



VALETTA (MT)



450,000

Restore, don't replace!



Collaborating to save timber balconies and the traditional craftsmanship



Quality of interventions
on cultural heritage

Challenge

- Traditional closed timber balconies are part of Malta's cultural identity. They highly influence the aesthetic of the streetscape with their colours, materials and decorative motifs. However, climate change and lack of maintenance threaten these fragile heritage features.
- Owners often replace traditional balconies with new materials (such as aluminium) or modern infrastructure considered more affordable and maintenance-free. This threatens the urban landscape and conservation areas. Decreased restoration also threatens the transmission of traditional craftsmanship.

Solution

- Maltese local authorities designed a holistic strategy engaging with heritage professionals and citizens, leading to the restoration of more than 4,000 timber balconies. Meetings and workshops with craftsmen and artisans gave local authorities deeper understanding of the needs and barriers in preserving timber balconies.
- This informed integrated policy actions leading to updated guidelines for timber heritage restoration: improved education and training for heritage professionals; awareness-raising for residents and more adapted funding schemes to encourage restoration.

How ?

In 2006, Malta's Heritage Planning Unit collected data on timber balconies: The number, types and proportion between traditional and new ones. This included visits to artisans' and carpenters' workshops.

The information led the Planning Authority to improve conservation and restoration of traditional timber balconies through:

- Participation in an EU-funded project on education and training of heritage professionals on wood and furniture conservation and restoration.
- Review of the 'Heritage in Timber Guidelines' completed in 2019 and to be updated in 2020. Improvement of 1996 grant schemes to mitigate the cost of restoring and maintaining traditional timber balconies.
- Awareness-raising activities with residents to increase public awareness of the loss of balconies. Communication tools included a roving exhibition with a cross-section of an old balcony in local council offices, schools, and science fairs in 2019. As an ongoing initiative, the Planning Authority's media campaign includes dedicated radio and TV programmes and social media.

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Budget/Financing

€ 800,000

This initiative is supported by two European Social Fund Projects: 'Wood CPR – Education and Training in Wood Conservation Restoration' (€500,000 – EU co-funding 85%) and the 'Valletta Marsamxett Balcony Scheme' (€300,000 – EU co-funding 80%).

Management

- The Heritage Planning Unit (HPU) within the Planning Authority (PA) was responsible for the implementation of the practice.
- Local Councils of Malta (68) have been closely involved in the project in particular for the implementation of local grant schemes and the awareness raising initiatives.
- The project benefited from extensive collaboration with other governmental bodies, namely Heritage Malta (involved in an European Social Fund - ESF- project) and the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage.
- Other stakeholders were Heritage Malta (for the ESF project), carpenters, Grand Harbour Regeneration Committee (for the Valletta Marsamxett Grant Scheme).



Transferability

- Engage with the public and provide information and guidance even at a personal level.
- Engage with heritage professionals (artisans, craftsmen, carpenters) to inform policy making.
- Know your audience and secure sufficient funding for your communication and awareness raising campaign to be successful.



Impact

- Increased capacities and skills of carpenters and heritage professionals in wood conservation and restoration with established conservation principles.
- Improved data collection and knowledge on traditional timber balconies.
- Transmission of craftsmanship techniques and use of traditional materials, design, and proportions.
- Updating of heritage policies and restoration guidelines.
- Increased conservation and management of cultural heritage.
- Enhanced aesthetic qualities of local cityscape and urban conservation areas.
- Increased local awareness and appreciation for conservation of local heritage.



Links

More info on traditional timber balconies:

<https://bit.ly/2ChnWMI>

<https://bit.ly/2ZcxT6r>



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