



Local Workshop

Valletta, Malta

17-18 October, 2014

Future of our past
F.O.P



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IN THE MEDITERRANEAN



Programme funded by the
EUROPEAN UNION

Introduction

As part of Work-package 2, Communication, all partners in the project need to organize a series of local workshops to raise awareness about the project. In Malta, the first of these workshops was organized on the 17-18th October, 2014.

The main objective of the workshop was to present the project to the target population, particularly the residents, in order to involve in it as many people as possible. The workshop had to present the innovative 'scattered hotel system' in a way that is appealing to the local residents, enticing them to join the network created for the project. Later on, the members of this network, the local stakeholders, will be invited to take part in the training activities planned through the project to promote this form of sustainable accommodation.

At the same time, the local workshop will provide an opportunity for FTZ, the Maltese partner in the project, to present its territorial report for Valletta. In this way, it is hoped that participants, representing local stakeholders, will come to share a common tourism vision for Valletta. Specific reference is being made to the historic but notorious area of Strait Street, identified to be addressed by FTZ in this project. Eventually, the Sustainable Tourism Development Plan will be constructed around the vision of this part of the capital city, Valletta.

After consulting local stakeholders, it was decided that it would be better to organize the workshop in the evening, when the targeted participants would be able to participate more since they would not be at work. In view of this, the workshop was held at Europe House, in Valletta, on the 17th of October, with the discussion proceeding the following morning (Saturday 18th) at The Splendid, in Strait Street, Valletta – where the project is aiming to encourage the setting up of the first scattered hotel (albergo diffuso) in Malta.

A series of presentations were given by the selected speakers, as per agenda at the end of this report.

Session 1: Presentation of the FOP Project and the Valletta Territorial Report

Following registration of participants, a Welcome Address was delivered by Mr Jesmond Xuereb, Executive Secretary of the Fondazzjoni Temi Zammit (FTZ). Mr Xuereb highlighted the work being carried out by the Foundation to revive the city of Valletta and to regenerate the historic centre of Strait Street.

This was followed by a brief address by Mr Vince Fabri, the Valletta Local Councillor responsible for Culture. Mr Fabri described the initiatives being taken by the municipality to breathe back life into the city in the evenings. Indeed, he mentioned how these efforts were bearing fruit, as the nightlife in Valletta was this month praised by Lonely Planet as one of the more dynamic elements of the city, contributing to its increasing attractiveness.

The next speaker of the session was Ms Catherine Tabone, Director of Culture within the Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government. Ms Tabone read out a message delivered by the Minister responsible for Culture, the Hon. Dr Owen Bonnici, who expressed his regret that he could not be present in person, to address the participants, due to other prior commitments. The Minister stated that the regeneration of Strait Street through similar initiatives constituted an important task for his Ministry, particularly in view of Valletta's role as European Capital of Culture in 2018. He assured the participants that the project will find the total support of the public entities and departments falling within his portfolio. Having read out the Minister's speech, Ms Tabone then expressed her own views on the need for such a project and also promised her backing.

Following the introductory speeches by the representatives of the project partner, FTZ, the municipality and the Ministry, the first proper session of the workshop consisted of the presentation of the Future of Our Past project and the Valletta Territorial Report that had been drawn up. The project theme and objectives were introduced by Mr Jesmond Xuereb, on behalf of FTZ.

Since this was the first FOP workshop held in Valletta, a detailed presentation of the project describing its objectives and actions was delivered. The intention was to make the audience, composed of members of the local community and other stakeholders, aware of the project and to encourage active involvement in its activities. Ultimately, the aim was to encourage participants to enrol for the training activities of the project, to join the network being set up and to support the concept of the development of innovative accommodation models for historical centres like Valletta. In particular, FTZ sought to obtain support for its plan to create the conditions for setting up a scattered hotel, or albergo diffuso, in Valletta.

The next speaker to take the floor was Architect Erika Massa, representing Urban Lab Coop Ltd, who gave practical examples of the 'scattered hotel system' from Italy. Through comparisons with the growth of the sector in the Mediterranean, Architect Massa also highlighted the potential of this hotel system for historic centres like Valletta.

