

Grassroots Museums:
How Curators of Micro Museums
interpret and present their
Community - Mediterranean
Historical Imaginary.

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L-Università
ta' Malta

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Abstract

This thesis discusses ways curators of grassroots micro museums interpret and present their communities and the Mediterranean historical imaginary in their roles as curators, something which emerges from the constant re-negotiation of identity with the communities they speak from, for and to. Twenty-three micro museums were studied to find out the practices, approaches and methods curators used to represent communities located in Mediterranean islands. The micro museums studied were situated in the Maltese Islands, Sicily (Italy), Mallorca (Spain), Corfu and Crete (Greece), and Brač and Murter (Croatia). The focus was on micro museums in the Mediterranean because the objective was to find out how this context impacts on the museum model and philosophy adopted by curators. Comparisons were focused between Maltese and Sicilian micro museums owing to historic connections and geographic proximity.

An ethnographic approach incorporating visual methodology was used to study curatorial practices connected to the interpretation and presentation of the represented communities. An initial approach was adopted to find out which micro museums represented which community, how the community was presented to the public, which facet of its identity was given importance, and why and how it was interpreted to the public through the information and narratives used. The researcher paid attention to the narratives and information provided, assessed whether this changed according to the audience involved. He also considered with whom negotiation practices were adopted, which sources were referred to and relied upon for the construction of information and narratives presented alongside exhibits, displays and media relaying information about the represented community. Curators were asked to identify practices which they adopted to meet their museum's objectives and satisfy community-oriented objectives, and whether they participated and acted in matters concerning community debates and issues. Participants were asked whether grassroots micro museums and state/institutional micro museums adopted the same or different techniques, and why if this occurred. This thesis investigated the symbiotic impact different types of museums have on each other, and whether or not grassroots micro museums add to, or investigate subject matters which other bigger museums do not. This means that curators of museums might in one way or another be responding to what other museums might not be doing, underlining an implicit networking between museums, even when this is not acknowledged.

Another set of questions concerned the significance, interpretation and presentation of the Mediterranean to represented communities and the Mediterranean historical imaginary held by the community made manifest through the museum's collection and representations. As underlined above, identities are negotiated and re-interpreted on a collective basis, and hence are never static. A critical social theory approach was adopted in conjunction with ethnography. Critical social theory proved useful in this research because it incorporates some of the issues embraced by Sociomuseology, which is a reflexive type of museology.

Different methods tend to be adopted in ethnographies. The study was divided into two phases. In phase one, semi-structured, on site, face-to-face interviews were conducted with curators of the nine participant micro museums on the Maltese Islands

and nine in the Ragusan Province (Sicily). In phase two, visual observations at the same Maltese and Sicilian museums were also conducted. This enabled the researcher to collect data on display layouts and how they were linked to community representation. Semiology and ethnographic discourse analysis were used to analyse these layouts. The main issues which emerged from the data gathered from these intensive interviews were guided by a questionnaire which was also sent to five museum curators found on other Mediterranean islands, so that the data could be compared with the data collected from the Maltese and Ragusan museums.

In this study two types of *grassroots micro museums* emerged - *independent* and *private* micro museums. On the whole, curators envisioned the micro museum as an effective place for pedagogy, socialising, information dissemination, entertainment, and also as a means of expressing an identity and a way of safeguarding heritage and the knowledge of the community. Above all, curators of independent grassroots micro museums adopted practices which promoted the needs and interests of the community they represented and tended to voice the concerns of their communities both inside and outside the museum with the objective of bringing about social change. Grassroots micro museum curators tended to adopt a bottom-up approach, engaging community members through various activities, giving them the space and voice to re-negotiate representation of the community in which they were embedded. Curatorial roles and practices found at grassroots micro museums tended to be wider than those of the traditional museum curator and carried with them many more responsibilities. This was because the issues were not mainly the artefacts and pedagogy, but the need to bring about the necessary social change within the community the museums speak for, with and from.

Curators of micro museums care about presenting ‘authenticity’ and about being consistent. They however found it hard to describe the Mediterranean through their museology. A Mediterranean model and philosophy of museology and curatorial practices however did emerge. The curators of grassroots micro museums tended to adopt a social activist role since their sole aim for the setting up of the museum tended to be the promotion of the welfare of the communities represented by the micro museum. It might have started from the need to safeguard community heritage, but with time it became linked with other issues. Further research needs to be carried out in order to find out whether this museology is adopted by other micro museums across the world. This research also found that curators of grassroots micro museums have more leeway when it came to experimenting with different approaches to museology since a number were self-taught and were not hindered by curatorial traditions deriving from academia. This was evident from the heritage they chose to safeguard, and the imaginaries and images which they adopted. They all departed from traditional types.

The final chapter of this thesis discusses a number of recommendations which emerged from this study. Some of the recommendations were generic and others were applicable to individual participant museums.

Keywords

community, curator, grassroots, identity, interpretation, micro museum, museum, practices, Mediterranean

Dedication

*for my wife, daughter, mother,
for all departed relatives,
and
for those museum curators and staff who have the courage to stand up
and change the world for the welfare of their communities.*

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Museums, Curators and others on the Maltese Islands

- Tunnara Museum - Westreme Battery, Mellieħa, Malta.
 - Mr. Tony Valletta, Curator,
 - ArtClub2000, and
 - Mellieħa Local Council.
- Razzett tal-Markiż Mallia Tabone, Mosta, Malta.
 - Mr. Joseph Bartolo President and Curator,
 - Mr. Louis Vassallo, Vice-President and Assistant Curator, and
 - Għaqda Filantropika Talent Mosti.
- Żabbar Sanctuary Museum, Żabbar, Malta.
 - Mr. Ġużeppi Theuma, Curator,
 - Mr. Michael Buhagiar, Assistant Curator, and
 - Rev. Archpriest Evan Caruana.
- Xarolla Windmill Museum, Żurrieq, Malta.
 - Mr. Dorian Baldacchino, Curator,
 - the two other curators, and
 - Żurrieq Local Council.
- Nadur Maritime Museum (ex-Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum), Nadur, Gozo, Malta
 - Mr. Kerry Evison,
 - Ms. Nora Evison, Curators
 - Rev. Parish Priest Joseph Xerri.
- Old Prison and Gran Castello Historic House (Folklore Museum), Rabat, Gozo.
 - Dr George Azzopardi, Principal Curator
- Ta' Kola Windmill, Xagħra, Gozo
 - Ms Daphne Sant Caruana, Curator
- Ta' Bistra Catacombs, Mosta, Malta.
 - Ms. Janica Buhagiar, Curator

- Heritage Malta, Malta
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 - Ms. Nicoline Sagona, Gozo.
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 - Ms. Cheryl Haber, Gozo.

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 - Antica Farmacia Cartia, Scicli (RG), Sicily, and
 - Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane', Scicli (RG), Sicily.
- Dott. Giovanni Mario Incatasciato, Curator of
 - Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla, Modica (RG), Sicily, and
 - Museo Diffuso 'Murika' – Racconti di Pietra, Casa degli Avi, Modica Alta, (RG) Sicily.
- Arch. Ing. Giuseppe Nuccio Iacono, Curator-Director of the municipal museums
 - Museo del Castello di Donnafugata, Donnafugata (RG), Sicily.
 - Museo del Costume, Donnafugata (RG), Sicily.
 - Museo del Tempo Contadino, Palazzo Zacco, Ragusa, (RG), Sicily.
- Sig. Giovanni Virgadavola, Curator and family,
 - Museo del Carretto Virgadavola, Vittoria (RG), Sicily.
- Sig. Mario Nobile, Curator
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- Elena Vasilakis, Curator, Content Creator Management Specialist & Digital Strategy
 - Folklore Museum of Acharavi, Corfu, Greece.
- Krunoslav Cukrov and Kate Cukrov, Curators
 - Muzej Uja (Olive Oil Museum), Škrip, Brač, Croatia.
- Kate Šikić Čubrić, Curator-Director, and Mirela Bilić, Marketing Manager and Guide (both referred to as Curators in the text)
 - Muzej betinske drvene brodogradnje (Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding), Betina, Croatia.
- Enrique Bolado Ferreras, Curator
 - Museo Santuari de Lluc, Escorca, Palma, Mallorca (Spain).

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Glossary

<i>collection</i>	tangible objects of any material collected and which may be placed on display for public viewing or awaiting display.
<i>curator</i>	the person in charge of the day-to-day running, preparation and planning of a museum's display and activities, caring, researching, documenting and sharing knowledge about the content of the museum and the theme represented.
<i>display</i>	an exhibition or a group of related exhibits (tangible objects) and other material such as printed matter, lighting and audio-visual effects presented as a themed or sub-themed exhibition at a museum or part thereof.
<i>establishment</i>	the dominant institutions, the elite organisations, a group or class of people having institutional authority within a society, as those who control the public service, government, armed forces, and the Church from a conservative perspective. (Collins English Dictionary, 12 th Edition, Harper Collins Publishers, 2014)
<i>exhibit</i>	any tangible item placed on display at a museum (see <i>object</i>)
<i>for-profit</i>	operates with the goal of making money (i.e. businesses which sell products or services to customers), owners and shareholders may earn from the income and profits respectively. (Heaslip, Emily, 'Nonprofit vs. Not-for-Profit vs. For-Profit: What's the Difference?', CO, U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Retrieved on 30 June 2019 from www.uschamber.com).
<i>founder/s</i>	the person/s who established the museum and opened it for public viewing.
<i>grassroots</i>	the common or ordinary people who occupy no political or other position of authority.
<i>grassroots museum</i>	a museum created by common or ordinary people who do not occupy any position of power in society.
<i>grassroots micro museum</i>	a micro museum whose collection, display and activities intend to fulfil objectives aimed at the welfare of a community and the cultural and historic heritage it owns.
<i>micro museum</i>	a place or space where a collection, which in the majority of cases is less than one thousand objects, and presents knowledge connected to a specific or focused theme, is on public display and run by a small number of multi-tasking staff with limited resources.

<i>musealia</i>	objects which have undergone the process of musealisation and could thus claim the status of museum objects (EVE, June 2015, with reference to Stransky, 1970). However this study expands musealia to incorporate all the means (i.e. objects, prints, narratives, light, audio-visuals, and other material) used at a museum to convey information, knowledge, emotions, ambience and provide an experience at a museum.
<i>museographer</i>	a person who is in charge of cataloguing a collection, its classification and display.
<i>museologist</i>	a person who is a professional learned in the science of museum organisation and management.
<i>museum</i>	a place or space where collections and information intended to disseminate knowledge are displayed for public viewing and interaction (Note: the definition is in the absence of an ICOM definition).
<i>museum tour</i>	a guided tour round the museum which informs visitors mostly by a spoken, written or audio-recorded narrative which informs on the venue, the exhibits and other content displayed, visible or perceived.
<i>non-profit</i>	an organisation formed explicitly to benefit the public good, which can have a separate legal entity, but is run like business and tries to earn a profit (which is not intended to support any single member). Startup funding, however, may be provided by members, trustees or others, no repayment is made, as profits or losses are kept or absorbed by the organisation, which may have paid employees whose pay cheques do not come from fundraising (i.e. universities, medical institutions, national charities and foundations, associations, cooperatives, and other registered voluntary organisations formed to further cultural, educational, religious, professional or public service objectives, and most NGOs). They are usually granted tax exemptions and contributions to them are often tax deductible. (BusinessDictionary.com, non profit organization. Retrieved on 30 June 2019 from www.businessdictionary.com and www.uschamber.com .)
<i>not-for-profit</i>	an organisation which exists to fulfil an owner's or members' organisational objectives and is not required to operate for the benefit of the public good, but cannot have a separate legal entity, and which as a 'recreational organisation' (e.g. a sports club) does not operate with the business goal of earning revenue, and is run by volunteers. All earnings from business activities or donations are dedicated to running the organisation. Such an organisation may apply for tax-exemptions.

(Retrieved on 30 June 2019 from www.businessdictionary.com and www.uschamber.com .)

<i>object</i>	any tangible item placed or capable of being placed on display at a museum (see <i>exhibit</i>)
<i>small museums</i>	like micro.museums, but which in most cases have a number of exhibits ranging between 1001 and 5000 objects on display.
<i>staff</i>	a group of persons voluntarily, remunerated or salaried involved in the day-to-day running and work of a museum.
<i>venue</i>	the place at which a museum operates and which may not be totally used for its displays, activities and public visits.
<i>volunteer</i>	anyone who performs tasks or services or doing something willingly without expecting payment or remuneration for work or service provided.

Appendices

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Acronyms (in alphabetic order) and Abbreviations used in the thesis

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Full museum's name</i>
AFC5	Farmacia	Antica Farmacia Cartia, Scicli, (RG), Sicily
AGHM	AGHM	The Agricultural Heritage, St. Paul's Bay, Malta
BMH	BMH	Bir Mula Heritage, Bormla, Malta
BMWS	Betina	Muzej betinske drvene brodogradnje (Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding), Betina, Croatia
FMAA	Acharavi	Folklore Museum of Acharavi, Corfu, Greece
GCHH	GranCastello	Gran Castello Historic House, Citadel, Victoria, Gozo
HMCC	Heraklion	Historical Museum of Crete, Heraklion, Crete, Greece
MCDF	Donnafugata	Museo Castello Donnafugata, (RG), Sicily
MCIV	Virgadavola	Museo del Carretto Virgadavola, Vittoria, Sicily
MDTC	Contadino	Museo del Tempo Contadino, Donnafugata, Sicily
MLIA	Italafrica	Museo dell'Italia in Africa, Ragusa, Sicily
MMTC	Campailla	Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla, Modica (RG), Sicily
MPBP	Bonelli	Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane' - Museo Albergo Diffuso, Scicli, (RG) Sicily
MRDP	Murika	Museo Diffuso 'Murika' - Racconti di Pietra, Le Case degli Avi, Modica, (RG) Sicily
MSDL	SantLluc	Museo Santuari de Lluc, Escorca, Palma, Mallorca (Spain)
MUDECO	MUDECO	Museo del Costume, Donnafugata, (RG) Sicily
MUSB	Škrip	Muzej Uja – Museum of Olive Oil, Škrip, Brac, Croatia
NDMM	Maritime	Nadur Maritime Museum (ex-Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum), Nadur, Gozo
OPRM	OldPrison	Old Prison, Citadel, Rabat, Victoria, Gozo
RMMT	Razzett	Razzett tal-Markiż Mallia Tabone, Mosta, Malta
TBCM	BistraCat	Ta' Bistra Catacombs, Mosta, Malta
TKWM	TaKola	Ta' Kola Windmill Museum, Xagħra, Gozo
TMWB	Tunnara	Tunnara Museum - Westreme Battery, Mellieħa, Malta
WMC	WMC	Wickman Maritime Collection, Xgħajra, Malta
XRWM	Xarolla	Xarolla Windmill Museum, Żurrieq, Malta
ŽBSM	ŽabSanct	Žabbar Sanctuary Museum, Žabbar, Malta

ACE	Art Council England
EGMUS	European Group on Museum Statistics
GSO	Gallery Site Officer
HM	Heritage Malta - national agency
ICOM	International Council of Museums
MINOM	International Movement for a New Museology
MuCEM	Musee des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Mediterranee, Marseille, France
NGO / s	Non-Government Organisation /s
VO / VOs	Voluntary Organisation /s

Preface

The author's interest in museums

My interest in museums and heritage started during childhood. My family never discouraged me or deprived me from collecting anything from which I could learn. At age six my parents took me to Britain and my first experience of museums such as the Victoria and Albert, the British Museum and others showed that I was glad to enter a museum but hard to get out again! As I finished school, I intended to go to University to become an archaeologist, but circumstances disrupted my dream. Necessity led me elsewhere, but I kept a strong interest in anything related to archaeology and history. I purchased books recommended for archaeology undergraduate courses and other academic literature, to keep developing my interest and knowledge. I researched at national libraries and parish archives, focusing especially on the region where I lived. I took the initiative to set up a permanent display of old musical instruments and was a volunteer researcher for the founding of a socio-religious micro museum. With the support of my mother, I went on to establish our own ethnographic micro museum: Bir Mula Heritage. Since then, my day-to-day practice as curator identified other needs all of which required the input of our own resources. After I married, my wife encouraged me to pursue my dream with something related, centrally, to museum studies. I continued my studies, visited many museums around Europe, attended and participated in conferences amongst which by ICME-ICOM and *The Inclusive Museum Network* with own and co-authored papers, had papers published on international peer-reviewed academic journals and books, acted as reviewer for a museum studies journal, and concentrated my efforts on the present research and thesis. I have other dreams and projects to accomplish in the field of museum studies and within my museum, but most of all I wish that this contribution and future contributions will benefit the museum world and the communities they serve.

At the start of my curatorial experience, I found no publications which could guide the novice curator of a micro museum and put him on the right track. None treated the type of museum in which the curatorial role extended beyond its exhibits and walls. Books and publications were helpful as a start, but hands-on experience was much more useful. The first exhibition set up in the entrance hall consisted of a set of twelve montages of monochrome pictures and text in Maltese and English on

cardboard telling the community's history: a history extracted from publications of Maltese history. Early in the inception of the museum, a number of objectives came into focus. Besides the display of objects in showcases, the micro museum offered visitors the opportunity to touch and handle objects which can prompt memories, emotions, connections and interaction between visitors, staff and the community both inside and outside the museum. It aimed to raise awareness of the cultural heritage of the locality and its community, to inform and educate local people about the wealth of history and heritage of such a locality, and to attract visitors to experience and meet the community. The micro museum was to serve as a cultural space where the community could promote its identity, discuss social and political issues and debates concerning the community, exhibit its talents and meet other communities. Overall, the museum had to serve as a pedagogic tool to educate, bring along change and improve lives.

Academic literature about grassroots micro museums was relatively scarce at the time of writing. Such a scarcity limited the author's chances as a curator himself to learn from the experiences of others, or even to assess and compare his own practices to the practices of curators of similar museums elsewhere. Most studies met in museum studies concentrated on the larger institutional museums. Few analysed small museums, and even fewer focused on the still smaller micro museums.¹ Less research existed on independent and private micro museums created by the grassroots themselves with grassroots objectives, where *grassroots museums* refer to museums created by common or ordinary people who do not occupy any position of power in society. Such a dearth was highly noticeable when it came to carrying out research into Mediterranean grassroots micro museums.

A recent study about micro-museology in the United Kingdom maintains that there is no specific agreement on the definition of what constitutes a micro, a small, a medium or a large museum.² Different authorities and studies apply different measures such as the number of paid staff, the participation of volunteers, low visitor volumes, income, floorspace, the number of objects on display, or having 'single subjects or themes that fall outside of the academic disciplines.'³ Likewise, this study tried to

¹ The study took among other considerations the measure that micro museums, as defined by some authors, are those museums with less than 1000 objects on exhibit, and small museums are those with a number of exhibits ranging between 1001 and 5000 objects on display.

² Candlin, 2006: 6, 9. Candlin does not provide a definition for 'micro museum'.

³ Candlin, 2016: 2, 4, 6-9.

avoid exclusions by any of the aforesaid factors, and relied rather on the claim of the curators themselves who consider their museums as micro museums. Consequently, such grassroots micro museums merit consideration by academic disciplines connected to the fields of museum studies, anthropology, cultural heritage, tourism, sociology and community studies.

Chapter One introduces the theme with a brief history of museums with particular attention given to the history of museums on the Maltese Islands, inclusive of the first micro museums identified in the context. The geographical scope, aims and objectives of the research are followed by the methodology and methods adopted inclusive of visual observation. The key challenges and limitations expected and met are also mentioned. After the presentation of ethical issues regarding anonymity and reciprocity, there is a description of respondents' and participants' recruitment. A few exclusions and inclusions of museums or collections resulted, and the reasons for this are explained in Chapter One. This led to a choice of museums for the research. Then there is a look at the theoretical discourse and concepts (theoretical framework) that deal with the theme under research were presented. Theoretical assumptions are then followed by the concepts and theories used. In a following section the Chapter provides relevant definitions to facilitate understanding. These deal with such terms as grassroots, curator, community, museum community, and museum. It concludes by presenting what does not make a grassroots museum. The study focuses on how curators of grassroots museums on Mediterranean islands interpret and present the community. All this was important in order to provide for a definition of what a grassroots museum is, and what type of ramifications or types can be identified (independent or private) from the study.

Chapter Two presents the transition from New Museology to Sociomuseology. After briefly describing the origins and objectives of New Museology, the Chapter discusses the main tenets, theory and methodology of Sociomuseology and its museum model. The full argument leads to an identification of contemporary alternative museum typologies found under the umbrella of grassroots micro museums. Chapter Three presents and discusses the findings about how curators deal with visitor and community meanings, national identity, differences between the represented community and the national community, followed then by an analysis of the element of community in the museums' objectives. Some demographics about the participant curators are also included for comparative reasons. The chapter continues with a

discussion on findings about spaces and facilities offered by the micro museums for community use. The curator-visitor relationship is presented and followed by findings on curators' participation in political and social debates concerning the community. The chapter concludes with a discussion on modern and postmodern curatorship, curator interaction, pedagogy and conflict, venturing further into the curator-community relationship. Chapter Four presents findings on the communities represented, how curators describe them, the tools they use and whom they include or exclude. The discussion continues with findings regarding reactions to various interpretations of the represented community, the sources relied on to construct the narrative, shared imaginaries about the community, and the museum tour narrative. The degree of negotiation allowed by curators with the community and final decisions on descriptions conclude the chapter. Chapter Five deals with findings concerning curators and collection interpretation, the selection of objects for display, sources relied on to describe the displayed exhibits, and finally the importance given by curators to the imaginaries and interpretations of others. It concludes with a brief discussion on museums and the colonial experience, images and the past, and the response of a bottom-up approach. Chapter Six focuses on the Mediterranean historical imaginary. Starting with a definition of historical imaginary and Mediterranean, the chapter sets the scene of community-Mediterranean relationships in both historical and contemporary contexts. The findings presented in the chapter tell about the relations and importance of the Mediterranean to the represented community. It presents the community's imaginary as described by curators and as presented by the collection. Various conclusions also help describe how the Mediterranean historical imaginary is presented by the museum, and how media is used at the museum. It concludes with exclusions recognised by the curators and changes noticed in the imaginary today. Chapter Seven gives a brief account of the visual observations carried at the participant Maltese and Sicilian micro museums. It concludes with recommendations emergent from the study.

CHAPTER ONE: Museums - history, shifting methodology and theoretical approaches

Aims and objectives of the research

The study aims to identify practices which curators of grassroots micro museums adopt to interpret and present their community. It aims to record and analyse practices, approaches and methods they adopt and to test the assumption that their practices are wide and also differ from traditional curatorial practices for several reasons. It will explore the idea that through the Mediterranean context and its historical imaginary, there emerges a different type of curatorial practice, while typologies of museums are dictated by past events, contemporary society and other factors impinging on the museum, the curator and the represented community. The Mediterranean islands with their different peoples, cultures, experiences, histories and connections contribute to a diverse way of seeing the role of museums, museology and museum curatorship. Curators become frontliners to ensure the welfare of their communities, to safeguard a community's heritage and actively bring about change. The study was intended to contribute to the discipline by filling a gap identified in museum studies concerning the practices of curators of grassroots micro museums in various Mediterranean islands. It also aims to urge further and deeper studies about grassroots museums of different regions around the globe.

It will be noted that different curatorial practices have emerged with such museums, especially when they change their original ownership and form of administration. There are major contradictions in the curatorial roles and practices embraced by curators of independent or private museums on the one hand and curators of institutional museums on the other.⁴ Even if the International Council of Museums (ICOM) observes that curatorial roles and practices differ,⁵ there has been no analysis of which roles and practices make curators of grassroots museums differ in the interpretation and presentation of communities. This study attempts to provide tangible and worthwhile answers to any gaps identified and also help future research. Analytical tools help to identify how curators act on, or retreat from, issues and debates within the community they represent, or in which they are located; and in so doing

⁴ Fowle, 2007: 18.

⁵ Ball, 2008: 1.

these tools help promote the community. The study intends to find how circumstances, context and resources specific to museum, curator and community, impact on curatorial choices and practices. The analysis focuses primarily on grassroots micro museums on the Maltese Islands. It compares them to participant micro museums within the Sicilian Province of Ragusa and respondents on other Mediterranean islands.

The Maltese archipelago is placed strategically at a crossroads of Mediterranean maritime routes. It can boast of a wealth of cultural heritage and history as contacts with the three continents surrounding the Mediterranean helped enrich Maltese culture. Historic events influenced Maltese communities and their perceptions of the Mediterranean. Therefore, the historic imaginary of the Mediterranean presented within such museums may either replicate past imaginaries or present a new one. Curators may either reinforce the Mediterranean imaginary presented at national and institutional museums or challenge it with a different imaginary. Thus the findings inform whether the Mediterranean historical imaginary is rigid or fluid, an autonomous social notion or a matter of reflexivity (i.e. the cause and effect of other factors within society, generated by time and circumstances).⁶ The imaginary, described in detail in Chapter Six, is how communities imagined the Mediterranean back in time and whether it was perceived as a strict geographic boundary or an imagined flexible boundary which extends and retracts according to the connections established by its peoples and cultures. The practices of such curators shows whether or not everything is ‘socially determined.’⁷ The agency of such museums gives curators, and consequently their museums, the liberty to be involved or evade involvement in contemporary processes, or else apply power in order to bring about change.⁸ Similarly curators from Sicily and other Mediterranean islands informed how, when and why they and their museums become involved or evade community issues and debates. They show how their museums evolved and what imaginaries they convey of the Mediterranean in history. Comparisons between the imaginaries presented by curators in Maltese museums and those in the Ragusan Province show

⁶ Bourdieu, 1985: 723-744.

Archer, 2010: 272-303.

⁷ Bourdieu, 1984: 75.

⁸ Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009: 44-45.

Golcwehr, 2017: 119.

that the close ties which existed in the past are still present among some museums but not necessarily expressed in the museum. Similarities and differences of the Mediterranean historic imaginary as expressed by the curators are presented in the study.

A brief history of museums and museums in Malta

The history of museums dates back to the 6th century BCE (c.530BC) with the world's first museum dedicated to Mesopotamian antiquities being the work of a female curator named Ennigaldi-Nanna.⁹ Though the daughter of the last king of Babylon, she claimed to have come from 'humble origins', not from any regal lineage or wealthy family. The claim was recorded as of unimportance in the inscriptions of her father Nabonidus, known as Babylonia's first archaeologist, and her paternal grandmother Adad-guppi (Addagoppe).¹⁰ It is tempting to suggest that the oldest museum ever recorded was as a dream accomplished by someone whose roots were not noble, but from the grassroots, a point that shows that heritage matters for those from less privileged positions, and in response to the fact that their heritage is never or scarcely told. Nonetheless, Ennigaldi-Nanna, as the pioneer of museum curators, accomplished her dreams when she was able to finance such an endeavour.

The limitation of resources available to common people is mostly an impediment for grassroots initiatives such as starting a museum. Even if they succeed in establishing and opening such a thing for public viewing, the limitation of resources prevents them from achieving more than they do or than they could accomplish. Sixteenth century *cabinets of curiosities* were a pastime of wealthy individuals who had sufficient resources to afford them. Some collectors were among the first curators whose collections gave birth to the first institutional museums, which survive to the present day.¹¹ Museums started by common people were reported as a phenomenon of the 1970s¹², but the present study has managed to trace grassroots museums in the

⁹ Pryke, 2019;
Pryke, 2019 (a), 4-5.

¹⁰ Reimer, 2013: 250.

¹¹ Meixner, 2012.

Sir Hans Sloane, 2017. Other examples are the Metropolitan Museum and the Harvard Art Museums in New York, USA, and the British Museum, London, United Kingdom.

¹² Weldon, 2010: 75.

Candlin, 2016: 1.

Mediterranean to the 1950s, while also witnessing a major impetus at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries.

The oldest recorded independent museum on the Maltese Islands dates from the early seventeenth century. It was a collection assembled by Giovanni Francesco Abela (1582-1655), known for his 1647 work '*Della Descrizione di Malta isola nel Mare Siciliano: con le sue antichità, ed altre notizie.*'¹³ Abela, born to a noble family in Valletta,¹⁴ is regarded as the first Maltese historian and the father of museology in Malta.¹⁵ As a historian, auditor, chaplain and Vice-Chancellor, to the Grand Master of the Hospitaller Order, he could assess the value of archaeological remains, artifacts, and objects which he or others found or were aware of on the archipelago. This led him to organise a collection of antiquities and valuables at his home. He made observations about archaeological sites and recorded what he saw and found at such sites.¹⁶ Many of the artifacts found and collected by Abela are nowadays preserved at the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta.

