

Experts meet in Malta to focus on preservation of historic cities

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Photo: Chris Sant Fournier.

Heritage experts from around the world are meeting in Malta to come up with a set of policy guidelines for the sustainable preservation of historic places such as Valletta.

The guidelines are expected to be outlined tomorrow at the end of a two-day symposium and will be known as the Valletta Guidelines for Historic Town Preservation Management.

"It is difficult to find that magical balance for historic cities that allows us to turn the clock back and restore them to their original beauty while ensuring they have a modern function," Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi told the members of the International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages.

Committee president Ray Bondin explained that the aim of the symposium was to outline the set of policies for the urban sustainable development of historic cities.

Ironically, the symposium is taking place at a time when the topic is extremely relevant to Valletta - a world heritage site - as works on the City Gate project are scheduled to start in summer.

The works include building a new Parliament in Freedom Square, transforming the Royal Opera House ruins into an open-air theatre and the regeneration of City Gate.

Dr Gonzi said Valletta was experiencing a new renaissance through the ongoing regeneration that aimed to respect the history of the capital while ensuring it had a modern function.

"These historic cities are magical but they do not live a fairytale. There is no happily ever after unless they are maintained. And for this we need a formula that allows for sustainable development," he said.


Dr Gonzi added that the controversies that often surrounded new projects in historic cities highlighted the need for such guidelines. He gave the example of the regeneration of Valletta Waterfront where people had objected to the differently-coloured apertures on the newly-restored façade.

Now, as the City Gate project by Italian architect Renzo Piano was about to take off, a controversy erupted over a Parliament building in Freedom Square.

Dr Gonzi stressed on the importance of removing Parliament from the President's Palace to be able to restore the precious space back to its original glory.

"The project will not only be giving Valletta its much-needed symbol of national democracy but also a signature building that will put Valletta and Malta on the international map of contemporary architecture.... Valletta has the ability to retain its tradition while blending it with innovation," he stressed.

Comments

Joe Fenech(21 hours, 54 minutes ago) 

"Dr Gonzi added that the controversies that often surrounded new projects in historic cities highlighted the need for such guidelines. He gave the example of the regeneration of Valletta Waterfront where people had objected to the differently-coloured apertures on the newly-restored façade"

This is more than an aperture!!! You are replacing a whole building.

Not only we need to keep that Victorian jewel, but also one does not want a work that's a con! Who cares if it's Renzo Piano who designed it. It's not that gigantic bus stop of a project that's going to attract tourists or the international community attention.

This project is sheer arrogance from Piano-Gonzi. What is Gonzi thinking here? - that he's going to get the Pompidou Centre or the Rome Auditorium????! Yes, maybe if the project came anywhere near to that, MAYBE people would have closed an eye!

James A. Tyrrell(1 day ago) 


@Raymond Sammut. "In a democracy, public opinion serves to elect government. It also obliges that government to remain accountable to the same public throughout its term in office." Are you saying that the present Government's interpretation of

'remaining accountable to the public' is basically to ignore them? It has been shown through the pages of this very paper amongst others that the majority of Maltese people are opposed to their Government spending a low estimate of 100 million Euros on a new Parliament building.

The Government's response to these objections is to ignore them and carry on regardless. If you don't agree that the majority of people are against the project then you should be supporting the call for a referendum. It's not a case of not wanting change Raymond, but assuring that the change which takes place is acceptable to the majority of Maltese people and fits in with the city of Valletta.

Raymond Sammut(2 hours, 39 minutes ago)

There was a poll carried out on the net (cannot remember the site) which asked a general question, something along the line: "Do you like the Piano designs?" The question was neutral and without addressing any aspect in particular of the entire project. The response, at the time I was visiting the site, shortly before the decision to proceed was made, was about 55% in favour. I have reason to believe that presently people in Malta, in their majority, have no objection, and as the project keeps progressing, more and more people will like what they see. Time will tell. I have no doubt that the new structures will be liked and all resistance will peter out.

victor pulis(1 day, 5 hours ago) 

Dr Gonzi stressed on the importance of removing Parliament from the President's Palace to be able to restore the precious space back to its original glory.

And we ALL agree with that

."The project will not only be giving Valletta its much-needed symbol of national democracy but also a signature building that will put Valletta and Malta on the international map of contemporary architecture....

Valletta doesn't need an ultra modern building to put it on the map. Democracy doesn't need a monument while it is still thriving. Only when it dies will it need a monument to be remembered by.

