



Living Cities, Liveable Spaces: Placemaking & Identity

THE FOURTH VALLETTA 2018 ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

22-24 November 2017

Focus: cultural diplomacy, place branding, soft power, liveable cities, community, identity

Background

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) aims to *“highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, as well as to promote greater mutual understanding between European citizens”*. The title is based on a European Community Action and is assigned on two main dimensions, namely: (i) the European Dimension, and (ii) the City and Citizens dimension. Various cities look at the title as a different opportunity, with legacy being one of the most desirable outcomes of receiving the title.

The City of Valletta was declared European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2018 on the 12th October 2012. The Valletta 2018 Foundation¹ is responsible for implementing the project in Valletta and Malta. The ECoC will include all the Maltese Islands, with an aim to spread the impacts throughout the whole Maltese territory. Valletta will be hosting the title in 2018 with the Dutch city of Leeuwarden.

Setting the context

Malta is among the island states in the centre of the Mediterranean which has given specific attention to the concept of nation branding. This important strategy aimed to enhance the Maltese Islands' public diplomacy as well as its international relations following the decolonisation period which saw the Maltese Islands being declared independent in 1964 and later, its accession to the European Union in 2004. Presently, the country is capitalising on a number of aspects, such as public and international relations and the use of its cultural resources to prepare, and celebrate, a number of local and international events, making the timeframe 2014-2018 an eventful *present* period, possibly, one of the most eventful in the country's history, including an element of commemorating the island's history and *past*, whilst looking forward to its challenging, yet exciting, '.

¹ The Valletta 2018 Foundation is responsible for the implementation of the cultural programme, which will enable the participation of the citizens of Malta and Europe and will form an integral and sustainable part of the long-term social, economic and cultural development of Valletta. In conjunction with the cultural programme, the Foundation will develop a programme of consistent, accessible and comparable research and evaluation directly linked to culture.

The 2014-2018 period is characterised by four national anniversary commemorations, namely the 40 year anniversary of Malta being declared independent in 2014, the anniversary of Malta becoming a Republic (1974), the anniversary commemorating the end of the British occupation of the Islands in 1979, and the 10 year anniversary of Malta's accession to the European Union. This eventful period also includes the celebration of Valletta's 450th anniversary and hosting international cultural events in 2016. The year 2017 is considered as a milestone year, with Malta presiding over the Council of the European Union in the first six months of the year, and returning to the Venice Art Biennale after an absence of 17 years, ultimately leading up to the hosting of the European Capital of Culture in Valletta in 2018 (Xuereb, 2016).

Repositioning cities through cultural diplomacy

The development of a cultural strategy and use of cultural diplomacy, in and by cities, often allow for their repositioning with unique opportunities such as the bidding for, and hosting of, large-scale public events, including hosting the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), amongst other events. Other cities choose to move away from bidding for such events but instead choose to develop signature buildings and attractions which are used to make them more distinguishable.

In light of this context and the run up to these eventful years, the Maltese Islands are using cultural diplomacy, and employing their soft power, by concentrating efforts to elevate the Islands' in terms of international relations (Xuereb, 2016). In her article entitled 'Is the European Union's soft power in decline?', Smith (2014:104) defines soft power as that which, "emanates from the attractiveness of a state's culture, political values and foreign policies".

Malta's rich history and ancient past is a reflection of a country which has always embraced cultural diplomacy. This is particularly evident from the time of the plethora of contextual evidence left by the Knights of St John, the British Empire, and later by the early Maltese Governments which by then established an increasingly important role with its Mediterranean neighbours. All this clearly reflects the islands' role in cultural diplomacy. This is further emphasised in its present, through the hosting of the Valletta Summit on Migration, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and hosting the 7th World Summit on Arts and Culture (IFACCA, International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies) in 2015, and Malta's role as President of the European Council in the first part of 2017.

In view of these important milestones, Malta's cultural sector has experienced a radical change over recent years which, as part of this place branding process, which change has also allowed for extensive capacity building efforts within the cultural sector. These included the drafting of a National Cultural Policy in 2011, the selection, in 2012, of Valletta as an ECoC in the year 2018, the restructuring the former Malta Council for Culture and the Arts through the setting up of Arts Council Malta in 2015, the setting up of Malta's national dance company *ŻfinMalta* and national theatre company *Teatru Malta*. These actions, coupled by major initiatives through the Malta Tourism Authority and the Malta Film Commission to further establish Malta as a filming location but also to develop Malta's own film industry further, are all clear examples of the exciting times in the cultural sector, as well as the increased importance being placed in the wide Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs), in a bid to enhance Malta's strategic role internationally.