Another major collection started around 1600, was that of arms and armour from the 1565 Great Siege now forming part of The Armoury exhibits. It was the first official museum which the British government inaugurated in Malta in 1860.¹⁷ Other artifacts were held at the Old University in Valletta. In 1897 the Church shifted its collection from the Cathedral to the ex-Seminary building to establish the Mdina Cathedral Museum, officially inaugurated in 1969.¹⁸ Artifacts of national importance were mostly held at educational institutions, libraries and archives, but in 1905 the British government, in its attempt to promote the nation-state agenda by means of a national identity reflected through heritage and art,¹⁹ inaugurated the National Museums of Archaeology and of Fine Arts.²⁰ It was after the last war and especially in 1974 that the Maltese Government pushed to open more national museums in the

¹³ Translation: Of the description of Malta island in the Sicilian Sea: with its antiquities and other information.

¹⁴ Ciantar, 1772: vij.

¹⁵ Cutajar N. 1995.

¹⁶ Abela, 1647: 5.

¹⁷ Delia, 2011: 567-593.

¹⁸ Mdina Metropolitan Museum website.

¹⁹ Lonetree and Cobb, 2008: xxvi-xxvii.

Onciul, 2015: 30-31.

²⁰ Delia, 2011: 569.

Islands. The Museums Department was responsible for state-museums and national heritage sites till 2002, when it was replaced by the national agency, Heritage Malta, which is entrusted with State 'museums, conservation practice and cultural heritage.'²¹

It is highly likely that micro museums on the Maltese Islands started before that of Abela and can be traced as private collections kept by convents and monasteries. Religious communities kept objects which they valued as precious antiques, works of art, mnemonics and archives, but these were rarely accessible to the public, as convents were strictly cloistered, being accessible for males or females separately, and really only for the members of the community in question. The Church had in an implicit way started its own museum when in 1565 it took all it could from places of worship around Malta to the safety of Mdina Cathedral.²² After 1565, parish churches and confraternities had also started some sort of collecting, preserving objects they considered valuable mnemonics, although they did not quite have the idea of setting up museums for public viewing. In the second half of the nineteenth century, organisations such as band clubs started collecting and exhibiting old musical instruments and objects related to the club's history. Only a few band clubs still display some of these old musical instruments, some of which are from the eighteenth century. Other clubs and groups on the Islands, such as those involved with sports, social, philanthropic, religious or cultural objectives, collected such items at their venues. Despite a growth in collecting items connected to the past, none presented their collection officially as a museum.

Till the 1950s no private or independent micro museum was officially recorded on the Maltese Islands. Certainly, most families and individuals could not afford collecting, but as awareness of heritage and its value grew, a few families started collecting works of art and objects of antiquity found on the Islands or imported from other lands. Such an interest may have been caused by the presence of other people and cultures. The British period had certainly brought to the Islands interest in various collectibles, such as philatelic items, militaria, match boxes and other collectibles. However other collections started by individuals consisted of various natural items

²¹ Heritage Malta website.

²² AAM, 1575, 139v.

Borg, 1975: 86-103.

such as seashells and molluscs, insects, rocks and fossils, most of which started as childhood collections.

Among the Maltese micro museums studied, the *Żabbar Sanctuary Museum* (Photographs 93-96) at Żabbar is the oldest. The venue was built in 1952-1954 and inaugurated on 5 September 1954 specifically to host a collection of art and religious items formerly scattered in the church, sacristy and other rooms. The Kelinu Grima maritime collection at Nadur (Gozo), now the *Nadur Maritime Museum*, (Photographs 65-68) started as an individual's collection in the late 1960s and officially opened at the parish priest's house in 1999. Another maritime collection is the Wickman Maritime Collection, which opened at Xgħajra in the late 1960s. The Bir Mula Heritage museum at Bormla opened officially in 1997. The Tunnara Museum - Westreme Battery collection at Melliċha started in the late 1990s and re-opened officially in 2007. The Xarolla Windmill at Żurriq opened as a museum in 2000. The Agricultural Heritage museum opened in 2010 at St. Paul's Bay, but was permanently closed by the time of this research (2018-2019). The folklore museum at the Razzett tal-Markiz Mallia Tabone at Mosta, was inaugurated by a group of volunteers in 2011.

There are also a few other micro museums and collections open for public viewing and a few historic houses which are lived in. Themes are mostly specific and vary in ways of display and presentation. Some museums have a fixed opening schedule, while others accept only visits by appointment. However, that may alter for reasons and circumstances according to context and time, as museums eventually become run by other family members, relatives or community groups in collaboration with, or independent from, the founders or owners. Occasionally there are also cases of grassroots initiatives such as collections which, owing to the absence of descendants, or their inability or lack of interest may even be handed over or sold to the State or some other establishment. At times, it is the State that neglects certain places which communities then hold as part of their heritage. Inversely, the State does not sell or transfer the ownership of property but allows curatorship or custodianship of the site and its collection. Most likely museums which start as individual or family initiatives find it difficult to cope, and they may either close or take other forms of partnership, and sharing of responsibilities aimed at keeping the museum open and alive.

Geographical Scope

Participant curators hail from micro museums on Mediterranean islands. Although all the inhabited islands were targeted as places where micro museums could be found, not all inhabited islands had at least one micro museum. While some islands were uninhabited, more than half had a population of below 5,000. The rest had populations which exceeded 5,000 and reached to over 5 million.²³ (*Table 2*) The participant curators are from micro museums situated on Malta and Gozo (Malta), Sicily (Italy), the Balearic island of Mallorca (Spain), Corfu and Crete (Greece), and the Dalmatian islands of Brač and Murter (Croatia).(*Images 1-7*)

Although limited to Mediterranean islands, the geographical area can be further subdivided into a primary and secondary focus of the Maltese Islands and then the Ragusan Province respectively. Together they represent the central Mediterranean. The other museums are included for comparison of curatorial practices from *seas* within the Mediterranean Sea. The two Croatian museums represent the Dalmatian islands and the Adriatic Sea. The Corfiot museum represents the eastern side of Greece along the Ionian Sea, of which Malta and Gozo are the western edge. The Cretan museum represents the Levant and Cretan Sea, while the Mallorcan museum represents the West basin and Balearic Sea. These museums were therefore representative of the Mediterranean in its major subdivisions and could therefore present circumstances and matter which allow for comparison and inform on how curatorial practices of micro museums differ or agree within their island, country and Mediterranean context.

Methodology

The methods chosen for this comparative study can be divided into three. The first is the semi-structured face-to-face interview with curators²⁴ of museums on the Maltese Islands, which interviews in turn guided face-to-face interviews with participant curators from the Ragusan Province. The second is the descriptive

²³ Wikipedia: List of Islands in the Mediterranean.

²⁴ The face-to-face semi-structured interview was guided by the same questions used for the written questionnaire (Appendix I) but not necessarily asked in the same sequence or providing close-ended replies to the interviewee. Interviewees could express themselves freely on the matter in question and switch between subjects.

observations using visual research methodology at the participant Maltese and Sicilian museums.²⁵ The third was the written Questionnaire sent to the participant museum curators from other Mediterranean islands. A copy of the Questionnaire is found as *Appendix II*, while the author's guide for carrying visual research is in *Appendix III*. The choice for a semi-structured face-to-face interview was intended to capture the spontaneous replies of participants, that is, the curator and sometimes their assistant/s or co-curators. The method was expected to minimise chances that respondents could rethink, remodel and self-censor their replies. In some instances, respondents opened more on a theme discussed and provided more information than was immediately relevant to the study.

Initially around ninety museums on different Mediterranean islands were identified. Some museums could not be directly or indirectly reached as no email address, social media page or intermediary contact²⁶ was traceable. Others had ceased activity, leaving the researcher with less than half the original number. Museums which had an email address, a social media page or a third-party email address were invited to participate by correspondence addressed to their curator.

In June 2019, the author started the fieldwork on the Maltese Islands. The author contacted eleven curators of museums, four of which being State-museums which were contacted through the national agency of *Heritage Malta*. After gaining consent, the author started face-to-face interviews with these curators. Observations came to an end by the end of September 2019. The interviews on the Maltese Islands were audio-recorded and transcribed.

By mid-June 2019, invitations for participation were sent to twenty-four curators who had a valid contact and whose museums met the criteria requested. Till the end of July 2019 only three curators replied positively: these were the Historical Museum of Crete, Heraklion, Crete (Greece) (Photographs 17-20), the Folklore Museum of Acharavi, Acharavi, Corfu, (Greece) (Photographs 9-12), and the Antica Farmacia Cartia, Scicli, Sicily (Italy) (Photographs 1-4). All three curators were sent

²⁵ Pole, 2004.

²⁶ By intermediary contact the author means a local authority or a webmaster which advertised the museum.

an electronic copy of the Questionnaire and Consent Form (*Appendix IV*), for which they were allowed time to fill in and return via electronic or postal mail. To facilitate matters, respondents could reply in six languages: Maltese, English, Italian, French, Spanish and German. Notwithstanding several reminders, the response from museums outside the Maltese Islands and Sicily was low. It was only another three museums that sent in their interest in participation. These were the Museo Santuari de Lluc, Escorca, Palma, Mallorca (Spain) (Photographs 57-60); the Muzej Uja - Olive Oil Museum, Škrip, Brač (Croatia) (Photographs 61-64); and the Muzej Betinske Drvene Brodogradnje - Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding, Betina, Murter (Croatia) (Photographs 5-8). Their curators were allowed the time necessary to provide feedback. Two of them requested an extension due to the lack of human resources.

In early October 2019, owing to the proximity and deep historic connections of the islands, the author focused on Sicily, identifying and inviting for participation the curators of twenty museums from the Province of Ragusa. By the third week of October 2019, the curators of eleven museums had replied and showed their intent to participate. As some curators curated more than one museum, dates and times for the interviews and the observation were agreed upon. Throughout November 2019 the author was in Sicily. Despite all the bad weather encountered, the interviews went on smoothly. Unexpectedly, the curators of *Museo della Memoria Sicilia 1943* (Modica) and *Obsculta* (Ragusa), a Benedictine nunnery museum, cancelled the interview the evening before the agreed meeting, for a family mourning and another unexpected circumstances, respectively. After the interviews and observations had come to an end, the author returned home to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews carried out in Sicily. A last filled-in questionnaire was received in mid-December 2019. At this point the author started the next phase of the study: the analysis of replies, followed by the identification and discussion of findings, the process of planning, invitation for participation, settling on meetings, interviews, observation, traveling, transcribing and waiting for feedback, had taken in all six months of non-stop activity and effort.

Visual observation at Maltese and Sicilian museums intended to collect data on display layouts – i.e. how exhibits are placed and presented, and whether certain exhibits took precedence over others. Attention was also given to text and information provided alongside the exhibits, displays and spaces of the museum. Text and means

were observed to see whether the content expressed cultural or symbolic power: semiology and ethnographic discourse analysis. Interactions between curator and visitors during visits such as the museum's guided tour were considered, where this was a practice. These enabled the comparison of the information collected from interviews, together with observed practices concerning curator, visitor and musealia in general. The data was then compared with that of other museums and earlier literature concerning micro museums.²⁷ Certainly, there may be some strengths and weaknesses associated with the methods chosen, such as interviewer or interviewee bias, seasonality of interview and observation time and place. The level of communication allowed between interviewee and interviewer was another consideration. While the interviews and observations at the Maltese museums took place during summer (July - September), at the Sicilian museums they occurred in mid-autumn (November).

Key challenges and limitations

The study met several challenges. The first was to identify museums which fit the definition of grassroots micro museums and follow grassroots objectives. The second was that micro museums, or small museums, were initially targeted according to the volume of objects on public display, as claimed by previous authors.²⁸ This yardstick alone was not found tenable as the research progressed. An example of such a paradox was that found at the *Antica Farmacia Cartia* museum at Scicli (Sicily) where all the museum was housed in a single room with over 5,000 exhibits. Consequently, the approach of the research did not limit itself to venue or floorspace occupied, or space dedicated to displays, as the theme and exhibits dictate various types of venues: from a small single room to large buildings with surrounding lands.

²⁷ Candlin, 2016. Candlin's research on *micromuseology* in the United Kingdom was the only book encountered discussing micro museums in detail during this study.

²⁸ Tongue, 2017.

Note: The 1000-object threshold is mentioned by various reports on museums and their collections. It is worldwide regarded as a milestone in determining the size of the collection and the museum itself. This helps to identify the small from the smaller museum, here called 'micro museum' by the volume of objects displayed.

Krebs, 1991: 7. Quote: "Most of the museums are small, with collections not exceeding 5,000 objects, and have a skeleton staff of a director, one or two professionals and a number of helpers and guardians."

Another factor was that the geographic size and area of Mediterranean islands vary considerably. Sicily happens to be the largest island of the Mediterranean, with Crete in fifth place, Mallorca in seventh, and Corfu in the thirteenth place. The island of Brač is twenty-second, with Malta in the thirty-fourth place, Gozo sixty-seventh and the island of Murter one-hundred twenty-first.²⁹ Sicily, Mallorca, Crete and Malta rank among the first six most populated islands in the Mediterranean. Grassroots micro museums on Mediterranean islands and archipelagos present differences as well as commonalities. For this reason, several similar museums on Mediterranean islands were identified, contacted and invited to participate.

Although participants were invited to reply in one of the six languages mentioned, the use of English for the Invitation and Questionnaire could have inhibited responses from those not familiar or literate in that language. The low response led the researcher to look for more museums on Mediterranean islands and to make a second attempt focused on museums within the Sicilian Province of Ragusa. Communication with the Sicilian curators was facilitated as the author is adequately conversant in Italian. The Province was chosen because of its strong historic ties with the Maltese Islands, and as a relevant counterpart for comparison.

The highest response was from curators from the Maltese Islands (7 out of 9) and the Ragusan Province (9 out of 11) as they replied affirmatively for an interview and allowed observation. Other positive responses came from two museums on the Greek islands, one on a Spanish island, and two on Croatian islands. A behaviour expected during interviews was that known as the ‘Hawthorne Effect’, where the interviewee or the observed may modify their replies or responses in direct relation to their awareness of being observed.³⁰ Interferences which could limit or disrupt the development of the interview were feared as these depended on the place chosen by the curators. It was only the interview with the curator of the *Museo del Carretto Virgadavola* that took place at a public space during a public event. Even though visitors came in and out, and the activity was hectic and noisy, luckily, no significant interferences occurred.

²⁹ Mediterranean-Yachting.com and Wikipedia.

³⁰ McCarney *et al.* 2007: 30.

Another challenge was the ability to identify and describe distinct and innovative curatorial practices different from the practices of traditional curators or practices mentioned in the literature. An overall challenge was to remain unbiased and find ways to minimise chances of preconceptions which might hinder the findings and analysis thereof. The number of visitors present at observation times, the seasonality of visits and events or activities conducted during the observation, were other factors thought to impact on the efficiency of this research. Overall, the interviews were all fruitful, interesting to the objective of the study and a great source of learning and growth to the researcher.

Finding museums with a focus on the ethnography and history of a local community was a major concern in the search for potential grassroots micro museums. In their absence, alternative communities were envisaged. The micro museums identified, grounded on the founding objective and the theme of the collection, presented three types of communities: communities bound by locality or localities, communities bound by practices, and communities bound by interests and themes reflected in collections. In such a scenario, the study looked at different micro museums born as grassroots micro museums, and which by time had developed into a larger museum. A significant factor was that such micro museums had to have been originally founded and curated by the grassroots for the grassroots, even if they had changed from an individual's or a family initiative to a type of museum functioning under a different form of curatorship and administration. There are grassroots micro museums which focus on a theme or an area of interest prevalent in an island, or the area of the island in which they are situated, and therefore their 'local community' aspect is differently present. These micro museums tend to appeal to, and present, a community which is not strictly defined by a geographic boundary and may reach further than the museum's locality or island where they are situated.

A challenge was finding literature about similar micro museums promoting a Mediterranean imaginary, and also literature which researched and discussed their curatorial practices. Curator-visitor interactions were mostly observed at those micro museums where the curator led the museum's guided tour or sought interaction with visitors. The visual observations of displays and musealia offered another challenge

as the study tried to extract secondary meanings and semiotics behind the connotation of text, symbols and visual material.³¹

Ethical issues and recruiting participants

Though the author offered curators and participants the option for anonymity, none requested such a restraint. Nonetheless, throughout the study the author refers to participants mostly by denoting their role such as ‘the Curator’, ‘Assistant Curator’ or ‘Curators’ where collective curatorship is practiced, or by another pseudonym describing the role. Visitors were not interviewed but observed, and their behaviour noted if significant for the research. Basic demographic data about curators was referred to if supportive to the argument discussed. Acknowledgements are made at the introductory section of the study. A consent form was in any case presented and signed by both respondent and researcher. All participants and respondents had the right to withdraw at any time or refrain from answering questions.

The main respondent targeted was the present-day curator, but that was not necessarily exclusive of supportive staff involved in curatorship, interpretation and presentation. Curators were informed about the research, its objectives and how the interview and observation would take place. A convenient date, time and place were agreed upon for the interview and observation. Owing to the shared history and geographic proximity of the Maltese and Ragusan communities and cultures, the focus of visual observation at these museums allowed for a comparative analysis of the ethnographic, semiotic and visual ethnography. Visual observation and curator’s interactions with visitors and community members during visits, where practised, happened during the museum’s guided tour. It considered who invited dialogue and other curator-visitor interactions within the museum space, and which exhibits or displays were given importance by the curator or person guiding. The observation of exhibits, displays, texts and narratives were also considered as part of the semiotic analysis. Visitor reactions and behaviour were considered in respect to the musealia, the museum and its displays.

³¹ Harper, 2012: 118, 128-130.

Museums excluded and included

Micro museums which did not fit the museum typology studied, or those which explicitly refused participation, were excluded. Mainly they did not fit in the definition of grassroots museums. Neither did they possess a community objective, nor represent a community.

Three Maltese micro museums established by the grassroots were excluded for three different reasons. The first was *The Agricultural Heritage* museum (AGHM), St. Paul's Bay, which represented the agricultural community. Several attempts to hold a proper interview with the curator failed. From the information gained, the AGHM operated as a cooperative. It exhibited farming equipment used prior to industrialisation and the introduction of electric power.³² The reasons for closure were informally described as: (i) a sharp decrease in visitor volumes, (ii) a poor attendance to activities organised by the museum or at the venue, and, (iii) the suspension of support from institutions which took groups, especially elderly persons to edutainment, socio-cultural activities and visits at the museum. All in all, the owners could not cope with the expenses and charges imposed by the Maltese regulatory framework, which classifies such museums as commercial entities and therefore as *for-profit* activities.

A second museum excluded was the *Wickman Maritime Collection* (WMC) situated at Xgħajra, which at the time of research was not open for public visits. Established in the 1960s, the WMC is an individual's collection, embracing a maritime theme, assembled and exhibited in a private house. It focuses on the island's maritime history, with content mostly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The museum has no fixed opening schedule and visitors must make an appointment.³³ Although its collection can be equated to that of the Nadur Maritime Museum, it is an individual's collection with no specific ties to the community. For that reason, it cannot be considered a museum *per se*. At an informal earlier visit and meeting, the founder-curator Victor Wickman, maintained that the WMC did not seek to register or place the collection under a legal or regulatory recognition because of the regulatory and

³² Ilovefood website, 2018.

³³ *The Times of Malta*, 11 Dec 2005. Information retrieved from promotional flyer of the same museum.

financial burdens it brought along. He maintained that since the micro museum depended on his own resources, it was not viable to carry burdens imposed by the system. Besides, he was distinctly disappointed that he had never enjoyed support from the State, even when he helped substantially in the setting-up of the National Maritime Museum. He observed that national agency curators and staff still referred to him and his collection to interpret objects received at the national collection or to prepare information about them. Admission to his collection was free, although a donation was encouraged.

A third exclusion to avoid subjectivities, is the author's own museum: an initiative by the curator and his mother. Through an ethnographic collection and exhibits relating to social history, the museum represents the local community of Bormla: a microcosm of Malta and the Mediterranean. Established in 1996, *Bir Mula Heritage* (BMH) was registered as a private enterprise in 1997. It started as a family collection in the early twentieth century and was gradually enriched by the succeeding generation. In 1996, the Vellas started to restore the present venue, and converted it into a community-oriented museum. The objectives were, and are, to raise awareness of local and community heritage, to safeguard and promote the local tangible and intangible heritage, and, to support and benefit the community with its activities. The collection consists of objects pertaining to the Vella family, artifacts found on site or donated, and items used in everyday life in the past. Its historic narrative and pictorial content focus on a locality and community which grew around its ancient harbour, maritime facilities and services. The museum allows space for contemporary exhibitions, pedagogic activities and 'edutainment'. Currently the museum opens for a few hours on weekends and special occasions or by prior appointment. The museum holds a free admissions policy to attract those who could not afford paying for museum visits elsewhere.³⁴

Four State micro museums on the Maltese Islands were included for comparative purposes. These were: (i) the *Old Prisons* museum, (Photographs 69-72) which compares to the *Tunnara Museum Westreme Battery* (Photographs 85-88) owing to its small space and its austere aspect, (ii) the *Gran Castello Historic House*

³⁴ Bir Mula Heritage museum website, 2018.

museum (Photographs 13-16)- a name which distorts the real ethnographic and folkloristic collection displayed in a complex of three adjacent houses, and which compares to the folklore museum initiative at the Razzett tal-Markiż Mallia Tabone (Photographs 73-76) , (iii) the *Ta' Kola Windmill* museum (Photographs 81-84) as it serves for comparison with the Xarolla Windmill museum, (Photographs 89-92) and (iv) the *Ta' Bistra Catacombs* (Photographs 77-80) as it is a museum with only a handful of exhibits on display and which concentrates its appeal on the site itself: it is similar to the *Murika - Racconti di Pietra*, Modica, Sicily (Photographs 53-56). All four were included to facilitate comparison.

Three museums in Sicily, the *Museo Castello Donnafugata*, the *Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patané* (Photographs 49-52), and the *Murika - Racconti di Pietra - Casa degli Avi*, were included. This was because their use by the relevant curators was deemed helpful to understand the influence that such places had on the micro museums studied and the collections attached to them, on the way of thinking of their respective curators, and their relationship with the communities represented. The *Museo Castello Donnafugata* (Photographs 21-24) was the venue, which at ground level, accommodates the *Museo del Costume* (MUDECO) (Photographs 25-30) and is closely attached to the *Museo del Tempo Contadino - Palazzo Zacco* (Ragusa) (Photographs 35-38) due to the function of the Castello as a fortified farm since the fourteenth century.

An independent micro museum participant in the study – the Għarb Folklore Museum (Gozo) - withdrew participation at the conclusive moments of writing this research.

What the research looked for

Twenty-three participant museums (see *Table 1* and *Appendix VII*) were to fulfil the goals of the research, and another four mentioned where necessary. The study searched for information on curatorial practices connected with the interpretation and presentation of the represented community: that is, the community represented, its identity and how its curators present the community to the public in his/her interpretation, information and narratives. The study considered what image the curators presented of the represented community. It asked whether the narrative about

the community and information provided through curator-visitor interaction changed according to the audience. The study also asked about sources referred to and relied upon for the construction of information and narratives presented alongside exhibits, displays and media. Curators were asked further to identify practices which they adopted to meet their micro museum's objectives and satisfy community-oriented objectives.

The roles shouldered by curators at grassroots micro museums were factors for identification since those roles expected in the absence of, or shortage of resources. Owing to their community-oriented objectives curators were in conclusion asked whether they participated and acted in matters concerning community debates and issues. If they did or avoided participation, an explanation was requested. The study sought information and analysed circumstances which forced some museums to change their legal status. Some micro museums established and initially run by individuals or families from the grassroots, (which this study calls *independent grassroots micro museums*), had through time changed to what are identified as *private grassroots micro museums*. They in due course came to be run by groups forming a VO, a society, an NGO, a foundation or a form of association acknowledged by the State. Curators were asked to identify whether the practices of grassroots micro museums impacted on, or stimulated, changes in institutional or State museums. Curators were asked whether their museums held any relations with similar or other museums in and around the Mediterranean.

Similarities and differences identified among Mediterranean micro museums were factors under research, especially between curatorial practices of participant museums on the Maltese Islands and the Ragusan Province. Findings concerned the significance, interpretation and presentation of the Mediterranean to represented communities, and the Mediterranean historical imaginary held by the community then and now, and through the museum's collection. Aspects such as pedagogy were mentioned since pedagogy complements the activities and objectives of the micro museum in relation to its represented community and visitors. A number of points arising from the interviews, and which are relevant for their legal content and for sustainability, are discussed and presented in *Appendix V*. Visual research carried at the museums highlighted factors from the displays, narratives and other noticeable

semiotics. Across the board recommendations emergent from the study are presented in the conclusive chapter, but specific recommendations, applicable individually to some participant museums, are presented as *Appendix VI*.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

This section discusses briefly the theoretical framework adopted for the study. It sets out to test the main theoretical assumptions, the concept and theories chosen as an approach to the research, and concludes with some relevant definitions. The theoretical assumptions (hypotheses) are that

- (a) curators of independent grassroots museums adopt curatorial practices that promote the needs and interests of the community they represent; and
- (b) by finding out what these curatorial practices are and how these curatorial practices take place, a different museum model and philosophy³⁵ emerge from the museums under study, both in a national context and as part of the wider Mediterranean.

The critical social theory approach³⁶ adopted for this research maintains that cultural and symbolic power are continuously changing and seeking legitimisation.³⁷ The philosophical underpinnings derive from concepts embraced by Sociomuseology termed also as Social Museology.³⁸ Sociomuseology is described as ‘a new social approach to heritage’ and ‘a renewed vision of social museology and new museology, Eco museums and community museums’; thus emerges a type of museology that adjusts to different conditions and circumstances and which acts and ‘responds to the needs and realities of local communities’ lives’ in contemporary society.³⁹ As a

³⁵ Candlin 2016: 2.

³⁶ McCarthy, 1981: 272-273. Briefly critical social theory revisits Marxist social criticism, rejects typical political and philosophical interpretation, appraises capitalist and neo-liberal views, promotes human emancipation, and strives to uncover injustices and oppression in their various types.

³⁷ Wacquant, 2006: 16.

Bourdieu, 1991, 163-170.

Hall, 2003.

³⁸ Assunção dos Santos 2013, 5-9.

Moutinho 2010, 27-31.

Moutinho 2016, 1-3.

³⁹ Stoffel and Victor, 2016: 412.

Assunção and Primo, 2010.

Moutinho, 1993: 5.

Assunção dos Santos 2013, 5-9.

reflexive type of museology which aims to transform the society around it, Sociomuseology seeks to bring together members of a community, museum content and heritage, and their meanings, interpretations and images as recognized by the community, in order to prompt social action.⁴⁰

Stoffel and Victor (2016) maintain that Sociomuseology revolves around four fundamental principles which together make museums responsible to the public and communities around them. These are

- (i) envisioning heritage as a means for inclusivity,
- (ii) recognizing the museum's role in its geographic context,
- (iii) being open to innovation and diversity of opinion and culture, and
- (iv) allowing for negotiation with the community on heritage matters.⁴¹

Museums, accordingly, are viewed as 'contact zones' where communities define and describe themselves to themselves and to visitors.⁴² The museum deals with community problems and issues and also the debates faced by the community or groups within it. It may also act as mediator between the community and those in authority or other power structures.⁴³ Sociomuseologists maintain that museums of any type are 'political, poetic and pedagogical' protagonists,⁴⁴ and their exhibitions are on-going actors on problems, issues, inequalities and injustices faced by communities.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, some complain that sociomuseological concepts, values and practices are still disregarded by different nations and international institutions representing the museum world.⁴⁶ The sociomuseological concept was chosen as it is linked to the agenda adopted by grassroots museums, where museums, as for example in the Iberian peninsula and South America, voice community concerns and struggle for community development and welfare. The purpose of such museums is to act with the general objective of helping the community.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Stoffel and Victor, 2016: 412. Quote: "actor subject, the cultural object and their values and representations."

