

A Regeneration Strategy For Valletta

***Il-Biccerija* A Case Study**

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1. Introduction

1.1 The city of Valletta was founded by Grand Master Jean de la Valette following the end of the 1565 Siege. At that time, the Order of St. John, which administered the island since 1530, was considering either to abandon the island completely, or leave a small garrison on Malta, or to reconstruct the damaged defenses and build a new fortified city. The proposal for the construction of a new city on Mount Sceberras was continuously under review by the Order, almost since their arrival on the island. In fact various proposals and plans were made, namely by Antonio Ferramolino in 1541, by Bartolomeo Genga in 1558 and by Bartolomeo Lanci in 1562. Although the Order was aware that their base at Birgu was overlooked by higher ground on the other side of the Grand Harbour, and that for this reason, they were at a military disadvantage, the proposals for the new city were never implemented, mainly as a result of the constant fear of enemy attack.

After the Order pleaded assistance from the European Courts, the military engineer, Francesco Laparelli from Cortona, was assigned to prepare plans for the new city. His proposals and ideas are well documented in his codex (diary). Laparelli, described as a man of determination and ability, was inspired by Gabrio Serbelloni. He opted for practical, and the best of traditional, fortifications. In his codex he describes that his new city of Valletta is a combination of ideological ideas and practical experience (Miceli Farrugia 1996). Four main aspects were considered in Laparelli's project of the new city; these included the size of the city, the design of its fortifications, the layout of the streets and buildings, and finally the utilisation of labour and material. When proposing the size of the city, the main issue was establishing the boundary on the landward side. There were three options; a line at 700

yards from Fort St. Elmo, an idea which was aborted since the result would have been a small city, still overlooked by higher ground; a line at 1,900 yards from Fort St. Elmo, an idea which was also discarded because of the long distance between this line and Fort St. Elmo and the long seafronts; an intermediate line, about 1,200 yards from Fort St. Elmo was chosen. The fortifications were the first structures to be built. Laparelli wrote in his codex, "I will arrange the streets differently from what many are thinking." The contemporary concept of the ideal city was based on geometrical and symmetrical patterns. "So we shall make a town which is suggested by the site itself, and it seems to me that this should be done elsewhere." After allowing a large "piazza d'armi", behind the front line of fortifications, to allow space for the two cavaliers, Laparelli proposed one main street in the centre of the city - from the main entrance gateway to the gate of Fort St. Elmo. The innovation was that all other streets of the city were to be narrow and serpentine to follow the contours of land. This was not normal in Renaissance planning, however Laparelli argued:

".... a city in a hot, dry place must have narrow streets, whereas cities in humid climates should have wide streets so that the wind and the sun can take away the humidity. Narrow streets are cooler because they are not dominated by the sun. For windy places like Malta, it is necessary to find a way to break the wind with trees or high walls, but this cannot happen here because all the island and especially this place is bare and without trees, so it will help to make the street serpentine with sweetness like (medieval) Pisa..."¹

In addition to the main street already mentioned, there had to be four serpentine roads running in the same direction to this street. Each important building had to have a square in front of it, with the size relating to the importance of the building.

The city that was built is different from that proposed by Laparelli. There are no indications in the codex that his proposal was rejected, nor are there noted any amendments which reflect with the eventual plan. The city that was built is based on a rigid grid-iron plan. The main road runs from the entrance gate, in the middle of the landward fortifications, to the tip of one of St. Elmo's bastions, (and not to the gate). There are eight longitudinal streets compared to the four originally recommended. The idea of eleven public squares also seems to have been abandoned. Although Francesco Laparelli's original plans put aside contemporary ideas of town planning, the city was built according to the practices of that time. Therefore the city of Valletta may be considered as a worthy example of sixteenth-century town planning, and as a renaissance 'new town'. An additional aspect which makes Valletta an important landmark is that, the first Town Planning regulations were set up for its building, managed by the *Officio delle Case*. These regulations were and included conditions that buildings had to be built on official street alignments, and could not have self-imposed setbacks or front gardens; that corners of corner buildings had to be decorated with street shrines; and, that each building had to have its own water storage.

The first building to be built, in the new city, was the church dedicated to Our Lady of Victory. By the end of 1566, new buildings began to rise, and on December of that year, the Council carried out a compulsory purchase order on all the land which lay inside Laparelli's fortifications. On the 18th March 1571, Grand Master Fra Pietro del Monte, moved the headquarters of the Order from Il Borgo to the new city (Hughes 1969). The last areas to be developed in the new city were *il Mandraggio*, and the area of the Ghetto Valley (the area now bounded by Marsamxett Road, St. Sebastian Road, Old Bakery Street and St. Christopher Street).

The development of the *Mandraggio* was delayed because the stone for the construction of the city was cut from this area, with the main objective of forming a sheltered basin within the fortifications, for the berthing of the Order's navy. This plan was subsequently abandoned, and the area was developed, and occupied by poor citizens. The urban pattern of this area did not follow the rigid grid-iron plan of the rest of the city, but was very similar to the inorganic medieval pattern of narrow and serpentine streets found in most of the local villages. The other area, the Ghetto Valley area, is one of the lowest parts of the city, and the closest to sea level. The area was also originally the site of a lime kiln, and therefore was considered to be an industrial area.

Throughout the past four hundred years since its foundation, the city of Valletta has seen very few transformations in its urban pattern. The most radical changes were made in this century, mainly as a result of damage during the Second World War, and of housing improvements in the latter half of the century. *Il Mandraggio* was totally cleared after World War II, and new housing blocks, respecting the grid-iron pattern of the city were built. The entrance of the city was also changed in the 1960's and 70's, by the creation of a large square just after entering the city gate. Another square was created in front of St. John's Conventual Church. Other changes were made in the area bounded by South Street and Windmills Street; along Fountain Street; the area around the Old Hospital (now the Mediterranean Conference Centre).

As a living city, various transformations were made to its built fabric. These changes were mainly alterations to the original buildings built by the Order, so as to accommodate uses, particularly commercial and

other public uses. Once again, the most radical changes were made after the end of World War II; during the reconstruction of damaged parts of the city, new buildings were erected, mainly in the city centre. Following this 'reconstruction era', a phase of rehabilitation and 'slum clearance' followed. With the justification of 'slum clearance' and the need for social housing, extensive blocks of old buildings, many of which pertaining to the foundation of the city, were cleared and new, modern, blocks built instead.

