TeMA

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Special Issue 2.2024

Urban Inequalities

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Contents

Developing processes for the co-creation and co-governance of urban green space in dense urban areas: a Maltese case study

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Abstract
The lack of and inequitable access to recreational and green open space in Malta is clearly documented. In an attempt to address social inequalities, research on place-led experimentation as a co-creation and co-governance process is ongoing. A multiple case study and participant action research methodology through the application of placemaking and urban living lab concepts is adopted. Communities are engaged to rethink public spaces as greener places and foster a better relationship with nature while improving the urban environment through nature-based placemaking. The research strives to understand how residents of Maltese localities can be motivated to participate in bettering their urban environment and foster a sense of pride in their spaces. This paper presents the findings of the locality of Senglea case study. A placemaking toolkit, by Placemaking Europe is adapted, applied and analysed within the Maltese context, consisting of a series of workshops to build a relationship with local communities according to their specific needs and desires. This paper provides insight into some of the key learning outcomes emerging from this first case study. Moreover, it puts forth recommendations on how processes for co-creation and co-governance of public spaces in dense urban areas such as Malta may be developed.

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1. Urban green spaces

Urban strategies and policies are constantly striving to move towards resilience and sustainability (Gaglione et al., 2021). Urban open spaces are a valuable and integral part of the urban landscape. Their importance is evident through the wide range of international strategies that incorporate the integration of open spaces such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities (United Nations, 2024) and the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019). Additionally, the development of policies such as green space factors have been developed for several cities (Beatley, 2012; Semerano et al., 2021). Numerous theorists have valued open spaces in relation to the benefits that they can provide (Carr et al., 1992; Jacobs, 1961; Tibbalds, 1992; Whyte, 1980). Their impact on ecological functioning, health and human well-being, and other social and economic benefits has been clearly documented (Haase, et al., 2014; Pauleit & Breuste, 2011). Other authors (Bell, 2012; Lehmann, 2010; Scheiber, 2021) identify the contribution of open spaces within urban areas to the sustainability and quality of the built environment while Gisotti et al. (2024) argue that open spaces in particular, play a key role in implementing a local, sustainable and equitable green deal.

The importance of green open space networks are also advocated (Atiqul Haq, 2011; Haase et al., 2020; Noguera et al., 2016; Priego et al., 2008; Scheiber & Zucaro, 2023). The concept of Green Infrastructure (GI) as a planning tool has emerged (Moneteiro et al. 2020) where urban green space planning is seen as a multifunctional infrastructure that supports social, economic and ecological processes (Mobaraki, 2023). The potential benefits of urban green space have thus been widely researched and recognised (Ugolini, at al., 2022), so understanding the possibilities to increase the availability of high-quality green space in urban areas, is ever more important. Linked to this is the need for effective citizen engagement such that the provision or improvement of urban green space is informed by the users' needs (Lazzarini et al., 2024).

Planning and governance of urban green space is therefore also crucial. This has traditionally been the responsibility of government authorities. However, the reduction of public sector budgets, the failure of top-down planning processes and increasing interest from civil society have instigated local communities, enterprises and nongovernmental stakeholders to take a more active role in green space decision-making processes and management activities. The idea of including various stakeholders is referred to as the principles of 'governance' as opposed to 'government'. There are various ways for non-government actors to participate in planning processes or decision-making. These can vary from formal consultation processes to more informal co-design workshops and self-governance initiatives. Also, such processes can work at different scales, from tiny green verges or ancillary green spaces to city-wide green networks. The different models of governance can be distinguished depending on the level of involvement. While at one extreme, there is greater government influence, at the other, civil society has more control and involvement in the process and its implementation. (Ambrose-Oji et al., 2017).

The participation of civil society organisations or individuals in green space governance, is called active citizenship. Esopi (2018) characterises such socio-spatial interactions as 'urban commons' that contribute significantly to the generation of social capital as a form of wealth. From a socio-economic perspective, businesses can also get involved in active citizenship. Different arrangements exist and Ambrose-Oji, et al. (2017) describe the six most common models from research carried out in 12 European cities. These are grassroots initiatives, organisation-initiated grassroots initiatives, green hubs, co-governance, green barter, and municipalities mobilising social capital. While, investment in GI can sometimes lead to gentrification as a result of improving a neighbourhood's character, one way of addressing this is to implement GI projects which are not over the top and which primarily serve to address local communities' concerns. This can serve to avoid attracting speculative investment. To achieve this, community involvement and a participatory planning process that promotes inclusion in the planning and design of GI are crucial (Hansen et al., 2017).

