid books. This European vision is sharpened through the materialisation of the cultural programme of cities that have succeeded in winning the title during the preparation phase, when the advice and guidance of the monitoring panel may be fundamental in defining the final steps towards implementation. However, it has been observed that certain cities do lay such ideals by the side in pursuit of more concrete, tangible, and deliverable objectives, like economic regeneration. This is particularly true in relation to the development of infrastructure, increasing growth and jobs, and attracting higher numbers of tourists (Monitoring and Advisory Panel 2017; Žilič-Fišer and Erjavec 2015).

Valletta is a case in point of this trend. A strong characteristic of the project during the preparation phase was the pursuit of the city to regain its European credentials, linked to its foundation by the Knights of St John in 1566 when it was supported and financed by various noble families and royalty across Europe until the end of the eighteenth century (Mitchell 2002). The ambition of establishing 'an environment of exchange' reflected efforts at transcending the past through the present with an eye on the future in recognising the culturally rich and diverse milieu Valletta had enjoyed, lost through years of neglect and urban growth elsewhere on the Island, and sought to regenerate through the ECOC title (Valletta 2018 Foundation, 2012; 2011).

With regard to the areas under examination here, the one area which has met, and even exceeded, expectation is the economic one (Manduca 2014). On the other hand, little has been achieved in terms of social regeneration and cultural diplomacy.¹⁶ This is in large part down to the way the communication and delivery of the cultural programme has been watered down. Focus has been on appealing to existing audience segments through popular marketing techniques. This has led to an under-valuing and short-changing of

¹⁶ Out of a programme which boasts more than four hundred events, community projects aiming at addressing social regeneration are less than ten: <http://valletta2018.org/cultural-programme/the-valletta-2018-cultural-programme/> [accessed 15 January 2018]. With regard to cultural diplomacy, the most notable effort consisted of exporting a Maltese nativity crib to the Vatican, and then Betlehem, in 2016 and 2017 respectively: <http://maltawinds.com/2017/12/17/maltese-artistic-crib-inaugurated-bethlehem/> [accessed 15 January 2018].

the challenging, engaging, and European dimensions of the programme, choosing to present the opportunity for engagement not as one of citizenship participation through culture and the arts, but one of self-congratulation, praise, and celebration (Valletta 2018 Foundation 2017). A sense of achievement, of having 'made it', is pervasive and parallels the rhetoric of the party in government, who directly or indirectly appointed most of the key people in the cultural institutions in Malta. It is not surprising that they are trumpeting the current season in Malta as 'the best time ever' (*L-Aqwa Żmien ta' Pajjiżna*).

In terms of cultural diversity, little effort has been maintained to engage with different audiences and scarce residual impact on Malta's diverse population is envisaged. On the one hand, the programme itself has sustained preparatory efforts at reaching out to different sectors of society and even encouraging those not traditionally familiar with particular art forms or ways of performance to be part of creative processes and eventually attend the delivery of events, in line with the ACM strategy for a broader appeal of the arts. On the other hand, outreach to new audiences has been curtailed to an exercise in popular, broad-stroke marketing that tends to deliver what is expected to easily targeted audience segments, with little creativity going into actually mixing audiences up and encouraging different people to engage with programmes generally outside their cultural, social, or financial experiences.¹⁷

It is worth noting that at the organisational level, political and personal allegiances have encouraged particular groups of people to work on delivering the programme, while excluding others. One may speak of the maintaining of a trend in this case, as political affiliation and practice generates groups of collaborators, at the expense of true inclusion and diversity even from a professional, management, and logistical level. A country the size of Malta, at just over three hundred square kilometres, and with a population of just under half a million, handicaps itself further by hampering its main economic resource: that of humans.

As noted above, the ECoC initiative in Malta has contributed to the general economic well-being of the capital city, as well as the Island. This is true in terms of tourism as well as the upgrade of particular areas of infrastructure. The impact is particularly felt in terms of the several *palazzi* that have

¹⁷ The discourse employed is traditional and conservative, relying on tropes and language common in parish celebrations of the local *festi* (feasts).

been cleaned and refitted to house boutique hotels, and key sites like the old covered market, the relocated museum of art along the lines of community-driven curatorship, and the old slaughterhouse to host an international design cluster.

