

Does Malta need a second Silent City?

Valletta is losing its vibrancy and if the government wants to keep it as a living monument it needs to come up with urgent, practical solutions, the Valletta Business Community Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry said.

A few years ago the government embarked on a commendable strategy to embellish and upgrade Valletta, it said. But the process of change is not being efficiently managed and, from the business point of view, it seems that Valletta is gradually being transformed from a bustling capital into a soulless monument frequented only by those persons who have no choice but to enter Valletta.

The business issues pertaining exclusively to Valletta encouraged the Importers, Distributors and Retailers Economic Group of the chamber to bring together all businesses that operate in the capital across numerous sectors. For this purpose, the Malta Chamber's Economic Group pioneered the setting up of the Valletta Business Community Committee, which now represents over 350 businesses. The committee includes representatives from the Valletta Alive Foundation, the Republic Street Business Community Association and the Merchants Street Business Community Association.

In order to keep a finger on the pulse of business in Valletta, the committee has surveyed the businesses it represents to gauge business activity over the festive period.

The study conducted in January showed a significant loss of business during the Christmas period. "However, it is known that that this loss is constant and not merely linked to the festive season, nor to the international recession. It is simply caused by the continuous elimination of parking spaces in Valletta," the committee said.

The business community has seen a continual reduction of parking spaces and an increase in restrictions, the introduction of the CVA, the Park and Ride, residents parking and parking spaces allotted for the exclusive use of ministers and members of parliament, not to mention the continuous increase in reserved parking places. This is clearly detrimental to business in Valletta.

"The reformed public transport system will ameliorate matters as will the installation of lifts from the Valletta Waterfront and the expansion of the Park and Ride facility. However, we fear that by the time these new resources are available, severe and irreversible damage will have been done."

If the government wants Valletta to survive as a living monument then it needs to come up with some urgent, practical solutions that make running a business more attractive. The Valletta Business Community Committee is willing to offer its experience and expertise to the government and wishes to be consulted on all issues that are of direct interest to the business community. The business community has continued to invest in our nation's capital.

“The fact is that, while other convenient destinations are being developed, Valletta is becoming increasingly problematic. This will result in more and more businesses leaving Valletta and shops closing down. The lack of activity will result in Valletta losing its vibrancy. We already have one Silent City, we do not need another one,” the committee said.
