

Bulletin on the Signs of the Times:

Education, Media and Culture

May – July 2025

Stories

In relation to **Education, Media and Culture**, three main themes led the news between the months of May and July 2025, these are: (1) **Spending on the Mediterranean film festival**; (2) **Malta's State of Conservation Report for Valletta** and (3) **Conserving the Maltese language**.

The first story set in this bulletin relates to the spending on the **Mediterrané film festival**, where newspapers reported that this festival, which was held in June, cost around €5 million. Included in these costs were an award ceremony, film screenings, a film competition, panel discussions and workshops. The costs also included five-star hotel accommodations for the actors, film crews and journalists who were invited to the festival as well as their travelling expenses for business class and private jet flights. Mr Jason Micallef, the chairman of the Valletta Culture Agency (VCA), criticised the amount spent on the festival, stating that it was excessive and adding that he could have funded 20 editions of the Valletta New Year's Eve party with the same amount. The Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) also criticised the way the money for the festival was distributed, claiming that, while the presenter was paid an exorbitant fee, fees for local filmmakers were as low as €250, when considering the €5 million allocated to the whole festival. The MEIA also added that the festival could have featured more networking opportunities for local filmmakers and could have been used to better promote Malta's unique characteristics with regards to filmmaking. In response to this criticism, the Malta Film Commissioner, Mr Johann Grech stated that, in the past years, the commission, through events such as the Mediterranean film festival, helped to attract big film productions to Malta. He also added that schemes, such as those of the cash rebate, helped to sustain 15,000 jobs in the film sector and inject €1 billion into the economy. These contributions by the commission were also recognised by the National Audit Office (NAO) and the MEIA, however these entities also called for better transparency on spending and a fairer, more sustainable use of funds.

The second story set relates to **Malta's State of Conservation Report for Valletta**, which was submitted to UNESCO in 2024, as per their request. This July, a meeting held by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee (WHC) in Paris accepted and welcomed¹ this report submitted by the Maltese state. This document discussed the conservation of Valletta as a world heritage site and included three sections: (1) a Views and Vistas Analysis (VVA) which outlined policies on height control aimed to protect the city's skyline, (2) a proposal for a buffer zone for Valletta and (3) the implementation and submission of impact assessments for projects which may impact the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the city, such as those of the Evans Building, the Marsamxett Lift and Strickland House, to

¹ [UNESCO World Heritage Centre - Decision - 47 COM 7B.114](#)

name a few. When accepting these reports, UNESCO encouraged Malta to continue to strengthen these processes by taking into consideration the impact which current and future developments are having both directly on Valletta as a heritage site and indirectly on the surrounding buffer zone. In fact, it noted that current planning policies and regulations are not robust enough to safeguard Valletta's character and therefore requested that several planning documents are revised, including those of the Grand and Northern Harbour, in order to introduce better height control within and around the site. UNESCO also requested that the buffer zone is further delineated, with special consideration to the northern area, where the Marsamxett harbour is located, as that area was identified as having a high development potential. Apart from suggesting these amendments, in their website², UNESCO also listed other factors which may be impacting Valletta's character as a world heritage site. These are commercial development; housing; identity, social cohesion, changes in the local population and community; impacts of tourists, visitors and recreation and the management plan or systems.

The third story set relates to the **conservation of the Maltese language**. In May, a conference entitled *The Role of Maltese in a National Language Policy* was organised by the University of Malta. Throughout this conference there was a call by professionals, academics and linguists for the government to develop a cohesive national policy to promote and strengthen the Maltese language, while taking into consideration current digital developments and the context of a more multilingual society. During this conference, Mr George Mifsud, from the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Department, highlighted how the current educational system is not adequate to teach an appropriate level of Maltese. He indicated how, within childcare centres, there is a lack of resources suitable for children to learn Maltese, as well as noting that the use of the language by caregivers needs to be given greater consideration. Similarly, within schools, he noted that teachers lacked proficiency in the language and they had little time allocated to teach it. In secondary schools, students also had fewer opportunities to use the language properly. Overall, the speakers at the conference called for the need to standardise orthography and terminology, promote the use of the Maltese language, increase public awareness and appreciation for the language, and coordinate advocacy attempts. However, they claimed that there needs to be a greater effort and the political will to introduce and implement these initiatives. In an opinion piece published by the Times of Malta, Dr Jacqueline Zammit, who specialises in Maltese pedagogy, highlighted the need to include the Maltese language in digital platforms and tools such as search engines, spellcheckers and speech recognition tools as well as AI models, so that the language does not face digital extinction. She also highlighted the need to include the Maltese language in films and streaming services, either by producing new films and series in Maltese or providing Maltese subtitles for those in a different language.