However, plans for addressing the dearth of infrastructure that can deal with contemporary artistic expression, particularly visual and performing arts, remains. The lack of political and administrative will, rooted in what is a lack of understanding of contemporary cultural needs stemming from colonial short-sightedness, has weakened efforts to curate and host important contemporary exhibitions and other projects in Valletta and elsewhere in Malta. Ironically, while public authorities trumpet the regeneration of Valletta on the basis of popular attraction and an increase in tourism, the cultural offer lacks innovation in a general way, with the exception of a number of heritage and ecclesiastical events (Xuereb 2017a). On the other hand, residents and middle-to-lower class sections of the population see their capital city and areas once inhabited by popular and working classes becoming gentrified and out of reach (Zahra 2016).

A similar omission may be observed with regard to the digital agenda that is promoted by the EU and also supported on a national level.¹⁸ In local terms, efforts towards integrating technological innovation into cultural expression as a means of engaging with young audiences have improved, and collaborations among entities responsible for culture and science have increased (Arts Council Malta 2017). However, in comparison to other ECoCs, efforts in Malta feel underwhelming, especially when models are repeated rather than improved upon through innovation.¹⁹ Furthermore, important linkages between different sectors of the creative industries, including design and technology, are not exploited enough to generate new areas of economic growth and jobs, in line with European and national agendas.

With regard to cultural diplomacy efforts in relation to the ECoC, one can note a quantitative increase in the number of European artists engaged to contribute to the local programme. The artists range from organisations with experience in spectacles that are ideal for big events to individual artists or

¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/scoreboard/malta> [accessed 9 October 2017].

¹⁹ Mons2015 and its legacy project Mons2025 and Aarhus 2017 provide interesting examples: <http://www.mons2025.eu/en/node/128>; <http://www.smartaarhus.eu/projects/aarhus-2017> [both accessed 9 October 2017].

small collectives focusing on smaller projects. However, as has happened with ECoCs preceding Valletta, efforts to accompany these interventions with sustainable collaboration and international influence through networking and exchange of best practice is left unplanned and unfunded. Following the great expectations generated between 2016 and 2017 with the hosting of the World Summit on Arts and Culture organised by the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), the Med Forum by the Anna Lindh Foundation and a series of cultural events during the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU, the actual capital culture year seems not to have fulfilled its potential.

The impact of non-culture policy areas on culture

As we near the conclusion of this paper and its attempt to draw out links between policy areas and tools in the field of culture, it is worth noting that a great deal of effort towards cultural development is initiated outside of its strict remit. This is true at both the EU and the MS level. As noted earlier, one key area of EU policy and the ensuing funding that addresses cultural initiatives is that of Structural Funds aimed at supporting local and regional development across Europe. While the priorities are economic and social, a significant number of projects and funds are tied in with cultural objectives that directly contribute to the EU Strategy 2020 and its goals for growth across the Union.

The same applies to Malta. A number of development projects in conjunction with Valletta 2018 and elsewhere on the Island have cultural tie-ins that address regenerative aims by addressing cultural aspects of society. The Valletta Design Cluster application for around €5M in European Regional Development Funds is an example of this, as are other small amounts applied for projects to affect local level development, intertwining economic, social, and cultural developments. It will be worth noting the future of such investment in light of the termination of the current funding programme in 2020.

There are several other areas lying outside the strict confines of culture that contribute significantly to the furthering of cultural aims. At both the EU and the MS level, education, social affairs, international affairs, and agriculture/fisheries have all drawn links with cultural affairs, given the social and relational dimensions they share.