However, the right strategies need to be adopted and this often means investment to overcome the barriers to efficient public participation. Coordinating community involvement needs the right facilitation skills. Additionally, when considering citizen involvement and volunteering, departments dealing with the management of green space still need to have the resources for organising, supporting and monitoring DIY activities. This can make such projects expensive and personnel-intensive (Hansen et al., 2017). To counteract such challenges, cities can engage in urban experimentation and tactical urbanism, building upon urban strategies such as *Piazze Aperte* (Open Squares) in Milan, *Supermanzanas* (Superblocks) in Barcelona, Megaplots in Shanghai and Parking Days in Rio de Janeiro. There is a recent awareness that although such initiatives quickly increase residents' quality of life and the urban attractiveness of the neighbourhood, issues of permitting, maintenance, governance and gentrification arise and require institutional support to manage them in the long term (Fabris et al., 2023; Nogueira et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the process of participatory planning and co-governance needs to be context-specific. One such process is that of placemaking, a form of participatory planning which is used for shaping public space that harnesses the ideas and assets of the people who use it (PPS, n.d.). In light of this, this paper presents ongoing research by the authors that has the aim to explore the potential for placemaking and place-led experimentation as a co-creation and co-governance process for transforming public space in Malta. The methodology being adopted is a qualitative one using multiple case studies and participant action research (PAR) as a means of exploring the use of placemaking and experimentation processes in Malta. The overall research strives to understand how residents of Maltese localities can be motivated to participate in bettering their urban environment and ultimately foster a sense of pride in the spaces they use.

This paper presents the findings of the first case study, the locality of Senglea. The aim is to analyse the processes adopted throughout the project as a form of post-implementation evaluation, so as to provide insights into some of the key learning outcomes emerging from this case study. Moreover, the aim is to put forth recommendations on how processes for co-creation and co-governance of public spaces in dense urban areas such as Malta may be developed. The authors shall further this research in the future, through additional case studies, leading to the incremental development of a set of guidelines and policy recommendations for applying place-led experimentation in Malta.

2. Urban green space and planning inequalities: the Maltese context

When attempting to understand spatial planning processes in Malta, a starting point is the realisation that the Islands constitute a relatively young independent state, having gained this status in 1964 following nearly two centuries of British colonisation. The continued challenges the country faces today as a Small Island State, have a direct and significant influence on participatory processes related to spatial planning. In fact, Baldacchino (1994) states that participation on the Islands takes place in a manner that is sure to uphold current power relations in the arguably misguided interests of avoiding adverse economic impacts at all costs. Succinctly put, he states that there is an "absence of explicit policy measures directed towards building a direct relationship between effort and reward, along with the absence of supportive legal, educational and cultural baggage [which] both undermine participative dynamics".

Bourdieu (1980) speaks of the expenditure of labour and time in return for favours as a form of distribution of forms of capital from those who can distribute to those who require it; thereby describing systems of patronage. Patronage has been characteristic of the way the Maltese population has dealt with foreign rulers of the Islands since the Middle Ages. During the time of British colonial rule, the lacuna formed by the lack of domestic institutional arrangements was filled by the Church, which developed political and economic functions. Zammit (1984) attributes the roots of current attitudes of compliance to the reaction of locals' powerlessness and lack of representation channels during these times. Patronage has therefore been attributed to the culture of dependence fostered in the Maltese because of a history of occupation by foreign

rulers. It was widely acknowledged that the distribution of resources was based upon the relations that individuals or social groups had with the occupiers, in tandem with the shadow economic activity and strengthening of informal relations associated with a population that was not given administrative rights (Gauci, 2002).

Whilst democratic legitimacy remains an overarching goal, ingrained patronage and clientelism weigh down efforts towards the establishment of contemporary methods of inclusion and participation (Boissevain & Gatt, 2000). It is acknowledged that the achievement of a balance between a legitimate degree of inclusion and the application of professional knowledge may be difficult to accomplish, particularly since it is influenced by factors other than planning considerations, such as political intervention. Participation is often motivated by vested interests and therefore, the interest generated by certain projects is often proportional to the perceived impact of such projects on an individual, that is, to the perceived change to one's hyper-local context, whether physical, social or economic. One is led to conclude that it is the perceived impact on one's property assets that is the defining factor in participant motivation, more so than the representation processes available through which to participate. Stakeholders find means to make their voices heard, whether through legitimate or clientelist means (Mifsud, 2019).