Furthermore, Valletta, and the Maltese Islands' geographic location offer a strategic position as a political and cultural meeting hub. This is an outstanding local asset which can define further new collaboration opportunities for both the Maltese Islands and the surrounding countries.

Branded Liveable Cities

Research shows that cities are increasingly using branding as a vehicle to facilitate socio-economic development. More specifically, "place branding is one of the best known applications of branding in the public sector" (Klijn, Eshuis & Braun, 2012:500). Cities are continuously striving to distinguish themselves and utilise their distinctive characteristics in this process. As Bıçakçı (2012:994) notes,

"Culture in the form of cultural facilities and events, architecture and urban history plays an important role in forming and sharpening the city image, thus becomes a strategic tool for the ones who are benefiting from the positive reflections of a city brand".

Place branding is a complex process, often used as a predominant factor which allows for the positioning of a city or a particular destination. The process entails trying to create a positive image for the city to differentiate it from other cities, in a bid to attract external investment and to increase tourist arrivals. The process is both a marketing and a governance process, which involves a number of actors working independently from the actual branding managers, making the process a complex one with a number of issues being encountered along the process.

Before, resorting to cultural diplomacy to brand a city space, many cities would have taken up regeneration or revitalisation projects through the cultural and creative industries. Case studies focusing on place branding demonstrate a direct link between place branding and cultural and infrastructural regeneration. Amongst these case studies, the most obvious and often-cited example is that of the city of Barcelona. The city, which used the Olympic Games (large-scale public event) as a tool to reposition itself (place branding), carried out a number of projects to revitalise the city (cultural and infrastructural regeneration) along the way. The city branding of Barcelona created an extensive transformation of the city, with creativity, innovation and identity being key concepts used along this transformation process. The Games were used as a catalyst to redevelop basic city infrastructure and the creation of an estimated 20,000 permanent jobs. What makes the Barcelona-case more distinctive than other examples is probably how the city continued with this transformation and reinvention process and its urban redevelopment strategy, which include important aspects of identity and social cohesion, long-after the Olympic Games and how now, twenty five years later, Barcelona's story is still used and referenced widely (Belloso, 2011).

The role of the local community in this process, the involvement and participation of various community groups, and the potential of grassroots projects is crucial to the success of such regeneration strategies and to ensure that cities reflect the identity of the various communities which inhabit or interact within the same space. These projects often aim to ensure that cities are living cities, but there is a clear distinction between the concept of living cities and liveable spaces.

There are various ways to define a liveable city, and probably, there is no singular clear-cut definition. Underwood (2013, para. 3) defines a liveable city as a city that, "is meeting the needs of the individuals *actually living there*". Liveability depends on the various factors, including the physical public

space available, the communities who live, or aspire to live in this space, interaction between different social groups, cost of living, affordability of housing, quality of care and education, amongst other factors. The Global Liveability Ranking, issued annually by the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) lists the following factors as impacting on the liveability of a city: (i) stability, including terrorism and social unrest, (ii) provision of public and private healthcare, (iii) culture and the environment, including social and religious restrictions, cultural availability, censorship, climate, corruption and sports, (iv) provision of public and private education and (v) infrastructure available, including housing, roads, energy, and other basic utilities. This mixture of factors shows how liveability is a fluid concept which is dependent upon various aspects in community members' everyday life (EIU, 2016).

Furthermore, the empowerment of combined forces of technology and new forms of citizenship can provide an increased element of liveability in today's and tomorrow's cities. The application of user-centred urban design and the appearances of smart cities, which use data from private and public sources and enable civic and public players to improve living conditions have been shown to be directly linked to people's perception of a city's liveability (Sadoway & Shekhar, 2014).

Cultural planning, implemented through a clear bottom-up approach, allows for cities to strengthen the opportunities given to involve local communities in creating branded liveable cities and large-scale events such as the ECoC may be used as a tool in this extensive process. Research shows that many cities, considered with a low, or at times negative, profile, have experienced a 'renaissance' in their image and hence positioned or repositioned themselves by hosting the ECoC. The ECoC may, and is often also used, as a cultural process to allow for internal, more localised rebranding. Throughout the ECoC process, and the implementation of the extensive Cultural Programme which is developed and takes place along the title year, cities engage themselves in changing local perceptions of the city itself, whilst trying to foster a sense of pride, which partly relates to image impacts is more widely created through encouraging active participation and the development of grass-roots projects within the Programme (Garcia and Cox, 2013).

