

The Impact of Valletta Regeneration on its Residents



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Valletta, the capital city of Malta, is a small, yet vibrant urban centre with a rich history dating back to the 16th century. Known for its grand architecture, cultural landmarks, and historic value, Valletta has seen many significant changes due to regeneration over the last decade or so. This process has brought very drastic changes to the city when compared to itself 20-30 years ago. This includes its infrastructure, economy, and community life. While the transformation has brought many benefits, it has also brought some challenges, particularly for the city's local residents. This article explores the impact of regeneration on the people who call Valletta home.

Urban regeneration is the process of improving and redeveloping areas to make their economic, social, and environmental aspects better in every way possible. In Valletta, regeneration efforts include, restoring historic buildings, founding modern infrastructure, encouraging tourism, and promoting cultural activities. These changes strive to make the city more attractive to visitors while preserving its unique heritage.

But what about the residents? I interviewed two Valletta residents to gain deeper insights into this situation. One is a long-term resident, while the other is a newcomer who has recently started living in the area. Despite her recent arrival, the newcomer has already observed certain aspects of the advantages and disadvantages in the community. Some of these aspects are mentioned below.

The residents of Valletta have experienced many benefits because of this change, some of which include:

The restoration of landmarks like St. John's Co-Cathedral and the historic works have been strictly restored, ensuring their survival for future generations. For residents, this means living in a city that values and maintains its cultural identity, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

The regeneration efforts have also led to the modernization of infrastructure. Public spaces, such as squares and gardens, have been restored, making them more accessible and enjoyable. Improvements in transportation have made daily life more convenient for residents and for visitors who would like to spend the day there.

It has boosted the local economy and due to this it has attracted many businesses and tourists. The influx of visitors has created jobs in the hospitality, retail, and cultural sectors. Residents benefit from increased employment opportunities and the lively economy that thrives in their city. "Services have increased," said the long-time resident. The newcomer stated that there's "anything you need" which makes shopping easier and more convenient.

This change has also helped Valletta become a hub for cultural activities, hosting festivals, art exhibitions, and performances. These events not only attract tourists but also provide residents with access to a rich cultural scene.



Valletta's Year-Round Festivals And Cultural Events

But although the regeneration in Valletta has brought many advantages, it has also brought many disadvantages that the residents must deal with in their everyday lives. These include:

The rising cost of living is one of the most significant challenges that the residents of Valletta must face in their daily lives. As the city becomes more attractive to tourists, property prices and rents rise through the roof. For many residents, particularly those with lower incomes, affording housing in the city has become increasingly difficult, which often leads to them leaving the city to live somewhere else cheaper.

The success of regeneration has made Valletta a popular tourist destination. While tourism boosts the economy, it also brings challenges such as overcrowding, noise pollution, and tension on the locals, and may disrupt their sense of peace. Both the residents I interviewed agreed that Valletta is "exploding with people."

Gentrification has also been a major drawback for Valletta's residents, since they are driven away by these problems like overcrowding and the concerning amount of people. I also reached out to the Valletta Local Council to get their insight on this specific topic. "Gentrification in Valletta is most noticeable in central areas like Merchant Street, Old Bakery Street, and areas near St. George's Square. These have seen significant transformations due to increased investment in tourism, retail, and dining establishments."

The residents find it harder to continue living in Valletta because of the flood of international businesses and the focus on tourists. Some residents feel that Valletta's local charm is being drained. Traditional shops and services are being replaced by establishments aimed at visitors, which can make it harder for residents to access everyday needs. "Us older residents are uncomfortable," said the old-time resident, regarding the streets that are filled with chairs in the middle of the road. The local council tried to help with this change in the economy. When asked about it, this was their response; "We strive to balance the needs of residents with the demands of the tourism and entertainment industries. Managing these priorities often involves additional planning, coordination, and efforts to maintain the community's quality of life."



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The benefits of regeneration are not always evenly distributed. While some residents are comfortable in the renewed economic state, others struggle to adapt. Older residents or those with limited means may find it challenging to keep up with the rapid changes.

For the regeneration process to really succeed for both the visitors and the residents, we need to find a balance that would make both sides comfortable and make sure they both enjoy their time in Valletta. There are several things that need to be modified and worked on for this to work. Some of these things are:

“In recent years, renting has become more common due to the demand for properties in the city, particularly from short-term rental platforms.” Affordable housing initiatives to maintain or increase affordable housing can help prevent the displacement of residents, while also ensuring that the visitors and other outsiders respect the parking spaces that are reserved for residents only.

Engaging the residents in decision-making processes would ensure that their voices are heard. Involving the community in planning and development projects can help create solutions that address their concerns.

Managing tourism practices can reduce the negative impact of mass tourism. Strategies like limiting visitor numbers during peak seasons and promoting

less crowded areas can help maintain a balance between tourism and the residents' life.

If we support local businesses more, it will eventually encourage them and help preserve Valletta's unique identity. This will ensure that traditional shops survive in the market.

Making sure that the law is followed and enforced. Both residents I interviewed agreed that Valletta would be a "dreamland" to live in if the laws were enforced more.

"Over the years, we have implemented measures to address these challenges, including stricter enforcement of noise regulations, traffic management strategies, and advocating for policies that protect residents' interests. Moving forward, we aim to continue these efforts also with the use of the latest technology, like the recently installed AI Camera in the Valletta, a first of its kind and engage residents more actively in decision-making processes." - Valletta Local Council.

In conclusion, Valletta's regeneration has strengthened its beauty and economy but brought challenges for residents, from rising costs to overcrowding. Striking a balance between tourism, locals' needs, enforcing laws, and supporting the community are needed to ensure the city thrives as both a cultural gem and a liveable home.



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