The Strategic Plan for Environment and Development (SPED) (GoM, 2015) identifies that densification in Malta, has negatively impacted different localities. The quality of streetscapes and public open spaces has been reduced, in turn impacting social and community facilities. Factors such as increased traffic, congestion, the poor state in the general upkeep of the environment, poor air quality, and noise pollution result in decreased residential amenity and the breakdown of socially cohesive communities. The low provision of urban green space does not encourage healthy lifestyles (GoM, 2015). Numerous policy documents and local research identify the poor quality and lack of urban open spaces in Malta (GoM, 2012 and 2015; Scheiber, 2021). The latest official quantification of recreational open spaces in Malta was carried out in the early 2000s by the Planning Authority (PA). The aim was to establish whether sufficient open spaces existed in relation to locality population density. A benchmark based on existing recreational open spaces within each Local Council was established. At about 2.4 m^2 per person it emerged to be quite low. and at the time, 47 out of 68 Local Councils (69%), did not reach this existing national average (PA, 2002).

More recently, through a review of two study areas in Malta (Fig.1), Scheiber (2021) concluded that 3m² and 4.6m²/capita of open space was available as recreational areas. This is low in comparison to international standards adopted worldwide which tend to vary between 5-50 m²/capita. The quantity however is not the only factor to consider. Quality, vicinity and ease of access for recreation are also crucial aspects. In fact, the calculation did not include water bodies, natural and semi-natural areas, surface car parks and amenity green space as these were either inaccessible or not available for recreation. However, if 50% of this available space would be made accessible as recreational space, there is the potential to add another 4.3m² and 3.1m²/capita. There is therefore the potential to increase the provision simply by making better use of existing spaces (Scheiber, 2021).

In terms of quality, Scheiber (2021) identified the need to increase vegetation in urban open spaces, both with respect to the provision of trees particularly for shade benefits as well as increased ground cover. There is also scope to improve the design approach when achieving objectives to create 'green' spaces, 'green lungs' or 'natural' spaces. Physical surveys showed that the character of open spaces is predominantly urban and opportunities for respite and access to nature are lacking. The shortcomings were also reinforced by a user survey, where participants were dissatisfied with the lack of open spaces which were either too small or not enough. They also echoed the need for more greenery, trees and natural qualities. Interviews with Local Council representatives also revealed the lack of open spaces. Particularly gardens and green areas were mentioned, as well as spaces that allowed for different activities to bring different demographics together (Scheiber, 2021; Scheiber & Zucaro, 2023).
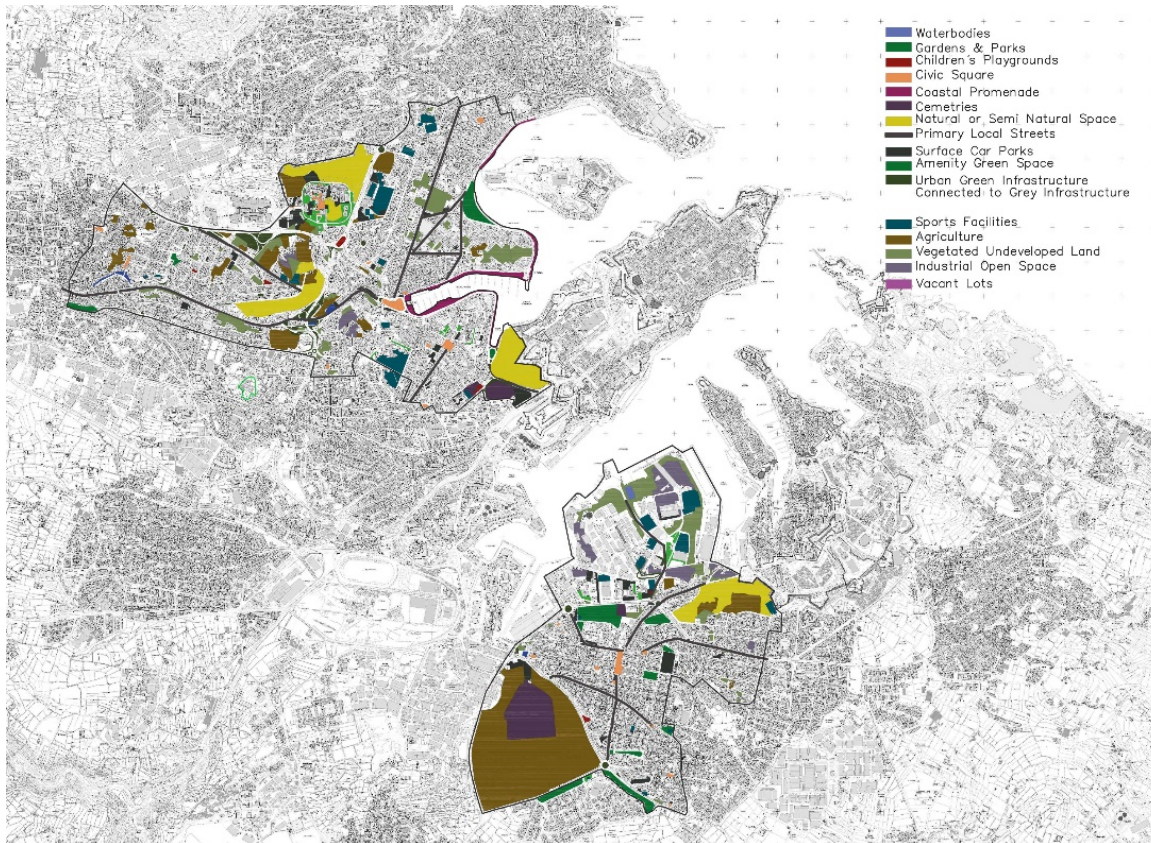
Fig.1 Map illustrating the two study areas