- 1.5 Various other proposals and plans were made during the last decades, mainly aimed at revitalising the city but little success was registered in regenerating Malta capital. One cannot conclude this historical outlook of the capital city without mentioning the fact that the city of Valletta has been declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage City.

2 Issues of Valletta

- 2.1 Although the decline in residential population is one of the most problematic issues of Valletta, this definitely is not the sole problem. The decay of the general environment of the capital, excessive car presence, degradation of buildings, obsolete infrastructure, social problems, and the effect of tourism and commercial activity are some of the other issues which shall be discussed *infra*.

Demographical Issues

2.2 Although Valletta was originally planned to have a *Collacchio* (an area strictly reserved for members of the Order), these plans were abandoned after internal objections from the Order itself. This could have been considered as an incentive to the flourishing of the population in the founding years of the new city. The population of the city maintained a steady growth under the Order, mainly as a result of the peaceful times, which followed the Great Siege of 1565. However, the highest figure in residential population was recorded in the 1881 census, under the British rule, when the figure reached 24,854. This implied that, at that time about 16.5% of the Maltese population lived in Valletta. At the time, the Grand Harbour was the main centre of commercial activity, and most opportunities for employment apart from those related to agriculture, were to be found in this area. It is probable that most of the subdivisions of the large houses of Valletta, into smaller housing units (*kerrejja*) were made during this era, so that the incoming population could be housed there. Although the census carried out between 1828 and 1931 show that population of Valletta remained somewhat stable (varying between 20,000 and 25,000), in the years following World War II, the residential population displayed a radical decline (**Include bar chart**). According to the 1995 Census, the population of Valletta reached the low figure of 7,184, which is less than 2% of the total Maltese population. The trend is destined to continue, since most of the residential population consists of old people aged 60 and over. The percentage of this age group reaches 28.54%

of the total population of Valletta, a figure which is only exceeded by the 30.11% of its suburb, Floriana. (**Include figure**) indicates this, and compares the age group distribution of Valletta to the national percentages. This indicates that whilst the national trend is towards an increase in young population, the trend of Valletta is the reverse.

Economic and Social Issues

2.3 The increase in commercial activity and the presence of several offices, both public and private, in the capital, lead to an increase in daytime population. The heritage value of the city and the number of museums in Valletta is an attracting pole to a considerable number of tourists through out the year. Such influx, opposed to the night time population, and the lack of evening activities in the city, reduces the capital to a ghost city during the evening. Another problem caused by the considerably high daytime population is the decay in environment. The untidiness of the streets in the city centre is but one aspect which is causing environmental decay.

The clutter of shop signs and wires is another. The main problem which is caused by the large influx of daytime population to Valletta is the traffic. Although an additional license fee is paid for every vehicle entitled to enter Valletta, except for residents, the number of vehicles having such license is quite high, and had increased radically in the last ten years, (**Include Figure**). The problem not only refers to traffic, but more seriously to parking, and the broad car presence in the city.

During the day, cars are often parked on pavements, obstructing not only pedestrian flow, but sometimes also blocking doorways of residential buildings. This high influx of traffic in the city is also probably causing decay to its historical buildings and monuments as a result of pollution caused by exhaust. **(Include Social/Criminal assessment from SF)**

Tourism

- 2.4 Tourism is one of the mainstays of the Maltese economy. It has grown from an almost negligible economic activity to the complex and large industry that it is today, over a period of some forty years. Benefits from tourism in the local sense have accrued from increased employment, investment and foreign earnings. Tourism in Malta accounts for 24.3% of Gross National Product (GNP), at the maximum level, and over 25% of exports of goods and services. In terms of employment, tourism employs a total of 19,362 full-time equivalent jobs, or 12.79% of the total FTE jobs in 1998. (Mangion, Vella, 1998). 27% of full-time equivalent jobs in Malta is supported by tourism expenditure, in some way or another.²

From the survey carried out by Malta Tourism Authority in April 2001 the following facts were found.

Profile of Valletta foreign visitor (September-December 2000)

- ◆ **Age group: young to middle-aged 25-54 years**
- ◆ **Visits with spouse/partner**
- ◆ **For 66% of respondents, this was their first visit to Valletta, 34% were on a repeat visit.**
- ◆ **On average, a tourist spends four to six hours in Valletta. Those on tour spend around 5 hours in Valletta; those visiting on their own spend six hours in the city.**
- ◆ **70% consider the amount of time they spent in Valletta as not enough because there is much more to see**
- ◆ **Average expenditure per person: Lm 13.79 – those on tour spend slightly less during their Valletta tour, individuals spend slightly more.**

- St John's Co-Cathedral, Upper Barrakka Gardens, Grandmaster's Palace, Fort St Elmo/War Museum and audio-visual shows are the main five sites/attractions in Valletta visited by tourists. Other attractions are visited too which clearly indicates that tourists visit different areas within Valletta and are not solely concentrated in one or two areas of the city.
- Catering establishments and retail shops are popular with tourists with almost 70% of respondents stating that they made use of these

establishments' services. The open-air market is visited by some 44% of respondents. Basic facilities, such as banks, exchange bureaux and public conveniences, were considered by most respondents as a must. The tourist information office in Valletta is made use of by some 30% of respondents. Interestingly, the Biblioteca is visited by 8% of respondents.