Be careful what you wish for

Culture has been widely acknowledged to offer a good opportunity to cities to have a competitive edge, including the previously mentioned hosting of cultural events and development of infrastructure, with a number of success stories which have been widely referenced and published, with other examples being more critical of these processes (Richards & Wilson, 2004). Nonetheless, one also needs to analyse the real success for the city itself, including participation and ownership by the local communities who inhabit these cities and the usability of specifically created large mega structures (Garcia, 2004).

Pratt (2011), notes that, whilst the benefits derived by such strategies is easy and visible to witness, it may be hard to define such process as a successful one if this ultimately leads to gentrification and the city in question becomes less liveable. These processes may eventually make life easier to the benefit of an already privileged group, making the quality of life worse to others less privileged.

Cities aiming to host important cultural events, or aiming to develop cultural infrastructure as a place-making initiative may also end up with a so-called 'legacy of crisis'. Various reports and research provide a critical discussion on how hosting such events, or developing iconic cultural infrastructure can impact a city. These impacts include costs associated with building or enhancing of cultural, sports and accessibility-related infrastructure, particularly if such projects are undertaken without a clear long-term

vision which spans well beyond the event itself or the first few years of operation of the new building (Berlin, 2015, Gordon, 2016, Richards & Wilson, 2004 and The Economist, 2014).

Conference aims and objectives

Living Cities, Liveable Spaces: Placemaking and Identity aims to explore the interplay between cultural diplomacy, place branding and liveability, particularly in light of large-scale public events such as the European Capital of Culture.

The conference aims to discuss the following questions:

- What are the real effects of place branding, use of soft power and cultural diplomacy to reposition cities on an international sphere?
- What is the role of the local community in city positioning?
- What is the impact such processes leave on the fabric of a city, including the many communities which inhabit and interact within these cities?
- How do residents and local communities themselves position a city and how does this contrast, or play out, with the official place branding process?
- Should creating, transforming or sustaining a liveable city, happen before a city positioning process? Can these two processes happen in parallel?

Conference thematic areas

The conference seeks to explore research, policy and particularly practical, grass-roots examples from different researchers, academics, policy makers, cultural practitioners, urban planners and designers, activists and community members, combining policy and strategic aspects to practical, on-the-ground perspectives.

The conference thematic areas are:

1. **Cultural and creative expression as a cultural diplomacy tool** – The growing importance being placed by many cities and countries on the Cultural and Creative Industries reflect the role that the sector may have in cultural diplomacy. In this theme, we seek to explore different case studies and scenarios of how cities, and countries, have used or are currently using the sector to strengthen their role internationally. We aim to evaluate success stories, as well as assessing the dependencies and obstacles that may hamper or neutralise its positive contributions.

Key questions:

- What are the effects of culture on cultural diplomacy and how does promoting cultural diplomacy impact upon other diplomatic sectors (e.g. economic collaboration, conflict resolution)
- Does the use of culture as a diplomatic tool shape or direct the work of grassroots artistic communities? How does this tally with the concept of art as an anti-establishment tool working outside official paradigms?

2. **Branding a liveable city** - Whilst city positioning is often carried out in order to change the external image of the city, the needs and sense of ownership of the local population may at times been marginalised in this process. In this theme we seek to explore the impacts of rebranding policies and strategies on cities and the community members who inhabit or interact with these cities, seeking to identify grass-roots initiatives.

Key questions:

- What are the effects on the local population, especially if branding strategies are often top-down led approaches?
 - Do such strategies allow for gentrification? Do 'branded' cities ultimately become less liveable?
3. **Challenging times** – It is undoubtedly a challenging time for the Euro-Med region. From internal issues in the European Union, the EU is set to face challenges which could undermine its soft power, or potentially make it stronger. External threats and issues faced in terms of the immigration crises, terrorism and the ISIS breakout in surrounding Libya and Syria amongst also pose a risk to the area. In this theme we seek to explore the threats a whole region faces in terms of soft power and the role of cultural diplomacy to face challenging times.

Key questions:

- How can citizen and other actors in urban centres in the emerging 21st century Mediterranean, see their opportunities to reinvent themselves for the future?
 - Which are the main challenges along this process?
4. **Future Cities** – There is arguably a direct link between a city's liveability, its attractiveness and name brand strength, and the capacity it has to embrace new forms of citizen engagement and technology application. The concept of smart cities is built on systems that harness technology to empower city users and city managers, by addressing issues of governance, diversity, resource and environmental management, mobility and health. In this theme, we seek to explore the nexus between cities' image-building and their future.