In this paper, the locality of Senglea is being considered as a case study, since it encapsulates the above-mentioned social characteristics and functions as a thriving town at the heart of Malta's urban conurbation. Senglea is one of the Three Cities, as the localities across the Grand Harbour abutting Valletta, Malta's capital city, are known. As Malta's smallest locality, its proximity to the sea has shaped the history of the city and the region. Senglea was designed as the Islands' first walled town in the very early years of the Knights of St John's colonisation of Malta and witnessed heavy fighting during the Great Siege in 1565. The Three Cities were also the most heavily bombed during the Second World War. The resulting diaspora was exacerbated by the declining fortunes of the dockyards, previously the economic powerhouse of the Islands. This caused Senglea to be a somewhat economically peripheral locality since the tourism and services economy of Malta in the 1980s was not centred on the locality (Bugeja et al., 1993; Caruana, 1999).

Today, the tourism economy is undergoing a change in favour of heritage tourism and short stays in boutique hotels, which has had a regenerative impact on Senglea. Sengleans are proud of their locality and strive to make it an attractive place, making the most of the advantages the beautiful waterfront has to offer in terms of leisure opportunities, enhanced by the ubiquitous heritage that the many historic landmarks in Senglea manifest. There is in fact a reticence for the waterfront to become over-commercialised, as has happened with other localities, most notably in Birgu, another of the Three Cities, across the creek from Senglea (Cassar, 2009).

Senglea´s high population density can be an opportunity for community-led initiatives to complement the economic regeneration of Senglea. Senglea falls within the highest threshold of population density on the Islands, with a density of 14,418 persons per km^2, even though the population has been steadily declining since census data was first recorded in 1921. In the intervening years between the last two censuses, from 2011 and 2021, the population of the locality fell by 16% (NSO, 2023). It is interesting to note that the dependency ratio for the locality is above the regional average, standing at 59.9 as compared to 54.9; while

that for old-age dependency is far above average, standing at 43.7 as compared to 35.3 (NSO, 2023). In addition, the study on leisure and recreation carried out in the early 2000s found that Senglea had only 0.9m^2 of recreational open space per person when compared to the national average of 2.4 m^2 (PA, 2002). Balzan et al. (2021) also found that for the Valletta urban area (of which Senglea forms part), the regulating and cultural ecosystems services capacities which are linked to urban GI "were negatively correlated with areas of relative disadvantage when indicators for educational attainment, employment conditions, illness and old age are considered."

In terms of gender, the split is relatively balanced, with 53% being male and 47% of the population being female; cumulatively having an average age of 47.2 years. 96% of people living in Senglea are Caucasian, 91% are Roman Catholic and 89% are Maltese, with only 255 non-Maltese living in the locality. Of these, only 31 people had moved to Senglea from abroad during the year before the census data was collected, while 24 people had moved to Senglea from another locality in Malta, amongst the lowest figures for the Southern Harbour Region (NSO, 2023). Residents do welcome visitors to their locality but would not like to be inhibited from enjoying the city's many amenities by visitors doing so. Regeneration can truly be a double-edged sword, and Sengleans are aware of the pitfalls associated with unbridled commercialisation and a lack of community participation in regenerative processes (Cassar, 2009).