- Respondents were requested to identify what they liked and disliked about Valletta. These likes and dislikes could be considered as the City's strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths:

- 1st - buildings and architecture
- 2nd – city atmosphere, particularly that of a medieval city
- 3rd – museums/places of interest
- 4th – St John's Co-Cathedral
- 5th – Gardens
- 6th – Shopping
- 7th – historical attractions

Weaknesses:

- 1st – Pollution and dirt problems, particularly rubbish/litter on streets, pollution/smells
- 2nd – Insufficient/inexistent facilities and services (signposting, toilet facilities, facilities for disabled, open-air seating, etc)

3rd – visual eyesores, particularly monuments and old buildings crumbling down, wires on facades

Physical Aspects

2.5 Valletta is a World Heritage site. It lies amidst a densely populated urban conglomeration, characterized by industrial areas and heavy traffic. Valletta and Floriana are established office centers generating considerable vehicular traffic within the fortification network. Activities focused around the Grand Harbour should also not be undervalued. The central power station at Marsa, the Malta Dry-docks and Shipbuilding, and a number of smaller industries within Marsa and Corradino industrial areas discharge harmful substances into the environment. Cruise liners and cargo ships, although on a much smaller scale, are also an important source of pollution. Valletta is also strongly affected by its natural geographic position. Being a peninsula, it is constantly subjected to a salt laden environment, while its siting on a promontory, makes it more exposed to the prevailing winds.

The factors affecting the present state of the buildings in Valletta are numerous and may be categorized as:

- Inherited characteristics of the primary materials.
- Consequential factors.
- Geographic considerations.
- Environmental considerations.

Inherited characteristics of the primary materials

Stone is the primary building material. The geology of the Maltese Islands is characterized by marine sedimentary rocks, mainly limestone from the Oligocene – Miocene Age, capped by minor quaternary deposits of terrestrial origin. The area which these islands now occupy was once a seabed where millions of algae and minute organisms accumulated and deposited themselves. In time, with the addition of sand and other materials, all these cemented themselves and became hard rock. For millions of years, these organisms amassed to form various strata of rock. An uplift of the land below the sea resulted in this stratification of rocks to appear above sea-level.

The different strata, constituting the geology of the island are characterized by rocks of varying properties, and although in particular places, one or more layers may be missing, these rocks are always found in the same sequence.

In the harbour region, the lower globigerina limestone and the Mara member of the Lower Coralline limestone strata are exposed, thus constituting the major source of building material for the construction of the Fortified Cities.

The Mara member consists of tabular beds of pale-cream to pale-grey carbonate mudstones, wackestones and packstones. When exposed to the elements, this formation is prone to deterioration characterized by an acute scaling of the stone.

Consequential factors

- Development
- Second World War
- Post Second World War

Geographical considerations

- Sea
- Wind
- Insolation
- Hydrology

Environmental considerations

The major source of atmospheric pollution in Malta is sulphur dioxide, mostly generated from the power station at Marsa. Until the late 1990s the station was powered by both hard coal and fuel oil, with a consumption rate of about 260,000 tonnes of coal and 230,000 tonnes of fuel oil per year. It is estimated that about 17,000 tonnes of sulphur dioxide were emitted from the Marsa power station in 1990. A second power station, operative since 1991, is oil-fired and contributes towards the ambient Sulphur dioxide, although its effect on the built environment is considered as minor in comparison to that at Marsa. The contribution to the level of sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere by automotive traffic in Malta is estimated to about 600 tonnes a year.

Recent studies on this phenomenon show that the inner harbour region is by far affected by an elevated presence of sulphates in the atmosphere. As one would expect, the sulphation of building surfaces does not only depend on the distance from the source (Power Station), but also on its bearing with respect to it.

Likewise, Valletta is affected by an elevated deposit of superficial soot deposit. In this regard, vehicular traffic and especially diesel engines are an important additional delocalized source of black soot particles in the area.

The degradation and decay of buildings in Valletta is not, however, only caused by atmospheric pollution, but also by a lack of maintenance, and

sometimes also by extensive alterations. Several buildings, even historically important ones, especially within the centre of Valletta, have been extensively altered, possibly to accommodate commercial outlets, offices or stores. Even public buildings have undergone through such transformations. The most serious problems occur where the ground floor of some buildings is altered into a commercial outlet, whilst the upper floors will either remain vacant or are used merely as stores. When a building is not properly occupied, lack of maintenance is a natural consequence. In fact Valletta has a high percentage of vacant buildings; according to the 1995 Census, this figure reached (*****) of the total number of dwellings. Another contributing factor to lack of maintenance of buildings is the current legislation regarding rents. Notwithstanding the cheap rents payable for the use of the property, tenants fail to maintain the buildings which they occupy; on the other hand, landlords cannot afford to maintain such property when they do not make any profit from their lease. The current rent legislation, does not allow landlords to increase rents on their property to realistic market levels, unless the tenants change; as a result it is possible to find valuable property leased at very cheap rates. According to the 1985 Census 91.01% **(Update this to last records)** of the property in Valletta is leased, whilst only (*****) is owned by the occupier; (*****) is free.

Although several restoration projects have been carried out on public historic buildings, through public funds, the work done so far is very limited when considering the number of buildings which still need to be recovered. Lack of financial resources, and qualified human resources,

to perform rehabilitation projects are two major problems, which further exacerbate the lack of maintenance of both public and private buildings in Valletta.

Another aspect leading to the degradation of Valletta is the fact that some areas have been identified for 'slum clearance'. Although a number of buildings have been turned into slums, through the several subdivisions of property in the past, this only does not justify their clearance. Such buildings can be rehabilitated by trying to revert them into an acceptable size by removing past changes and alterations. For several years, social housing in Valletta has been linked with the bulldozing of existing buildings and the reconstruction of new blocks of apartments. It has happened that as soon as an area is identified for such projects, the area would suddenly degrade, and if such project fails to materialise for several years, the area will be occupied by squatters and remain so until the new project is carried out.

Infrastructure

- 2.6 Notwithstanding the fact that there are several public offices in it, the infrastructure of the capital, does not reach acceptable levels. It is well known that most services are now outdated and in a very poor state of repair. The most serious problems refer to the mains water supply, since, in most areas the pipes are very old. Thus residents living in the upper apartments of residential blocks do not have the service which they expect. Although power cuts in Valletta are not so common, the way the supply is distributed, leaves much to be desired. Besides the amount of overhead cabling, forming webs of wire across streets and along building facades, when cables are passed underground, little care is taken to preserve the traditional paving. This also applies to the telephone

cables. Although in the past years, the Valletta Rehabilitation Project had been trying to co-ordinate such infrastructure, little had been achieved, and the proposal of using the underground tunnels, of which there is a network, had never materialised. The use of such tunnels is not being accepted by the corporations involved, since these are also being used as sewers.