⁴¹ Stoffel and Victor, 2016: 412.

⁴² Pratt, 2002: 23 (4).

Boast, 2011: 57.

⁴³ SoMUs, 2017.

⁴⁴ Moutinho, 2010: 27.

Smith, 2006: 281.

⁴⁵ Moutinho, 2016:1-3.

⁴⁶ Stoffel and Victor, 2016: 412.

⁴⁷ Moutinho, 2016: 1-3.

Definitions

Definition of the term ‘grassroots’

Lexicographically, the noun *grassroots* is defined as the common, local, low level and ordinary people in a community, country, society, or organisation rather than its leaders, or the people who make decisions (especially as a political, social, or economic group).⁴⁸ As an adjective the term *grassroots* implies ‘involving the ordinary people in a society or an organization’⁴⁹ The adjectival use within the title term *grassroots museums* is more suitable to such museums since it is assumed that the curatorial practices, decisions and actions adopted at various levels *involve* the ordinary people in a society or an organisation.⁵⁰ In this research, the degree of community involvement allowed by curators, and the type of engagement the grassroots opt for, are important. The study may consequently identify whether it was the demands of the community that produced the curatorial and museal practices, or whether the curatorial practices themselves were responsible, or the museum’s physical presence and contents, or both. The study therefore intends to capture the impact of such factors on the curatorial practices and decisions, both inside and outside the museum. It is also expected to identify boundaries and limitations of the curatorial practices themselves. Curatorial practices of such museums may be considered as a form of modern philanthropy, of ‘private initiatives, for the public good, focusing on the quality of life’⁵¹ of their community. The study might also show whether curatorial practices of grassroots museums surpass the boundaries of philanthropy and become a social, a cultural, an environmental, an economic and above all a political actor for the community. In contrast, such museums might tend to avert themselves from anything political. With its practices, the grassroots museum ‘attempts to mobilize individuals to take some action to influence an outcome, often of a political nature’ or lobby with policymakers to take action, especially at a local level.⁵² The study tested whether grassroots museums may be considered as grassroots initiatives for a grassroots movement: hence, a bottom-up approach to museums and museology.⁵³

⁴⁸ The Free Dictionary by Farlex, 2018; *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition*; Macmillan Dictionary, 2018; Oxford Learners Dictionary; Dictionary.com, 2018, Cambridge Business English Dictionary.

⁴⁹ Cambridge Business English Dictionary, q.v. *grassroots*.

⁵⁰ Cambridge Business English Dictionary, q.v. *grassroots*.

⁵¹ McCully, 2008: i.

⁵² Oxford References q.v. *grassroots*.
Bergan, 2018, q.v. *grassroots*.

⁵³ Heijnen, 2010: 14.

Definition of ‘curator’

The term *curator* is defined as ‘a person in charge of a department of a museum or other place where objects of art, science, or from the past are collected, or a person who organizes and arranges a showing of art or other objects of interest’.⁵⁴ Such definitions are more formal, describing a rigid function usually expected in a job description. As Golding and Modest (2013) observe, the term *curator* ‘holds a range of meanings as custodian, steward keeper, superintendent, guardian, which in a positive sense emphasize care while negatively foregrounding hierarchical lines of power and a rigidity of processes.’⁵⁵ The ICOM states that the curator reports to the museum director and ‘is responsible for the collections in his/her charge. Duties include the care, development, study, enhancement and management of the collections of the museum.’⁵⁶ However when it comes to describe the curator of a historic house, ICOM states that ‘a historic house museum curator is an all-rounder with a wide range of knowledge and ability, who takes a pragmatic approach to his or her task. He or she has to be a flexible person, able and willing to run a one-man/woman show.’⁵⁷ It is this which is probably the source of the curator’s initiatives, innovations and creativity. Although ICOM provides no description for a grassroots micro museum curator, the study will test whether the description of historic house museum curator fits within the practices of a grassroots micro museum curator.

Studies note that curatorial practices have lately moved further from the traditional practices of ‘acquiring, conserving, researching, communicating’ and making exhibitions. These have been augmented by a wider practice which embraces important social and cultural dimensions of society.⁵⁸ This evolution of the curatorial role and practices may go further than the exhibits themselves and beyond the museum walls in order to seek and create interaction with the community and be active in solving community problems and concerns.⁵⁹ Scholars propose that the curator of the twenty-first century needs to have good diagnostic skills to be able to help the community, lead thought and bring different people together. He must also have the

⁵⁴ *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary* (online), q.v. curator.

⁵⁵ Golding and Modest edit., 2013: 20.

⁵⁶ Ruge, 2008: 16.

⁵⁷ Ball, 2008: 1.

⁵⁸ Folke Henningsen and Vest Hansen, 2014: 123-124.

⁵⁹ Schaffer Bacon, Yuen and Korza, 2013.

ability to curate community dialogue, an ability to forge and sustain partnerships (network capital), learn to be creative and innovative, and be open to new ideas and critical feedback.⁶⁰ Scholars also comment that curators must improve the quality of life of the community, but this can only succeed if the curator is cognizant of the values and aspirations that motivate the members of the community.⁶¹ Certainly the qualities required by curators today are different from those of traditional museums. Information and communication technology has impacted on the world around us, and museums are no exception. Scholars of Sociomuseology maintain that museum collections and museology are no longer object-focused but have moved on to become collections composed of problems and issues surrounding people: a scenario which demands new skills from curators.⁶² Even in the eventuality that interviewees define themselves as ‘collectors’, Desvallées and Mairesse (2010) recognise that collectors, and especially private collectors, have contributed to collections which subsequently became institutionalised museums; and that such collectors work very closely with curators.⁶³ This present research has intended to identify roles which curators of such micro museums play, what curatorial typologies have emerged from grassroots micro museums, and to what degree do curators have mimicked the traditional curator model, or detached themselves from it and why.

Today, curators are called by, and call themselves by, different terminologies when they act as platform providers to their audience, and are expected to ‘address timely artistic, social, cultural and political issues.’⁶⁴ Fowle (2007) observes the major ‘contradiction’ stands between the curators of independent museums and those of institutional museums:⁶⁵ a matter which it is hoped will be sustained or rejected by this study. By taking into account the definitions which Desvallées and Mairesse (2010) provide for *museology* as the museal philosophy, and *museography* as the applied practices of museology (i.e. the museum’s operations and activities), it could be that some curators assume, or combine, the roles of museologist and museographer

⁶⁰ Brown and Tepper, 2012: 19-25.

Roos-Brown, 2013.

⁶¹ Brown and Tepper, 2012: 20.

⁶² Moutinho, 2016: 1.

⁶³ Desvallées and Mairesse edit., 2010: 27.

⁶⁴ Fowle, 2007: 16.

⁶⁵ Fowle, 2007: 18.

through necessity or limitation.⁶⁶ While these may be roles and practices assumed by curators at any museum limited in staff numbers and resources, curators at grassroots micro museums who assume such roles and practices may therefore qualify as ‘museum professionals’ as described by ICOM’s International Committee for the Training of Personnel (ICTOP).⁶⁷

Definition of ‘community’ or museum community

Different disciplines present different meanings to the term *community*. It is sociologically defined as a vague, elusive and abstract term without a specific meaning,⁶⁸ having ‘a particular constituted set of social relationships based on something which the participants have in common - usually a common sense of identity.’⁶⁹ Sociologically the factors which define a community include group interactions, a defined geographic territory and members who share common values, beliefs or behaviours.⁷⁰ Earlier scholars maintained that the term represents also a wider sense of unity over a rather unspecified sphere of life and interests dependent on the cultural background of a person,⁷¹ and that a community cannot be static but is constantly evolving.⁷² The definition and meaning of the term ‘community’ has evolved thanks to the advancement of connectivity. From small tribal, territorial, cultural and other close networks, social media and other means of communication have led to the formation of networks which form so-called virtual communities.⁷³ Nowadays communities are not limited to time and space. James *et al.* (2012) define the term community as

a group or network of persons who are connected (objectively) to each other by relatively durable social relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties and who mutually define that relationship (subjectively) as important to their social identity and social practice.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Desvallées and Mairesse, 2010: 52-56.

⁶⁷ Espacio Visual Europa (EVE) , 2015. .
Ruge, 2008.

⁶⁸ Sociology Guide – A Students Guide to Sociology, q.v. community.

Bruhn, 2011: 12.

James, 2006: 17, 18 and 319.

Davis, 2007: 59-60.

⁶⁹ Scott, 2005: 93 q.v. community.

James, 2006 : 319.

⁷⁰ Neal, 2014.

⁷¹ Parsons, 1996: 19-20.

⁷² Clark, 1937: 146.

⁷³ Bruhn, 2011: ix,

⁷⁴ James *et al.*, 2012: 14.

They go on further to classify the relationships that lead to the formation of a community under three taxonomies called (i) *grounded*, related to place and identity, (ii) *life-style*, based on morals, faith, shared interests that one engages in or close proximity related to an activity, and (iii) *projected* which is more fluid, changing and seeking recognition.⁷⁵ Despite the definitions given by various disciplines, the curatorial viewpoint of the community represented by a museum may at times fit one or more of these, or none.

Although the term *community* is very complex, fluid and continuously changing, from a museological perspective it is the sense of belonging and the conceptualisation of identity which are important.⁷⁶ Simultaneously it depends on the way that the museum community sees and perceives identity.⁷⁷ In this research, the term community is looked at from the standpoint of the curators interviewed. The researcher acknowledges that the curator's individual opinion may vary depending on his background, education, family, lifestyle, affiliations, creeds and factors as the moment of the interview itself. It is recognised that, through future studies, the definition of *community* reached in this study may be found equally valid or unrelated to other museums, times and contexts. It is therefore important to make the study as replicable as possible in different museums and contexts, now and in the future. The study however attempted to explore

- (i) how the curators, initially, based on the founding objectives of their museum defined their target community, that is to say, the community which initially they chose to represent and present to the wider audience,
- (ii) the reasons why they chose to represent and present that specific community in their museum initiative, and,
- (iii) what after years of existence, constitutes their present-day community, communities or even sub-communities of their museum, thus questioning whether the initial community which the museum chose to represent is today still the same or has changed.

⁷⁵ James *et al*, 2012: 14.

⁷⁶ Watson, 2007: 3 and 4.
Golding and Modest 2013: 25.

⁷⁷ Kavanagh, 1990: 68.

Museums can be influenced by their immediate physical context: venue and, in the context of the present study, location on the island, the island itself and the socio-cultural location of all three in the Mediterranean. Context sensitivity, (i.e. the awareness of cultural values and beliefs), is an important variable which can influence the curator's response to the community and the perceptions of what makes the community. Certainly, most imaginaries are constructed through the curator's viewpoint and the tools he used to reach the targeted community, different audiences or perceived communities, and the general public inclusive of non-community visitors such as tourists. The community represented is assumed to be those people targeted by the museum's theme and who are the direct beneficiaries of the museum's objectives and activities. Nevertheless, in practice they may be a fraction of the actual visitor population and participant audience. Watson (2007) suggests that the target audience is not the museum community, but a community which changes with time and circumstances.⁷⁸ The community represented by the museum therefore extends beyond the targeted community, and inclusive of those who participate in its activities, visitors and those who share its benefits. The museum may directly or indirectly reach further than its targeted community, its visitors and participants, to a wider community. That wider community may incorporate visitors and participants in the museum's activities who are not the community that the museum initially aimed to represent, and which may even be non-visiting or non-participant. Curators may or may not distinguish between such variance in their communities. While museums may identify and define the territory of a localised community, museums which promote a community of practice, or a specific group which comes together through an area of interest, cannot be defined by geographic territory.⁷⁹ Nowadays scholars no longer restrict community formation to locality, sentiment and identity,⁸⁰ or whenever 'the members of any group small or large live together in such a way that they share, not this or that particular interest but the conditions of a common life.'⁸¹ Watson (2007) maintains that museum communities are interpretive communities and that the concept of community may significantly vary from that of the museum professional.⁸² She states that communities may be defined in seven different interpretive ways:

⁷⁸ Watson, 2007: 4.

⁷⁹ Parsons, 1951: 91.

⁸⁰ MacIver and Page, 1952: 9-10.

⁸¹ MacIver and Page, 1952: 8-9.

⁸² Watson, 2007: 4.

- (i) by shared historical or cultural experiences,
- (ii) by their specialist knowledge,
- (iii) by demography/socio-economic factors,
- (iv) by identities (national, regional, local or relating to sexuality, disability, age and gender),
- (v) by their visiting practices,
- (vi) by their exclusion from other communities, and
- (vii) by location.⁸³

Definition of ‘museum’

ICOM’s (2007) generic definition of *museum*⁸⁴ acknowledges that the form, functions, contents, operations and management of museums has changed significantly with time.⁸⁵ Desvallées and Mairesse (2010) maintain that *museum* refers to either the institution or the establishment or the place generally designed to select, study and display the material and intangible evidence of humans and their environment.⁸⁶ Laster (2011) claims that there is a distinction between public and private museums, and that a private museum is ‘a collection, usually on a very limited topic and operated by individual enthusiasts, collectors, clubs or companies.’⁸⁷ Dillenburg (2011) does not differentiate between public or private museums. He maintains that it is *the exhibits* which define and make the museum *a museum*, different from any other organisation serving the public,⁸⁸ and these exhibits are *real, physical stuff*, within a *physical environment* that is *dimensional*. Moreover, these exhibits are able to provide visitors with *an experience*, through embedded information, presentation, and design of exhibits and displays.⁸⁹ He defined the museum ‘*as an institution whose core function includes the presentation of public exhibits for the public good.*’⁹⁰ ICOM (2016) proposed that

A museum is an open to all, ever changing place, in the service of humanity, where curators act as keepers and transmitters of

⁸³ Watson, 2007:4 (with reference to Mason, 2005: 206-207).

⁸⁴ ICOM (2007). Quote; “a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”

⁸⁵ Desvallées and Mairesse, 2010: 56.

⁸⁶ Desvallées and Mairesse, 2010: 56.

⁸⁷ Laster, 2011.

⁸⁸ Dillenburg, 2011:11.

⁸⁹ Dillenburg, 2011:12-13.

⁹⁰ Dillenburg, 2011:11-12.

knowledge, culture and values that are shared with co-curators in innovative and inspiring ways, giving them insight into their past and present and informing their future self-development.⁹¹

In July 2019, despite several discussions, ICOM proposed a more complex definition of museum stating that

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.⁹²

This definition is still debateable and is awaiting, at the time of writing, a vote for approval in June 2021 to replace the 2007 definition in ICOM's Statutes.⁹³

Therefore *museum* is a collective term encompassing different forms of collections made available to the public, irrespective of their theme, size, composition, content, collection, nature of exhibits, persons involved, venue, audiences targeted and included or implicitly and explicitly excluded. Under the collective terminology of *museums*, McCall and Gray (2013: 5) placed the following: 'museums, galleries, historic houses and collection centres.'⁹⁴ Although the perception may be that museums are similar in their respective functions, their day-to-day operations, activities and events, management and administration, their curatorial practices could demonstrate both similarities and variations. The following sections expand on the distinction between micro or small, independent, private and other types of museums.

Museum categories

The European Group on Museum Statistics (EGMUS) (2004), which adopted the ICOM (2007) definition of *museum*, differentiates between museums and groups them under four main categories, which are:

- a. State-owned museums

⁹¹ Solery, 2016.

⁹² ICOM, 2020; and ICOM, 25 July 2019. When classifying all museums as 'not for profit', ICOM may be missing on *non-profits* and museums which do not have explicit laws in their country.

⁹³ Aksoy, 19 January 2020.

⁹⁴ McCall and Gray, 2013: 5.

- b. Regional museums
- c. Museums which fall under the remit of municipalities, associations and churches, and
- d. Private museums and foundations.⁹⁵

These museums differ from each other not in size, but in funding and ownership of exhibits. For example, State-owned and regional museums are mainly funded by national and regional funds.⁹⁶ Religious museums may be funded by the Church, and/or receive public subsidy, depending on the time and place. Museums may be further divided into four types based on the rapport generated between the collection and the visitors and also the different ways museums seek to relay knowledge through their exhibits.⁹⁷ Social scientists maintain that museums may be further subdivided into four generations of education or knowledge construction. The first type is *contemplative*, where object information is totally provided by the museums, with no allowance made for visitor interpretation. The second is *science and technology*, which educates through controlled interaction with objects. The third is *interactive*, where objects are contextualised and intended to communicate an idea or concept to the visitor, even through interactivity. The fourth is an educational project, called *museum staging*, where visitors are expected to interpret the objects by themselves and are allowed to construct different interpretations and knowledge.⁹⁸ (Table 4)

Micro museums, as defined in the next section, differ from other types of museums. Differences are not only structural and static, (i.e. physical, operational or organisational), but functional and dynamic, (i.e. with the purpose and practice to bring about change and improvement). Simultaneously, one needs to underline that although micro museums are massed together under the same category, they tend to differ from each other, even with regard to scale, institutional framework, funding and agenda.

Laws and regulatory frameworks frequently demonstrate a narrow mindset when defining a museum. They rarely differ between large, small, micro, institutional,

⁹⁵ European Group on Museum Statistics (EGMUS) 2004: 11.

⁹⁶ Davison, 2004: 204-206.

⁹⁷ DDF, 2018.

⁹⁸ DDF, 2018, *ibid.*

private, independent and grassroots micro museums. Maltese laws and regulatory frameworks to date differentiate only between national and private museums and they do not acknowledge *non-profit* enterprises. Consequently, independent museums end up being categorised as commercial private enterprises, and hence as *for-profit*. A white paper called *The Social Enterprise Act* issued in June 2015, has since been shelved and forgotten.⁹⁹ The type of independent grassroots micro museums identified by this research is the kind with a social function,¹⁰⁰ not museums created specifically *for-profit*. The term ‘social function’ is used when implicit and explicit activities conducted by the museum are intended to benefit a designated community;¹⁰¹ this can be a local community, a group within a community, or a community connected by a practice, a shared interest or a shared theme.

Another term which is bandied around is *private museum*. The term *private museum* has different meanings across countries.¹⁰² In some countries, it includes museums owned by individuals or families, which this study sees as a distinct form of museum, here called *independent* museum. To be more accurate, *private* museums are owned by NGO’s, Quangos, associations, and private businesses among others (as in the case of pseudo-NGOs),¹⁰³ commercial banks, large manufacturing companies, world-renowned brewers and similar business-oriented entities. In certain countries, however both private and independent museums are recognised for statistical purposes, but not when it comes to funding or other types of support.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Sant, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Paroissien, 2006: 12.

¹⁰¹ Hein, 2010: 1-8.

¹⁰² Hagedorn-Saupe and Ermert, 2007: 7 and 10.

Quote page 7: “a seemingly easy term like “private museum” does not mean the same in different countries.”

Quote page 10: A similar problem is presented by a category like “private” museum, which in Germany also includes museums held by private individuals, whereas in the United Kingdom only museums by charitable associations fall under this category (since in the UK, museums held by private individuals are not accepted as true “museums” at all.)”

¹⁰³ Pseudo-NGOs are NGO’s created by political governments to help certain sectors of society or having a cultural project. These are funded by public funds, employ paid staff and were mostly create with the intention to access and secure regional (as EU funds) for the political government which created them.

Miszlivetz and Jensen, 1998: 83.

Bryant, 2002: 629-639.

Charlton, May, and Cleobury, 1995: 19-42.

Bouchet, 2015.

Adams, 1998.

Andrews, 2012: 20.

¹⁰⁴ Hagedorn-Saupe and Ermert, 2007: 7 and 10.

In Austria, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Spain, private and independent museums, inclusive of micro museums, are both recognised and supported for their contribution to the economy, for their social and pedagogic usefulness, the welfare they provide to communities, and the efforts they make for the cultural development of local communities.¹⁰⁵ In these countries, such museums are acknowledged and recognised for their contribution to society as they have initiated and continue to the generation of new tourism niches; and also because their presence attracts and increases visitors to places which were earlier thought unthinkable for tourism. Some countries, for example Norway, fund and support such initiatives.¹⁰⁶ Norway allows independent micro museums the possibility to register as non-profit private liability companies, and thereby gain access to Norwegian Cultural Funds.¹⁰⁷ In the United States of America, small independent museums and similar initiatives run by individuals or families are supported and funded to help care for their collections.¹⁰⁸ These are signs that authorities acknowledge that the preservation of the heritage of small communities is significant. While many countries acknowledge that independent small museums play a key role in generating tourism and economic activity, beneficial to both the state and the community,¹⁰⁹ the same cannot be said of Malta.

Note: Statistics concerning Malta and Cyprus do not feature in this report. According to the EGMUS website, Malta's input dated back to the year 2000, and the link to 'Kultura 2000: a survey on cultural participation 2000' demonstrates that Cyprus has refrained from giving updated statistics. Both countries are also reported to not having submitted their data for the *Culture statistics* 2016 edition, EuroStat Statistical books, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union: 42, footnote No. 1 Accessed at http://www.egmus.eu/fileadmin/intern/Materials/Eurostat_Culture_Statistics_2016.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Hagedorn-Saupe and Ermert, 2007: 13, 42, 61, 64, 69, 73-75, 79, 104 and 108.

¹⁰⁶ In Norway limited liability companies can register as non-profit. Norwegian museums can apply for support through the Arts Council funding for museum and cultural protection. This offers the following support schemes aimed at museum and cultural heritage on i) multidisciplinary measures, ii) project support cultural protection, iii) nonfiction cultural heritage, iv) aspirant scheme, v) hedge funds for museum, vi) state insurance, vii) guest accommodation support for venues, viii) operating grants and on ix) museum programmes. <https://www.altinn.no/en/Start-and-Run-a-Business/Stotteordning-ny/Stotteordninger/Kulturradets-stotteordninger-for-museum-arkiv-og-kulturvern/>.

¹⁰⁷ Extract from *The Cultural Funds* - Arts Council, Norway: <http://www.kulturradet.no/english/the-cultural-fund>.

¹⁰⁸ Various funding opportunities listed for small museums in the United States of America are found on <http://ideas.gallerysystems.com/Annual-Grants-Guide.html>. Accessed 20 December 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Bell, 2012.

What is a micro museum?

Museums, irrespective of their surface area or property occupied, rely on three resources mainly

- (i) the cultural resource or what is on public display mostly as exhibits,
- (ii) the human resource (i.e. staff both voluntary or paid), and
- (iii) the resources, internal and external, for sustainability, such as financial, education and intellectual material, other support, accessibility to funding and other resources, to function effectively on a long-term.

With regard to the term *micro museum*, from an exhibits perspective this means that the museum encompasses less than 1,000 exhibits, and it is this which makes it smaller than the small museum.¹¹⁰ Single topic museums are generally assumed, typically, to have fewer exhibits than museums with more than one theme. *Small* museums are those with more than one thousand (1,000) but fewer than five thousand (5,000) objects on exhibit.¹¹¹ The 1,000-object thresholds for micro museums is based on literature and published documentation of museums and also on people involved in the arts and museum sector worldwide. Nevertheless, a question which arises is whether the above measure is sufficient to classify museums as micro, small or other.

The present research encountered many museums which are or can be classified as micro museums. Micro museums derive from several situations and for several purposes. They come in various forms, sizes, venues, administrative and operative models, and present various themes. The literature on the subject argues that micro museums have a limited number of exhibits on public display. They assert that these exhibits vary from a handful of objects or artifacts to anything less than a thousand objects.¹¹² However, the study shows that, while some micro museums experience a standstill with their collection or collections, other micro museums

¹¹⁰ Tongue, 2017.

Gutierrez, 2016: 4.

Note: The 1000-object threshold is mentioned by various reports on museums and their collections. It is worldwide regarded as a milestone in determining the size of the collection and the museum itself. This helps to identify the small from the smaller museum, here called 'micro museum' by the volume of objects displayed.

¹¹¹ Krebs, 1991: 7. Quote: "Most of the museums are small, with collections not exceeding 5,000 objects, and have a skeleton staff of a director, one or two professionals and a number of helpers and guardians."

Candlin, 2016: 7.

¹¹² Berg, 2017.

continue to grow and become small museums with their number of exhibits ranging from 1,001 to 5,000 exhibits.¹¹³ A few, although rarely, may even reach and exceed the 5,000 exhibits threshold. Despite their sizeable collections and the number of exhibits on public display, their curators still consider them as micro museums. There are various circumstances which may shape the micro museum and help it grow to a small museum, or even a larger museum.

Another factor not considered by the literature is that of size of venue and floorspace. This study challenges the claim that museums shall be classified as micro, small or larger museums according to the volume of objects they put on public display. Secondly, the claim is challenged that objects on display may or may not depend on the size of the museum alone but on the size of the objects exhibited, followed by the size of the venue and the space available to accommodate such objects for public viewing. Thus the definitions supplied by various authors¹¹⁴ for micro and small museums may not be so rigid, and indeed largely untenable, as the number of objects on display may vary according to the size of the objects in the collection and the space available. These are two variables which are not easily measured in any case. For example, a museum displaying buttons can have a collection of more than 5,000 buttons in one small room, while a museum with a collection of industrial heritage or attire may require a large venue with larger rooms or spaces just to display a dozen items. Such different scenarios are met in Sicily at the Farmacia (AFCS) museum at Scicli and the Virgadavola (MCIV) display of traditional Sicilian *carretti* at Vittoria.

A significant factor regarding a museum is its venue. It is the first thing that catches the eye. The venues of some museums, such as those of the Italafrica, Virgadavola or Tunnara, may give the impression of a shabby and small insignificant exhibit; but as one walks through, the visitor's opinion changes as the museums present collections unequalled anywhere else. Other museums may on the contrary present a magnificent baroque façade or a striking example of modern architecture but only a collection lacking presentation or display. A third type is that kind of museum where, independent of size and theme, the architecture is another museum in itself as

¹¹³ Krebs, 1991: 7.

¹¹⁴ Krebs, 1991: 7, see footnotes 112 and 113.
Crosby, 2018.
Berg, 2017.

it presents features and characteristics which tell a story and a history, either not found in the objects on display or complementary to them to enhance the visitor's experience.

Micro museums are sometimes contained in a single room, like the Farmacia, but others may even occupy several rooms, such as the Maritime. Others occupy interconnected adjacent houses, like the State-museum GranCastello, or even acres of land as the Donnafugata, depending on the collection or theme they present. Their collections may be focused on a single theme, as with the Xarolla, ŻabSanct, Campailla (Photographs 43-48), Italafrica (Photographs 39-42), Škrip and Betina museums, or connected through corresponding collections or themes relevant to the objective of the museum, as is the case with the Virgadavola (Photographs 31-34), the SantLluc, the Acharavi and the Heraklion. Among these themes are collections of traditional tools and old crafts, folkloristic items, historical memorabilia, agricultural, industrial and production heritage, archaeological artifacts, home utensils, religious paraphernalia, agrarian and maritime collections, militaria, dolls, children's toys and novelties, different forms of art, attire and fashion, musical instruments, printed matter ranging from postage stamps to posters and large prints, transport tickets, telephony, banking and other cards, books, movies and cinematography, photography, coins and medals, sport trophies and sport related objects, keychains and pens, native artifacts, nature and natural history, mineralogy, and much more. However, what is a museum if it is not available for public viewing?

An important factor of this study was that the museums were, in one way or another, still available for public viewing at the time of research, irrespective of how much time they allowed for visits. The term *micro museum* in this study included some which may have been considered small museums or larger micro museums by previous authors, since their collections on display comprised 1,001 to 5,000 exhibits (or more). Participant Mediterranean museums which exceeded the threshold of 5,000 exhibits on display, were the Farmacia, Acharavi and SantLluc. Like the participant Maltese non-State museums, they presented similar issues and museum types, and were established by individuals, families or groups of persons who had joined forces. Despite all this, the study sought reasons for the closure of a museum or its no longer being open according to a fixed schedule – i.e. accepting visits only by appointment

or being open sporadically. Reasons for closure or a reduction in opening times, whether permanent or temporary, were thought useful for the study.