3. Methodology

This paper presents research based on the first case study – Misraħ Andrea Debono, a small public open space in Senglea. In the words of Takahashi & Araujo (2020) understanding a phenomenon through a case study starts by wanting to "know something about what we want to understand and how we might study it". This sentiment echoes Stake's (2003) interpretation of a case study; in that it is a unit of study that the researcher chooses to delve deeply into, rather than simply as a research method. Eisenhardt (1989) contended that case study research goes beyond mere descriptions of a scenario, but that case studies have an important contribution to make in building theories that are immersed in real-world situations, and can moreover directly address research gaps through an inductive research strategy (Siggelkow, 2007). Here, the choice of case study was based upon a phenomenon, according to Ragin's (1992) often-quoted definition. The spatial and social context of Misraħ Andrea Debono was chosen because it was deemed to have all the required characteristics to analyse the indicators identified, related to co-governance.

Embarking upon an ethnographic approach to research poses several challenges. Particularly, the researcher must become well-acquainted with the social dynamics of the research context, its governance approach and the geographic scale at which these dynamics operate. When researching in a community context, an essential starting point is understanding of interests involved at each scale of the power hierarchy within which stakeholders are embedded, including the knowledge and values held at each. This will allow the researcher to place data gathered from these stakeholders in their socio-political context of power relations (Pinel, 2014). Participant observation is a valuable tool that allows for such knowledge-building about the community context to happen since the researcher forms relationships with members of the community or stakeholder group to open avenues of inquiry (Silverman, 2014). Researchers thus use participant observation to understand cultural aspects of a community through direct participation in the routines of that community. It has the advantages of enhancing the interpretation of the collected data, as well as informing more relevant research questions throughout the research; making it both a data collection and analysis tool (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). The social context is composed of the planning team and the relevant stakeholders, including members of the community to choose to register as representees, the Local Council, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other interested parties. The spatial context is often the office or boardroom, but it is being increasingly recognised that public space is just as important a spatial setting (Gordon & Manosevitch, 2011). In this case study the participant observation is conducted by the authors, who are members of an

environmental NGO committed to implementing place-based experimentation in Malta, called *Dawra Madwarna* (lit. Our Whereabouts) (Dawra Madwarna, 2022). Drawing upon the resources of the NGO, primarily the knowledge and time of other members who volunteered to form part of the Working Group, the team immersed themselves in the process and implemented placemaking events in Misraħ Andrea Debono in Senglea. By playing an integral role in the organisation and participation in the various activities developed as part of the participatory process adopted for the project, the researchers observed, analysed and subsequently developed learning outcomes leading to initial recommendations based on this case study.

A placemaking toolkit developed by Placemaking Europe (Placemaking Europe, 2022) was adapted and analysed within the Maltese context, consisting of a series of events to build a relationship with local communities which were tailored to their specific needs and desires for their locality. The workshops and activities were held over a six-month period (see Fig.2) as part of the project ReCreate (NatuRE-based Co-CREATion in SenglEa - Beauty in Diversity), a community project led by Ecostack Innovations in collaboration with Dawra Madwarna, Senglea Local Council and the University of Malta. ReCreate sought to engage with the community to rethink streetscapes and public spaces as greener places and foster a better relationship with nature for residents while improving the urban environment through nature-based placemaking. ReCreate successfully achieved funding through the EIT Community New European Bauhaus which is supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union.