Key questions:

- How will the concept of liveability change in the future, particularly in light of new technologies and new tools for citizen and social engagement?

Timeline

Call for Papers and Posters	17 March 2017
Call for Papers and Posters closes*	21 April 2017
Registration opens	28 June 2017
Early bird registration closes	15 September 2017

Submission of conference documents**	31 October 2017
Registration closes	8 November 2017
Conference	22-24 November 2017

**Call for papers may be extended or a second call may be issued at the discretion of the Valletta 2018 Foundation*

***Full papers, presentations and posters, as applicable*

Call for Papers

The conference will take place over three days, 22-24 November 2017, in Valletta, Malta. The conference will include plenary sessions, various networking session, a number of parallel sessions and other sessions.

Contributions addressing some of the issues highlighted above are welcome. The range of papers may cover theoretical and methodological perspectives, practical examples and artistic interpretations of the issues and challenges faced in cities by communities.

Interested applicants are requested to submit, by email, a paper proposal (abstract) of not more than 250 words by **no later than 21 April 2017 to research@valletta2018.org**.

A 20-minute slot will be allotted to each selected presenter, followed by a discussion session with participants.

To submit a proposal, send a document containing the following:

- Project title;
- Five keywords;
- Abstract not exceeding 250 words;
- List of which of the conference themes the abstract addresses (maximum of 3, in preferential order);
- Short bibliography in support of the proposal;
- Type of presentation being proposed – oral, performance, workshop, etc.;
- Full details of primary author, including name, surname, title, institution, email, phone number;
- Name(s) of other authors (if applicable);
- A short bio not exceeding 250 words.

Non-traditional presentation forms are also welcome.

Late proposals will only be considered if space is available. Applicants will be notified of the acceptance of their proposal by **28 June 2017**. Registration will open in June 2017.

Call for Posters

The conference may also include a Poster presentation session. Below are some guidelines for submission:

- Poster shall address at least one of the conference thematic areas
- Interested participants shall submit an **abstract of 250 words** (max) describing the poster;
- Poster presentations should incorporate illustrative materials such as tables, graphs, photographs, and large-print text, and materials should be clearly readable from a distance of three feet;
- Poster presentations may represent completed work or work that is currently taking place, and is to illustrate new findings or approaches to the subject matter;
- Participants whose proposal will be accepted shall use a standard poster size of A1 with a good quality paper.

The chosen posters will be on display for part of the event. The authors would be encouraged to stand by their poster and discuss aspects of their research with attendees and delegates during the various networking sessions of the conference.

All interested researchers, PhD students and practitioners are invited to submit, by email, a poster proposal (abstract) of around 250 words by **no later than 21 April 2017** to research@valletta2018.org.

The Valletta 2018 Foundation may select only a selection of the posters being displayed to be presented during the poster session.

To submit a proposal, send a document containing the following:

- Poster title;
- Five keywords;
- Abstract not exceeding 250 words;
- Short bibliography (a minimum of 5 relevant references) in support of the proposal;
- Full details of primary author, including name, surname, title, institution, email, phone number;
- Name(s) of other authors (if applicable);
- A short bio not exceeding 250 words.

Late proposals will only be considered if space is available. Applicants will be notified of the acceptance of their proposal by **28 June 2017**. Registration will open in June.

Conference Costs

**tbc*

Early bird	Euro 75
Regular admission	Euro 85
Concession (Students, Senior Citizens, Speakers)	Euro 70

All participants will be required to register for the conference through the Valletta 2018 Foundation website.

Further costs with regards to parallel events as part of the conference cultural and social programme will be announced upon registration launch.

Other Details

Full conference details, including programme, fees and list of speakers will be published in due course on the Valletta 2018 Foundation's conference website <http://conference.valletta2018.org>.

The conference main language shall be English. The Valletta 2018 Foundation may also offer sign language interpretation upon request.

Proceedings

The Valletta 2018 Foundation will be publishing the conference proceedings, in collaboration with Fondation de Malte, www.fondationdemalte.org. The Valletta 2018 Foundation will also be exploring the possibility of publishing a number of papers in selected journals following the conference.

Contact details

For further details please contact the Valletta 2018 Foundation at research@valletta2018.org.

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