Another problem which is linked to particular localities of Valletta, are the steep and stepped streets. Stepped streets are a burden to disabled people, to the elderly and young children; they also pose problems with regards to vehicle accessibility. The steep streets, especially on the sides and lower parts of Valletta, offer similar disadvantages.

3. What has been done up to now?

3.1 In 1987 a rehabilitation committee was formed for Valletta. The Valletta Rehabilitation Committee had the aim of managing a rehabilitation project for Valletta. This project, as a result of financial, but especially human resource limitations, has been limited through the past years to the maintenance and restoration of specific public buildings in the capital, and the upgrading of some public spaces. In its early years of existence, the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, with the technical assistance of the then Antiquities Department focused on emergency restoration interventions on landmark buildings in Valletta. St. John's Co-Cathedral and the Presidential Palace were the first to benefit from this attention, followed by Auberges (Auberge d' Aragon, Auberge de

Provence, Auberge de Bavière) and religious buildings (Our Lady of Pilar, Our Lady of Liesz, St. Roque, St. Lucy, Ta' Giezu, Our Lady of Victory, St. Paul, Jesuits, St. Domenic, St. Augustine, St. Barbara, St. Francis). A plan for the upgrading of open spaces within the fortified city was also developed, with the paving of Republic Square and St. John's Square in 1991 being the first significant interventions in this regard. These were later followed by the restoration of the original paving in St. Christopher's Street and new paving works in Republic Street and Zachary Street

During its initial months, the Committee also commissioned the architectural workshop of Renzo Piano, to propose a new entrance for the City of Valletta and to formulate guidelines for a master plan. The guidelines for the master plan were presented in 1989. Before the proposals were made, several surveys were conducted, including land use, vehicular traffic, pedestrian flow and demographical studies. Piano's guidelines did not focus solely on Valletta itself, but included also Floriana. Piano identified the axis along the Mall, City Gate, Republic Street and St. Elmo as the "backbone" of the urban area, and proposed that this axis be fully pedestrianised, and used mainly for recreational, shopping and office purposes. He then identified five other nodes on the periphery of Valletta, and linked these nodes to the centre through proposed pedestrian routes, ferry services, vertical links and bus links. Along the streets linking these nodes to the centre of Valletta, Piano recommended that commercial activities should be promoted on the ground floor, and first floor of buildings along such streets, but also advocated residential use on the other floors. Proposals for upgrading of open spaces and the creation of new gardens were also made. Piano identified sites for peripheral parking and proposed new traffic circulation

routes both within and outside Valletta. Although a formal masterplan, based on these guidelines has not been drawn up, and although none of Piano's nodes have been rehabilitated, according to Mr. Ray Bondin, Executive Coordinator of the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, the guidelines "serve as the basis for discussion for all developments in Valletta, and particularly they are the basis for all decisions and projects at the Valletta Rehabilitation Project office."³

- 3.2 The Malta Structure Plan which was approved in 1990 has one of its three goals focusing directly on the need to rehabilitate the existing urban fabric. It also designates Valletta as an Urban Conservation Area and paved the way to the drafting of a local plan for the Grand Harbour Area. This local plan was approved and started being implemented by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) on April 2002. The Local Plan caters for a ten year horizon, and covers the landward areas of Valletta, Floriana, Marsa, Kordin, L-Isla, Bormla, Birgu and Kalkara; together with the water area and shoreline of the Grand Harbour. The Plan have been developed into two main sets of policies. The first set covers the whole of the Local Plan area and puts forward policies dealing with issues relevant to that area generally, where they are not sufficiently covered by the Structure Plan. The second set consists of area specific policies, according to individual localities within the plan area.

The vision of the plan is that "directed towards securing the economic and social revitalisation and regeneration of the Grand Harbour area in a fitting environmental context, with an emphasis on conservation."⁴ It has been stated that the plan is intended to show the public, parastatal agencies, private organisations and others who have an interest in the way land is to be used or developed, what the MEPA wishes to achieve

and how it intends to go about this process⁵. Among the aims of this plan are; the containment and more efficient use of the urban areas in the context of a settlement hierarchy; reversing population decline mainly by rehabilitation and redevelopment; maintaining and enhancing the positive characteristics of the Local Plan area, especially in relation to heritage and urban design aspects; enabling the port function of the Grand Harbour to flourish; and reinforcing the vitality and viability of Valletta as the nation's capital.

The General Policies are gathered under eight different sections, namely; strategic policies; settlements; heritage; transportation; environment; social and community facilities; the Grand Harbour port function; and, local economic development.

The main elements of the Local Plan strategy in respect of Valletta are described as; to strengthen the role of the City as the national capital; to encourage economic regeneration; and, to seek environmental improvement.⁶ These goals are planned to be reached by:

- Maintaining and improving access to the City, but seeking to minimise growth in peak hour traffic flow;
- Encouragement of residential use
- Enlivening Valletta in the evening;
- Strengthening Valletta's role as a primary town centre;
- Optimising the tourism potential;
- Improve facilities for pedestrians;
- Conservation and restoration of the positive features of Valletta's townscape; and
- Seeking appropriate community facilities.

The plan then lists thirty policies, by which it is thought that the aims listed above could be reached. Some of these policies are general ones and others apply to specific areas or localities in Valletta. Although in the introductory part of this plan it has been stated,

"Whilst a 'compact' centre has a number of advantages, it is evident that many parts of Valletta have major, as yet untapped, potential for more intensive use. The development of other 'attractors' - using this term in the sense of nodes of intensive land use activity around the city drawing pedestrians - could help to spread betterment over a much wider area, and initiate property improvement."⁷

4. A Rehabilitation Strategy for Valletta

4.1 The architectural and historical importance of Valletta, and its social and environmental problems, discussed in above, justify the need to rehabilitate the city. As discussed earlier, various plans and programmes have already been proposed with little success. The objective of this section is to try and identify a strategy which could yield better results. Three possible approaches which can be adopted to the rehabilitation of Valletta are identified. The advantages and disadvantages of each possibility are listed and then the best strategy for the capital is recommended.