Crucial to the process was a newly established resident group called Senglea Community Gardens active in the area. A relationship was first formed with members of this group and the wider community through a series of place-based scoping missions. This was followed by a first workshop aimed at meeting the community in an informal manner and indirectly start a visioning process for Senglea's public spaces. The focus was on understanding how Senglea residents believed their town could become a greener and more attractive locality. Activities were held in Misraħ Andrea Debono, working with the community to improve the space, including the painting of benches. A 'Suggestion Tree' built from recycled materials, served as a place where residents hung their written suggestions, while the Senglea Crochet Club spent the evening knitting several brightly coloured spirals to embellish the tree.
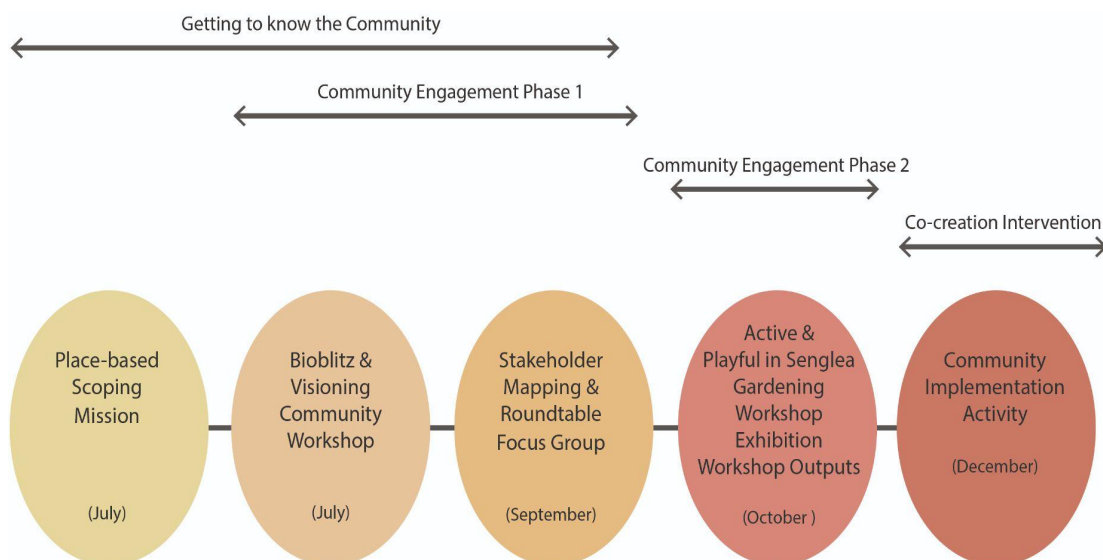

Fig.2 Diagram of the process adopted

A stakeholder mapping exercise was then held to identify the various stakeholders and invite them to a Focus Group aimed at exploring the views and needs of different organisations present in the community. The data collected was analysed and compiled into a number of themes. These were used to inform the development

of activities for a second community workshop which focused on being "Active and Playful in Senglea". A community exhibition of ideas for the spaces concerned was also developed such that the community could vote for those deemed most suitable. The feedback from this second workshop was then used to develop the final Community Implementation Activity for the space.

4. Results and Discussions

The five different activities are critically analysed and the results presented individually in this section, identifying aspects which were beneficial to the process, and others which did not work as expected. Since placemaking is a relatively new method of co-governance in Malta, the authors feel that such a critique is essential to inform future iterations of placemaking programs, building upon lessons learned to eventually form a best-practice placemaking toolkit tailored for the Maltese socio-spatial context. The recommendations on the process are made in the next section.

4.1 Scoping mission

It became increasingly apparent that initial scoping is crucial to the success of the ensuing activities. Scoping took place on social and spatial aspects and was undertaken by academics and built environment professionals with knowledge of spatial planning policy and governance processes. It is essential to become familiar with the spaces that can potentially support placemaking activities and to research the spatial planning policy governing such spaces. The team had in-depth knowledge of how to carry out spatial analysis and was able to apply this to Senglea. In addition, the team had knowledge of governance processes, which could thus be applied towards building relationships with local stakeholders in advance, building trust and social networks so as to take advantage of funding opportunities that arose. A placemaking program therefore has much to benefit from a strong team of built environment professionals with different specialisations. In this case, the team was composed of members of Dawra Madwarna who had already carried out scoping activities in Senglea when the NEB call was published.

This gave the team a head-start as the team was already well acquainted with residents who were carrying out initiatives of their own accord. Strong alliances based on trust between collaborators are essential for placemaking projects to get off to a good start, and in Malta, forming a relationship with the Local Council is one of the first steps that must be undertaken. This is because Local Councils are the closest level of governance to the residents and have jurisdiction over interventions in public spaces. Thus, the research into ongoing initiatives carried out at scoping stage proved invaluable to understand where there was potential to form relationships based upon the interest of community members and the Local Council's mandate. The placemaking program was able to build upon the momentum of such initiatives and act as a catalyst to further such community interests and ground them in specific public open spaces in Senglea.

4.2 First community workshop

An initial decision that was to determine the rest of the placemaking program was the choice of an ideal space. Misraħ Andrea Debono was chosen because it is car-free and did not require traffic rerouting and the relocation of parked cars. This allowed the workshop to focus on issues of liveability, beyond the challenges of achieving a change in mentality related to the ubiquity of the car. The space was also chosen due to the presence of a large planter which provided the opportunity for themed activities relating to community gardening, one of the stated interests of community members living nearby. Ongoing encounters with locals who were using and maintaining Misraħ Andrea Debono created the opportunity to discuss patterns of use, aspirations and needs for the space, allowing for further familiarity to grow with the community. This served to dovetail the organisation of the workshop with their interests, building enthusiasm, and encouraging the community to

participate in the activities. It also enabled local people to get to know the faces behind the organisation and to trust the organisers, who were engaging in voluntary work towards the betterment of Misraħ Andrea Debono. The event organisers, though not locals, were no longer strangers. This was crucial to the success of the event and the overall relationship moving forward.

