

My vision for Valletta

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We now have two major plans for the harbours and with some fine-tuning, these can be integrated. At the same time there is also the need for a comprehensive plan on the cities in between. What about the full peninsula of Valletta and Floriana? One cannot be treated independently from the other. Much work has already been done, but it seems there is a lack of cohesion and long-term planning.

I have written about the St Elmo area, which I consider a macro project. Cruise liners, which we hope will use Malta as a home port, will also require a convenient hotel and the refurbished and modernised St Elmo fort would surely attract many, at least to stay in a unique historical building. A hotel joined to a cruise terminal would be an added attraction. The tourist would head straight to the hotel from the airport and in a few minutes, he/she is on board.



**Old Bakery Street in Valletta.
Photo: Chris Sant Fournier**

The main problem with Valletta, and to a lesser extent, Floriana, is the hilly terrain. From whichever point one enters Valletta, people have to manage narrow streets, steps and steep hills. The Knights were aware of this problem, but it was impossible to flatten the terrain, except the main central part. Therefore, the most crucial requirement is to facilitate movement without much effort. Traffic control and the introduction of electric cabs cannot be considered an optimum solution. An easier mode of internal communication and movement is essential.

The removal of slums, both in Valletta and Floriana, should be hastened. There should be different classes of apartments, so that the inner cities will once again be populated by a range of classes. The provision of social housing is praiseworthy, but a city must be populated by different strata of people. It is therefore essential to also have luxurious apartments to attract the higher classes.

Private property should be bought by outright purchase. The Government (if need be with private partnership) can upgrade both areas and encourage people to move back into the cities. These are utopian ideas, they are not new ones. Many old cities have been regenerated in this way. Buildings worth preserving should be renovated. There are also a number of grand houses, some of which have lost their main entrance, which has been turned into a shopping outlet. These can be used as upmarket dwellings for business purposes or even for local or international organisations.

What I consider to be a major necessity is the building known as the Main Guard. If I recall well, the government had given notice of acquisition of the whole block. A properly designed building, in line with the prevalent Valletta architecture, would be an ideal location for the House of Parliament. Building up to the level of the President's Palace (two storeys), but also utilising the lower storey level with Strait Street (three storeys), there will be ample space to provide all the facilities needed by MPs. A lower basement will provide parking facilities instead of St George's Square, while the square could also provide additional underground parking to be used during official functions.

The money saved from the Opera House can be used for this project.

Malta should have a proper and dignified House of Parliament, and the central square in the city is the most logical place for such a prestigious building.

Valletta, therefore, will have various highlight zones that will entice people to move around the whole city instead of concentrating on two or three blocks in the centre.