State Funded Approach

4.2 The first possible approach is that where the Central Government

embarks on an extensive rehabilitation project for the whole city, the whole project being financed from public funds, with a possibility of acquiring some foreign grants. This project should start by conducting a detailed survey of the existing physical situation of all the buildings in Valletta, accompanied by a demographical, economical and social analysis of the present situation. From these studies, it would be possible to identify areas which need immediate intervention and the type of action needed. The rest of the areas will be covered by a plan of action, including a priority order of actions. This project could include the restoration and rehabilitation of buildings, the upgrading of public areas, and possibly the demolition and redevelopment of specific buildings.

This rehabilitation approach has the advantage of being administered by one body, the Central Government; there would be full control of all the actions being taken in the whole city, and priorities could easily be identified. If a long term plan were drawn up, with amendments from time to time, the financing of the project would not be impossible. However, a main disadvantage lies in its funding. Without doing any detailed studies, one can state from the outset that various buildings require immediate intervention, as a result of their present state of decay. It is impossible for most countries, that a considerable amount of the government's budget be directed towards such projects, since every government has argued that there are other national sectors, such as the health and education, which are higher up in the priority list. One can state, from past local experiences, that conservation lies almost at the end of the priority lists of any government. Another problem which can hinder such an approach is the fact that several buildings in Valletta are privately owned, thus making it very difficult for the government to intervene.

Partnership Approach

- 4.3 Another possible approach could be that of setting up a partnership between the Valletta Rehabilitation Project (representing the central government) and the Valletta Local Council, with the possibility of a Heritage Trust joining in as another partner, thus obtaining a partnership between the central and local government, and the private sector through the Heritage Trust. A preliminary survey of the existing situation of Valletta, will always need to be drawn up first. A plan of action needs then to be formulated, wherein the Valletta Rehabilitation Project would be responsible for restoring and rehabilitating public buildings; the Local Council would be responsible for public open spaces, and the Heritage Trust would give financial grant aids for interventions by private owners. The plan of action would be open for public consultation, and any suggestions and comments raised by the public would be catered for.

The advantage of such an approach is mainly that everyone would feel part of the rehabilitation project, which is not the case if the whole project is accomplished by the Central Government. Another advantage would be that funding does not rely only on central government. The main deficiency of this project is that, locally, the role of a heritage trust has been conceived as that of a pressure group, and not that of a fund-raiser and executor of conservation projects. It is only recently that one of the local trusts has taken such a role. Another problem is that one needs to solve the potential overlaps of jurisdiction there is between the Valletta Rehabilitation Project and the Valletta Local Council, since in the past these have had serious implications on joint approaches. The other problem is that the Valletta Local Council still depends on Central

Government funds, and with the current legislation, the Local Council cannot raise funds. Therefore both the Local Council and Valletta Rehabilitation Project depend directly on the central government's budget.

Nodes Approach

- 4.4 The third possible approach is that of identifying a number of areas in Valletta, and intervene in these specific areas. In these nodes, active conservation would prevail, in that uses which attract residents and visitors would be introduced.

These nodes would then act as poles of activity which would generate the upgrading of the links between them. This could be considered as one of the major advantages of such an approach. Another advantage is that the private sector could be involved directly with this rehabilitation approach, and therefore some of the problems of funding could be resolved. A problem which could be attributed to this approach is that of discrimination between one area of the same city and another. This could lead also to social friction between the residential population.

- 4.5 Learning from mistakes of past strategies, and from the successful foreign experiences, one could recommend a strategy for rehabilitating Valletta which probably could be more effective than the past ones. Foreign case studies show that the central or local government were involved in an active way, however the feasibility of rehabilitation depended on the private sector involvement. In these foreign case studies, the success of the rehabilitation schemes depended on partnerships, between public agencies, authorities and even private and voluntary organisations. In these countries, where public funds are better

than local, had utilised private investment into their rehabilitation schemes. It is therefore obvious that a rehabilitation scheme, covering an area such as Valletta, cannot depend solely on public investment. Therefore, the first approach described above, which is very similar to the rehabilitation approach being adopted so far, cannot work.

- 4.6 Although the second recommended approach is much better, than the first, since it tries to involve the private sector, through the Heritage Trust, in view of the extent of problems in Valletta, such scheme cannot be implemented upon the whole city. This leads to the last approach discussed above. The concept of creating activity nodes, or attractors within the city, and focus on their rehabilitation first, does make sense. Through this approach, both public and private investment will be focused on one area, thus results will be more visible, rather than distributing interventions throughout the city. This concept had proved to work in the past. A good example, is the activity which was created along the lower part of St. John Street and St. Mark Street, when the ferry service was a very popular means of transport to Valletta. The ferry landing points and the city centre were nodes of activity, people commuted between these nodes, and activity was generated along the routes.

Three option strategy:

1. **State Funded Approach** - Central Government embarks on an extensive rehabilitation project for the whole city, the whole project being financed from public funds, with a possibility of acquiring some foreign grants.
2. **Partnership Approach** - Setting up a partnership between the Valletta Rehabilitation Project (representing the central

government) and the Valletta Local Council, with the possibility of a Heritage Trust joining in as another partner, thus obtaining a partnership between the central and local government, and the private sector through the Heritage Trust

3. **Nodes Approach** - Identify a number of areas in Valletta, and intervene in these specific areas. In these nodes, active conservation would prevail, in that uses which attract residents and visitors would be introduced. These nodes would then act as poles of activity which would generate the upgrading of the links between them.

5 Selecting Nodes

- 5.1 It is obvious that the selection of nodes where intervention is to be directed should be made after a comprehensive study of the current state of Valletta, is carried out. These studies, based quantitative and qualitative techniques, should include among other aspects: land use surveys; historical research; architectural analysis; surveys on pedestrian flow; and, demographical surveys and social analysis of resident population. Public opinion questionnaires, both for residents and users, covering demographical, social, cultural and commercial aspect, are also beneficial to this planning exercise. Most of these surveys have been carried out as part of the Local Plan for Valletta. The Local Plan for Valletta, which in a way is adopting similar strategy towards the rehabilitation of Valletta, had identified two main nodes, the waterfront of a Valletta, with Fort St. Elmo as the main "attractor", and the commercial

centre of Valletta, both of which were obvious candidates. However, the identification of other possible nodes should have been within the terms of reference this Local Plan.