During the research, many independent collections were identified, but none of their owners expressed an interest in opening these collections to the public on a fixed schedule or by appointment. In brief informal discussions with some of them, they expressed reasons for doing so. Some no longer opened because they had not found volunteers ready to open on a regular basis. Many held back owing to the expenses and burdens imposed by national laws, authorities and regulatory bodies. Among such obstacles they mentioned registration fees, conditions imposed by government authorities and most current administrative burdens, inclusive of fees that had be paid to third parties for services such as accountants and auditors. Common concerns among such persons focused on the lack of freedom to open for the public, the treatment of such ‘micro museums’ or museums as businesses or ‘for profit’ activities. Also mentioned were the financial and administrative burdens imposed by the current regulatory framework, the absence of national support, and the impossibility of accessing funding, both alone or in association owing to the terminology used for such museum activities in the Maltese Islands, which frequently did not qualify them owing to their perceived *for-profit* nature. Others complained that their limited resources could not meet the demands imposed by law and by funding requisites. A few museums or collections which were formerly open for public viewing were at the time of writing closed for health reasons and because of the advanced age of the person or persons who curating, running, maintaining and sustaining them.

Distinctions and similarities among grassroots museums exist at their establishment, as they may be founded by an individual, a family or families, or by a group of volunteers. However, major distinctions become apparent once the persons involved decide to register the activity under a legal or regularised form of existence and administration. It is at this stage that most of the administrative problems surface. Where founders and non-immediate family members come together in a partnership, or are trusted with the running of the museum, other types of problems and concerns are met.

In a nutshell, the definition of a micro museum is:

- a place or space where a collection of objects and knowledge connected to a specific or focused theme is displayed for public viewing;
- in the majority of cases, a collection of less than one thousand objects on public display. However this is variable as amounts depend on the theme of the collection, the size of the objects collected and displayed, and the space available or allocated for display;
- a collection, displays and material intended for public viewing and knowledge contained in a single room or spread over property connected with the theme presented;
- rarely found in an iconic building, except for some establishment micro museums;
- whether independent, private or institutional, run by a small number of staff who may be volunteers, paid or remunerated, or a mix, depending on ownership, structure and/or resources available;
- staff whether volunteers or not, are commonly multi-tasking, except at some establishment micro museums where job descriptions dictate roles and responsibilities;
- at times, supported by a number of volunteers or friends of the museum;
- limited in resources available and may present itself in alternative forms, sizes and places;
- a collection and display of objects which never, or scarcely ever, find their place on displays at establishment museums;
- appealing to visitors seeking information or knowledge about a special interest or theme;
- curated by a curator and staff who are unequalled specialists in their area, irrespective of their educational background or literacy;
- curated by curators and staff who tend to be closer to visitors and more 'present' interacting with them than curators at larger museums.

Types of Grassroots micro museums

Apart from the State-owned micro museums and museums owned and managed by large institutions as the Church, the museum types established by the grassroots can be an initiative started by different stakeholders and run by different forms of administration. The present study focused on grassroots micro museums and

found out that there are different types, all of which started at the grassroots and which have till the date of this study remained so, or else evolved in size or administration as explained in the following typologies. The types of grassroots micro museums and collections met on the Maltese Islands were those

- (i) started by an individual or a family and which remained so without any legal status, such as the WMC which compares to the Virgadavola in Sicily,
- (ii) started by an individual or a family and which opted to register under a legal status such as a company or a family business, such as the BMH, AGHM (prior to 2007), which compare well with the Murika in Sicily,
- (iii) started by an individual or a family, but then later circumstances led to the museum being transferred to a form of legal voluntary organisation, an institutional organisation, or the establishment such as the State, local government or the Church, such as the TaKola; which compares to the Bonelli, Farmacia, Donnafugata in Sicily,
- (iv) started by an individual or a family, and which circumstances led to the museum being transferred to a form of non-legal voluntary group within the establishment such as local government. Examples are Xarolla, and Italafrica in Sicily,
- (v) started by an individual or a family, after which circumstances led to the museum being transferred to a form of non-legal voluntary group within an institution such as the Church. Examples here are the ŻabSanct and Maritime,
- (vi) started by a group of volunteers from an institution which evolved into an autonomous legal non-government organisation such as the Razzett.¹¹⁵

In the Province of Ragusa, Sicily the study came across micro museums which

- (i) started by an individual or a family and which remained so without any legal status (Virgadavola),
- (ii) started by an individual or a family and which opted to register under a legal status such as a company or a family business (Campailla, Murika),

¹¹⁵ As with the introduction of the Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap. 492) dated 11th December 2007.

- (iii) started by an individual or a family, after which circumstances led to the museum being transferred to a form of legal organisation that was a non-profit cultural association (*associazione culturale*); (Farmacia, Bonelli),
- (iv) started by an individual or a family, after which circumstances led to the museum being transferred to a form of legal organisation that was a non-profit tourism and cultural association (*associazione culturale e turistica*); (Donnafugata, MUDECO, Contadino, Campailla, Si-Moutique)
- (v) private-public partnerships between the local/municipal or regional authorities and the private curator/association running the museum and its activities (Italafrica, Campailla),
- (vi) public-private partnership between the local/municipal or regional authorities and individuals who could curate, run and administer the museum in a property provided by Municipal (Comune) government (Donnafugata, MUDECO, Contadino).

The other museums from Brač and Murter (Croatia), Mallorca (Spain), Crete and Corfu (Greece) displayed the following types of museums:

- (i) established by an individual as an independent museum (Acharavi, Corfu),
- (ii) established by a family as an independent museum administered on the lines of a family-business (Škrip, Brač),
- (iii) established by a religious congregation or society (SantLluc, Mallorca),
- (iv) established by an academic society as a non-profit foundation (Heraklion, Crete), and,
- (v) established by a local community under the form of an association (Betina, Murter).

A visual scheme of micro museum development from founding stage to later possible developments is presented in *Diagram A: Micro museum development*.

The non-museum

During the present research, the study came across other collections which are unique but not open for public viewing on a regular basis or by appointment. They are invisible to the visitor and to researchers. It is only through word of mouth and mostly through direct contact with their founders and owners that one can have the good fortune to visit them. All curators of such collections remarked that if they were to

have the right environment without the current regulatory, legal and financial burdens, they would open their collections to the public on a regular basis. Owing to the objects and curiosities owned, some collections can become real attractions and can serve various pedagogic purposes. Although such collections may even be found in museums outside Malta, there is no similar State museum in the whole Maltese archipelago. All the heritage and efforts behind such collections cannot be appreciated and they may even be lost forever if such collections end up in the wrong hands, or are not in the right ambience. Observations made by these collectors and participant curators about the current issues faced by non-State museums of any size and type provide food for thought. They all recommend changes, and viewing museums created by the grassroots in a new perspective. A much more favourable context for such grassroots museums on the Maltese Islands and elsewhere, not necessarily just legal and regulatory, would finally benefit all society and the economy.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Hagedorn-Saupe and Ermert, 2007: 13, 42, 61, 64, 69, 73-75, 79, 104 and 108.

CHAPTER TWO: Museology and Museum typologies

New Museology was proposed as an alternative to the failures of traditional museology and the need to detach the museum from the perception of isolation, elitism and to have a better return on public investment.¹¹⁷ It intended to turn the focus of museology from objects and collections to people, communities and social groups earlier excluded from the museum or discriminated by it.¹¹⁸ New Museology debates on the social and political contribution of museums in society, invites participation from the people not just as visitors but also as stakeholders in the curatorial function.¹¹⁹ Notwithstanding all this, New Museology did not manage to change much of the traditional practices and curatorial roles.¹²⁰

Sociomuseology: its main tenets, theory and methodology

Sociomuseology is a maturation and evolution of New Museology, informed by trans-disciplinary resources such as the social sciences or humanities. It endeavours, through cultural and natural heritage, to make social interventions which, like grassroots democracy,¹²¹ promote sustainable development and community participation.¹²² Sociomuseology promotes museums to become ‘organizations of community power and grassroots democracy.’¹²³ As ICOM maintains, museums and heritage have the potential to bring about positive and sustainable cultural development in communities.¹²⁴ ICOM’s proposed definition of museum led to a lengthy controversy as it departed from an object-centred, top-down definition and introduced most of the elements of Sociomuseology and bottom-up modelling focused on improving and empowering communities.¹²⁵ Sociomuseology, in the context of globalisation and major social changes, can bring about social transformation. The approach sees the museum as ‘a microcosm and a local lab for a society in evolution’

¹¹⁷ Vergo, 1989.

McCall and Gray, 2013: 2-3.

¹¹⁸ McCall and Gray, 2013: 2-4.

¹¹⁹ McCall and Gray, 2013: 2-3.

¹²⁰ McCall and Gray, 2013: 13-14.

¹²¹ Ekins, 1992: 135-137.

Coles, 2006: 547-561.

Kaufman and Alfonso, 1997: 1-24.

Moutinho, 2010 and 2016

Dos Santos, 2010 and 2012.

¹²² Moutinho, 2010: 27.

¹²³ Kaufman, in Kaufman and Alfonso edit., 1997: 9 and 21.

¹²⁴ ICOM stands for the International Council of Museums

¹²⁵ ICOM 25 July 2019; ICOM, 2020; Noce, 9 Sept. 2019.

which has potential to bring together natural and cultural resources, to promote social justice, by investing in the community as the greatest resource.¹²⁶ Sociomuseology fits museum services to present-day circumstances, links them to community projects, and anchors the museum to small, intimate, local communities rather than to the national or global. It acts as a resource for the sustainable development of society based on equality and inclusion.¹²⁷

Sociomuseology pursues a model which embraces participation, enabling the re-configuration of new museum practices which benefit the community where the museum operates.¹²⁸ While some maintain that Sociomuseology, as a model emergent from New Museology, perceives the museum as a socio-cultural institution,¹²⁹ others compare it as a concept to *Ecomuseums*, that is to say, museums focused on place identity through community participation for the improvement and development of the same community. The comparison is also made with *community museums* focusing on the social history of an ethnic group, other groups or a dispersed community.¹³⁰ In Sociomuseology, the museum's objectives are focused on reinforcing a sense of cultural identity, on presenting and preserving heritage within the context of social action and change. These initiatives intend to combat negative self-image and facilitate the creation of positive imaginaries leading to community development. This approach can help raise awareness among community members so that they take care of their own heritage, since heritage impacts on both the individual and the collective.¹³¹ The sociomuseological model is equivalent to the grassroots museum model delineated in this study. The grassroots museum model, however, extends the idea of community to communities not only strictly bound by locality, but also by practices, common or shared interests, and other forms of bonding.

Sociomuseology encourages curators and staff to reach out and become socio-cultural actors, and hence active participants and initiators for positive community development. The International Movement for a New Museology (MINOM-ICOM)

¹²⁶ Sancho Querol and Sancho, 2013: 91-92.

¹²⁷ Moutinho, 2010: 27.

Assunção and Primo, 2013: 25.

¹²⁸ Moutinho, 2010: 32. see also Moutinho, 2012, Presentation Slides.

¹²⁹ van Mensch, Peter. 1992: Chapter 6.

¹³⁰ Moutinho, 2010.

¹³¹ van Mensch, 1992: Chapter 5.

further points out that ‘local museums’ can achieve community development through their practices if they release themselves from ‘rules, institutional structures and financial dependency.’¹³² As underlined before, they can only do this when they avoid affiliation or ties to State and institutional structures. Evidence of freedom and restrictions were met among the museums studied, and some do indeed surmount that and voice their concerns for the community. The findings are further elaborated and discussed under the section entitled *Socio-political curatorship*.

In traditional museums, curators, community and visitors are regarded as alien to each other. Visitors are mostly considered as passive passers-by. Sociomuseology promotes interactivity, where curator, staff, local community, visitors, as well as non-visitors, come together to cooperate, participate and negotiate where the museum content is conceived. In the Mediterranean, where conflicts and changing geopolitical allegiances shape the region, its culture and the future, challenges to historiography become fundamental and inevitable to those dealing with power politics. Sociomuseology as a multidisciplinary approach looks at museums differently. It maintains that museums can be transformed into vehicles of local and regional development, as they can help promote local identities, groups and minorities:¹³³ now a matter of controversy for ICOM’s new definition of museum. The sociomuseological approach maintains that globalisation is pushing museums to deal with diversity, multiculturalism, as well as issues involving gender, identity and biodiversity. The approach posits that museums shall adopt new methods to deal with intangible and tangible cultural heritage, memory, authority and conflict.¹³⁴ To do this, museums must abandon the traditional model and move on to become service providers, rooted in social inclusion, social participation, geographic representation and development.¹³⁵

Modernity

While sociomuseological approaches promote diversity and inclusion, for centuries institutional museums helped to construct homogeneous imaginaries of the ‘nation’.¹³⁶ Governments during the nineteenth century, particularly those of war-torn

¹³² MINOM, Statutes Art. 5-3.

¹³³ FCSEA: 6.1

¹³⁴ FCSEA: 6.2.

¹³⁵ FCSEA: 6.5.

¹³⁶ Ashley, 2005: 7, 15.

Europe, focused on ensuring long-standing stability and securing power by creating unity through homogeneity.¹³⁷ An analogous approach was maintained by postcolonial governments to secure authority and perceive superiority over their communities. They manipulated and directed public opinion.¹³⁸ They designed and constructed an imaginary through the formal education system, publications, audio-visual media and other institutional tools.¹³⁹ Authorities in power managed to construct a Mediterranean historical imaginary which accommodated their goals; as they sanctioned a filtered history and promoted a ‘subjective’ historiography.¹⁴⁰ These ‘subjective’ historiographies can be reinforced or challenged by a museum’s social narrative, as it excludes or legitimises certain hegemonic perspectives and past imaginaries.¹⁴¹ In the interpretation of history, neither community members nor visitors from outside the community were allowed to contribute or participate,¹⁴² as they were considered outsiders to the museum. Sociomuseology challenges and questions all this, as power relations within society are not fixed and roles may change according to circumstances.¹⁴³

Livingstone (2011) expresses doubts about authenticity within non-public museums, as she perceives that private museums, which are not ‘publicly funded and professionally accredited’ do not have ‘concerns for the authenticity or cultural sensitivity of content presented.’¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, if we consider that historiography was exclusively subjective, biased and dictated by authorities in power, this may be quite the opposite in independent grassroots micro museums. Curators can negotiate history and construct interpretation and presentation with both community and visitors, rather than rely on and promote State or institutionally approved

¹³⁷ Trouillot, 2001: 127, 130, 131.

Calhoun, 1993: 220.

Smith, 1998: 2-3, 30, 32-33.

¹³⁸ Smith, 1998: 40.

Beck, 2005: 338-340.

¹³⁹ Smith, 1998: 32-33.

Anderson, 2006.

Said, 1993.

¹⁴⁰ Carnegie, 2006: 70.

Sobe, 2014: 313-318.

Williams, 2014: 1-9.

¹⁴¹ IMLS, 2011: 8.

¹⁴² Davis, Huang and Liu, 2010: 84.

¹⁴³ Coronil, 1994: 648-649.

Quayson, 2000: 2.

¹⁴⁴ Livingstone, 2011: 16.

interpretations. Carnegie (2006) suggests that, even in social history museums, authenticity and perceived truths come into conflict as communities value memories which transmit meanings far beyond what could have actually occurred, or interpreting history with a twist to create different desired meanings from those normally imposed or dictated by central authorities.¹⁴⁵ Biases in favour of those in power, for instance State and religion, were strongly evident when recording and reporting the past.¹⁴⁶

In the Mediterranean, history and historic records were made by those who controlled the region and had the power to produce an imaginary, promote it and perpetrate it through their classical museums.¹⁴⁷ These practices prompted reactions from those not in positions of power and whose histories were subjugated.¹⁴⁸ The creation of homogenic nation-states discriminated against and erased the different communities and identities within.¹⁴⁹ Minorities and those who were not supportive or accommodating to the will of authorities were considered inferiors, faced exclusion and stigmatized.¹⁵⁰ Institutional procedures and practices ensured a structure where the few, even if popularly chosen or elected, enforced measures for securing power against the many in society. They exercised their authority and power in ways to turn human beings into submissive subjects and also promote a specific identity to control any other group or individual activity which could destabilise or topple the imaginary, the historic narrative and the identity they promoted.¹⁵¹

Sociomuseology encourages museums to use their knowledge and resources to listen to suppressed voices and to recognise them in their space and place. Authorities are urged to liberate museums from any form of sanctioning and oppression imposed on them through social, economic and political frameworks.¹⁵² Sociomuseology, as a

¹⁴⁵ Carnegie, 2006: 74.

¹⁴⁶ Samuel, 2012.

¹⁴⁷ Braudel, 1972: 225.

¹⁴⁸ Dos Santos, 2012: 24-25. The term 'subjugated histories' is drawn up from Freire, 1970: 54.

¹⁴⁹ Lleras, 2008: 287, 289, 293, 294-297.

¹⁵⁰ Fyfe, 2016: 54, 56, 58-59, 63, 65, 70-71, 77.

Stevens 2007: 35.

¹⁵¹ O'Farrell, 2006:106-107, 110, refers also to Michel Foucault. It was divided into three main characteristics described as: "*firstly, the institutions and knowledge which manage the population; secondly the pre-eminence of certain exercise of power based on administrative practices of governance; and thirdly, the process by which a State, based on a system of law [...], was replaced by a way of administering a population.*"

Encyclopaedia Britannica, q.v. governmentality.

¹⁵² MINOM, Declaration MINOM Rio, 2013.

theoretical stance, feels that museums should endeavour to promote the sustainable development of humanity.¹⁵³ It therefore moves a step further than New Museology and as a bottom-up approach it acknowledges grassroots initiatives for their contribution to community welfare. Earlier museology promoted practices which led to the ostracization of ‘common’ history. With the bottom-up approach proposed by Ekins (1992) and Sociomuseology, an understanding and awareness of the context through which these museums act are important. In a nutshell, Sociomuseology demands that museums give recognition, place and space to the diverse histories of different communities. It strives for community empowerment through an objective re-presentation of their identity and cultural heritage, and is aimed at facilitating social transformations for the well-being of the community and its members.

Grassroots museology

As the sociomuseological approach is a maturation of New Museology, a grassroots museum model offers plenty of scope for the application of the postmodern approach outlined here. Museums, museum practices and objectives have already gone through what can be termed as the modern era of museums, and which can be differently perceived by people and scholars in different countries and within diverse contexts at different times. Through an analysis of museums, past and present changes and curatorial practices may be the fine line which delineates the different approaches and stages of ‘museums’ and, of course, of museology.

Like socio-museums, grassroots micro museums are also location based. Some define them as community-based museums, as they can be located anywhere amidst the urban landscape or at some distance within a small rural community. Most small cultural or heritage attractions, such as micro museums, are hardly identified by passers-by as they are not housed in imposing landmark buildings and may not display large installations or signage.¹⁵⁴ As grassroots initiatives, they tend to maintain a low profile, which in addition to the represented community can help them embrace the local community and in return be embraced by that community.¹⁵⁵ They explicitly or implicitly apply a bottom-up approach to the practical and theoretical aspects of New

¹⁵³ Moutinho, 2010: 27-31.

¹⁵⁴ McKercher and Ho, 14:5, 2006: 484.

¹⁵⁵ Hampton, 2005: 752, 754.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.472.9038&rep=rep1&type=pdf> .

Museology. Indeed, the grassroots approach pursued in this study is currently practiced in museums adopting a Latin sociomuseological approach to museology. Latin new museology as a response to the British type of New Museology, gave rise to museums created and managed by the community, and with objects and narratives interpreted by the local community.¹⁵⁶ The Latin school of new museum practices maintains that, while the museum is engaged in its purposes as a museum, it uses heritage as a tool for empowerment, for social development, increased accessibility, grassroots participation and social inclusion.¹⁵⁷ Its social political efforts occur through a bottom-up approach. The grassroots approach is used in social, economic, political, environmental and developmental disciplines.¹⁵⁸ Even within the type of museums as grassroots micro museums, the study recognised differences and therefore other typologies, which as an initiative of common people, follow an objective that intends to transform and improve the community or communities which they represent.

Museum typologies: a transformation

In the post-war period, the founding of ICOM (1946) brought together many people from different countries, to discuss and analyse the operational and practical sides of museums. In 1971 the concept of *Ecomuseums* - introduced, as an alternative to the traditional museum and its sanctioned narratives - focused on the well-being and development of local communities through the safeguarding of cultural landscapes, community participation, the identity of place, and the interpretation and management of heritage for sustainable development.¹⁵⁹

New Museology was a philosophy born out of traditional museology. It aimed at incorporating the history of museum development, and then sought to define a museum's social roles and responsibilities, and also the necessary undertakings which guarantee the survival of the collection and the didactic role it follows. New

¹⁵⁶ Dos Santos, 2010: 5, 7-9.

¹⁵⁷ Heijnen, 2010: 13-24.

¹⁵⁸ Uphoff, Norman, 1993, Grassroots Organizations and NGOs in Rural Development: Opportunities with Diminishing States and Expanding Markets, *World Development* 21 (4): 607–622, Publ.

Elsevier Ltd., [doi:10.1016/0305-750x\(93\)90113-n](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750x(93)90113-n);

Harris, 2019, definition of Grassroots Democracy.

Wall, 2010: 12. Grassroots democracy is one of the four pillars of Green- or Eco-politics described by Wall.

¹⁵⁹ de Bary, Desvalles and Wasserman, 1994.

Davis, 1999.

Riva, 2017.

museological values and principles developed between the 1970s and the 1990s had before long reached many museums worldwide.¹⁶⁰ With its root principles of conscientization, New Museology supports grassroots participation and social change. Despite its rapid growth, the countless changes happening in a neo-liberal world made it quickly outdated and in need of an update.¹⁶¹

In Brazil, grassroots initiatives inspired by Freire's works and Liberation theology may be traced to the 1960s.¹⁶² For example, a grassroots initiative in the form of a micro museum, the Museu da Maré, emerged from one of Rio's favelas. As an initiative following what Dos Santos (2012) called grassroots museology,¹⁶³ it can be termed as a grassroots museum. This type of museum and its museological concepts aim to

secure a place for new or neglected community stories [...] makes a connection between the memories of a neighborhood participants and an intensely activist philosophy and practice [...] to organically adapt itself to the social demands of the favela inhabitants and other relevant stakeholders.¹⁶⁴

It aims also, critically, to engage communities with their heritage, to make the museum a tool for empowerment and emancipation of communities and groups within them, to address social and cultural concerns, stigmatisation and present community identity and memories, with the aim of transforming society and helping the community stand on its feet.¹⁶⁵ Dos Santos (2012) concludes that one of the drawbacks of grassroots initiatives could be a lack of self-critique and institutionalisation.¹⁶⁶

Sociomuseology, known also as Social Museology, and seen as an evolution of New Museology, came about as a response to the vast changes in modern society and globalisation.¹⁶⁷ It is also associated to such grassroots initiatives as those described above. Owing to such developments in the world of museums, Sociomuseology seeks to adjust the museum to present day realities, mostly resulting from neo-liberal policies

¹⁶⁰ Vergo, 1989.

¹⁶¹ Dos Santos, 2010: 5.

¹⁶² Dos Santos, 2012: 21.

Freire, 1968 (English version, 1970: xxix-xxx, 10, 13, 39, 44, 55, 104 and 110).

¹⁶³ Dos Santos, 2012: 21.

¹⁶⁴ Dos Santos, 2012: 22.

¹⁶⁵ Dos Santos 2012: 22, 24-25.

¹⁶⁶ Dos Santos, 2012: 33.

¹⁶⁷ Freire, 2001: 113-115.

leading to migration, refugees, the formation of new identities, the growth of inequalities and ever-increasing poverty: matters all relevant to the Mediterranean. As a concept, the sociomuseological school of thought demands that museums open themselves to grassroots participation and to informed negotiation with all stakeholders. As a branch of social sciences, the area of Sociomuseology and its overall approach become transdisciplinary, with the objective of identifying the museum as a means for ‘sustainable development, based on social and economic inclusion.’¹⁶⁸ Examples of Sociomuseology from South America and the Iberian peninsula led to the establishment of museums by disadvantaged local communities. Such museums, overwhelmingly micro museums, contained objects donated by the community, and led to a negotiated interpretation of objects together with a negotiated historic narrative around them. These interpretations and narratives tell history and perceptions of the community from its own experience and viewpoint of events. They may consequently conflict with interpretations and narratives found in establishment museums. Such situations place the curator in a critical position, since the curator’s informed interpretation and historic narrative about the community may disagree with that of the donors.

Transforming museums as national or institutional representatives into representatives of communities and voices which were earlier subdued was, and is, not easy.¹⁶⁹ Museology and curatorial practices as well have gone through change and stagnation. Traditional museums flourished during colonial times¹⁷⁰ but have remained subjected to the narratives and decisions of the colonial power.¹⁷¹ Likewise, in post-colonial and post-independence years, museums which belonged to the State maintained the same colonial perceptions of authority and power as central. During the post-independence period, attempts to disassociate images portraying the colonial power as the supreme culture led to the presentation of national identity in State museums and priority to national image, culture and identity. Yet at the same time the colonial mentality of putting all under a single and homogeneous identity remained.

¹⁶⁸ Moutinho, 2016: 2.

¹⁶⁹ Ross Lichfield, 2004: 85.

¹⁷⁰ Bennett, 2004: 2.

¹⁷¹ Bennett, 2004: 5, 7, 9-11.

Like the colonial power, the nation-state did its utmost to preserve its own position and maintain the status quo.¹⁷²

Curatorial practices had excluded or minimised the contribution of different members of society, including women. Diaz Ramos (2016) argues that curatorial practices in museums shall ‘aim at dismantling museological authority, destabilizing power structures and challenging patriarchy and hierarchy’, and bring to an end hegemonies, hierarchies and privileges which devalue women and simply include feminine artists or their works in exhibitions for form’s sake.¹⁷³ Nonetheless the argument about women is also valid to different groups and communities whose identity was and still is excluded in national or institutional museums owing to race, ethnicity, class, creed or other factors.

Although collecting started with the pedagogic intention of the collector, it evolved into a pedagogic tool for many others besides the collector. Their institutionalized collections became selective and exclusive, not just in objects fit for their own collection but also in how they described objects, people and cultures connected to them. In view of the practices of the traditional museums and their curators, the new museology attempted to raise awareness and create an opening into diversity and multiculturalist perspective. Colonial rule and post-independence power structures, however, seem to have supported the same practices of selection and exclusion. The objectives behind the promotion of a homogeneous national community, and therefore a unique identity for all within the nation-state, started with the rise of colonial powers and left its mark also on museums and curatorial practices.

Alternative museums: Typology of museums under research

Grassroots micro museums

Grassroots micro museums are defined as museums established by the common people and which mostly start by displaying a small number of objects or visual presentations highlighting the history and culture of the community they represent. Samuel (2012) maintains that micro museums differ from the *do-it-yourself curators* and *mini-museums* which he describes as museums with ‘display cases in

¹⁷² Sriramesh and Verčič, 2003: 14, 97, 112 and 153.

¹⁷³ Diaz Ramos, 2016.

reception areas’ or which elevate houses to ‘miniature historical shrines.’¹⁷⁴ As grassroots initiatives, grassroots micro museums are created, curated and run by members of a community, such as individuals, families, a number of relatives, a group of people from a localised community, from a community of practice, or from a community of persons who share a common interest.

When it comes to resources, grassroots micro museums are mostly sustained by the resources owned, earned or generated by the efforts of such persons or communities. By resources, the study intends financial, human, educational, manual capabilities and other abilities demanded by a museum and its activities, though there might be exceptions. Where staff are concerned, grassroots micro museums tend to have no paid curators or staff, and most work is done voluntarily. However, the possibility of paid, remunerated or salaried staff is not excluded. Staff at such micro museums comprise mostly volunteers from the same family or community and they are expected to be *ground-level* or *street-level* staff, who work within the museum’s service and have a high level of interaction with visitors.¹⁷⁵

Although the volume of exhibits is taken as a starting point and as an independent variable which classifies the dependent variable (i.e. the museum, as micro, small or larger), the volume is not an absolute measure with which to classify micro museums. The independent variable of ‘volume of exhibits on public display’ is not a determinant variable but is itself a dependent variable which changes according to other factors such as the size of the venue, the space allowed for public displays, the theme of the collection and the size of the objects on display, which also depend on other factors. However, most micro museums in this study fall within the ‘less than 1,000’ objects on public display¹⁷⁶ category, and this confirms that the number of objects on display is an important factor which mostly classifies a museum as a micro

¹⁷⁴ Samuel, 2012: 27.