Commentary

With regards to the first story set, this year's exorbitant amount spent to organise the Mediterranean film festival is not acceptable and more responsible and sustainable use of the Malta Film Commission's funds is needed, especially when taking into consideration the commission's history of a lack of transparency and documentation related to its finances as well as issues with overbudgeting, as highlighted by the NAO³. While some of the expenses used to host such events and initiatives helped

² [UNESCO World Heritage Centre - State of Conservation \(SOC 2023\) City of Valletta \(Malta\)](#)

³ [NAO \(2024\) Evaluating the role of the Malta Film Commission in promoting the Maltese film industry](#)

to bring Malta to the forefront of the film industry on an international scale, other expenses, such as those used to fund lavish and luxurious accommodation and travelling expenses do not help to promote local talent. This is especially the case when considering how €5 million for one festival lasting 8 days were spent and used to accommodate well-established actors and, in contrast only €2 million in funds was allocated to 36 local filmmakers for the whole year, an amount which still leaves a gap in their much-needed funding. Apart from creating unequal and unfair treatment between famous international artists and local ones, this excessive spending is also an irresponsible use of taxpayer contributions. Therefore, there is a need to better monitor, document and plan spending within this commission to ensure that local filmmakers and artists receive funding in a fairer and more equitable manner.

With regards to the second story set on Valletta's conservation report, it is commendable and encouraging that the Ministry for Culture, government entities and relevant NGOs work with UNESCO to safeguard Valletta's beauty and character. Therefore, the concerns raised by UNESCO with regards to the increased commercialisation and tourist activity within Valletta as well as the increased development at the Marsamxett port, which is set to impact the city's skyline, should be taken into consideration. Appropriate action to mitigate the impact of these factors on Valletta's character should also be implemented. However, the recent planning reform bills that were introduced in July, which propose an overhaul to the planning system, risk impacting the character and the views surrounding Valletta. This is because height controls set by current planning policies (which are still not considered robust enough by UNESCO), especially those within the city's buffer zones, can be overlooked once these bills pass. Therefore, when changing planning policies, a broader and more holistic perspective is needed to effectively protect the heritage value, not just of Valletta, but of other culturally and historically significant sites as well.

There needs to be greater efforts to strengthen and preserve the Maltese language, both within the educational system and the digital world. With regards to the educational system, there is a greater need for training on the proper use of the Maltese language for both teachers and childcare workers, especially when considering that these educators spend a long time communicating and interacting with children, therefore contributing greatly to their language learning. In schools, there also needs to be more time dedicated to teaching the Maltese language within curricula. Additionally, greater attention should also be given to the use of Maltese terminology and phrases related to the different subjects taught, such as the sciences, in order to increase the relevancy and practical use of the language for students. However, when implementing these initiatives, one must also take into the consideration the high number of foreign and non-Maltese speaking students who are learning at our schools. Therefore, an early and intense focus on teaching Maltese, such as in childcare centres and primary schools can help these students catch up on Maltese at an age where language development is at its peak. For older students who did not receive their early education in Malta, initiatives to include Maltese lessons tailored for these students should also be considered within the educational system. The need to promote the Maltese language in the digital world and in the media we consume, particularly within streaming services, further argues for greater support for our local filmmakers and productions, not only to promote a Maltese product, but to also further include the Maltese language

in our everyday lives. Therefore, more funding and incentives are needed to create productions in the Maltese language.

Reflection

There should be greater efforts to prioritise and give greater support to our local artists and productions as their talent deserves greater recognition. Examples of this great talent have also been published in the newspapers. In July, Stargate Studios Malta, a Maltese visual effects company was nominated for an Emmy award for their work on an episode in the latest season of *Black Mirror*. Additionally, a Maltese short film named *Stations of the Cross* won the award for the best experimental film at the Hard Faith Film Festival in Los Angeles. When considering these great achievements by talented, local artists and filmmakers, it is hard not to speak about the need to further support them to achieve their full potential through greater resources and recognition.

The rise of commercialisation and increased tourist activity in and around Valletta is to be better controlled and its effects need to be studied closely. Not only because these will impact the cultural and historical value of the city, but also because it is home to a number of residents, whose quality of life depends on better planning policies which protect the character and identity of the city.

Greater efforts to promote the use of the Maltese language and integrate it better in aspects of everyday life, such as digital technology and entertainment, could help to both encourage more Maltese people, especially young people and foreigners who live in Malta, to appreciate and utilise this unique and expressive language which forms part of our culture and identity.

Follow-Up

- The Church, through initiatives such as the rooftop series organised by the Office of the Archbishop's Delegate for Culture at the Catholic Institute is encouraged to continue promoting local artists and musicians.
- The Church is also encouraged to continue conserving, restoring and increasing appreciation for the great number of churches, palaces and other historical landmarks in Valletta, therefore contributing to conserving part of its rich heritage.
- The Maltese language forms an integral part of the local Church, which utilises it skilfully in many aspects of its function in different forms of worship, celebrations, meetings and in its work. Through its use of the language, the Church and, more specifically, the Curia as a place of work can be used to set an example of how the Maltese language can be included in everyday life and in the world of work.
- Church schools are to continue in their efforts to promote the Maltese language and its appreciation among young people, especially through engaging and fun projects, such as *Mal-Melodija*. Teachers should also continue to be trained on the proper use of the language and be further encouraged to utilise it through relevant terminology in Maltese related to the subject they teach.

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