Land use

- 5.2 A land use survey, preferably covering all levels of each building, is essential in analysing the present property uses in Valletta. Through such survey one can identify areas which have an intensive use, and others which are characterised by vacant properties. Although intensive use is sometimes a problem in itself, such occurrence is an evidence that the area is relatively active. On the other hand, high rates of vacancy indicate that there could be serious problems in such areas. When identifying nodes, the latter areas could be ideal candidates. One can also identify areas with a dominant use, such as residential areas, commercial areas, industrial areas, and others; identify their boundaries or the overlap of one on another. Conflicting uses, which can be detrimental to that area, can be also identified. A land use survey will also lead to the identification of present nodes, such as the upper part of Republic Street, which through its commercial activity, acts as a node. Shortage of important facilities will also be identified through such survey.

Historical

- 5.3 A historical review of Valletta is a requisite before one recommends new activity nodes in the city. One should identify activity nodes which existed in the past, why they had been created and why they failed. Examples of such nodes are the ferry berthing facilities at Marsamxett and the Grand Harbour. These were created as a means of transport between Sliema and Valletta and the Three Cities and Valletta respectively. When this ferry service was created, it was considered to be an efficient service, in

the absence of other comforts which exist today. At that time, users of such mode of transport did not find any difficulty in the steep gradients of St. John Street, to reach the central area of Valletta. This service failed as soon as car ownership increased, when it became possible to reach Valletta by private car. With the failure of these nodes on the fringes of Valletta, the decline of the commercial activity along St. Mark Street and St. John Street, which resulted from the public movement between these nodes and the central commercial area of Valletta, was evident. A similar situation had happened in Strait Street. Fifty years ago, Strait Street was a hub of nightlife activity in Valletta, however, social improvement and the absence of naval fleets, have left this street in Valletta inactive and physically degraded.

Architectural

- 5.4 In addition to historical studies, one should also conduct architectural surveys as part of the process to identify activity nodes. Both studies are required in identifying key buildings of historical and architectural importance, which can act as hubs in possible activity nodes. Besides this, the quantity and condition of historically and architecturally interesting buildings would further justify the need to rehabilitate an area, and prioritise one area before another.

Pedestrian movement

- 5.5 The present pedestrian flow should be also surveyed, in order to identify routes which are preferred by pedestrians, popular areas, and others which are less frequented. Through this survey, one can also identify existing activity nodes. A good analysis of such survey could also recognize barriers which obstruct pedestrians flow through certain areas of Valletta. Although one can recommend activity nodes which fall along

presently popular pedestrian routes, it is more ideal to identify nodes which are off such routes, so that new activities will be introduced along presently unexplored streets.

Demography & Social Analysis

- 5.6 A demographical analysis of the city is vitally important. Through such analysis, one can perceive the population change in specific areas of Valletta, the level of resident mobility to and from such areas, the age groups of the resident population and their social status. This data can then lead to social evaluation of certain areas in Valletta. Problem areas can be identified from this survey. Although the recommendations of such problem areas as activity nodes is a difficult challenge, this has to be considered as an important move if one has faith in the rehabilitation of Valletta. Although ideally one should promote the rehabilitation of areas which have been already vacated, and therefore avoiding the problem of gentrification, this cannot be the rule since most areas of Valletta are still populated, though not at the expected rates. Another point which should be considered in this strategy is that when planning a residential area, one should seek to have a mixed population, with regards to age, status and social background.

Public Opinion

- 5.7 One cannot recommend a plan for an area without getting to know the residents and users of that area. A tool which is constantly used by planners, is the public opinion questionnaire and public participation. Questionnaires are a means to get in contact with people living in the area and the people using the area; it is only through such contact that one can identify the problems and needs of that area. Public involvement in a plan, would make the people, effected by the plan, feel part of that

plan and "own" the plan. Through such questionnaire, the residents of Valletta can mention services which they find that are lacking in their city, and possibly they can recommend locations for such services. Such locations could be ideal activity nodes for the resident population. Similarly, the users of services provided in Valletta, that is the general public, could be involved in this plan by getting their opinion on the commercial and administrative parts of the city.

Surveys needed for all Valletta area

- 1. land use surveys;**
- 2. historical research;**
- 3. architectural analysis;**
- 4. surveys on pedestrian flow;**
- 5. demographical surveys and social analysis of resident population;**
- 6. Public opinion questionnaires, both for residents and users, covering demographical, social, cultural and commercial aspect, are also beneficial to this planning exercise.**

6 Prioritising Nodes

6.1 As have been discussed above, it makes more sense to focus all available resources onto one node, and then when the plan is completed move onto another node. It is therefore important, that after selecting the nodes, through the process explained above, one should prioritise the nodes. Prioritising of nodes depends on a range of criteria, as shall be discussed infra.

6.2 The present physical state of a node, is one of the most important criteria

which should be considered in choosing the first node to act on. A node which is made up of a relatively high number of degraded buildings, should have preference on another in which buildings are better maintained. Although such difference in Valletta is not that evident, there are areas which are in a much worse physical state than others.

- 6.3 Another aspect which should be contemplated when prioritising nodes, is the historical value of the node. A node, which has lost most of its original buildings, especially those lost in the Second World War, and the majority of its buildings are postwar reconstructions, should have less priority than a node which contains a considerable number of sixteenth and seventeenth century buildings. When deciding on two nodes, both having retained their original character, the node which has key historical buildings in it, such as auberges and seventeenth century churches, should have priority on that which has a lesser amount of such buildings.
- 6.4 Nodes having higher vacancy rates than others should have priority. The rate of vacancy could relate with the unpopularity of an area, and therefore intervention through such areas is most essential. As mentioned earlier in the previous section, a node having higher vacancy rates, is much easier to act upon, since one would avoid the displacement of existing residents, and the possibility of gentrification.
- 6.5 The population mix of a node, if the area is residential, is another criteria which should be considered when establishing priorities between nodes. A node having a comparatively aging population; or having a considerable number of families with social problems; or dominated by a low income population, should have a higher priority than one which has a better mix.