¹⁷⁵ McCall and Gray, 2013: 5. Quote: “Ground-level staff” is used to refer to those who work within the museums service and have a high level of interaction with visitors and are often called ‘street-level’ workers (Lipsky 2010).”
Pfeiffer, 2019.

¹⁷⁶ National Watch and Clock Museum – website, 2019.
Government of Canada, 2016.

Note: The 1000-object threshold is mentioned by various reports on museums and their collections. It is worldwide regarded as a milestone in determining the size of the collection and the museum itself. This helps to identify the small from the smaller museum, here called ‘micro museum’ by the volume of objects displayed.

museum. (Table 5) Nevertheless, the findings show that curators and circumstances may either keep the micro museum as it was established or, if circumstances offer such opportunities, grow and develop. For such a reason the study considers the volume of exhibits on public display as a significant independent variable, yet dependent on other independent variables such as the size of the objects, the space available and the space allowed for displays. While half of the curators of Maltese micro museums reported that they had objects which were not on public display, in Sicily all curators except one reported that all their objects were on public display. On the contrary, four out of five curators of the remaining micro museums reported that they still had objects which were not on public display (Table 5). This may indicate that micro museum curators in Sicily have venues with more space available for their collections, and certainly storage, than curators on the Maltese Islands. Another observation may be that on average museums on smaller islands tend to attract and collect more than those on larger islands. Most of the Maltese micro museums which lack space for their exhibits are independent micro museums belonging to an individual, a family or a non-legally recognised group of volunteers.

As discussed earlier (in *Types of Grassroots micro museums*), the major subdivision of *grassroots micro museums* is divided into *independent* and *private* micro museums, with a clear distinction made between the terms *independent museum* and *private museum*, and consequently of the sub-types of such museums. It must be noted that the literature offers no clear-cut definition between independent and private museums. Authors tend to confuse the two terms or use them interchangeably. Confronted by such a dearth of definition, this study attempts to present a definition which may be later upheld, developed or challenged. The EGMUS (2004) maintains that even the patterns, concepts and definition of what constitutes a *private museum* vary from one country to another.¹⁷⁷ The EGMUS maintains that *independent* museums were more likely to be created by individuals or families under the definition of *private-owned* and *private-managed* museums, and for such a reason this study calls them *independent* museums. The EGMUS definition includes private entities such as foundations, associations registered under private law and public-private partnerships,¹⁷⁸ but which this study classifies as *private* museums.

¹⁷⁷ European Group on Museum Statistics (EGMUS) 2004: 7, 8.

¹⁷⁸ EGMUS 2004: Sections 3d and 4d.

Independent micro museums

Another vague and generic definition, given by Cossons (2015), defines *independent* museums as ‘not administered directly by any Central or Local Government agency or authority’ and may present themselves under different constitutional frameworks that determine their access and eligibility to significant or no financial support at all.¹⁷⁹ Cossons’ definition leaves a wide gap, since any indirect involvement of a ‘central or local government agency or authority’ cannot ensure that a museum is *independent*, as the amount of dependence of a museum on such agencies or authorities may hinder its independence.

With regard to Malta, non-State museums which fit the EGMUS definition of *privately-owned and privately-managed museums* are considered as private entities and placed under the generic nomenclature: private museum. The Maltese National Statistics Office (NSO) divides museums and historical sites into two main categories: *Public (State-owned)* and *Private and/or Church Organisations*.¹⁸⁰ Further on, the NSO divides museums by the type of management into four categories: *Public entity*, *Church or Church-run organisation*, *Private (for profit) enterprise* and *Private (voluntary/non-profit) organisation*.¹⁸¹ However, museums in Malta can either (i) choose to stay off the legal recognition and operate at risk, or (ii) register as a business and hope to survive the system, or else (iii) register as a non-profit / not-for-profit organisation type and carry the burdens it may impose. It is worth noticing that not-for-profit organisations, such as VOs or NGOs, or what this study calls *private museums*, are allowed to generate money and make profit from admission fees, activities, the selling of merchandise for fundraising, the engagement and payment of staff, receiving donations for visits, services and facilities, and finally from sponsorships and receive third-party contributions. They are bound to re-use that revenue for the same museum and its objectives, and in addition reap the benefits of tax exemptions, preferential treatment, and qualification for various funds and schemes offered at local, national and regional (EU or Mediterranean) levels. In contrast, those museums registered as *for-profit* or as commercial entities/businesses,

¹⁷⁹ Cossons, 2015: 112.

¹⁸⁰ National Statistic Office (NSO), 2015: 1.

¹⁸¹ National Statistic Office (NSO), 2015: 3.

under which some *independent museums* fall, are usually ineligible for cultural funds and schemes. Maltese laws make no distinction between the initiative taken totally by an individual or a family (as the independent museum),¹⁸² and that taken by an organisation (as the private museum). It is unlikely that such individual or family initiatives are registered as a VO or an NGO or what is called a ‘democratic organisation.’ One risk it poses is that members could divest the founders from owning, managing and nurturing their own museum initiative; one for which they devoted huge sums of money and much effort. Moreover, being a *for-profit* (even if profit never comes) excludes the museum from various benefits enjoyed by the *non-profit* institutions. In the current situation, it therefore seems that there are two weights and two measures which put those micro museums falling under the *for-profit* category at a huge disadvantage compared with those registered as *non-profit*.

An analysis of the current Maltese scenario presents various inequitable circumstances. The TaKola Curator explains that *Heritage Malta* (HM), the national agency, faced problems in its revenue generating activities and had made losses year after year, as the revenue from admissions was not enough to sustain the museums, even if they were not considered as *for-profit* entities. The TaKola Curator confirmed that the Maltese Government had created the national agency ‘to be able to manage the sites’ as heritage sites and museums are leased by central government to the national agency at a standard annual fee. The Curator explained that the national agency kept the revenue generated to pay salaries, sustain and maintain the sites and museums and that the sale of tickets, books, souvenirs and other merchandise was not considered as a commercial or business activity. HM is a non-profit organisation and any profits are set aside for projects within the agency.¹⁸³ It is only special events, special clients, space renting and some services which fall within the commercial arm created as a private liability company, *Heritage Malta Services Limited*, that are considered as commercial activities. The Curator acknowledged the threat that if national museums were to become unsustainable the scope of the agency would fail. For such a reason, the national agency was considered as a *non-profit*, was allowed several privileges and later allowed to enter into *for-profit* activities normally outside

¹⁸² In Germany, independent museums are traced back as far as 1901-1908. (see Winkler, 2011: 496. [ISBN 978-3-05005083-6](#)).

¹⁸³ Laws of Malta, Act VI/2002, Art. 8(2).

the realm of public entities. All this confirms the BistraCat Curator's observation that the agency's museums are now in competition with the private sector.

As was explained by the TaKola Curator and confirmed by HM's website and its Annual Report 2018,¹⁸⁴ *Heritage Malta Services Limited*, the commercial arm of the national agency, takes responsibility for the business side of the agency. Activities which fall within such a commercial classification are: 'the rental of venues for corporate events and services for weddings at Heritage Malta venues,' receptions, dinners, shows and more. HM advertises thirty different spaces at twelve different sites and museums.¹⁸⁵ It also promotes 'the newly launched Taste History project' where the agency combines the experience of cuisine, culture and entertainment.¹⁸⁶ Besides all these, the agency provides restoration and conservation services.¹⁸⁷ However the income from admissions, the sale of books, souvenirs and other merchandise by the agency's museums are lawfully held as a *non-profit* activity and therefore not a business/commercial activity. The reason is that these are accordingly considered by law as revenue necessary to sustain and to maintain the national museums, to pay salaries to staff, to pay for any services by third parties, and to be able to present a state-of-the-art museum and experience to the visitor.

All this constitutes discrimination (i.e., the lawful application of two weights and two measures), as the activities mentioned earlier are totally considered as *for-profit* or commercial activities if performed by museums not falling under the remit of the national agency. This is predominantly common among independent grassroots museums, which were and are still constrained to function under a *for-profit* identity. Private grassroots museums, as voluntary organisations, on the other hand are eligible to some tax exemptions¹⁸⁸ enjoyed also by the national agency.¹⁸⁹ However none of the independent or private grassroots museums on the Maltese Islands generates the revenue registered by the national museums and they do not enjoy the blessings of the same resources available to the national agency.¹⁹⁰ In addition, it must be noted that

¹⁸⁴ Heritage Malta, Annual Report 2018: 51.

¹⁸⁵ Heritage Malta, 2019, Venues.

¹⁸⁶ Heritage Malta, 2019, Taste History.

¹⁸⁷ Heritage Malta, Annual Report 2018: 44 and 51.

¹⁸⁸ Laws of Malta, S.L. 123.190, 1st January 2020.

¹⁸⁹ Laws of Malta, Cap. 445, Art. 11, 2019.

¹⁹⁰ Heritage Malta, Annual Report 2018: 55-58.

none of the national agency's employees sacrificed money from his or her own family pockets, let alone dedicated similar time and effort for a museum project. The museums of the national agency, it should be emphasized, were created out of, and are sustained by, public taxes. Even if the individuals or families who started and now run the independent museum are themselves taxpayers contributing to the national museums, they still get nothing in return for their initiatives.

The TaKola Curator declared that regarding certain activities as *for-profit* places an unnecessary burden to the national agency since the revenue paid in taxes and other related expenses could be reused for the maintenance and improvement of the same museums. If this is a burden on the national agency, then what a greater burden it must be for non-national museums, which are sustained and maintained from the limited resources available, and whose curators and staff are mostly volunteers. Such museums also experience ineligibilities and other exclusions applying to the *for-profit* conditions.

Given such an argument, questions such as 'what is profit?' and 'who is really making a profit?' naturally arise. Although the national agency's staff or management are not considered as making a profit, they are paid for their roles within the agency. Curators and staff at independent and private micro museums, in contrast, receive no payment, even if they exceed working hours and assume wider roles. While curators at national museums receive a salary for their limited roles, curators at independent and private micro museums end up spending from their own pockets to sustain and maintain their museums. Such a scenario demands a revision of what is *for-profit* and what is not. Independent and private grassroots museums can no longer be considered as a *for-profit* or as commercial activities. If they are not eligible for funding and other benefits enjoyed by the national museums, the application of two weights two measures between museums is indeed discriminatory. It is even absurd and disrespectful to have a public authority as the NSO (Malta) calling such cultural initiatives as a *Private (for profit) enterprise*.¹⁹¹ Besides, wherever independent and private museum curators or staff receive a form of payment or remuneration, such

¹⁹¹ NSO, 2015: 3.

money is paid subsequent to the various efforts, and sacrifices they make, not from public funds. The situation demands correction.

To understand better the differences presented by independent and private grassroots micro museums, the research identified the four types of what makes an *independent museum* and the characteristic which makes a museum a *private museum*. By focusing on the key concepts surrounding grassroots micro museums, the research delineates the term ‘independent micro museum’ as distinct from private micro museum. Independent are those initiatives started by individuals or social units like families or members of a community, and which may not qualify as either *non-profit* or *not-for-profit* private entities. At times, they are registered as commercial enterprises or limited liability companies, or else they enter the so-called *not-for-profit* framework as VOs, and other *non-profits*. For all the laws and regulatory frameworks, it is an interesting question how private the NGOs, VOs and sometimes NGOs established by central government or an institution can be *non-profit*. Some are established to capture funding opportunities for which government or private enterprise cannot apply. Some independent initiatives may even choose not to be part of the system and are automatically excluded.¹⁹² This may also apply to community groups who seek no legal recognition for their group and museum: which may constitute a favourable step as it excludes the activity from various legal and financial burdens imposed by law and the regulatory framework.

Conflict of Interest: between definition and practice

The Maltese *Cultural Heritage Act* defines ‘cultural heritage’ broadly and inclusive of privately-owned collections made accessible to the public. Its interpretation may imply that the national agency is responsible for cultural heritage belonging to State museums alone, but the Act gives the Superintendence responsibility to document cultural heritage at non-State collections too once opened for public viewing;¹⁹³ thus recognizing them as cultural heritage.

¹⁹² Candlin, 2016: 12-14, 21, 26-28, and 30.

¹⁹³ Laws of Malta, Cultural Heritage Act, Cap. 445, Part III, Art. 7, 5(a)(iv).

The Act even calls all stakeholders and interested parties to participate in the annual National Forum, which in breach of the Act has not met since 2014,¹⁹⁴ and consequently no interviewee mentioned. Museums do not qualify automatically, as participation by registration requires the Minister's approval.¹⁹⁵ The practices of the agency do not yet mirror the definition as it focuses on making profits for central government and raising visitor volumes for statistical purposes.¹⁹⁶ There were instances when the agency asked non-State museum curators to discuss issues raised by ICOM, but for some reason such dialogue and collaboration were discontinued.

The Act binds the agency to preserve cultural heritage in localities in collaboration with the Superintendence and Local Councils.¹⁹⁷ The absence of council members with a cultural background, legislation and political allegiances are, however, a major setback. Where the venue of the museum is State property such as the Xarolla, Razzett and Tunnara, local councils, the agency, and the Superintendence agree to a deed of custodianship, but nothing similar happened with other grassroots museums.

The Act states that the Board of Directors of the agency is also appointed by the Minister in Malta and that of Gozo for a maximum period of five but not less than three years.¹⁹⁸ This causes pressures on the Board, its decisions and initiatives, as they cannot challenge political government on whom they depend for a budget, and any delegation of functions or responsibilities is subjected to a written approval from the Minister.¹⁹⁹ This impedes the agency's attempts to include community museums, as it may be accused of betraying the trust and interests of their main sponsor. Political governments tend to forget that the national agency, its employees and museums are ultimately supported by public revenue, and that most collections started thanks to the initiative of individuals like those at the grassroots museums studied. While the Act requests private and voluntary sectors to collaborate on the conservation and

¹⁹⁴ The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, State of Heritage Report, Valletta, Malta, and Act Part II, Art. 16(1).

¹⁹⁵ The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, 'Legislation', see section 'National Forum'.

¹⁹⁶ Martin, Ivan, Record visitors to museums but numbers don't reflect tourist arrivals, *Times of Malta*, 23 Dec. 2017.

Pace, Fiorella, Which historical sites in Malta attract the most visitors? TVM, Malta, 20 August 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Cap.445, Art. 8 (f)

¹⁹⁸ Cap. 445, Art. 9 (1) and (2)

¹⁹⁹ Laws of Malta, Cultural Heritage Act, Cap. 445, Art. 8(5a)

management of cultural heritage,²⁰⁰ their contributions to do so are still unacknowledged.²⁰¹ The agency's Annual Report clearly states that Heritage Malta is 'entrusted with the management of *national* museums and heritage sites and their collections,'²⁰² thus excluding museums, heritage sites or collections outside the *national* remit. Despite an awareness that non-State museums can be complementary to State museums, fears of repercussions hold the agency from seeking collaboration and giving support to grassroots museums. As the curators interviewed maintained, the national agency must be distinct from anything of a partisan political nature and work in tandem or be integrated with the Superintendence. Autonomy can help the agency fully adhere to the Act to protect and promote all Maltese cultural heritage assets, irrespective of type or ownership, and have sufficient legal clout to intervene and halt further damage or destruction.

Well-organised collaboration between all museums has potential to attract more visitors even from lower socio-economic groups. People may crowd to State museums on free admission days but that defeats the museum's objective. Once people get aware of their immediate cultural heritage and visit local museums, they may explore heritage existing away from their hometown inclusive of State museums. The agency, through the definition and powers given by the Act, can bring together all museums, to discuss and propose to government changes in policies and laws which impede museums of any size and ownership from doing more. The agency can alternatively collaborate with community museums to reach and dialogue with local groups and communities through pedagogic activities and cause knowledge sharing among museum professionals. It is through such collaboration and mutual support that museums can benefit communities, raise appreciation of cultural heritage, and induce pedagogy. A wider selection of museums has potential to attract different audiences to usual and unusual places of tourism, and consequently benefit local communities and help local economies to grow.

Typologies

²⁰⁰ Cap. 445, Art. 4(4a)

²⁰¹ Cap. 445, Art. 7(p)

²⁰² Heritage Malta, Annual Report and Consolidate Financial Statement for the Year ended 31 December 2019, under Principal Activities, 2020: 1.

The following are the typologies identified by this study. Independent grassroots micro museums can be subdivided into four types.

- (i) The first are created, run and sustained by individuals, a family or a few relatives who have no ties to or support from a parent organisation that is legally recognised. They depend totally on resources donated by their founders-curators and those involved in the day-to-day running of the museum. They may generate revenue through optional donations made by visitors, donors, and from optional donations which participants give for activities organised by or at the same museum mostly for free. Above all, they opt to stay out of a legal recognition.
- (ii) A second tier are those created, curated and run by a group of volunteers, for example from a community with no ties to, or support from, a legally recognised parent organisation. They depend totally on resources provided by their founders-curators and those involved in the day-to-day running of the museum and the community which they represent. They may generate revenue through optional donations made by members of the community, visitors, donors, and from optional donations that participants give for activities organised by or at the same museum mostly for free, which they may consider as fund-raising. Above all, they opt to stay out of a legal recognition.
- (iii) A third tier are those created by a group of volunteers who have no legal recognition but are only recognised as an informal group by a subsection (such as a parish church) of an institution (such as the Church), a local authority (e.g. local government) or a private enterprise (e.g. a winery, mill, a school, a club) which supports their existence sporadically but does not necessarily support them in raising funds or supplying funds. Most of the time these must generate their own revenue to survive, as they do not qualify for funding.
- (iv) A fourth group are those museums as in (i) above, which are totally dependent on their own resources and self-generated revenue as in (i), but who seek to operate as a family business, a social enterprise or a limited liability company: thus obtaining a legal recognition, since they do not qualify for any other form of association. The choice however

excludes the museum from qualifying for culture-oriented funding owing to their *for-profit* legal recognition.

Independent grassroots micro museums belong to an individual or a small number of individuals who cannot be statutory bound or legally recognised as a *non-profit* organisation. Such ineligibility forces them either to stay out, as the WMC (Malta) and the Virgadavola (Sicily) have done, or function lawfully as a *for-profit*, like the AGHM and BMH (Malta) and the Murika (Sicily).

Private grassroots micro museums are here grouped as a fifth tier of grassroots micro museums:

- (v) Such museums are created by a group of volunteers who seek legal recognition (a) within another organisation, an institution, a local authority, a private enterprise or (b) externally on their own. In both cases they support their existence by fundraising activities, charging admission fees, donations and revenue generated from events, services and products under a legally recognised *non-profit* or *not-for-profit* type of association, such as a VO, a NGO, a foundation, partnership, trusts, or an organisation with a philanthropic, artistic, scientific, academic, cultural or similar objective.²⁰³ Most of them generate revenue to sustain the museum, their association, and may employ paid or salaried staff. In most cases these automatically qualify for funding and support schemes as they fall within the *not-for-profit* type of association, even if they manage to make sizable profits when compared with the independent grassroots micro museums mentioned earlier.

Private grassroots micro museums belong collectively to a legally recognised/statutory *non-profit* organisation. While (i) and (iv) above are museums organised within a property belonging to the same person or persons who curate and run the museum, in (ii), (iii) and (iv) the venue and/or the collection may not belong to the persons collectively running the museum. However, in certain circumstances collections belonging to independent grassroots curators without a venue may find their collection

²⁰³ Laws of Malta, Chapter. 492, Part I, Article 2 and 38 (Definitions: “non profit making”, “not for profit”, “non-profit” and similar phrases) and the First Schedule of the same Chapter 492. Maltese Laws put all terms in one basket.

made welcome at a property offered by an organisation, institution, enterprise or authority, as is the case for example with the Maritime, ŻabSanct, and Xarolla on Malta and the Italafrica and Virgadavola in Sicily. Private museums on the other hand are those which depend on an institution: religious, financial, political, universities, hospitals, or an enterprise. Some might be *for-profit*. However, it is not clear why on the Maltese Islands museums, archives and libraries are still found among *for-profits* and/or registered as commercial entities, even after a 2017 Subsidiary Legislation omitted the requirement and renewal of a trading licence for such activities.²⁰⁴

Private grassroots micro museums are sometimes created by a legally recognised association of volunteers, who run it, even if with salaried or remunerated staff, but who thanks to their *non-profit* recognition still qualify for benefits not enjoyed by the independent grassroots micro museum. Some such private grassroots micro museums could have been originally established as independent grassroots micro museums, but circumstances and time forced them to change hands and administration. The present study concurs with Candlin (2016) when she contends that those who run such museums are not necessarily institutional or professional elites, as the presence of professionals is predominantly met at private grassroots micro museums. On many occasions, such professionals are engaged by the organisation or authority responsible for the museum. In some museums they are both founders and curators. These circumstances were met whenever the independent micro museum cannot access funding or enjoy benefits enjoyed by *non-profits*, or is in danger of closure or loss. A common quintessential objective shared by independent and private grassroots micro museums is their mission to help the community in which they are embedded or the community which they represent. Findings show that curators of independent grassroots micro museums face higher challenges and risks to keep their museums alive.

Most studies available deal with the larger, national institutionalized museums, and, those managed by NGOs²⁰⁵ or quasi-non-government organisations

²⁰⁴ Laws of Malta, (S.L. 441.07 Trading Licences, Part II General Provisions, 5 (3)), 2017.
Dictionary Online, 2018, Quango is “a semi-public administrative body outside the civil service but receiving financial support from the government, which makes senior appointments to it.”

(Quangos).²⁰⁶ The key difference between the establishment museum and the grassroots micro museum is that the former tends to enjoy State or institutional support which the latter rarely or never receives. The nomenclature under which they operate, or are officially registered, may hinder or disqualify them from opportunities enjoyed by establishment museums. Differences are many times dictated by, and dependable on, the country and can have serious impacts on the sustainability and survival of such museums. These disqualifications and their own limitations present numerous challenges and put the sustainability of such museums at risk. They are therefore obliged to operate in different ways from establishment museums. They depend on the input of voluntary staff who may not be professionally trained, but who assume different responsibilities, and practice an array of activities and multitask.

Conclusion

Considering the museums under study, the findings show that there is no single typology of grassroots micro museums. Grassroots micro museums are divided into two main types, independent and private, out of which the first can be further subdivided into four subcategories as described earlier. Independent grassroots micro museums are the initiative of an individual, a family or a small informal group of individuals, which are situated in a property that belongs to the same individuals or allowed within a third party property, which is self-sustained through the earnings of the individuals concerned, visitor donations and a few of its own fund-raising activities; which could either be in or out of any lawful recognition. Consequently, they do not qualify for cultural funding or support schemes. In the absence of alternatives existing outside their country, some may have no alternative but to function as a *for-profit*, which makes matters worse. Private grassroots micro museums are either the initiative of a group of people who form a *non-profit* organisation, or an organisation whose property belongs to a legally established non-governmental organisation, government itself, or an institution (church, university, hospital, political party, philanthropic club, a charity), or an entity given in trust by the founders to the organisation to use as a museum. Such a private grassroots micro

²⁰⁶ The Oxford Dictionary Online, 2018, Quango is “a semi-public administrative body outside the civil service but receiving financial support from the government, which makes senior appointments to it.”

museum is self-sustained through the group's contributions, membership, admissions, donations and fund-raising activities. Finally, thanks to its *non-profit* recognition, it has access to funding and support schemes.

This section discussed differences which make grassroots micro museums different from each other and from establishment-led museums, or what may be defined as the traditional museum. It also provided a definition to understand the types of museums discussed in this research. The concepts promoted by New Museology and the rapid changes brought about by globalisation may have been more easily embraced and applied by independent micro museums and their curators, since they decide for themselves. However, it seems that even more different roles and different approaches to museum and curatorial practices were applied by museums identified as *grassroots museums*. (Table 6)

In this section the most common terms were explained to enable the reader to understand better the research. Although terms like curator, museum, independent, micro, small, community and grassroots are explained and defined, the study went on to ask the curators how they defined themselves and their roles, how they defined the museum and its collection, and how they defined the represented community or communities. The study asked how such museums were established and their founding objectives. All in all, these were studied through the sociomuseological approach and the grassroots micro museum model identified by the research.

The study also discusses

- (a) the bottom-up approach as a political concept which some of these grassroots micro museums might embrace,
- (b) whether Sociomuseology practices are embraced by these museums,
- (c) the impacts and influences of the colonial imaginary on museums and how past practices in museums have reflected on the museum and the community because of power structures, and,
- (d) what community identity versus national identity is present, if any.

Grassroots micro museums as grassroots initiatives may challenge the homogeneous nation-state imaginary and give space and place to the representation of different communities within the nation-state. All this leads to a discussion on

matters of inclusivity, exclusivity and image. The matter of past exclusivity leads to a discussion about identity and museums, and a further discussion on how identity is negotiated between the curator and the community, and between the community and wider society.

CHAPTER THREE – Curators, Interpretation and Identity

This Chapter examines how changes in society and innovative approaches by museums lead to a rethinking of interpretation and identity as described in traditional museums. Initially the chapter discusses the presentation of national identity in museums. It shows how nations and Mediterranean regions were imagined (a matter discussed further in Chapter VI) and then promoted to accommodate the colonial power and, afterwards, the national authorities which succeeded colonial rule in the Maltese Islands. All this is countered by approaches adopted by the museum types studied.

Their bottom-up approach leads to a definition of what makes the micro museum independent. The chapter describes the relationship between curators and communities, and attempts to describe what makes independent micro museums actual grassroots museums. As museums created by common people for the same people represented – i.e. grassroots museums - they make various demands on curatorial practices and at different levels. The community therefore is not simply a visitor but also a community which forces change on curators, curatorial roles and what curators present in their museum and its activities, to bring about change and social transformation. Thus, through the museum, the curator facilitates and mediates for the represented community. Such approaches and practices may lead the museum into conflict with those who disapprove of such a departure from the traditional roles of curatorship or disagree for other reasons.

Museum presentation and interpretation generate opinion and present narratives which meet growing challenges and contestations.²⁰⁷ Such a response is attributed to the complex world in which museums exist in the aftermath of newer museological approaches and globalisation.²⁰⁸ Museum objects, displays and narratives develop and communicate new cultural meanings, messages and values constructed through processes of ‘selection, interpretation, display and classification.’²⁰⁹ Museums have the responsibility to record and safeguard the past

²⁰⁷ Euromed Heritage, 1998: 1.

²⁰⁸ Dos Santos, 2010: 5-6.

²⁰⁹ Euromed Heritage, 1998: 1.

for posterity and promote ownership of tangible and intangible heritage. Along these lines, museums can encourage greater local ownership of cultural heritage, which subsequently restores local pride and instils civic responsibility.²¹⁰

Interpretation, meanwhile, depends on the positioning and location of visitor and curator at a specific moment in time. Meanings would therefore become more dynamic. Their dynamicity increases if artifacts are revisited at different times and within different cultural constructs. Whatever we perceive, choose to memorise or think about, differs from one culture to another. Meaning varies according to previous experiences, to historical and cultural concepts, and to the knowledge which people possess. Interpretation may however be characterised by the politics of the community within which the museum functions.²¹¹ Communities may therefore endorse or contest interpretations and identities promoted at museums.

National museums and mainstream narratives

National museums are sometimes called public museums since they are financed by public funds. From their conception, they were implicated in the endeavour to *cultivate* their audiences. The intention was to transmit a high sense of national nostalgia, where the collective *we* is projected as a nation and a race different from the *others*, a phenomenon which has led to the bonding of different groups of people,²¹² and persuaded them to conceive an imaginary where they form part of a wider society. With the aid of historians and curators, power elites promoted the importance and commemoration of sanitised special events and extraordinary people,²¹³ intended to supersede issues of everyday life and ordinary people. Commemoration, supported by subjective and fabricated historiography, became a political tool which facilitated the imposition and maintenance of power and the exercise of social control over subordinates or ordinary people.²¹⁴ It was meant to generate consensus, and justify the status quo.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Euromed Heritage, 1998: 1.

²¹¹ Hooper-Greenhill, 1999: 4, 6.

²¹² Macdonald, 2003:5.

²¹³ Wong, 2013: 920.