On the one hand, one may witness several in-roads being

made by non-culture policy areas into the cultural sphere which have been influenced to varying degrees. Arguably, the opposite has been lacking. At both the EU and the MS level, cultural policy-making and initiatives have had a limited impact on economic and social matters, with the exception of areas closely related to culture, such as tourism. Recent efforts to try to relate culture to other policy areas and grow closer to planning and funding in areas outside its direct remit as a way of developing more holistic and socially-progressive projects of a strategically economic nature are therefore encouraged.²⁰

Conclusion and recommendations

As was outlined earlier and discussed above, the principle of subsidiarity, established and exercised with regard to cultural policy in Europe in order to respect national cultures, has its drawbacks: these stem from limits related to effectiveness and accountability to an over-arching authority. As things stand, a system of 'direct grants to various cultural actors, operating mainly at the local level, is thus at the heart of the EU cultural policy' (Sassatelli 2006: 28). While not invoking a centralised model wherein Brussels controls the development of cultural expression in MS, is it not time to ask whether cultural policy may be 're-framed in a context in which national objectives were no longer self-evidently the 'natural' priority?' (Meinhof and Triandafyllidou 2006: 3).

A wider, more inclusive, and citizen-driven dialogue supported by intercultural appreciation and understanding may contribute significantly to greater mutuality across EU MS. Cultural proximity may in turn contribute to social development based on a humanist approach towards economic regeneration, the development of innovative capacities and technologies that address the needs of different people and support diversity as an asset to Europe, rather than allowing it to be perceived as a threat that needs to be controlled and securitised. Efforts towards this should be 'informed by a commitment to the protection of the 'common cultural heritage', together with the promotion of a better knowledge and awareness of the cultures of the European peoples [...]

²⁰ A case in point is the ongoing discussion on cultural heritage that aims to increase synergies between cultural and other matters through horizontal and cross-sectorial action as witnessed in the draft Council conclusions 'on the need to bring cultural heritage to the fore across policies in the EU' (Council of the European Union 2018) coordinated by the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first semester of 2018.

whose variety [...] is the richness of Europe' (Sassatelli 2006: 28).

In spite of the complexities inherent to matters of identity, one may draw strength from the TEU article on culture that calls for efforts to be made to draw the commonality of European heritage 'to the fore'. It is also encouraging to observe current efforts that try to go beyond addressing European heritage as a depository for past identities out of which to forge European identity today. These seem to gesture towards developing a pan-European discussion exploring elements that may contribute to a framework for common identities tomorrow (Xuereb 2017c). With regard to Malta, efforts to make use of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 to celebrate national intangible heritage expressions, such as band music and traditional *fešta* celebrations, are understandable. However, one should go beyond self-recognition and nationalistic navel-gazing and reach out to different identities that contribute to European identity today and tomorrow (The Times of Malta 2017).

A great deal of effort has gone into cultural policy at the EU level, important elements of which have inspired policy, legislation, funding, and initiatives at the MS level, as this paper has tried to argue with regard to Malta. The guiding principles of EU-level policy are readily identifiable at the national level, and their implementation in Malta is traceable to developments at the level of the Union. Membership of the EU has gone a long way in instilling a correspondence between both levels.

While significant improvements can be witnessed at these levels, shortcomings seem to mirror each other as well. Some of the issues that have contributed to this lack of achievement are related to weak political will to implement visions, limited or competing resources, including funding, and culture being open to influence from other policy areas without managing to reach out and reciprocate equally.

One of the most serious shortcomings of cultural policy when it is not allowed to fulfil its potential is the missed opportunity to influence the ever-changing and diverse European population in positive, innovative, and socially meaningful ways. An influential cultural policy across the EU's institutions and its MS may be necessary to address a number of challenges faced by the EU today. These challenges include the disaffection with mainstream politics, the seeking out of extreme parties, the disaggregation of different populations within the EU, a weak European identity which pervades the EU both within as well as outside its bloc's territorial boundaries and high levels of cynicism that have infiltrated different levels of society.

Over the past years and months, populist political agendas and short-sighted social relations have marked societal developments across Europe. In Malta, the mainstream parties and the extreme fringes drum a tune which does away with culturally-reflective and inspired modes of thinking that may encourage different approaches to the challenges society faces (Fsadni 2017). While acknowledging that the real and apparent tensions and contradictions between liberal and nationalistic agendas cannot be eased and overcome quickly, a thorough cultural reflection that prioritises dialogue and cultural exchange as a way of achieving long-term economic goals may be part of a more consistent approach towards societal development in Europe (Marsili and Varoufakis 2017: 75).

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