Miriam Cremona(1 day, 6 hours ago) 


Parliament does not need a new building to vacate the Palace since it can move to other sites such as the Auberge de Bavière recently restored to take Parliament and the Main Guard block amongst others. Valletta does not need a signature building since it can hold its own without. Paolo Portoguese of the University of Rome, a much respected architect of international repute during a lecture at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura had warned "Progetti eseguiti nella citta di Valletta devono essere fatte con rispetto, molta prudenza e molta umiltà." The Renzo Piano building cannot be considered to be respectful of the architecture of Valletta nor prudent. Instead it is making an arrogant statement. Structure Plan Policy Com 1 which is law states. 'A new Government administration centre will be developed outside Valletta to house most Government Departments, while Parliament itself and the Ministries will concentrate in the palaces and auberges of Valletta.' And this is amply and clearly explained by paragraph 10.2:

"The Government will choose a site for a new Government administration centre to

house the staff and functions of most Government Departments while Parliament itself will be located in the palaces and auberges of Valletta.

Raymond Sammut(1 day, 2 hours ago)

I would agree with government ministries remaining within Valletta. But fitting parliament into an existing building in Valletta does not make sense. I have recollections, for example, walking through the palace's courtyard and overhearing voices coming out from nowhere as if there were ghosts in there. Buildings in Valletta were never intended for parliamentary sessions. I wonder whether most Maltese ever bothered to find out where their parliament was actually located. Parliament is a modern concept. Every parliament deserves its own house in a prominent and visible location. It should be a building which is easily accessible, friendly to people, inclusive, and encourages everyone to take interest and follow what's going on. Quite the contrary, historic buildings in Valletta are introverted and exclusive. It's just the way the knights were some three centuries ago. Obviously things have now moved on, and the new parliament house at the entrance will take this fact into account.

Raymond Sammut(1 day, 8 hours ago) 

"There is no happily ever after unless they are maintained. And for this we need a formula that allows for sustainable development,"(Dr Gonzi)

Historical Valletta residences can be refurbished and marketed as international guest houses. People from all over the world, for a competitive price, can be invited to come and experience Valletta for a week or two. The money earned should significantly contribute to maintaining the city's heritage on an ongoing basis.

A. Zahra(1 day, 6 hours ago)

Most of the empty buildings in Valletta are privately owned and Government has no right to tell the owners what to do with them. And neither have you.

Raymond Sammut(1 day, 2 hours ago)

@ A. Zahra Most, but not all by your own admission. A government can also buy property from private owners. If it can be shown that it is in the interest of the common good, a government can pass legislation in parliament to buy property on its own terms without violating the rights of the owner. You can never put yourself in a position, Mr Zahra, where you can tell a democratically elected government what to do or not do. Just because someone owns property does not mean that they can stand in the way and prevent the government of the day from doing what is good for the long-term benefit of the general community. It would be a form of autocracy, which is abhorrent.

James A. Tyrrell(1 day, 8 hours ago) 


Gonzi describes this new Parliament building as a "much-needed symbol of national democracy." Given that the majority of people in the country would appear to be against this project in what way does that reflect democracy?

Raymond Sammut(1 day, 6 hours ago)

That's a good try at implying the meaning of "democracy". And it comes from no other than Mr Tyrrell.

The Maltese are historical champions of democracy. In spite of our shortcomings, and often sorely temperament, democracy is very much a part of our character. The first Maltese parliament was unique in the world because it was established under colonial rule. But it remained a refugee under consecutive British governors, moving from one existing building to another. Finally and rightfully it will have its own house, its own home.

In a democracy, public opinion serves to elect government. It also obliges that government to remain accountable to the same public throughout its term in office. The incumbent government is also, however, obliged to make decisions. For better or for worse, this decision has finally been made after some sixty years of bickering. It would have been ironic that a dictator could have his palace, but a democratically elected government could not have its own parliament house.

Igalea(1 day, 9 hours ago) 

How about showing them the vandalization project for our capital city?

Can the government say what it is doing to bring back stolen heritage back to Malta, e.g. the cannons that were taken by the British and were for a long time on show in London, La Valette's sword, etc.


Did teh government take part in this conference and if not why?

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8608513.stm

Egypt calls for antiquities unity

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8606458.stm

Egypt hosts meeting on recovery of 'stolen treasures'

Paul Borg(1 day, 9 hours ago) 

Gonzi says: "no happily ever after unless they are maintained" – while half of Valletta, it is falling to pieces! What is building a parliament going to help the maintance of Valletta? Ahjar kieku they spent that 80million on repairs to our shabby, scruffy capital.

And all these paroli of the Palace, he is trying to justify the extravagance of this project with the excuse of the Palace. X'GHANDU X'JAQSAM!! The palace can still be restored and if the Parliament goes to another building not Freedom Square. ANZI, Gonzi, he is boasting about the wonderful restoration of the palace, so why they not restore yet another palace to put Parliament, it would still be cheaper than 80million.

He wants to put Valletta on the map? Well I tell you Dr Gonzi, Valletta it has been on the map since 1565, it is a real insult to us, you telling us that Piano will put us on the map! More like that he will reduce us to looking like other cities abroad and take us OFF the World Heritage Sites map.