An encouraging outcome of the first community workshop was that members of the community, knowing that one of the activities of the workshop was to re-paint some existing benches, brought their own supplies and acted upon their own initiative to paint the kerbs and balustrades in Misraħ Andrea Debono. The local crochet group also turned up and supported the event by crocheting decorations for the Suggestion Tree. Others helped out at the cake stand, selling cake and serving refreshments to participants. The atmosphere was such that those who preferred watching felt comfortable doing so, simply sitting in the space and enjoying the atmosphere. Having different activities to serve different types of community members was important, since this gave people an opportunity to engage in activities in which they were comfortable participating in. During the event, the opportunity was taken to speak to members of the community regarding their perception of liveable spaces. It also served to understand which community members play a key and active role and who could therefore be the drivers of change.

4.3 Stakeholder focus group

Next, a focus group was organised so as to discuss the themes arising in a formal setting that was envisaged to encourage an in-depth discussion on the needs and desires related to public open spaces in Senglea. Though extensive efforts were made to recruit participants over a number of weeks, few people turned up for the focus group, with one representative of an active community group, a resident and three members of the Local Council being present. The lack of participation by other Senglean community groups led to an important realisation for the researchers and organisers. Having been organised by researchers from the University of Malta, and held at the Local Council offices, it was widely felt that the setting for the focus group was somewhat intimidating and far too official in nature for people to turn up and voice their opinions. It must also be kept in mind that in Malta, critical opinions are often interpreted as criticism of people in power, and many were not ready to participate in such discussions within the same offices of their elected representatives. Out in the open space, this was in fact not the case, and people were willing to let us know what they appreciated and what they deemed inappropriate in the spaces they inhabited.

It was also the case that only one representative from each invited group was asked to attend the focus group, whereas the more informal setting of the open-air workshops allowed people to attend with their friends and colleagues. This lack of peer support influenced the participant rate, since people were unwilling to turn up alone to represent their social group. The lesson learnt from this experience is that during placemaking activities, the researchers must go to the community and be present within their space, rather than expecting them to respond to an invitation in a space within which they don't necessarily feel they belong. It was realised that the idea of a focus group activity, which is typically an academic data collection technique, is not well suited to such engagement processes, especially when the main aim is to gather community perceptions of their spaces.

4.4 Second community workshop

It was the intention to design the placemaking program as a series of activities, each building upon the knowledge gained in the previous ones. This, it is felt, was a key factor for the success of the overall program. It also allowed the community to continue working on the projects they started in the first workshop, while showcasing those which they finished. People visiting Misraħ Andrea Debono experienced a real change in the space that was inspired by the placemaking program, but that was implemented by members of their own community. This workshop was also a good opportunity to create an exhibition that brought together the

community's ideas that were gathered during the first community workshop. It is estimated that around seventy participants attended the workshop, all of whom were invited to submit feedback on the images showcased in the exhibition via a voting box, the contents of which were then used to inform the fifth and final activity. Though a lot of feedback was gathered, it was later felt that the initiative could have been more interactive, possibly through the use of perception mapping and art-based techniques to conceptually co-design the next interventions in the space.

A popular activity in this second community workshop was a gardening question-and-answer session with a farmer who was invited to the event. The activity was inspired by the community's interest in growing their own vegetables in the planter at the centre of Misraħ Andrea Debono. It was indeed a much-welcomed activity that proved useful to those who participated and lent a hand in weeding, hoeing and potting under the farmer´s guidance. Art was another theme that came up repeatedly during the prior events and the workshop provided the perfect opportunity for yet another project to get started. This time, an entirely community-led initiative took place, consisting of the decoration of the central planter´s walls with recycled ceramics. Last but not least, the residents installed cat boxes in one part of the space, showing that the placemaking activities did indeed serve as a catalyst in showing the community that they have agency and that they can take ownership in upgrading and maintaining their public spaces.

4.5 Community implementation activity

The last planned activity, led to the realisation that substantial forms of tactical interventions require for more planning than purely community-led, small-scale interventions. The five months that the contract for funding dictated was too short for the entire range of activities to be carried out to the same degree of success.