The next presentation focused on the territorial report drawn up for Valletta. This was delivered by Mr Jesmond Xuereb and Architect Stephen Micallef, representing FTZ. Following a generic description of the report and the main results of the analysis, the speakers emphasized the opportunities for such a development for Strait Street, the area at the heart of the city which was renowned for a mixture of uses including hospitality, popular culture, entertainment and nightlife, before being branded as a red light district and falling into disrepute. For almost half a century, the area lay abandoned and most of the buildings were stonewalled and earmarked for demolition, maintaining just their façade.

Session 2: National policies to revive Valletta

The second part of the presentation was oriented towards the future, describing an ideal scenario of how the area may be revived. The speakers referred to the strategies that could be applied in order to regenerate the district and to the cultural itineraries which may be

developed around its legacy, cultural and intangible heritage. The FOP project, as a follow up to earlier efforts of the Foundation and current initiatives being taken by the municipality and the Government, presented therefore an opportunity for conducting relevant studies and exploring the options of setting up a scattered hotel system in the neighbourhood.

After concluding the session on the project objectives and the territorial report, the workshop turned its attention to the national policies aimed at reviving Valletta. The session opened with a presentation on the Palazzini scheme, which was launched by the National Tourism Authority to identify historic buildings which could be converted to boutique hotels or other accommodation units with the help of EU funding and the Authority's assistance on the issuing of the necessary permits and licences. Mr Oliver Farrugia, who is responsible for EU funding schemes for the sector, could not attend the workshop, but an overview of the policies and sustainable tourism schemes of the past few years was presented to the participants.

The next speaker was Perit Mireille Fsadni, city manager for the Valletta UNESCO Heritage Site and head of the Valletta Rehabilitation Project. Her presentation addressed the overall strategy to rehabilitate our historic centres, touching upon the various restoration projects – ongoing or recently undertaken – in Valletta.

The final speaker of the day was Perit Charles Azzopardi, architect responsible for works at the newly rehabilitated Pjazza Teatru Rjal – the open-air theatre designed by the renowned Renzo Piano on the ruins of the former Royal Opera House, at the entrance to Valletta. Perit Azzopardi described the work carried out at the new theatre as well as other projects undertaken in Valletta. He concluded his presentation by showing a series of innovative but sometimes controversial architectural projects implemented in other countries, as a way of provoking the participants into considering what their reaction would be if similar developments were to be applied to Valletta.

Finally, Mr Xuereb informed the participants of the training opportunities for territorial promoters being offered through the project to any interested persons who might be interested. He invited participants wishing to undergo such training to register with FTZ staff.

Roundtable discussion

The workshop continued with a roundtable on the themes of interest to the local audience. The presence of residents, local councillors, policymakers, experts in tourism, businessmen and tourism operators, professional people, NGO representatives and cultural actors rendered the debate quite lively and led to a few recommendations on what could be done and what needs to be avoided.

The discussion focused on the need to promote a shared plan among all the stakeholders. A lively debate ensued between some of the residents and representatives of the municipality and the national authorities. More information on the territorial report was presented and the reactions of residents and other local stakeholders were noted.

Although FTZ, together with the municipality and central government officers emphasized the benefits of the project, showing how the historic parts of the city will benefit from the regeneration of the area, not all the residents were convinced. Some of the older citizens argued that such tourist development will bring along with it inconveniences, such as noise pollution, resulting in a lower quality of life for the residents. However, the majority of stakeholders were pleased of the plans to recover these abandoned spaces of the city, and they were satisfied of the efforts being made by the authorities to strike a balance between increasing tourist flows and the needs of the residents.

Perit Mireille Fsadni and Councillor Vince Fabri mentioned a number of examples of actions taken by the central government and the municipality to ensure that the necessary control is maintained in tourist and entertainment areas. They pointed out that the kind of visitor who

chooses to stay in Valletta, rather than in the more touristic areas of Sliema, St Julians and St Paul's Bay, is generally the cultural tourist who represents quality tourism. Moreover, it was pointed out that this development would bring along with it new employment opportunities for the residents.

