

Turn the Opera House into a modern library



"This is just what we need to give our general knowledge a boost and to decrease the horribly high illiteracy rate that we have..."

After theatre buffs it was the turn of bookworms to chip into the debate on the old Opera House, calling for the new building to house a modern library rather than Parliament, as is being planned.

Just as stage aficionados had done hours after the government recently re-launched its project for a grand reconstruction of City Gate and the Opera House by Renzo Piano, a Facebook group has been set up to lobby for the library idea.

The group, which already numbers 259 people, is backed by the Malta Library and Information Association (MaLIA), which is proposing that the place should be turned into a cultural centre, with a state-of-the-art library.

The association has so far collected 273 signatures supporting its idea, through an online petition.

This month's announcement that the City Gate regeneration project has been given a new lease of life under fresh plans by world-famous architect Renzo Piano was generally applauded.

However, the idea of rebuilding the Opera House into the new seat of Parliament was not met with the same enthusiasm. The first to complain were the theatre enthusiasts, backed by world famous tenor Joseph Calleja who said he was "shocked" to learn that government was planning to forge ahead with the idea.

The association, however, is not that drastic but is calling for the place to be turned into a cultural hub.

Their petition calls for a permanent display on the history of the Royal Opera House, a multimedia centre and a cafeteria as well as a public, lending library in the heart of the city.

One particular member, commenting on the association's Facebook page online, said that "maybe this is just what we need to give our general knowledge a boost and to decrease the horribly high illiteracy rate that we have in the country!"

Comments

Denis Catania (2 weeks ago)

Turn the Opera house into a Opera House with German money.

Michael Attard (2 weeks ago)

In fact anything but a new Parliament. Let them site Parliament at Fort St Elmo, apart from giving life to an otherwise depleted area to Valletta, when looking out the windows, the ministers can see the monstrosity that is Midi across the water.

Thomas Mueller-Troester (2 weeks ago)

I am a frequent visitor to Valletta and I love the idea of rebuilding the old Royal Opera House. Not as a house of parliament or a library but as an opera house. Unfortunately the size of the present ruins seems to me that it would be too small for state-of-the-art stage-productions. So why not preserve the ruins as they are? Just fixed in a save condition with save steps to the seats and proper restrooms and used as an open-air-theatre like it is used for some years during the art-festival.

The investment will be less than a rebuilding and you save two objects in one: A war-memorial and an attractive open-air-theatre (in addition to the wonderul Manoel and next to the "young" St. James Cavalier).

It's just an idea from a Valletta and Opera Lover who is looking forward beeing back soon in Malta.

Thomas Mueller-Troester, Vienna, Austria

Albert Attard (2 weeks ago)

Valletta / Malta needs an opera house that has been missing for so long and not a library – The Manoel Theatre, St. James or MCC are no substitutes.

Laurence Zerafa (2 weeks ago)

No one disputes that the role of libraries has changed. These days, besides information in print form (books, periodicals, maps etc.) they offer information in digital format both in- house (CD, DVDs, electronic databases on own servers) and externally via internet. Printed information is still around and it is a fallacy to assume that all information is available in digital format over the internet and for free. Not even all recently published information, let alone past publications. Ask any Melitensia researcher whether they need to refer to printed publications or not and you will soon find out they still need to use libraries (public or private).

But besides housing printed materials and electronic information with the equipment necessary to access it, public libraries should also offer the space for social interaction as highlighted by Mr. Leone Ganado. Visit any city or university town abroad, walk into the numerous modern libraries that are being built or renovated and you will realise what the Maltese public is missing by way of good libraries. Our notion still remains books on shelves some of which can be borrowed. The modern library, a still thriving institution, is much more than that.

albert leone ganado (2 weeks ago)

As Mr Sammut says the days of the traditional library are numbered. In future libraries like museums will be simply the repositories of historic books.

You can now hold on a pendrive in your pocket the equivalent of probably the largest private library. The future lies in ebooks and online access.

Most libraries would be better off investing in electronic book subscriptions with access rights to their students from home and school.

Indeed at schools and universities we should have a hard look at the large spaces being occupied by libraries which I am sure can be put to better use as a meeting places with Wifi connection for our students and staff .

Charles Sammut (2 weeks ago)

Just when European countries are digitising all their books to make them available online, someone comes up with this idea.

It might be a noble idea, but anachronistic in today's online world.