Fig. 3 Misrah Andrea Debono before the Placemaking Program

Though it was the intention for a semi-permanent installation to be designed inspired by the perceptions and feedback gathered from the prior events, the six weeks between the second community workshop and the community implementation activity proved too short to co-design, manufacture and install elements of urban furniture that would provide further amenity in the space. This was compounded by the fact that this final activity was held in December, close to Christmas, while people are somewhat distracted by the commitments and festivities of the season. Such seasonality should be accounted for when drawing up project timelines for community engagement activities, though it is not always possible to avoid such clashes when funding restrictions inhibit the possibility of adapting to the community's requirements. Having said this Fig.s 3 and 4 showing Misrah Andrea Debono before and after the placemaking program clearly illustrate the potential impact for such co-governance process to improve the quality and liveability of urban space.

Fig. 4 Misrah Andrea Debono after the Placemaking Program

To conclude, it is important to note that reporting on a single case study provides a limitation in relation to the generalisability of the learning outcomes and ensuing recommendations. However, reporting on individual case studies is also seen as crucial in starting to build a body of knowledge in relation to Malta's specific context. Eventually this case study will be an important contribution to knowledge through the power of collating the findings of multiple case studies through the comparison of their similarities and differences (Riddler, 2017).

5. Recommendations and Conclusions

This paper has analysed the Senglea case study, in terms of the placemaking program designed as a co-creation and co-governance process engaging with the community in the transformation of their public spaces. Though placemaking, in different guises around the world, has become an established urban strategy, it is a relatively new method of co-governance in Malta. By researching the opportunities and challenges encountered during initiatives such as *Piazze Aperte*, Superblocks and the like, a contextual approach can be tailored for

the Maltese context. Working on a contextualised placemaking approach forms part of a wider research initiative for the authors, that incorporates the multiple case studies over a long time period. It is therefore not the intention to put forth generalised conclusions based solely upon the experience in Senglea, but to identify recommendations in relation to the learning outcomes of the Senglea case study, when considering such processes in socio-spatial contexts such as Malta's.

Firstly, it is important to have a predefined program and timeline which sets out the overall goals of the project. However, the flexibility of the program is an integral quality of the success of such processes, and the activities need to be developed and adapted as one proceeds while still conforming to the overall strategy. The need to ensure appropriate timelines is essential. Co-creation and co-governance processes require time for the appropriate relationships to be built. Relationships and trust between collaborating stakeholders including the relevant statutory organisations are key. Additionally, when working with voluntary organisations and volunteers the timeline is also crucial to reflect the availability of people's time and resources.

There is also the need to gauge the community´s level of willingness to participate and engage. Getting to know the community and involving them in the process is a crucial part of creating a sense of ownership and lasting empowerment. In the case of Senglea, the identification of gatekeepers and innovators was rather easy, as the organisers were often approached during scoping visits to the locality. Such interest was an important indicator of the future successful community engagement. The lack of such interest might require more time in the initial stages of scoping and trust building.

A challenging aspect is developing a range of activities that is sufficiently diverse so as to retain the interest of both the organising team and the community participants. Additionally, the activities developed are not a one-size-fits-all, rather they need to respond to the scale and intimacy of the space in relation to the existing sense of ownership that the residents have.

Lastly, it is essential to understand the role of the intervening organisations and how this relates to or interacts with that of any local community organisations. A critical but challenging aspect to consider is understanding when and how to step back and allow the community and the Local Council to take initiative, full ownership and continuation of the process. Looking forward, it is considered worthwhile to conduct interviews with the collaborating stakeholders and community members so as to understand their perspectives on such processes, since the results and conclusions of this paper are based on a participant observation methodology. This will be the natural next step so as to further explore the potential for such place-led experimentation, and how it can be used to inspire successful co-creation and co-governance of urban green spaces in Malta.

Acknowledgments

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Image Sources

Fig.1: Scheiber, 2021;

Fig.2: Authors' elaboration;

Fig.3: Authors' elaboration.

Author's profile

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She is a lecturer and planner with an interest in participatory approaches to decision-making. Her ongoing research follows upon her Doctoral dissertation entitled 'A Study of Spatial Planning using Participatory GIS in the Maltese Context', obtained from the University of Malta in 2019. Wendy's academic and professional background has been varied, becoming an architect and then going on to gain postgraduate qualifications in heritage, GIS and spatial planning. She is now a lecturer in spatial planning at the University of Malta, having also gained professional experience working in the United Kingdom and Malta, dealing mainly with urban planning and strategic policymaking. She participates in various research projects as well as in the local environmental NGO 'Dawra Madwarna', actively striving to promote placemaking in Malta and abroad. Wendy is a member of the Malta Chamber of Planners and the Malta Chamber of Architects.