The evening session was brought to an end by some final concluding remarks by Valletta Councillor, Mr Vince Fabri. He remarked that the workshop had been very useful for the Local Council, as it highlighted what residents were wary of and therefore indicated what the Council needed to pay more attention to. The discussion proceeded in an informal manner during the light reception and networking session that ended the evening.

The event was continued the following morning at The Splendid, right at the centre of Strait Street, the historic area earmarked for such development. The Splendid was a former lodging house which had fallen into disuse and was now being proposed for re-development into an albergo diffuso and cultural and creative hub of the city. The topic of the discussion consisted in the common vision that stakeholders had of this part of Valletta.

Led by Mr Xuereb, the participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the Valletta touristic product, sustainability issues for the historic centre, the challenges facing policymakers, the opportunity presented to diversify accommodation options on offer, and the difficulties envisaged for stakeholders interested in embarking upon such developments. The representatives of the municipality and the central government intervened during the discussion to indicate how the authorities could support similar initiatives, both financially as well as logistically.

A brief summary of the proceedings by Mr Jesmond Xuereb brought the workshop to an end. Mr Xuereb thanked the participants and informed them of the next actions being planned through the project.

Conclusion

Overall, the local stakeholders who attended the workshop were in agreement with the analysis carried out through the territorial report. They were all interested in following what the project set out to achieve and most were in agreement and supported the idea of establishing the scattered hotel system in Valletta. The area selected for the first such attempt, Strait Street, was considered to be a good choice.

The workshop participants helped to define further the image described by the speakers of the shared plan of the Strait Street historic centre. The stakeholders endorsed this vision and fine-tuned it where they saw fit. Essentially, the majority were pleased of the plans to recover the abandoned spaces of the city, and they were satisfied of the efforts being made by the municipality and the national authorities to strike a balance between increasing tourist flows and the needs of the residents.

Bearing in mind that the total population of Valletta amounts to less than 7,000, FTZ cannot expect to attract high numbers of participants to its local workshops. It will however try to address this issue by organizing additional events to attract different target groups. Participants at this first event included residents of Valletta, lawyers and professionals having their offices in Strait Street, representatives of the area's business concerns, Local Councillors, officers from various ministries and government departments, as well as a number other public stakeholders.

Throughout the event, FTZ personnel were available to list down members of the audience who showed an interest in taking part in the future training to be offered. All participants expressed themselves in favour of joining the local FOP network to keep themselves informed of related activities and developments. Promotional material of the project was also distributed to the participants.



FUTURE OF THE PAST Local Workshop: Reviving our Historic Centres through Tourism 17 th October 2014, Europe House, Valletta	
16:45 - 17:00	Registration
17:00 – 17:30	Welcome address <i>Mr Jesmond Xuereb – Executive Secretary, Fondazzjoni Temi Zammit</i> <i>Mr Vince Fabri – Councillor, Valletta Local Council</i> <i>Ms Catherine Tabone – Director Culture, Ministry for Justice, Culture & Local Govt</i>
Part I: Presentation of the FOP Project & the Valletta Territorial Report	
17:30 – 17:50	Project theme and objectives <i>Mr Jesmond Xuereb – Fondazzjoni Temi Zammit</i>
17:50 – 18:00	An example of the ‘scattered hotel system’ in the Mediterranean region <i>Arch. Erika Massa – Urban Lab Coop Ltd</i>
18:00 – 18:45	The Valletta Territorial Report and FTZ plans for Strada Stretta <i>Mr Jesmond Xuereb & Perit Stephen Micallef – Fondazzjoni Temi Zammit</i>
Part II: National policies to revive Valletta	
18:45 – 19:00	National tourism policy and the Palazzini scheme <i>Mr Oliver Farrugia – Malta Tourism Authority</i>
19:00 – 19:15	Rehabilitating our historic centres <i>Perit Mireille Fsadni – Valletta Rehabilitation Project</i>
19:15 – 19:30	Regeneration of historic centres through culture and heritage <i>Perit Charles Azzopardi – Pjazza Teatru Rjal</i>

Presentation of training opportunities
Round table discussion
Concluding remarks
Reception and networking

The round table discussion will be continued on Saturday, 18th October, at 09:30, at The Splendid, Strait Street, Valletta.