Kapralski, 2011: 179-180.

²¹⁴ Samuel, 1994: 17.

²¹⁵ Samuel, 1994:17.

In recent decades, museums have been obliged by both democratisation and post-colonialism to cherish the significance of equality, cultural diversity and inclusion.²¹⁶ This is evident in the changes which have occurred in traditional museums. Scholars maintain that the old colonial experiences in Western European museums presented the perceived Western or North Western European cultures as superior to Mediterranean cultures,²¹⁷ but attempts were and are being made to overturn this misconception once and for all. In postcolonial times, museums may as well be actors in the construction of a distinct collective image and culture, which a community may refer to as its image and as a means to a collective imaginary of the group.²¹⁸ Grassroots micro museums, in contrast to establishment museums, enjoy more agency when it comes to deviation from the State-promoted collective imaginary. Since their staff members are not State employees and they do not depend on State resources, they are free to break away from State agendas and move on to create objectives to promote their community, and more likely to explicitly underline distinctions within a community. The methods and practices of grassroots micro museums serve to remind the represented community of such diverse and unique characteristics existing within.

The present research found that some grassroots micro museum curators do not differentiate between the represented community and the national community represented at State museums. Nonetheless, certain differences or characteristics which emerge do provide evidence for the promotion of a heterogenic identity within the nation. The Tunnara Curator sees a unique identity in the represented community, one typical of northern Malta and that part of Gozo where tuna-catching practices were annual events. Curators identify differences between communities from everyday practices and lifestyles adopted through time, the work those communities engaged in, and other activities. The Razzett Curator identifies various characteristics in his represented community, even though the museum sees it as an international community. A similar concept of community is shared by the Italafrica Curator, whose museum, despite its central position at Ragusa and a theme related to Italian history, attracts an international community more than locals. The ŻabSanct Curator and his

²¹⁶ Van Oost, 2012: 2.

²¹⁷ Chircop, 2015: 33.

²¹⁸ Stevens, 2007: 35, 36.

Assistant see few differences between their community and the national, yet they acknowledge that localities have unique and different identities, which national museums try to suppress by bringing different artifacts from different localities to one place, to create a general perception and promote a generic homogeneous national identity. The ŻabSanct Curators recognise that beyond the local there are regional identities or identities which are shared among neighbouring villages recognised by common traditions. They admit that differences within the community's identity do not come out explicitly in the museum narratives, even if a parish identity is explicit within the tour narrative. They identify differences also within the same village community which basically started with two distinct hamlets or communities: 'Tal-Misraħ' and 'Tal-Biċċieni'. However, there are smaller communities linked to specific sites and landmarks, such as Santa Duminka,²¹⁹ which is less known among modern residents. Despite such identities, the ŻabSanct Curators take a collective or homogeneous approach to unify and promote the diversities under the umbrella of a parish community: an approach of adherence to the identity promoted by the Church to which the independent micro museum is closest. Their attitude confirms acceptance of the past homogenization of different smaller communities into parishes. With the arrival of the Church, several earlier smaller communities of villages and hamlets were grouped under one parish title of one village.²²⁰ Therefore prior to the nation-state agenda, the parish policy of the Church had already homogenized groups of smaller communities. Thus, Malta experienced two distinct steps of homogenisation: the first imposed by the Church to organise its parishes, and the second by the State to promote the nation-state identity.

The Heraklion Curator identifies *dialect, cultural heritage, history, traditions, religious creed, and race*, among factors which make the identity of the represented Cretan community different from the national Greek identity presented in national/institutional museums. The Acharavi Curator observes that differences are identified on Corfu which, as an island with a multicultural history, 'implemented a lot in a unique way of living such as locality, local dialect, cultural heritage and history, customs, festivities, music, traditions, religious manifestations and other.' Likewise, the SantLluc Curator maintains that it is 'lengua, dialecto, cultura,

²¹⁹ Santa Duminka takes its name from an old chapel that stood in the rural area, now urbanised.

²²⁰ Vella, 2016: 67-68.

patrimonio, historia, tradición, y religión'²²¹ that make the identity of the represented Mallorcan community different from the national Spanish identity presented in national museums. The BMWS respondent maintains that the Betina community has a distinct identity from that presented at national museums amongst which are 'dialect, cultural heritage, history, [and the] traditions presented.' The Farmacia Curator groups the differences emergent from the Sciclian community as '*Le proprie identità culturali date da tradizioni e credi religiosi.*'²²² The element of community in the museum's founding objective was another factor to identify if it existed.

A brief description of each initiative, founding objectives, represented community, year of establishment, founders, management and administration, and venue is concisely provided. (*Table 7*). An analysis of the information provided by curators, staff and the respective museum website or social media page shows that the participant micro museums represent a variety of communities. The communities represented can be broadly classified under five types of community.²²³ Communities are made of people who come together for a purpose. The first type is that determined by geographical boundaries, generally called community of *place*, predicated on residence, work, visit, or other, where they spend much time such as a neighbourhood, village, town, island, or a larger geographical boundary.²²⁴ A second type of community is that brought together by their *practice*, such as agriculture, fishing, crafts, professions, arts, skills, common practices or academic areas in which they engage. A third is a community through which people come together by means of a shared *interest* or passion which they share. A fourth type is the community of persons who come together to take *action* and strive to bring about change. A fifth is the type of community which assembles according to *circumstances* and situations normally external to them.

Most micro museums, independent, private, and State-owned represent a community bound by place (16/26 = 62%). Among the participant independent and

²²¹ Translation: language, dialect, culture, heritage, history, tradition and religion.

²²² Translation: own cultural identities given by religious traditions and beliefs.

²²³ Schulz, 2013: 8.

Leese, 2006: 199.

²²⁴ Ramsey and Beesley, 2007: 850. "The 'spatial community' is that which is defined by geography (e.g. municipal boundary, health region)".

private grassroots micro museums, those representing a community bound by place are the most common (12/16 = 75%). Museums representing a community of practice are next common among all (10/26 = 38%), but their presence among the participant independent and private micro museums (7/16 = 44%) is higher. Micro museums representing communities of interest are next in line (9/26 = 35%) but slightly lower among independent and private micro museums (5/16 = 31%). Although none of the micro museums explicitly represents a community bound by either action or circumstances, those established in order to voice their community's concerns, raise awareness about a community's identity or safeguard heritage at risk, can also be considered as museums which react to circumstances and call for action.

At such museums, the founding objectives may not present the community represented as an actor, but as a beneficiary. Two examples are the *ŽabSanct*, where the founder wished to safeguard the various artistic, votive and religious paraphernalia scattered round the church, and the *Virgadavola* (Sicily) where the founder aimed to safeguard the Sicilian Iblean *carretto*, tools and utensils used by the rural and agricultural community. Therefore, the relationship between the founding/founder's principle and the museum's objectives are not always representing a community, but something which leads to circumstances and actions that nonetheless benefit the represented community. Grassroots micro museums are therefore not simply the display of a community, but vehicles of changes which benefit communities. Curators use and display objects, visuals and other material culture connected to the community, past or present, to reach the museum's founding objectives, borne as they were out of circumstances and asking for action. In line with Crooke's (2008) claim that communities need museums and museums need communities,²²⁵ this makes the curator practically an actor on behalf of the represented community, where the museum is the theatre with stage and backstage practices, and the community is the audience: an audience which demands on-stage and off-stage roles and an audience that also fulfils its expectations and benefits from the show. Curators are therefore expected to play different roles: they may be protagonists or backstage support helping the community preserve, interpret and present its history, culture, and identity to the public. As Crooke (2008) noted the recognition of such communities leads to the

²²⁵ Crooke, 2008: 1.

acknowledgement of the museum, justifies and validates its presence and its roles in society.

Founding objectives

A concise description of the founding objectives of the twenty-three participant micro museums is presented in *Appendix VII*. Eleven of the twenty-three museums studied (excluding the four mentioned in passing) were established and supported by individuals or a family. Ten were started by cultural associations or societies, some of which continued in partnership with the family owning the property. Four museums were established by local government authorities or by the State. In Malta, the State established its own national agency and avoided partnerships with persons involved in the establishment and running of independent or private grassroots micro museums. In Sicily, regional and municipal government authorities entered forms of partnerships with persons or non-profit organisations or cultural associations deemed experienced, qualified, or able to manage places as museums. Among the museums which at the time of research belonged to the State were museums established or ‘idealised’ by individuals outside the national museum’s authority. Three of the Maltese private museums, the Tunnara, Razzett and Xarolla, were in properties belonging to the State. Five of the museums at the Ragusan Province, i.e. the Donnafugata, MUDECO, Contadino, Italafrica and Campailla museums, were in State property through the local or regional government authority. The SantLluc in Mallorca, and the Heraklion of Crete had been established by a religious congregation and an academic society, respectively. Some of the venues and their collection, like the Xarolla, TaKola, Bonelli, and Farmacia museums, formerly belonged to individuals or families who had started the museum. The Betina is an example of how a whole local community comes on board not just to establish the museum and provide exhibits, but also as ongoing volunteers and participants in the museum.

The independent Virgadavola of Vittoria (Sicily) was the only museum still without its own venue. The Virgadavola Curator had originally kept the collection in his own greenhouse, which was a far from ideal environment to store and exhibit such heritage, but it was all the owner could afford till someone recognised its potential. The *Fiera Emaia*, a team of professional journalists and enthusiastic tourists from

different backgrounds,²²⁶ recognised that potential as a cultural heritage attraction for both locals and tourists during fairs and conventions held in the grounds at Vittoria. A similar event was actually experienced by the author: the Virgadavola during the Fiera Emaia was indeed an experience of its own, to which people flocked all day long. Although the large temporary shed is not a particularly suitable environment and venue for the Virgadavola collections, it still serves well on a temporary basis.

As observed by the TaKola Curator, since the Maltese national agency holds the opinion that non-State museums are in competition with State museums, a similar reason may explain the Virgadavola's situation in Sicily. While regional and municipal government authorities in Sicily seem supportive of such grassroots initiatives, central government authorities appear reluctant and slow to respond. In opposition to being competitive, the Curator of the Donnafugata, MUDECO, and Contadino remarks that State museums must look at such non-State micro museums as a complementary entity which can team up with State museums to enrich the cultural heritage of a place and its community, a country, society, the territory, and indeed environment, its tourism product and its economy. All of this can be fruitful if the concept of collaboration precedes that of competition, as micro museums and State museums differ in their products, objectives, and audiences. Yet, together, they can enhance each other's product as they promote and support each other to provide quality and authenticity and to safeguard the unique heritage of communities. This because it is these diverse communities and distinct identities which enrich a country or territory and its culture. A similar intention is found in the objective to which the BistraCat Curator aspires for her own State-museum. She states that the museum explicitly intends to safeguard the history of the nation and make the point that there were other sizable communities around Malta besides Rabat. Above all, the objects and themes displayed in independent and private museums are absent in State museums as they do not qualify to be exhibited as national heritage. Therefore, collaboration between State and non-State museums can increase the number of visitors and create awareness of the rich cultural heritage which countries, islands, and non-national communities can possess. Such collaboration may compensate for the absence and exclusion of non-national communities at national museums.

²²⁶ Fiera Emaia website.

Participant curators were asked to give reasons for the exclusion, or non-representation, of non-national communities in State or institutional museums. The Tunnara Curator stated that, owing to the specificity of the theme presented, the community represented at his museum could only be connected to collections displayed at the national Malta Maritime Museum, which displays some anchors which presumably belonged to old Tunnara vessels. He states that although tuna-catching, fishing practices and coastal defence are connected to, and revolve around, the maritime theme, they do not feature at the national museum. The Razzett Curator sees a difference in the fact that national museums purchase objects which they then put on display, while the Razzett receives objects which people donate. According to the Razzett Curator the advantage of the micro museum is that it can collect objects which pertain to communities living around the museum. Such objects are mostly place or community specific and therefore they do not qualify for inclusion or display at national level. The Razzett Curator maintains that, above all, people prefer to donate items to such non-State micro museums as the objects in question bring back memories of childhood and create nostalgia for the old days within that specific community. The Razzett Curator stresses that he and his team do their utmost to safeguard whatever is possible and has cultural heritage value. However, what is considered as valuable by curators at grassroots micro museum level may have no interest for State and institutional curators or the national agency. The differences between national cultural heritage and the specific cultural heritage of a non-national community are wide and extensive.

The Xarolla Curator observes that at national museum level, there may be objects which can be termed as representative of a local community. He mentions archaeological remains found at the Żurrieq and Ħal Safi villages but which are displayed at the National Museum of Archaeology (Valletta). Even though village communities express pride in the artifacts displayed at the national museum, such objects are presented as artifacts but not as representative of the community or its identity. He stresses that artifacts found at a locality must be connected to the community or communities of that place. The Xarolla Curator expressed gratitude that the Ħal Safi Local Council showed interest, intervened, and took the initiative to discuss with the national agency and thereby bring back some artifacts for display at

the locality and for the local community to enjoy. Similarly, the Żurrieq Local Council managed to get pieces of pottery found at the Xarolla site from the stores of the national collection and display them at the windmill.

The Maritime Curators maintain that national museums do not represent local communities because they are not interested in the collections which the grassroots or members of a community manage to accumulate. They argue that evidently collections found in grassroots micro museums are conspicuously absent from national museums as these are mostly personal collections that express a personal feeling: something which you cannot feel at national museums. They even recognise that in large museums, such as the national ones, exhibits are larger, while personal collections similar to the Maritime display small items which have significance to the person who collected them and the visitor who is able to connect with them

The Heraklion Curator believes that national/institutional museums exclude the non-national communities because they may not ‘own objects or material for an integrated presentation’ about that community. The Acharavi Curator argues that non-national communities are partially described, or included in national/institutional museums, ‘but in a way into feed to the formal narrative.’ This reaffirms the point that national/institutional museums include non-national communities only when it gives them an advantage, or to strengthen their interpretation or narratives. It resembles the situation described by the Xarolla Curator where the National Museum of Aarchaeology uses artifacts found at a village to present them as a national object. This reflects a homogeneous identity, but not as an identifier of a specific non-national community. As mentioned by the Xarolla and Acharavi Curators the object displayed becomes connected to the national identity, and the place of provenance or retrieval is just an information derived from a distinct, separate identity or a relation to that specific community. It becomes an object out of context, and presented in a void which is meant to indicate the national ‘belonging’ of the object, not the diverse communities and identities which form the national imagined community and identity.²²⁷

²²⁷ Smith, 2006: 289.

The Farmacia Curator does not think that non-national communities are excluded in national/institutional museums. This shows that Sicily as an Italian territory feels included in the national/institutional narrative, even at local level. The Campailla and Murika Curator, however, provides a reason why communities like those of Modica Alta and the medical community, represented by the two museums, are not represented within State museums. He argues that it is

*Perche l'ante-museo come le grandi cose e chiaramente infrontato su una organizzazione molto rigida e dove l'elemento affettivo, l'elemento come dire di vicinanza al territorio tende ad immarginare e di addiminuire. Sono improntati alla tecnologia piu' avanzata. La presenza della persona non e' necessaria al cento per cento e probabilmente quella tecnologia ti consente di fare anche un viaggio virtuale all'interno del museo.*²²⁸

The Curator attributes the absence of such communities in State museums because national museums are detached from the non-national communities. National and institutional museums strive to present a product or a service that is based on the latest technologies but nothing that is personal. He elaborates on the point that communities are represented by the small museums because

*Il piccolo museo si nutre si alimenta di comunita', si alimenta della persona fisica, e si alimenta del racconto, direi anche della consuetudine, quindi l'intimo, e' piu' vicino all'emozioni, piu' emozionale. E quindi dietro al piccolo museo c'e' la comunita'. Di rispetto al grande museo la comunita' e' un po' piu' distante. E quindi, si deve, se necessariamente c'e' questo iato.*²²⁹

Therefore, the hiatus, (i.e. the something is missing or not happening in the national and institutional museum space) seeks recognition and space elsewhere. The reasons provided by the Curator validate the argument that curatorial practices of grassroots micro museums seek not only to present a community in their displays but also to be indeed closer to those communities, to engage with them, and support them where and

²²⁸ Translation: "Because the ante-museum [pre-museum] like the great things is clearly confronted on a very rigid organization and where the affective element, the element as to say of closeness to the territory, tends to embellish and diminish. They are based on the most advanced technology. The presence of the person is not necessary one hundred per cent and probably that technology allows you to make even a virtual journey inside the museum.

²²⁹ Translation: The small museum is nourished by communities, nourished by the natural person, and fed by the story, I would even say of the custom, therefore the intimate, is closer to the emotions, more emotional. And so, behind the small museum is the community. With respect to the large museum the community is a bit more distant. And therefore, it must, if necessarily, there is this hiatus.

Cambridge Dictionary online, 2019, defines 'hiatus' as "a short pause in which nothing happens or is said, or a space where something is missing."

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hiatus> .

when necessary. They provide space for communities which are deprived of space in national or institutional museums. The allowance and provision of such space becomes more possible when curators are themselves coming from the grassroots, when they are part of the community, involved in community affairs, and share the same experiences and events of the represented community. They are not bound by protocols to authorities but to the community, which they seek to improve and benefit. The creation, sustenance and running of such micro museums are labours of love which go beyond the traditional curatorial practices or job descriptions which must be adhered to. The research shows that curators at Maltese grassroots micro museums exceed the boundaries of the traditional curator and curators at establishment museums. A reason for this is that their autonomy gives them more freedom to do so. Nonetheless, even if restricted by whatever the national agency and their job description allows them, the curators interviewed at the Maltese and Gozitan State micro museums, show an element of interest in engaging with and being closer to the community.

The objective of the State and institutional museum is not focused on specific non-national communities, except where the specific museum needs feedback from the local or nearby communities to build its interpretation and understanding of a site and its use in history. Therefore, in State and institutional museums, the local or specific community is engaged as a contributor to the museum rather than a beneficiary. The opposite is more noticeable in curatorial practices of grassroots micro museums. The community is nevertheless a contributor even to grassroots micro museums as its members are significant in providing information about objects on display, in the construction of historic narratives and in the interpretation of the community and its cultural heritage. Cherished oral history is scarcely found written or published, and therefore the contribution of such knowledge to museums within the community can help the community and its culture to survive among future generations. Some museums assume responsibility for this preservation of oral lore, but most grassroots micro museums lack the necessary resources, facilities, space, time and manpower to achieve as much as they would wish. The importance of recording and archiving oral histories of communities is acknowledged by curators of both grassroots micro museums and establishment museums. However, trends at national museums are in inverse proportion, even if many curators feel that it is their

role to safeguard such oral histories and knowledge.²³⁰ Since oral lore is scarcely recorded or available or, worse, excluded at establishment museums (which tend to represent the national homogeneous community), national and local authorities will seek ways and means with which to help curators of grassroots micro museums to implement or maintain such projects. In Malta, the capture and recording of oral lore for posterity is currently undertaken with the National Archives' *Memorja* project and the University's *Public Memory Archive*.²³¹ Oral lore (transmitted by word of mouth for ages within non-national communities and which was never written, published, or presented in establishment-led museums), shall not be relegated in importance, or allowed to vanish into oblivion. Among non-national communities, oral lore holds considerable knowledge and history which can nourish and clarify gaps met in the narratives and knowledge-base of national and institutional museums. The Škrip Curator blames the exclusion of non-national communities from national and institutional museums on the Communist legacy of the same country: for like colonial, post-colonial and post-independence authorities, it promoted the nation-state homogeneity in its museums.

As museums became entangled with the economic and socio-political agendas of central governments, strong pressures from excluded groups increasingly challenged the priorities set by government and the museum function itself.²³² Since heritage is essentially subjective, curators and heritage interpreters face greater difficulties to remain objective, but may easily find themselves in complex situations.²³³ Curators of State-owned museums cannot accommodate themselves to both government and community needs and interests at once since they are dependent on the approval of local or national government support and resources.²³⁴

²³⁰ Perks, 2013: 15.
Kendall, 2013.

²³¹ Memorja - National Memory Project. National Archives, Malta, <https://nationalarchives.gov.mt/en/Pages/Memorja.aspx> ; and, Public Memory Archive, Department of History, University of Malta, Malta, <https://www.um.edu.mt/arts/publicmemory> .

²³² Scott, 2003: 294.

²³³ Wilks and Kelly, 2008: 130.

²³⁴ Carnegie, 2006: 74.

The Role and Profile of the Curator'

Based on the sociomuseological concept which makes museology 'a means of social communication and intervention for the benefit and the development of the communities that it serves,'²³⁵ the curator's role shifts from that of a promoter of the dominant ideological hegemony to a facilitator and service provider for the community.²³⁶ The role depends strongly on the museum's context, its social and neighbouring environment, as well as the site and its architecture. Consequently, curatorial performance varies in definition and meaning according to physical and tangible variables such as museum space and context, and likewise according to the socio-cultural background and preparation of curators.²³⁷ The traditional definition of a curator has recently evolved into something much wider than that of a person taking care of museum objects. A curator is now referred to as 'caretaker, facilitator, mediator, catalyst, context provider, collaborator and negotiator' all of which consequently bring the curator to the 'forefront' of many 'extra-artistic roles' in an ever-changing society.²³⁸

The curator's position and location are those of a facilitator not only through his own efforts to communicate but also through the facilitative process which visitors allow from their position and place in museum and society. The curator has, therefore, developed into a pivotal figure with various roles. He is a creator of political opinion and an actor in the construction, negotiation, facilitation and broadcast of historical issues.²³⁹ The new roles attributed to curators raise questions of positionality - that is to say, where curators stand in relation to the power hierarchy of society or when they face dilemmas. In practice, their role shifts from one of structure to that of agency. Thus, from a limited and influenced availability of choices, they move into a position of being able 'to intervene in existing processes and to exercise power in order to' change the status quo.²⁴⁰

²³⁵ This is the definition supplied by the *Centro de Investigação em SocioMuseologia (CISMus)*, 2017: 6.

²³⁶ Moutinho, 2012: 103, 104, 107-114.

²³⁷ Gaskill, 2011: 4.

²³⁸ Gaskill, 2011: 2.

²³⁹ Gaskill, 2011: 3.

²⁴⁰ Golchehr, 2017: 119.

Giddens, 1984: 14. In sociology, **agency** is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. By contrast, **structure** is those factors of influence (such as social

A demographic look at the curators interviewed shows that there are key parallels and differences between the curators of Maltese and Sicilian grassroots micro museums and other Mediterranean islands participant in the study (*Table 8*). A common trend among Maltese grassroots micro museum curators is that they live in the same locality as the museum, except that of the ŻabSanct Curator, who resides elsewhere. The trend was common also among the Ragusan curators of grassroots micro museums, where distances were larger. All the curators of the other Mediterranean grassroots micro museums resided at the same locality as the museum.

Micro museums on Mediterranean islands are predominantly curated by male curators, most of whom are retired or of pensionable age. Female curators balance males at Maltese State micro museums, but fewer females are in a curatorial role at Maltese independent grassroots micro museums. At the Dalmatian micro museums (Croatia) females occupy most of the curatorial and managerial roles. A micro museum which was totally curated and managed by females was the Betina (Murter, Croatia). In Malta and Sicily, females are mostly present in supporting or shared roles of State, independent and private micro museums. The various roles which women play at the backstage of museums are not accounted for, and not even considered as a significant contribution to the museum world, especially in contexts where a patriarchal mindset is implicitly dominant. Irrespective of the various claims and measures for equality, the situation shows that the Mediterranean is reluctant to apply and practice such equality. The other conclusion is that it does not present women with equally advantageous conditions to help them participate in museum initiatives, both as paid staff or as volunteers. In fact, the female presence among Maltese private and independent grassroots micro museums is totally on a voluntary basis. Male curators and their assistants at the ŻabSanct, Maritime, and Razzett report that the contribution of female staff is indispensable. Female presence in the Sicilian museums was mostly among cultural associations, such as those responsible for the Farmacia, Bonelli, Murika, Virgadavola and the three municipal museums, the Donnafugata, MUDECO and Contadino.

class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs, etc.) that determine or limit an **agent** and his or her decisions.
Barker, 2005: 448.

Age was another factor taken into consideration. Male curators at Maltese grassroots micro museums tend to be retired persons, except for the Xarolla, where the three Curators are young. Females tend to be of a younger age than men in all cases except at one independent museum where the female assistant curator is a senior citizen. Among the Sicilian museums, only the Farmacia, Bonelli Curator was not of pensionable age.

Maltese museums show that State-owned micro museum curators hold tertiary qualifications in subjects related to museums, cultural heritage or art. Except the Xarolla Curator, curators of private and independent micro museums did not have tertiary education. Some did not even attend secondary, or post-secondary schooling. Tertiary level of education was more common among their assistants or supporting volunteers. However, such curators manage to establish, curate, run and multitask in their museum experience, which for most is more than a job but a passion through which they aim to help the community.

None of the curators at Maltese non-State micro museums had a museum-related qualification. In contrast, most of the Sicilian curators had a tertiary level of education, except for the Virgadavola and Italafrica Curators. However, it was only the younger Farmacia, Bonelli Curator and the Curator of the municipal museums' (Donnafugata, MUDECO, Contadino) who possessed museum-related qualifications.

While academically learned and qualified curators may find it easier to access museum positions within State or institutional museums, their curatorial experience and practices remain restricted to what their job description demands from them. Although theory and knowledge acquired at school or university are helpful, such curators lack most of the practical insights which can only be learnt by hands-on experience. Museum curatorship does not demand only the roles requested by a job-description, but also many other roles which are never mentioned in a curator's job description. The difference is keenly felt among curators of grassroots initiatives, such as the private and independent micro museums featured in this study. Curators of grassroots micro museums and supporting staff, such as family members or volunteers, learn mostly by their own trial and error, through daily experiences and

through their interest and commitment to do it better and do more. The necessity to multitask helps them understand better different museum functions and operations, which curators at State and institutional museums may never personally encounter during their curatorial roles. It is the ones who start at the bottom and gradually ascend the scale who understand the whole process and practice of a workplace. Likewise, no curator can truly become a museum curator without knowing what a cleaner at the same museum does (and experiences) to maintain a clean and presentable museum and its displays. To start at the bottom irrespective of one's own qualifications, even in a museum environment, may help bring the institutional museum curator closer to the grassroots museum curator. Alternatively, it is also suggested that grassroots museum curators and their supportive staff, whether volunteers or not, should engage in educational activities and events concerning museums and museum practices in order to enhance their knowledge, share experiences, and help themselves perform better. Curators, irrespective of museum, should never restrict themselves to the museums which they curate. Although resources and time may be a hindrance, the OldPrison and GranCastello Curator observes that curators should be themselves visitors at other museums and participants at other museum-related activities around the world. This is because learning never ends.

While no previous or other experience of museums existed among the Maltese grassroots micro museum curators, most of the curators of the Sicilian micro museums, private, independent and State-owned, had had experiences of other museums, both before their present curatorial role and at the time of research. Among the other museums, it was only the Heraklion and Acharavi Curators who had had experience with other museums, since their association was also in charge of more museums or collections on the islands of Crete and Corfu, respectively.

Half of the participant grassroots micro museum curators on the Maltese Islands claim that they have between 12 and 23 years of experience as curators, while the rest maintain that they spent 1 to 8 years in the role. In Sicily, the longest career is that of the Virgadavola Curator, who despite the limitations has persevered with his labour of love for fifty-five years. The Curators of the two Croatian micro museums, Škrip and Betina, are quite new to the curatorial experience, with six and five years, respectively.

With regard to the role of curator, all Maltese grassroots micro museum curators and their staff were volunteers, except for the Xarolla Curators who were being remunerated for their services to continue the voluntary work of the departed founder-curator. Only the State-owned micro museum curators at the Maltese Islands and Sicily are salaried employees, but this does not put them at an advantage. Among the Sicilian museums, the Curators of the Virgadavola, Italafrica, Farmacia, Bonelli, Campailla and Murika are volunteers, even if the latter is run as a business. The Curators of the Heraklion, Škrip and Betina have all declared that they are paid or salaried. Where the micro museum is run as a business, staff may not be salaried or even remunerated for their services. Such staff are considered to be volunteers, and their input may be much more than expected. This does not exclude that even as salaried employees in micro museums (such as the Xarolla, Heraklion, Škrip, Betina and some State or municipal micro museums), curators dedicate much more time, effort and knowhow to the museum and its visitors. Frequently such dedication and voluntary efforts of curators go unacknowledged and overlooked.