- 6.6 A node which in a way is already attracting visitors to it, should have less priority than a node which is relatively isolated. The possible effect which the rehabilitation of a node could have on the areas outside it, should be also considered when setting priorities.
- 6.7 An area which already has pressure for unacceptable redevelopment, or undesirable commercial pressure, should be acted upon before a node on which such pressure do not exist. Similarly, areas which have been identified for "slum" clearance in previous plans, and such clearance had not occurred, should have a high priority, for two main reasons. When such areas are identified, these areas tend to degenerate much quicker, both physically and socially; and if people are still living in unacceptable conditions, something should be done to improve their living conditions.
- 6.8 Property ownership, is another criteria which could be used in prioritising nodes. An area having a balance between government and private owned properties should have a higher priority than a node which is mostly owned by the private sector, or by the government. Such balance could facilitate both public sector involvement and encourage private investment.

Prioritising nodes:

1. The present physical state of a node, is one of the most important criteria which should be considered in choosing the first node to act on;
2. The historical value of the node;
3. The rate of vacancy could relate with the unpopularity of an area, and therefore intervention through such areas is most essential;
4. The population mix of a node, if the area is residential;
5. A node which in a way is already attracting visitors to it, should have less priority than a node which is relatively isolated;
6. An area which already has pressure for unacceptable redevelopment, or undesirable commercial pressure, should be acted upon before a node on which such pressure do not exist;
7. Property ownership, is another criteria which could be used in prioritising nodes.

7 Case Study – *Il-Biccerija* Node

- 7.1 Although this node was not selected according to the process explained above, its choice is being justified *infra*. Strategically, it is most ideal to select nodes which are at the fringes or along the waterfront of the city, so that people are attracted from the centre outwards. In addition to this, one should also consider an opposite flow, where people move from the outer nodes to the central nodes. This can be mainly achieved through the improvement of peripheral transport, on land or by sea. The node selected as a case study, is a peripheral node, located at the northeast part of Valletta (***Include site plan***). The case study area is delineated by Bakery Street, Archbishop Street, Marsamxett Road, St. Sebastian Road and includes the coastal area under the English Curtain Wall and St Sebastian Bastion. (***Include site boundaries***). The area is popularly known as *il-Bavjiera*, since the Auberge of the Anglo-Bavarian Langue is

found in the area. For the purpose of this paper, the area is being referred to as *il-Biccerija*, since the first slaughter-house of Valletta was built in this area. This area has a direct link to the coast, through what is known as the *Jews Sally Port* and to the exposed inlet known as *il-Fossa* or St. Elmo's Bay. Although mainly a residential area, the area is amongst the worst maintained areas of Valletta, and in desperate need for rehabilitation. This is not the sole reason why this area has been chosen as a node; the buildings along the bastion walls enjoy pleasant seaviews. The area is rich in historical buildings, several of which are presently vacant. The area, as explained above, is easily linked to the shore. There is also a prevailing social stigma against the area and the residents living there.

7.2 The detailed survey of the node should consist of: a historical survey; an architectural survey; a structural survey; a land use survey; a land ownership survey; and, a demographical and household analysis. Other data which could be useful when one comes to draft the rehabilitation plan for the area, can be obtained by interviewing people who know the area, such as Local Councilors, Parish Priests and the residents of the area; and other organisations, agencies, departments and authorities which could have vested interests in the area.

7.3 Although the need for a historical survey has been already identified in the nodes' selection process discussed above, the type of survey recommended here should be a more detailed research. This historical research should investigate any urban change which possibly could have occurred within the node selected, from the time of the building of Valletta. This can be studied by comparing maps, paintings and etchings, a number of which have been reproduced in literature on

Valletta. Through textbooks on the history of Valletta, one can associate any historical events with the node under study, and therefore can look for any buildings which relate to such events. A useful book which can lead the researcher to important buildings is *The Houses of Valletta*, written by V.F. Denaro and published in 1967. Another useful source of information is the Antiquities Protection List of 1945, available at the Museums Department. The research could then continue through the Archives of Malta at the National Library. A good source of information are the Treasury Books of the Order, and the various Foundations established by the Grand Masters. Some of these archives or *Cabrei* contain plans of buildings as built by the Order. The history of the area during the British period can be inquired in the National Archives at *Santo Spirito* at Rabat. Old photographs are important, when one is investigating the changes which had occurred to the area during this century.

- 7.4 Ideally, all the buildings within the node under study, should be surveyed both internally and externally, plans and elevations drawn up, and photographs (possibly rectified) taken. However, this is a very complex job, primarily due to problems which one could encounter in trying to get into buildings, and secondly, since such survey requires considerable financial and human resources. These should be surveyed both externally and internally. An Integrated Heritage Management Inventory should be collected for the whole area and buildings given a grade of protection. Through this survey, each facade would be examined architecturally and stylistically. Any special features, such as *fat* mouldings, continuous corbel supported balconies, sculptured features, engraved dates and coat of arms, should be carefully recorded. Such features are important references in dating buildings. By virtue of this

visual survey one can also identify any aesthetically offending elements in the streetscape. This survey is also crucial in featuring buildings which need immediate restoration. The survey explained above, should be extended to open spaces, with special reference to the state of the public spaces, such as streets, squares and other open areas. Any areas paved by hardstone or lava slabs should be recorded. Important vistas and landmarks are to be distinguished in this survey.

7.5 As a continuation to the surveys explained above, one should conduct a structural analysis of these buildings. Buildings which show serious structural problems should be clearly earmarked. Note should also be taken of other buildings which have problems with their roofs, or other minor structural problems. In the case of historically important buildings, one should also take note of structural changes which are evident, such as the introduction of intermediate floors, the closing up of the internal courtyards, the building of partition walls and other visible interventions. Ideally this survey should be conducted after the drawing up of plans of the buildings surveyed so that any notes taken can be located. This survey in conjunction with those explained previously can be used to identify buildings which merit no protection in view of their lack of aesthetic contextuality, or which as a result of their delicate structural condition, can be demolished, and others still, which as a result of their historical and architectural significance should be preserved at all cost. One should remark that the number of buildings identified for demolition should be very minimal, since in Valletta there should be a presumption against the demolition of its buildings.