Curators of Maltese State micro museums nevertheless believe that curators of independent and private micro museums enjoy more freedom in exercising choices and making decisions regarding the museum and its activities. Private micro museum curators are nonetheless bound by agreements and conditions imposed by law or by regulatory frameworks to which they adhere. They can also, depending on circumstances, be subjected to decisions of owners of the venue and/or the collection. Private micro museums present more complex situations regarding the decision-making process and administration of the museum than independent micro museums. Although they do not face issues of hierarchy or specific roles as those of State-owned micro museums, they may still be subjected to certain mutual issues of respect and collaboration to maintain peace and support. As Candlin (2016) observes, curators of independent micro museums are not bound by policies or managerial logic.²⁴¹

Common people prefer objects used in everyday life as these objects ‘often affect their lives far more intimately than the politicians who are celebrated in more

²⁴¹ Candlin 2016: 2.

conventional museums.’²⁴² From a phenomenological perspective, it may be posited that museum objects, displays or exhibits standing by themselves, are inanimate without any interpretation whatsoever. The study found that objects on display are not accompanied by an interpretation at the Maltese grassroots micro museums Razzett and Tunnara. In Sicily, the museum which displays objects without an interpretation is the Virgadavola. The Sicilian museums Farmacia, Bonelli, Murika and Campailla rely on a few interpretative panels since the museums are either self-explanatory in their space or else the interpretation is provided verbally by the curator during the museum tour. Likewise, the Maltese Xarolla relies on a few interpretative panels and labels which name the object on display. The Maritime and ŻabSanct Curators provide displays with more information than the other museums. Alternatively, objects and displays accompanied by an interpretation from the curator or the visitor, or both, may prompt interaction, instigate further, or elicit, a diverse interpretation of the same object or display. Although a clay artifact or piece of pottery in itself may relay no message at all, to the visitor it might convey a wider range of interpretations and meanings. If more information is provided, such as provenance and dating, and the object or display is set within its context, (as is the case with the pottery pieces and artifacts mentioned by the Xarolla and ŻabSanct Curators), then the exhibit can generate experiences or perceived experiences.

Construction of the Imaginary

The construction of an imaginary through artifacts may pave the way to an array of histories which rely on, and start from, the bits and pieces of material culture and the ‘junk’ of everyday life.²⁴³ In the absence of either evidence or facts, human beings tend to construct an historical imaginary of the past which the artifact in question is intended to resemble and represent.²⁴⁴ This is when curators are expected to provide professional, fact-based evidence and narrative, in contrast with that which either the visitor or museum staff (including the professional) may be allowed to narrate in the museum. In addition to Braudel’s definition of the historical imaginary as ‘what the past represents to the present,’ Fogu and Passerini (2003) add the visual

²⁴² *The Economist*, 2012: 65.

²⁴³ Samuel, 2012: 85, 114.
Gale, 1996: 293.

²⁴⁴ Samuel, 2012: 114.

and the textual respectively, both distinctively and combined, as the producers of imagination of the past, today.²⁴⁵ Despite the expectation that the curator is a thoroughly well informed professional, none can ensure that curators are totally correct in their interpretations.

The curator in charge of interpretation at a museum is creating the medium (i.e. information or methods of display and overall ‘context’) to build a bridge between the ‘intentional object’ and the visitor. The ‘interpretive context’ of an artifact on exhibit, or a display, facilitates and enhances the visitor’s museum experience. It helps visitors draw on their own experience as to what an artifact or an object represents. Historical artifacts transmit symbols and images which may be accepted by the general public because those symbols and images may be legitimised by formal educational and cultural institutions.²⁴⁶ However, no participant curator declared that his/her interpretation or presentation was criticized or repudiated by visitors or members of the represented community.

A departure from an elitist and exclusionary approach helps bring the museum and its visitors, especially those from a lower social class, closer to each other. A shared understanding of museum content is further enhanced and facilitated when the exhibit is known, experienced and interpreted similarly by both museum and visitor. The language deployed may either attract or repel audiences and publics to a museum as much as it does with other places of public participation, such as theatres, events, fairs and festivals. Relationships are better built on shared understandings, which occur when both museum and visitor speak the same language and agree about what the museum conveys to the visitor from both within and beyond the represented community. There is, therefore, both an explicit and an implicit stronger relationship between the museum and the represented community whenever there is an agreement or some level of negotiation on the museum content, practices, and images which museums communicate about the community’s identity and the displays.

²⁴⁵ Fogu, 2003: 11, referring to Braudel’s ‘what the past represents to the present’ and Passerini’s ‘the unleashing of the imagination in relation to the written word’ and ‘the interaction between texts, their authors and readers...’

²⁴⁶ Bennett, 2004: 146-147.

Curators must think further than just producing an exhibit or display. The meaning of images, such as photographs, in museums may change with time and context.²⁴⁷ Memories change too. In these circumstances, curators may need to ask themselves whether the display ‘will challenge, provoke, reflect and reject contemporary standards, attitudes and fashions.’²⁴⁸ Simultaneously, curators have to bear in mind that displays ought to reflect the history of segments of people within the community rather than that of individuals. *Stigma management* is another factor which curators must be aware of when constructing displays in museums. Displays form part of memories which the community might not be happy to share with visitors or others.²⁴⁹

Curators who choose to renounce the traditional model of an authoritarian pedagogic and social role, and embrace communication, interaction and dialogue with the ‘others’,²⁵⁰ might encourage more audience participation.²⁵¹ Ever increasing demands to create and to contextualise a place of debate, a political space within the museum’s exhibition space, are nowadays forcing curators to create exhibition spaces which offer opportunities for interaction.²⁵² Consequently, such spaces may be the focus of controversial reactions as curatorial practices encompass the wider society, culture and politics, and help entangle the curator in the broad relationships of society.²⁵³ Dialogue is fundamental to museum curation. It is pedagogic in nature for both curator and visitor, and concurrently facilitates the grassroots or bottom-up approach of heritage through museums.²⁵⁴ These ideas were considered and tested as curators provided answers to the research.

Spaces and facilities for community use

In connection to Gaskill’s (2011) claim that
[c]uration enables the space of exhibition to open up new possibilities for dialogue and exchange, with these new perspectives feeding back into the way in which the exhibition is perceived and reflected upon,²⁵⁵

²⁴⁷ Carnegie, 2006: 73.

²⁴⁸ Carnegie, 2006: 73.

²⁴⁹ Carnegie, 2006: 73.

²⁵⁰ Matusov and Rogoff. 1995: 102.

²⁵¹ Gaskill, 2011: 4-5.

²⁵² Gaskill, 2011: 5 and 7.

²⁵³ Gaskill, 2011: 7.

²⁵⁴ Dos Santos, 2010: 7.

²⁵⁵ Gaskill, 2011: 7.

curators were asked whether they created spaces and facilities at their museums so that the represented community and the public might use and reflect upon the musealia. The Tunnara Curator claims the size of the museum cannot afford space or provide the desired facilities for public or community use. On similar grounds, the Farmacia Curator informs us that owing to its limitations the pharmacy offers no space or facilities, but foresees the use of indoor and outdoor spaces available at the Bonelli, managed by the same cultural association, just across the street. The Xarolla Curator maintains that their windmill cannot afford or offer spaces for group or community activities. The Škrip has no facilities or spaces dedicated for public use, but it does offer the services of a kitchenette to visitors.

The Razzett Curator and his Assistant state that they provide spaces at the venue, inclusive of audio-visual equipment being made available, against a donation, as such a policy has potential to attract various activities all year round at parish community level and at national level. The ŽabSanct Curator and his Assistant explain that, owing to the open-plan type of venue they make available spaces left between the displays and showcases. They mention that the spaces are mainly used for public lectures, yet larger activities which require seating usually take place in the main hall, where staging, sound and projection facilities are provided. The ŽabSanct Assistant Curator states that spaces and facilities are not restricted to cultural activities, as they also offer support to researchers, ranging from schoolchildren doing a class project to reputable academics. They claim that, above all, they feel satisfied and compensated whenever beneficiaries acknowledge the museum in published research and projects. During the research it was observed that some micro museums provide facilities both indoors and outdoors for numerous entertainment and pedagogic activities. They have invested in furniture and equipment, which may deteriorate or go wasted if not used.

The Heraklion Curator informs us that the museum offers visitors such facilities as a baby changing room and rest areas (an indoor seating area and two outdoor spaces). The Heraklion museum also offers the community and the public a library and archives inclusive of a reading room. The Acharavi Curator states that the only spaces and facilities available and accessible to the public are a conference room and a traditional café. Both the Heraklion and Acharavi museums offer visitors basic sanitary restrooms, a kitchenette with basic food/beverage provision and heating point. The

Acharavi museum also offers baggage storage and a gift shop. Although the presence of a gift shop was found at one Maltese independent micro museum (the ŻabSanct), no baggage storage was offered at any private, independent or State-owned micro museum. The only participant Maltese micro museum which has archives available is the ŻabSanct. None of the Maltese State micro museums offered the public a library, an archive or a reading room. While some Maltese micro museums, mostly private and State-owned, have a conference or lecture room, none has the facility of a traditional or modern café. The SantLluc Curator informs us that the museum offers visitors a play area for small children, basic sanitary restrooms, and a kitchenette. Curators and museum staff may think differently and limit such spaces on account of fears and experiences they have had as curators, as staff and as visitors to other museums. Among the interviewed, none mentioned the availability of spaces and facilities where visitors might be expected to stop and reflect specifically upon exhibits and displays presented. The approach from which Gaskill (2011) expects bottom-up feedback is not yet applied or acknowledged by the participant curators.

The TaKola Curator argues that the windmill is small and provides a very limited space in which to organise public events, although there are plans to use an open space at the living quarters level as an outdoor seating area for visitors to relax and have a break. Likewise, the OldPrison and GranCastello Curator explains that, since the venues were originally built as houses, they provide none of the spaces and facilities found in purpose-built museums. Despite such restrictions the OldPrison and GranCastello Curator tells us that sometimes they find ways to use available spaces, for example, for activities involving schoolchildren. The Curator informs us further that whenever groups cannot be accommodated at the two micro museums, they use spaces between displays at the Gozo Museum of Archaeology within the same Citadel.

The BistraCat Curator argues that even though the museum is a very recent structure there is only one small room which can be used for group activities or lectures. Another room adjacent to it, supposedly offering games and pedagogic material for children, had never fulfilled its objectives. Apart from these rooms, the BistraCat has space adjacent to the catacombs which could be used but has in fact never been used. An outdoors playing area is nevertheless used for small functions.

All this demonstrates that micro museums, whether State-owned, private, or independent, have little or no space to offer for public or community uses. Unlike larger museums, micro museums cannot afford space for other activities – space which they could perhaps hire out to help them generate self-sustaining revenue. The ŽabSanct is the only museum with ample space to use for such activities. The Razzett provides rooms for small public activities, and an adjacent large outdoors canopy which serves as an activity hall. Some museums sacrifice display spaces for community use and consequently limit their display area. While State-owned museums are mostly set inside large historical buildings, State-owned micro museums are set up in small venues which rarely afford space for public or community activities. With the perception that modern museums should have spaces for public and community activities, most State-owned museums are, so to say, in the wrong places. However, as the OldPrison and GranCastello Curator argues, the authentic can be experienced only when the authentic is kept. With all the restrictions met the OldPrison and GranCastello Curator maintains that, in such circumstances, the micro museum should try to satisfy demands as best as possible. Such limitations place the curators of State-owned micro museums in a situation similar to that of curators of private and independent micro museums. The difference is that, while curators at State museums can offer an alternative venue and generate revenue for the national agency and indirectly to their micro museum, curators of private and independent micro museums cannot.

The Campailla and Murika Curator, despite his observation that all activities of the *associazione* occur at the Murika, states that the ample spaces available at the Campailla allow for the reception of people. The Murika spaces instead are left for the pleasure of resident guest-visitors, to enjoy the full experience of living there to the full without interruptions. The concept of the museum experience as a lodging experience, as practiced by the Sicilian Curators of the Castello, Murika and Palazzo, is possible in places where the museum has ample space. Such a facility demands much more than the museum and its displays. It brings with it concerns regarding the security of both the museum and its exhibits, the need for greater health and safety issues, adherence to lodging standards, and many other issues, all of which might accumulate to handicap the museum and prevent it from achieving its objective as a visiting place. The Murika is an example of inconveniences endured by the museum, which in order to accommodate resident guest-visitors, is hindered from holding other

activities. Though the facility of lodging at a museum may generate a healthy revenue, the ‘takeover’ by residents may hinder visitors and other activities of the same museum if no alternative is available. It is thanks to the Campailla’s spaces that the Murika Curator resolves the situation.

The Italafrica Curator informs us that spaces at the museum are limited and all it can offer is the use of the same museum to hold special exhibitions on special days of remembrance or national commemorations. The Italafrica Curator notes that, despite the lack of space and facilities, the museum is culturally available to all, such as to schools, conferences, conventions, and visits. The use of the term ‘*disponibilita culturale verso tutti*’ [cultural availability towards everyone] by the Italafrica Curator, is in line with that of the Curator of the three municipal museums, the Donnafugata, Contadino, and MUDECO and also the opinion of the Campailla and Murika Curator. The inclination to help and serve the community without prejudices or discrimination emerges as an important element of curatorial role and practice at the micro museums under study, even if curators are aware of, or identify, diversities between the communities they represent and other communities.

The SantLluc Curator explains that his museum offers the community and the general public all the nine exhibition halls at the museum inclusive of a temporary exhibition hall. Likewise, the Betina Curators (from here on a reference used for the Curator-Director and the Marketing Manager-Guide of the same museum together) state that the spaces offered for public or community use are

The entire exhibition space inside the building followed with the floating exhibition outside the museum building (open-air museum located in the town harbour). In Museum there are the following program units: Reception and Souvenir shop, Shipbuilding part, Sailing and rowing, Everyday life, Children`s playroom, Directorate - office, Depot.

The extension outdoors by the Betina is an asset which the museum regards as an opportunity to offer more facilities and space for public and community use.

Engaging with the community

Museum professionals today have an enhanced role which may determine and strongly influence the inclusion or exclusion of individuals and communities.²⁵⁶ Until recently, few museums attempted to engage with the community. When museum professionals perceive the museum as a cultural institution, rather than recognise its social potential, capabilities, and actions,²⁵⁷ museums are blamed for putting more emphasis on pedagogic and entertaining roles. The curator's role has shifted from that of an overall knowledgeable expert with the power of organising representation to that of someone who, with the resources available, has practical skills and competences to help communities or groups outside the museum generate influential statements.²⁵⁸ The curator has the role of being a 'moderator and facilitator' of debates generated by the museum and its content. Moreover, this role expands into issues not normally associated with, or met by, the museum.²⁵⁹ The curatorial role has moved away from simply being a descriptor of inanimate objects or displays within the museum walls and halls. State or institution funded museums might find it more difficult to sanction the voice, or voices, from the grassroots or from a local community.²⁶⁰

The curator and the visitor – a top-down approach

There are many attributes and requirements expected of a museum curator. Many scholars, even in recent studies, emphasize that a good museum curator must be an expert and a knowledgeable person, skilled at various levels.²⁶¹ In the traditional museum approach, visitors were considered a *tabula rasa* who ought to be spoon-fed information by the museum or its curator, whose knowledge was incontestable. The top-down approach was a position mostly adopted by other institutions in society as well.

Curators must today walk a fine line to promote a proper interpretation: i.e. an interpretation designed to help visitors understand the roles people played in history,

²⁵⁶ Giménez-Cassina. 2010: 39.

²⁵⁷ Lamas, 2010: 50.

²⁵⁸ Bennett, 1995: 104.

²⁵⁹ Proctor, 2010: 35-43.

²⁶⁰ Candlin, 2016: 2.

Scott, 2003: 301.

²⁶¹ Ewin and Ewin, 2016: 323-325; see also the definition for 'curator' as quoted from the *Campaign for Good Curatorship*, in Ewin and Ewin, 2016: 323.

the ways people and events were connected, as well as the lifestyles and cultural preferences specific to an age in time. Concurrently, curators should avoid an authoritarian role, because through the presentation of an interpretation as absolute, the local interpretation is silenced by the dominant one. As Bierly (2012) contends: whenever and wherever interpretation is held as incontrovertible, it becomes damaging as much as being ‘colonialist’.²⁶² It is up to the curator to be aware of which role to take in today’s museum.

As they widen the gap between the ‘traditional’ exclusive museum and the inclusive bottom-up model proposed by grassroots micro museums, curators surmount the elitist and exclusionary image promoted by the traditional establishment museum and prioritize the community they represent. As such museums and their curators give voice, space and place to earlier excluded or silenced communities, curators learn and experience new approaches, and consequently present themselves as facilitators and not as supreme figures within a power institution.²⁶³

Socio-political curatorship

Through such practices, grassroots micro museums and their curators become entangled in community struggles. Even if curators struggle to stay away from political issues concerning the community, the community is inclined to associate museums, their curators, staff and volunteers with political issues, albeit under different meanings and from different perspectives.

Nora, a Maritime Curator voices concern on how members of the community reacted to something which was nothing more than a matter of giving a facelift to the museum façade. She says that when they painted windows and doors blue to match the maritime theme, (i.e. the sea), people accused them of siding with a political party. A similar situation is reported by the Razzett Curator and his Assistant, who remark that people tend to label the museum as siding with a political party or the party in government whenever a political figure visits, opens an exhibition or launches an event. The Razzett Curator mentions that it is customary for political figures to visit

²⁶² Bierly, 2012: 3.

²⁶³ Witcomb A. ‘A Place for All of US?’ in Watson, 2007: 133.

the museum mostly close to a general, a European Parliament or a local council election. This shows that people in politics recognise the micro museum's role in society, its activities among the community and its socio-cultural and political role. He also comments that the museum's affiliation with State structures and the departure from the local would have changed the perception of the local people who would be happier participating in the *Ghaqda* but not in something that they implicitly associate with political or central government. The ŻabSanct Curators somehow blame Maltese culture for such immature reactions. They repeatedly make the point that, if a venue is inaugurated or receives a political personality as a visitor, people are quick to associate the group or initiative with a political affiliation, which damages the image of anything to do with the museum or club.

Museums and their curators may become active in political processes and civil society. They are obliged to take sides and be subjective in struggles for identity and recognition.²⁶⁴ As curators of independent grassroots museums pursue socio-museological objectives and practices, they can become highly involved in community issues and matters concerning the welfare of the grassroots. The Heraklion Curator reports that their museum presents the Corfiot connections based on political history. It seems that unlike the Maltese communities, the Corfiot community accepts and perhaps demands that such political aspects of their history are presented at the museum. Museums, which like the Tunnara, Razzett, Xarolla, and State micro museums like the GranCastello and TaKola present ethnographic collections which appeal to the senses. They help communities to raise awareness of their identities, their pasts, their collective imaginaries, and their unique culture and heritage: all of which lead to engagement with the museum, to pedagogy and actions which socially and politically benefit and safeguard the community and its identity, distinct and far off from the political perspective of partisan politics.

Participant curators were asked whether their museum participates in political and social debates concerning the represented community. The Tunnara Curator made the point of how the absence of sufficient revenue for restoration works on the battery forced them to seek the support of local government. The reason was that when the

²⁶⁴ Karp, Mullen Kreamer and Lavine, 1992: 14-15.

Curator and the VO (ArtClub2000) sought funds for restoration, several obstacles were met. The MEUSAC²⁶⁵ informed the Tunnara and the VO that neither could qualify and apply for restoration funds. They were informed that the only option was to seek support from the Local Council as the only entity which could apply and qualify for such EU funding. However, when they did so, they discovered that the conditions imposed by the application did not provide funds for *museums* but for *interpretation centres*. Through a very long process, all permits for restoration were received, funds were approved, but unfortunately no contractor tendered for restoration works. After three approaches to contractors which resulted in not one showing interest in carrying out the task, it was only when this research was being concluded that news arrived that finally someone had applied to start the restoration works. Therefore, it was the lack of financial resources, the legal recognition of the museum and the VO, and the criteria demanded in relation to the application for EU funds that inhibited the museum from carrying out the restoration on its own, without the necessity of having to turn to a political or local authority such as the Local Council. The Tunnara experience shows that EU funding requirements and Maltese legislation currently disqualify independent and private grassroots micro museums from accessing funds. The Tunnara museum could qualify neither as an independent micro museum nor as a private micro museum run by a registered VO. In consequence, the conditions imposed and demanded by the grant of EU funds compromised the original *museum* objective and forces it to change into an interpretation centre. This means that most of the exhibits will no longer be available for public viewing and what will happen remains a big question.

The Razzett Curator, although backed by a registered VO, confided that they feared the political role which the museum might play in the community. He blames the Maltese mentality which is quick to judge and label the museum as favouring one political party over another in a bipartite system. Therefore, the Razzett Curators do their utmost to stay away from taking sides on any political or social issue concerning

²⁶⁵ MEUSAC (Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee) was re-activated in 2008 and established as an agency in terms of the Public Administration Act (Cap. 497) by Legal Notice 154 of 2017. Its functions are (a) to promoting dialogue on European ideals, values and actions; (b) to communicate EU-related rights, policies and funding opportunities, and their impact on citizens; (c) to facilitate a structured consultation process on EU policy and legislation with stakeholders; and (d) to assist national and local government and civil society organisations to apply for EU-funded projects. <https://meusac.gov.mt/about/> .

the represented and local communities. The ŻabSanct Curator revealed that internally the museum discusses political and social matters concerning the community. He claimed that despite the objections made, they did not have sufficient strength to be heard or to change matters. The changes they managed to bring were more to do with internal matters concerning the parish priest and the church. The ŻabSanct Curator and his Assistant claimed that sometimes the Local Council asked for feedback or advice, but that the museum had no executive power over final decisions. However, there were cases where the museum objected and even threatened to go public on some undesired proposals made by the Local Council. The two scenarios show that, while the museum replies to requests made by the Local Council, it also reacts to matters which the Local Council does not refer to the museum. Despite some disagreements, the museum is frequently supporting the efforts of different local groups working within or external to the Local Council. However, the Curator remarked that the museum could only react or act within certain limits imposed by the nature of the museum.

The Maritime Curators, like the Razzett Curators, showed no intention of ever becoming involved in political or social debates concerning the local community. The Maritime Curators asserted that much of the failure or success of a museum depended on the support which they obtained from the Local Council. The Maritime Curators complained that the Local Council's main reason was that, since the Maritime belongs to the parish priest or is privately-owned, they cannot offer tangible support. Even if the Maritime Curators offered to compensate by organising tours to other attractions in the village, their proposal still fell on deaf ears as something like 'It's all talk but nothing happens really.' They also noted that the museum reacted differently when the Local Council organised the Xandriku fest and requested them for an *open day* at night. Maltese local authorities are bound by politics, laws and regulations, which inhibit and exclude initiatives such as those proposed by the Maritime Curators. However, by promoting micro museums, local authorities will promote their own locality and cultural assets, as micro museums through their curators, staff and the same community, can in turn promote other attractions and perhaps guide visitors around and boost the image of the locality. Initiatives from grassroots museum curators may be barred by laws and regulations concerning the decision process of local authorities and regulations for tour-guiding, competing tourism operators, and

other red tape imposed from above. Such scenarios raise queries about the laws and regulatory frameworks of the Maltese Islands, as they inhibit and suppress grassroots initiatives as those of the micro museums studied and the communities represented. Curators, museum staff, volunteers and members of a community are usually the true experts in a community's cultural heritage and history, but they are frequently excluded or banned from sharing or contributing their knowledge to public, local or State authorities, even if no equal is found among those licenced or acknowledged by authorities.

Dark episodes and experiences, as well as lack of support which museums may face from local authorities, have discouraged the museum's participation in political or social debates concerning the community. Consequently, such behaviour from persons in authority not only undermines grassroots initiatives, but also inhibits community development and participation, stalls pedagogy and ruins the economy of the locality which they govern.

The TaKola Curator observes that, as a State-museum of the national agency, they must intervene and discuss with the stakeholders wherever the integrity of heritage sites is concerned. The TaKola Curator notes that frequently the national agency acts as a watchdog to safeguard the cultural heritage of the country. Various authorities consult the agency where sites and their surroundings may be negatively affected. It is in such scenarios that the national agency voices officially its concerns. Yet, the TaKola does not participate in political or social debates and issues concerning the local community. Likewise, the OldPrison and GranCastello Curator denies involvement of the museums in political or social debates concerning the Rabat-Citadel community. He maintains that the museums came nearer to the community at the drafting stage of the Citadel Masterplan.²⁶⁶ Before the implementation stage, all stakeholders such as property owners, business owners, the Church and residents, were called upon to participate. At the meeting, the Citadel museums collectively presented their views to the project, but they were never formally included in anything else concerning the community. The BistraCat Curator also denies participation in political and social debates of the community.

²⁶⁶ Victoria Citadel Masterplan, Politecnica, Italy 2008-2010 and Cittadella Masterplan, Vols. I, II, and III Ministry for Gozo, Malta.

Nevertheless, the museum voices its concerns about matters related to historic heritage in the locality. The Xarolla Curator declares that often they are not aware of projects taking place in the locality as the Curators, despite being nominated and chosen by the Local Council, are not informed of developments which may implicitly impact the heritage on site. This seems absurd, he explains, as the cultural arm of local government is expected at least to inform, discuss and seek feedback from the Curators wherever it concerns local heritage or works which may impact such heritage.

The comments of Maltese curators show again that central authorities and local governments do not consult or discuss with persons qualified, knowledgeable or involved in the safeguarding of local heritage or the heritage of specific communities. Curators, staff and volunteers at private and independent grassroots micro museums generally are people who have a deep knowledge of the cultural heritage present at a locality or owned by a community. The same problem is even at national level. Central authorities have never been said to consult with such curators or staff about heritage which may be affected by development projects around the Islands. Frequently, persons at national authorities and curators at national museums are not cognizant of or sufficiently literate in, heritage at single localities or parts thereof, or heritage held that is dear to the hearts of specific communities. Curators and volunteers of private and independent grassroots micro museums, not to exclude some State micro museum curators, may be very well-versed in, and knowledgeable of, specific local heritage which is not recorded or listed among other protected cultural heritage. Such persons can contribute to the compilation of locality or community-based inventories which would guarantee a stronger safeguarding and administration of cultural heritage and its assets. Local Councils, furthermore, may use their knowhow of curators and other volunteers to act, where necessary, for the advantage of the community and the local economy. It is this unique heritage that attracts tourists to individual localities. It is such heritage that can raise awareness, increase knowledge and promote pedagogic activities in cultural heritage among communities. It is such heritage that raises visitor and tourism levels for the country. It is also such awareness that can save revenue and attract new income to the State and its museums. As remarked by the Curator of the three Ragusan municipal museums, *State and non-State museums must collaborate not compete.*

The Curators of the Heraklion, Farmacia and Bonelli museums state that their museums do not participate in social or political debates concerning the represented community. The Škrip Curator nevertheless states that the museum does not participate in social and/or political debates concerning the represented community, as the museum and attending work leave them no time to participate in such debates. The Curator of the three Sicilian museums, Donnafugata, Contadino, MUDECO, despite being recruited by the regional and municipal authorities, does not rule out the possibility of museums participating in political or social debates concerning the represented communities. He mentions that something similar has already occurred, and as curator he could not stay silent. He mentions examples where he vociferously opposed certain points of view, believing that, as curator he must always be vigilant and voice his concerns, even while not being a politician. However, he is glad that the *Comune* of Ragusa has ever since then referred to him with respect, asked for his opinion in order to do everything in an appropriate manner, and is very supportive of anything he proposes that is deemed right and beneficial to the same heritage and above all Provincial community. The collaborative nature of the relationship established between the Curator and the *Comune* is something to applaud.