6.6 In any planning exercise, a land use survey is of critical importance. When the process of selecting nodes was described earlier on, reference

to such survey had been already made. If such survey has been conducted in detail throughout the city, there is no need to repeat it for the node, as this should have been covered already. If, on the other hand, the previous survey was a general one, a more detailed land use survey should be conducted, within the node under study. This survey should ideally cover all floors. Through this survey one can identify the number of vacant properties, the services offered, any public or private offices, commercial uses and other types of uses within the area under study. Amongst other things, this survey can highlight important services which are lacking within the area and any detrimental imbalances in the mix of uses.

7.7 The most complex type of information, which is necessary when one tries to draft a rehabilitation plan, is land ownership. Although there are different sources from where such data can be obtained, the intricate way tenements are divided poses a serious problem in obtaining reliable information. Notwithstanding such problems, one should at least identify Government property. This information can be obtained from the Lands Department. Although the property in Valletta started to be registered at the Lands Registry Office, up to now, only property which was previously owned by the Church, and now administered by the Joint Office, had been registered. It is envisaged that both Government and private owned property will be registered in this inventory. When this information is compiled, it could be a reliable source, since each property registered is being surveyed and plans recorded.

7.8 A demographical and household survey of the node is also important. Through such survey, one can identify any imbalances in population distribution, with regards to sex and age groups. One can also deduce

population changes throughout time, by comparing past data with recent. One can also estimate the population density within the node, and conduct the necessary comparisons. Through a household survey, one can gather the rate of vacant units and the distribution of household size. All this data can be gathered through the Census carried out every ten years. It can be also gathered through a census designed specifically for the node. However, one can find problems in using these two methods. The Census information is not that easy to retrieve by property number, and is highly restrictive information. The second recommended method is highly time consuming and costly.

Surveying the node:

- 1. historical survey;**
- 2. architectural survey;**
- 3. structural survey;**
- 4. land use survey;**
- 5. land ownership survey;**
- 6. demographical and household analysis**
- 7. interviews**

8 Rehabilitation Methodology

8.1 Through the data collected in the above mentioned surveys, and in line with the recommendations of the Local Plan for Valletta, one should start by drawing out the main goals and objectives of a rehabilitation plan for the node under study. In line with the set goals and objectives, one should then recommend detailed actions related to specific buildings and spaces within the node. This plan, should be designed in a way to

ensure its implementation, and therefore when drafting recommendations one should think of their management. The plan should be economically feasible, socially justifiable and politically acceptable.

8.2 Although at this stage one is discussing the general approach to node rehabilitation, one can identify a number of key goals which should apply to all nodes within the city:

1. The node should act as a magnet to generate economic activity within the city but at the same time protecting the existing established commercial area;
2. The node should attract new residents within the city but at the same time protecting the present residents;
3. Any physical intervention should be made with special regard to the fact that Valletta is a World Heritage Site.

In addition to the above three main goals, one can add other goals which relate directly to the node under consideration.

8.3 The rehabilitation plan should then make specific recommendations related to the physical, economic and social aspects of the area. Physically, one should identify the main historical buildings in the area and if their present use is not in line with the established objectives, one should recommend specific uses to such buildings. In view of the historical importance of these buildings, ideally one should recommend uses by which such buildings can be made accessible to the general public. These uses can include public administrative offices, and a mix of culturally and tourist related uses or activities. On the opposite end of the scale, one should also identify those buildings of which their demolition is

to be considered favourably. The plan should give guidelines on the construction of new buildings, when such demolition is permitted. The plan should also give guidance on how the rest of the property within the node is to be rehabilitated. The rehabilitation plan should get into the economics of its implementation. Each proposal should be economically feasible to conduct. Therefore proposals should be directed in attracting, as much as possible, private investment.

8.4 The rehabilitation plan should not focus only on buildings within the area under study, but also on open spaces such as streets, squares and other public open spaces. Proposals should be drawn on traffic flow, pedestrian areas and recreational areas amongst other possible activities in such public spaces. The plan should give guidance on how such spaces are to be environmentally improved and made more attractive.

8.5 The final and most important consideration is the recommendation of the way how this plan is to be implemented. The plan can be implemented totally by the public sector. This approach, although having the advantage of a possibly better managed plan and a homogeneous results, it is economically and technically impossible, unless the node is a single building or a small open space. The other possibility is that of delegating its implementation to the private sector by leasing publicly owned property to the private, and binding them to follow the established plan; this can be made only if the whole area forming the node is publicly owned and if the plan is financially attracting. The disadvantage of this plan, is that although legally, such

property still remains owned by the government, public access through such property may be denied. Moreover, it is highly unrealistic, in the present situation of Valletta, to have a plan which is so economically feasible that it would be implemented only through private investment. The final and possibly the most effective implementation is that of forming a partnership between the public sector and the private sector. The public organisations could include amongst others, the Valletta Local Council, Valletta Rehabilitation Project, the Housing Authority, Museums Department and other government departments, authorities and public agencies which could have interest in the plan. The private sector, owning property within the area of the plan will be guided to get their property in line with the plan, and possibly, when need arises, be financially assisted through grant schemes. There could be also the possibility of the private sector buying property in the area and encouraged to rehabilitate such property according to the plan. This approach has a number of advantages. The public sector, as discussed above, can give incentives to the private sector to attract investment into the area. Moreover, the plan could require legislative changes for it to be implemented, which changes can only be made by government. The role of the government is needed in order to set the ball rolling, and then private investment would be attracted to the node.

If the partnership approach is to be adopted, it is useful to get the rehabilitation plan published into a development brief, explaining to the private sector the opportunities which exist in the plan itself. This plan

is published for public consultation and the comments raised by the public be addressed before the final plan starts being implemented.

Notes and References

1. From Laparelli's codex as quoted by Roger De Giorgio in *A City by an Order*.
2. The significance of Valletta as a tourism product: Findings of a Tourism Survey. Research and Information Division, Malta Tourism Authority. April 2001. p 10
3. Quoted from the introduction to *Renzo Piano's Guidelines for a Master Plan for Valletta*, written by Mr. Ray Bondin.
4. *Grand Harbour Local Plan - General Policies*, April 2002. p.11.
5. Ibid.
6. *Grand Harbour Local Plan - Valletta Area Policies*. April 2002. p. 5.
7. Ibid. p. 5.