The Campailla and Murika Curator confirms that his museums are open to any cultural or social event which valorises the community and not ideologically oriented to give advantage to one political ideology over another. He stresses the importance that

*le porte del museo restano sempre aperte, perche il museo puo svolgere una funzione che a volte altri organismi non riescono a svolgere.*²⁶⁷

He elaborates that

quindi la nostra disponibilita' c'e' sempre in collaborazione con gli organismi locali e non, quindi anche quando, che so', il Comune non e' disponibile per quella iniziativa, pero quella valorizzazione di quel idea in quel momento e' significativa e importante, allora il museo se ne fa interprete. Quindi da questo punto di vista, sicuramente, ecco basterebbe pensare al fatto che chiaramente anche gli enti locali hanno un proprio colore politico in un momento perche si avvicendano' le varie ideologie. E allora probabilmente non sposano la iniziativa di quel momento. E allora l'ente associativo, cioe' il museo, trova il modo di organizzare quell'iniziativa; pensando che non dev'essere strettamente proiettato

²⁶⁷ Translation: "the museum's doors are always open, because the museum can perform a function that sometimes other organs fail to perform."

*sull'asse ideologico e non deve essere un'iniziativa di stretta pertinenza di un gruppo.*²⁶⁸

As observed already, the Campailla and Murika Curator believes that the museum has a function which others in society fail to perform or do not perform because of their political loyalties or the ulterior interests of a group of people. By doing things right, the museum maintains its independence, credibility, and trust from the community it represents. The Italafrica Curator, despite the museum's dependence on the space provided by the *Comune*, boasts that it enjoys autonomy. He states with satisfaction that throughout the decade of the museum's existence the relationship between the museum and the *Comune* has been excellent.

Although grassroots micro museum curators nurture care about and support their represented and surrounding communities, the practices of Sociomuseology are not yet as much known to, let alone applied, by some of the Mediterranean participant curators. Indeed, it is not easy to take such a step forward. Whereas State and private grassroots micro museums may fear the consequences of their being in part dependent on public or institutional funding and support, independent grassroots micro museums can enjoy the liberty to take sides without fear of such consequences. Neutrality may be deemed as the best policy, but when museums pretend to be on neutral ground, as Freire (1985) maintains, they are siding with the authorities not with the community.²⁶⁹ If museums consider themselves as key social players, the impact on the imaginary they produce must primarily be cherished and recognised by their curators.

Museums, as collections of knowledge and valuables, are significant establishments capable of producing social concepts and social imaginaries.²⁷⁰ Social groups may maintain imaginaries for long without realising it. Alternatively, social imaginaries may cause shock with their arrival and the speed with which they penetrate

²⁶⁸ Translation: "therefore our availability is always in collaboration with local and non-local environments, so even when, that way, the *Comune* [municipal government] is not available for that initiative, but that is enhancement of that idea at that time is significant and important, then the museum interprets it. So, from this point of view, surely, it would be enough to think of the fact that clearly even local authorities have their own political colour at a time because the various ideologies alternate. And then they probably do not marry the initiative of that moment. And then the associative, that is the museum, finds a way to organize that initiative; thinking that it should not be strictly projected onto the ideological axis and should not be a close partnership of a group."

²⁶⁹ Freire, 1970: 122.

²⁷⁰ Karp, Mullen Kreamer and Lavine, 1992: 6-7.

the heart of that society.²⁷¹ Social imaginaries, perceptions and stigmas regarding individuals, groups, neighbourhoods, communities, cities or regions can be detrimental to a community. Social stereotyping, as propagated in some historical museum narratives,²⁷² influences social perceptions and images, which consequently become legitimised by society itself.²⁷³

Modern vs postmodern curatorship

Modern museum professionals, mostly curators, become interpreters rather than legislators, as well as identifiers and arbitrators of unadulterated facts about a particular society. By staying aware of what is around, they facilitate social and cultural access to different communities and social groups.²⁷⁴ The postmodern museum professional or intellectual is, in this manner, reshaping a more inclusive and equitable form of ‘culture’, where no culture has superiority over others.²⁷⁵

All participant curators and staff, irrespective of their professional or intellectual level, show great caution in matters sensitive to the community and its relationship with other communities. Even if they raise awareness and mention differences in identities, traditions and other matters, they never present the community as either superior or inferior to other communities. The practices and objectives of these grassroots micro museum curators demonstrate that they consider the represented community as the author of its own fate. Their interpretations seek stability by levelling the disparities of past society in today’s world. By so doing, within their displays and narratives, curators broaden their role as facilitators as far as pedagogic functions are concerned. On the social spectrum, curators carry the responsibility to expose past injustices and consequently appeal to society not to replicate them.

The curatorial role is no longer associated with that of an expert in collections. Curators are held as intermediaries who facilitate understanding between collections

²⁷¹ Blackshaw, 2012: 139. “social imaginaries can linger on the margins of a culture or society for many years without being concretely realized, but they can also arrive with a shock and move like a shot towards the centre.”

²⁷² Coffee, 2008: 3, 261-279.

²⁷³ Blackshaw, 2012: 139.

²⁷⁴ Ross, 2004: 90.

²⁷⁵ Ross, 2004: 92. The argument is based on authors from the 1980s and 1990s.

and visitors, communicated through the negotiated interpretation of objects.²⁷⁶ Curators of the twenty-first century are asked to climb on the main-stage of the museum and be available among the exhibits, displays and narratives presented to the public, rather than remain behind the scenes.²⁷⁷ The practice of grassroots micro museum curators is different from that of traditional curators, as the curator becomes an attendant on, and companion to, the visitor. All grassroots micro museum curators on the Maltese Islands, and all participant curators inclusive of those at municipal micro museums in Sicily, state that the curator or an assistant is always available and welcomes visitors, offering to guide them through the museum and its displays. Curators at Maltese State micro museums are restricted from guiding visitors on tours. Some have more than one museum or site to care for in addition to their daily administrative duties. At Maltese State museums, the national agency assigns the role to a Gallery Site Officer (GSO) who may not be on site, who must be booked ahead, and who cannot leave the reception-ticketing desk if alone. Curators at Maltese State micro museums are only allowed to tour-guide specialised groups or visitors whose speciality or interest matches the technical and scientific areas related to the museum's display. Among the other participant museums, only the Betina indicates the engagement of a full-time guide, even if she shares managerial/administrative responsibilities with the Curator.

Curator interaction and museum pedagogy

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the German museological world emphasized the importance of museums as a pedagogical tool in the same breath as schools and universities.²⁷⁸ The pedagogic concept became a matter for museological discussion again in the post-war years.²⁷⁹ ICOM's statutes (2017) include education as an important purpose of the organisation and the current definition of what a museum is.²⁸⁰ However, curatorial practices can be born out of necessity more than they emerge from museological concepts and precepts. To perform their roles well,

²⁷⁶ Ting, 2012: 33.

²⁷⁷ Ting, 2012.

²⁷⁸ Viereg, 2011: 135.

²⁷⁹ de Bary, Desvalles and Wasserman, 1994.

Davis, 1999.

Riva, 2017.

²⁸⁰ International Council of Museums (ICOM) Statutes 2017, and the definition of museum applicable since 2007.

curators of grassroots micro museums walk away from the office desk and roam the museum instead, meeting and interacting with visitors. Curator interaction is not only expected in the interpretation of the content but also in the concerns of the daily life, in debates and discussion of issues, whether contemporary or pertaining to the history of the community. The role of the facilitator is not ascribed to the curator alone, but to all staff, as practiced, for example, at Maritime, Italafrica and Betina. The experiences and learning of curators and staff are intended explicitly to serve the community effectively and efficiently. Such curatorial practices are proof of Stevens' (2007) declaration that the didactic role of museums has shifted to that of a facilitator who recognises its community more than earlier museums did.²⁸¹

The appeal of museums may mostly not be in the objects they display, but in the story they tell. The Castello Curator argues that all such success relies on the ability of the curator as the provider of information and interpretation, via print, panels, audio-visual media, or at best through personal contact with visitors. The study shows that no gadget and impersonal media can equal, replace or be as effective and adaptable as the human contact between curator (or a proficient staff member) and the visitor. Such curators or museum guides can identify and build the interest according to the visitor's own characteristics and expectations. Visitor and musealia can connect only if the visitor seeks also to build that personal connection, and is successful. In all cases the curator-guide is the facilitator and mediator of such an experience, where the musealia are the finishing touch to an experience gained. Visitors do not stop merely at seeing something, they also seek connections and experiences to take along with them. Just as in the past tourists sought souvenirs and photographs to take along with them for the rest of their lives and to recount to others (just as oral lore was thought to revive the experience of the ancients), curators are nowadays expected to revive earlier or long-gone experiences of the past in the immediate present. It rests on the capabilities of the curator, especially where the curator also conducts the museum tour, to succeed in reaching the visitor and to provide that visitor with the unique experience. It also behoves the curator to use the tangible and intangible heritage available to guide the visitor through that singular experience. The knowledge, background and experiences which a curator accumulates help attract the visitor's attention to listen, learn and

²⁸¹ Stevens, 2007: 32.

become immersed in the experience. These ingredients can make a museum appealing irrespective of the volume of exhibits, its size, gadgets and other non-human factors.

The Tunnara Curator asks for an increase in awareness, interest and visits from schools. This is because students of all ages are losing knowledge of the traditions of their parents and grandparents, and of the culture and heritage of the country. The Tunnara Curator perceives that a country can benefit more if students of any age are able to visit such micro museums and learn about their heritage than simply look at volumes of tourists visiting the country. He argues that there is no gain for the country in the long run by increasing tourist volumes at our museums, when the benefits of teaching our young about their heritage and culture are squandered. These of course are benefits which the young, in turn, could pass on to posterity. Tourism is not a secure sector as it is affected by seasonality, by tensions in the Mediterranean region, health threats, national political and economic scenarios which are not always radiant.

The ŽabSanct Curator gives importance to the method by which a curator delivers a message or passes on information to listeners. Visitors tend to give more importance to exhibits with which they connect than to those given importance by a curator. For such a reason, the ŽabSanct Curator maintains that it is essential for a curator to get to know his audience. He remarks that, for example, tour-guiding children at the museum is different from touring an adult audience, and the narrative must be kept interesting without entering into too much details. His Assistant adds that keeping the attention of children can at times involve a joke which would cheer them up but help them stay focused on the narrative being developed. He adds that it is important to use easy, everyday speech to maintain the visitor's attention. He believes that curators and staff with first-hand knowledge can provide visitors with their own experiences. Both the ŽabSanct Curator and his Assistant remark that they were autodidacts. What they know was not material learnt at school or within an academic environment but through own experiences and practices at the museum.

The Škrip's pedagogic objective is that of telling people how to 'work with real machines' in this case the rudimentary machines invented by our ancestors. The Škrip's pedagogic mission regarding such handmade and manually driven machines is likely to be shared by the Curators of TaKola and Murika. The objectives of the

Heraklion museum, guided by the principles of the Society for Cretan Studies, include both direct and indirect pedagogic activities, as the museum supports and promotes Cretan studies in archaeology, history, ethnography, language and literature, opening new museums, holding temporary exhibitions, conferences and events, publishing works related to Cretan studies, and organising educational programmes and activities. The Heraklion museum also shows that museum displays and space can become spaces and places for knowledge and pedagogy: a practice met at private micro museums on the Maltese Islands able to find the necessary space.

The Acharavi Curator declares that the museum has ‘a conference room equipped with state-of-the art audio-visual devices especially designed for educational and cultural projects, lectures and temporary exhibitions.’²⁸² As documented from Sofia Vlachos, the pedagogic vision of the founder was that

society could recollect, but also so that children could learn by understanding the lifestyle of their ancestors. Not just to respect their culture and tradition but to allow them to enter the spirit of that life. In the hope that their knowledge of history, tradition, morals and customs will give an added element of education in human conscience and respect for lifestyle and identity.²⁸³

The Italafrica Curator believes that the museum’s pedagogic tool is the publication of illustrative leaflets in Italian, and English, although most of the pedagogic initiative lies in the curator’s tour narrative round the museum. The SantLluc Curator states that the educational activities that the museum intends to achieve with its exhibits are in line with the message of the collection: ‘*Mallorca tiene una gran riqueza histórica, artística y cultural*’ [Mallorca has great historical, artistic and cultural wealth] and this is further achieved by offering ‘*visitas libres y guiadas*’ [free visits and guided tours]. He maintains that the museum targets ‘*todas las edades*’ [all ages]. He notes with regret that the museum does not reach out for schools and educational institutions within the community represented as ‘*no hay demanda*’ [there is no demand] as schools ‘*no están interesados en ello*’ [they are not interested in it]: an issue shared by other participant curators.

²⁸² FMAA website <http://www.museum-acharavi.com/2013/12/the-museum.html> .

²⁸³ FMAA website <http://www.museum-acharavi.com/2013/12/sofia-vlachou.html> .

Both museum educators and learner-visitors are held responsible for the sociological process, individually and collectively. The main pedagogic function of the museum includes helping and presenting individuals with opportunities to get away from the drawbacks of their social group and, in practical terms, experience a wider perspective of being.²⁸⁴ Nonetheless, museums may take a bottom-up approach by becoming equals to their audiences and public rather than dictate from a remote position of superiority. Through such an approach, grassroots museums become the keys to unlocking creativity and empowering the represented community.

Museums conflict

Museums are safe places for both communication and conflict. Conflict can either be levelled and minimised, or revived and intensified. Consequently, museums appear to empower and advantage one group over another.²⁸⁵ Whenever museums take decisions to integrate minorities and their memories and cultures, they risk entering into conflict with the political sphere.²⁸⁶ Dos Santos (2012) inspired by Foucault argues that when a museum acts politically, it gives a sturdy voice to the community and generates higher degrees of inclusivity in the local context.²⁸⁷ The Acharavi Curator argues that curatorial practices of inclusivity are best expressed by how and what a curator puts on display for visitors and the museum tour itself, by which the curator guides visitors through the displays and the museum.

The idea of superiority was promoted when states used heritage to protect and to safeguard a so-called 'national' stability. State-constructed and sanctioned images and memories were further strengthened by the interpretations of State-employed curators. These curators recreated and presented history and heritage as distinct from social struggles in a regimented society where all was well-organised, as if it was part of an industrial mechanism.²⁸⁸ In contrast, grassroots micro museums allow visitors to experience social conflict, as opposed to the State that seeks stability for its own political and economic safety and comfort. By eliciting different emotions, the grassroots micro museum is capable of reaching more deeply into the visitor than the

²⁸⁴ Matusov and Rogoff, 1995: 97, 101.

²⁸⁵ Stevens, 2007: 30.

²⁸⁶ Stevens, 2007: 32.

²⁸⁷ Dos Santos, 2012: 24-25.

²⁸⁸ Gale, 1996: 297, referring to West, 1988.

emotionless traditional museum. Likewise, the micro museum curator who adopts practices for personal interaction with the visitor has more chances to enhance the visitor's museum experience than the coldly detached showcases and displays where human contact is absent. Nonetheless, caution is always demanded as curatorial irresponsibility can bear negatively on both the museum and the represented community.

Interpretations of heritage demand higher attention and responsibility from curators. They can create conflict and disagreements, even when they intend to do justice to memories and interpretations.²⁸⁹ The museums studied present relationships and interactions which prevail between the represented communities and the contexts which surround them. Such contexts can widen or shrink as the same community, neighbourhoods or groups within, the island or country, the immediate and farther territory, the colonial influences and wider regional community (such as the Mediterranean, which scholars agree extends to three continents and a multitude of cultures).²⁹⁰ The methods of interpretation and presentation may not be embraced by those whose past actions are deemed as dark and negative, but may be highly regarded by the represented community. Whatever the objective of the curator may be, from a museological perspective, the intention is not to elicit conflict, but to facilitate dialogue between the museum and its visitors, public and audience.

Studies call for fresh and innovative curatorship where the curator, as a community member, communicates with the community, shares its issues and facilitates the resolution of its concerns.²⁹¹ Curators are therefore called to disengage the curatorial role from institutional bondage or affiliation. They are encouraged to foster exchanges between the museum, the community represented and the visitor. By taking an exhibitor's perspective, curators construct an interpretation with which visitors can interact and relate.²⁹² This is another step forward to level the museum's

²⁸⁹ Gale, 1996: 298;
Bierly, 2012: 4-5.

²⁹⁰ Kousis *et al.* 2011: 1.

²⁹¹ Weil (2009: 2, 3) calls for "a new generation of curators engaged in rethinking their work much more along the lines of being a facilitator and dialogist, an emulator of some sort."

²⁹² Weil, 2009: 2,3.

image and place its professionals on a similar footing with the wider museum community: the represented community, visitors, audiences and wider public.

So far, this research has discussed how colonial and government authorities constructed imagined national homogenic identities and excluded forms of diverse identities. Traditional museums and their curators were involved in the promotion of such a homogenic national identity, and such images may be reinforced or dismantled by approaches adopted by grassroots micro museum curators. The intention to help improve a represented community depends on how much curators decide to stick to, or depart from, traditional curatorial roles and practices. Grassroots micro museum curators above all show that they are also adept protagonists who can voice the concerns of their communities, both inside and outside the museum, and can act and bring about change.

Curators and Communities

In the nineteenth century, the presence of a museum was a clear statement that a community had its own identity, and as that community gained visibility and space, the displays and exhibits shown became strong representatives of that distinct identity.²⁹³ The community's identity can be promoted through symbolism linked to a 'sense of nostalgia and tradition.'²⁹⁴ Representation in traditional museums was subjected to a selection method which affected the interpretation of history. The same interpretation was then communicated through other media, which recorded or described histories and memories. All this retention of the 'hegemonic equilibrium' was, and perhaps still is, supported and propagated by museum custodians.²⁹⁵ Grassroots museums can re-interpret and re-negotiate social imaginaries with the community, but there is nevertheless the risk of being misunderstood by extra-community visitors, who might not uphold values and interests similar to the community in question.²⁹⁶ The chances of disagreement over interpretation in museums are high, since ingrained culture and knowledge often surface among visitors.²⁹⁷ State museums are criticised because they mostly follow a political agenda

²⁹³ Macdonald, 2003: 3.

²⁹⁴ Giménez-Cassina, 2010: 39.

²⁹⁵ Wilks and Kelly, 2008: 129.

²⁹⁶ Carnegie, 2006: 78.

²⁹⁷ Shamash, 2017: 121, 123.

designed by those in power.²⁹⁸ Dissatisfaction with the practices of traditional museums has led to a process of thought and reconsideration in the museum world. New Museology anticipated the desired and expected change: from a museum at the service of authorities in power to a museum where the visitor and wider community become participant, even though the degree of participation may vary.²⁹⁹

State-owned museum curators at the TaKola, OldPrison and GranCastello have pointed out that discussions play an important part when it comes to interpretation and presentation, but State museums take a national perspective not a community outlook. The BistraCat Curator, as a national museum curator who seeks more interaction with the local community, says that the construction and interpretation of the historic narrative about the community, is a team effort because the national agency has a team dedicated for such research purposes. The national agency provides the services of many experts, and many of these are involved even just to design, place exhibits and organise a showcase at a national micro museum. This contrasts markedly with what happens in private and independent grassroots micro museums where most curators carry out all the planning, research and thinking, the latter alone or in discussion within a limited number of volunteers available. The Xarolla and Maritime Curators report that they mostly rely on information provided by the former founder-curators. The element of oral history was given importance by the Tunnara Curator, who acknowledged the lack of literature about the *tunnara* practices. The Razzett and ŻabSanct Curators state that they rely on scholarly publications on the theme presented by their museum.

The Heraklion Curator states that in the construction and description of the historic narrative about the community, curators participate by contributing knowledge, by sharing experiences and scientific resources. Other participants are individuals from the interest group, academics and their contributions, respective institutions, and testimonies among other things. The Heraklion Curator informs us that the historic narrative of the community is founded on research, oral lore, publications and interviews. The Acharavi Curator informs that it was the curator and founder who participate in such an exercise of narrative construction and

²⁹⁸ *The Economist*, 2012: 65.

²⁹⁹ van Mensch, 1992: 17.

interpretation. To construct the historic narrative of the community, the Acharavi Curator relies on sources such as research, oral history, interviews, publications, books, newspapers, photos, and other sources. The Farmacia and Bonelli Curator adds that all the *Tanit* cultural association is participative in the process, but mostly that it is the expert members who contribute their expertise. The Farmacia and Bonelli Curator informs us that the historic narrative of his community is constructed ‘*attraverso ricerche storiche e interviste ai membri anziani della comunità.*’³⁰⁰

Apart from the Virgadavola museum, where the Curator relies on his own and family’s life-long personal experiences and knowledge, the curators of the other Ragusan museums refer mostly to the scholarly publications and documents which they come across research. As different communities represented by the museums produce different challenges to the respective curators, sources of information about a community can be extremely difficult to retrieve since history publications scarcely speak about individual communities of the kind represented by the micro museums studied. The SantLluc Curator states that in the construction and description of the historic narrative of his community, it is ‘*historiadores, arqueólogos, artistas, y coleccionistas*’³⁰¹ that participate. The Škrip Curator maintains that it is conservators from the Ministry of Culture who participate in the construction and description of the historic narrative of the community. This is an example where the grassroots micro museum relies on information coming from a government authority or a national source regarded as reliable and expert in the subject and which therefore expects no conflict in the interpretation. The Betina Curators are of the opinion that they frequently negotiate the description of objects, exhibits and community with professionals, academics and experts in museum studies and related areas.

As Ocampo and Lersch (2010) suggest, the history of a particular community is narrated and its collective memory is perpetuated, remembered, relived, analysed, re-interpreted, not forgetting lessons learned, in grassroots museums.³⁰² In the past, the dominant State interpretation of history attempted to exclude and eliminate communities and their identities from the historic record, and thereby devalue them.

³⁰⁰ Translation: “through historical research and interviews with senior members of the community.”

³⁰¹ Translation: “historians, archaeologists, artists and collectionists”

³⁰² Ocampo and Lersch, 2010: 139, 144.

Independent grassroots museums declare, defend and make acceptable their community's heritage.³⁰³ As community museums, they came about in areas where local heritage was being '*exported*' to museums elsewhere outside the community or where cultural heritage was being lost.³⁰⁴ This corresponds with the remark of the Xarolla Curator who stated that, while he was proud that something from his home-village was exhibited at the National Museum of Archaeology, he acknowledged greater connection through the shards recovered from the adjacent catacombs, which are now on loan from the national agency and exhibited at the windmill. A similar argument from the ŻabSanct Curators regarding artifacts at national museums indicates that the taking of cultural heritage out of context may have no effect on people. Communities may at the same time feel that they have been stripped of their local heritage. As noted by the Xarolla Curator, once local or community heritage finds its way to a national museum, even if referred to, the artifact is out of context, and pride is momentarily only felt among those who may know about it and visit it at the national museum.

There are various reasons which prompt social groups and communities to establish places of memory. Such places may either serve as a challenge to the way authorities in power have socially positioned the group or community, or else promote their daily politics.³⁰⁵ On similar lines, grassroots initiatives as grassroots micro museums or other places of memory may lead the community to engage politically. Community museums represent the grassroots at various levels of society and act in various ways to promote and sustain the community they represent.³⁰⁶ As Ocampo and Lersch (2010) observe, they act as tools which empower and help community representatives to achieve goals in various ways and fields, inspiring action and creativity.³⁰⁷ Likewise, museums are more capable of voicing different identities than the traditional 'national, homogeneous and bounded' voice. Macdonald (2003) contends that, in the past, museums could make connections between different continents and different ages, between cultures and peoples, and consequently, they could still do more.³⁰⁸

³⁰³ Ocampo and Lersch, 2010: 140.

³⁰⁴ Ocampo and Lersch, 2010: 143.

³⁰⁵ Till, 2003: 292, 297.

³⁰⁶ Ocampo and Lersch, 2010: 140.

³⁰⁷ Ocampo and Lersch, 2010: 141.

³⁰⁸ Macdonald, 2003: 10-11.

The grassroots initiatives studied started with several objectives. By taking an example from the smallest museum in this study, the Farmacia at Scicli, the researcher acknowledges that what was earlier a family initiative to earn the daily bread and provide a service to the community is now a heritage which represents the community in history and is a reminder about what the community's Sciclian ancestors referred to in the old days whenever they had health problems. However, the pharmacy did not serve only as a pharmacy. Certain outlets, such as shops, bars, green-grocers, the butcher's shop, the barber, the newspaper shop and indeed the pharmacy, served as community spaces for establishing social contacts, sharing news, gossip, transferring knowledge and experiences, and also as cultural spaces where community members might meet and communicate, within and with, external *others* who happened to be there. The pharmacy which was a solution to the negative experiences of illness, was also a point of relief for the community, not just in matters of health but also emotionally, intellectually, culturally and more. These are experiences which faded following the rapid changes brought on by the modern world. Small spaces such as these shops are now rapidly disappearing from residential areas and moving to the outskirts of towns, becoming in the process larger establishments stocking a very large range of merchandise. Likewise, micro museums resemble these old intimate small shops, while the large traditional museums are like the modern multipurpose outlets where the individual buys all his necessities, has minimal personal interaction with others, skims between objects (products) displayed, pays and walks out. On the contrary objects and displays at museums are intended to convey a message or stimulate thought.

Participant curators were therefore asked to describe the message they wished to convey through their collection. The Tunnara Curator explains that the intent of his collection was to raise awareness of the place (the battery) and remind us of the forgotten and remote tuna-catching practices and sufferings of our forefathers who were engaged in the practice. The Razzett Curator stated that the creation of a museum was intended to offer added value all year round to those who visited temporary art exhibitions. However, he explained that the message behind the collection was to show 'how ancestors used to work, cook, weave, things which you no longer see today' and a pedagogic tool for schoolchildren. The ŻabSanct Curator asserted that,

more than a message, his collection made a statement that the heritage of the locality was being kept, catalogued and safeguarded from being lost, because once things are listed somewhere there is less chance that they will be tampered with. He argued that the ŽabSanct was a landmark synonymous with the village itself and visitors to the village could not pass by without paying a visit. His Assistant added that the collection was mainly ‘educational’ and served also for research purposes. The messages behind the State-owned collections were described on almost similar lines. The TaKola Curator believed that the collection inspired appreciation of human creativity, how ancestors such as the millers, recycled and avoided perishables. She however argued that when it came to the mechanism, which resembled a clockwork but on a larger scale, the explanation of the guide was indispensable to the visitor. The TaKola Curator therefore acknowledged that a solo visit to the collection would prove less fruitful, even because there was scanty information available with the exhibits. In addition, interpretation panels failed to communicate with the visitor as much as when someone accompanied and explained the collection and the mechanism. As she remarked ‘I think it works, but with an explanation.’ This proves the importance of the human interaction, mainly between the knowledgeable curator or museum guide and the visitor: this is indeed a curatorial practice found common among most participant independent and private grassroots micro museums in the Mediterranean.

The OldPrison and GranCastello Curator explained that the OldPrison was more a type of museum, whose purpose was to give the visitor an experience of the place as a place of detention space and of what being held in prison in early modern era would have meant. On the other hand, the GranCastello hoped to provide an experience of domestic life as lived by residents. The reorganised domestic setting aimed to recreate the eighteenth-century domestic environment: how people lived, what commodities they had or lacked, their needs, and how they met different situations. In another way the rest of the museum aimed to give an experience of non-domestic themes, such as fishing, hobbies, food-production, crafts, weaving and attire among others. Through a different display setup from that found in more traditional museums and showcase exhibits, the museum attempted to teach and educate more than to provide an experience. It attempted to tell how ancestors lived, made things, spent time and more.

All this confirms that State micro museums aim to *teach*, not to offer an experience: thus, a top-down approach which is in contrast with the practices of grassroots micro museums. The BistraCat Curator despite the dearth of artifacts, considered the re-use of the catacombs by the farmer as an example of how the historic and funerary site was re-used and adapted to meet the needs of the farmer many centuries later. It is this episode that the Curator now promotes as a feature distinctive from that of other catacombs on the Islands. However she argued that the main objective of the museum was not to focus on the limited collection but on the social aspect of the site which, as a private property, continued to be used and adapted to the necessities of the family who resided there. Therefore, the four exhibits together with the site artifact served to raise awareness about cultural and historic heritage in connection with the social aspect of the site.

The Xarolla Curator explained that the primary objective behind the collection exhibited was an appeal to

*nippriservaw il-wirt nazzjonali tagħna. Il-Mithna mhix biss il-bini imma diversi biċċiet li jagħmlu parti mill-identita' taż-Żurrieq. W ukoll biex it-tfal japprezzaw dak li missirijietna u anke preżentament qegħdin nagħmlu biex nippriservaw l-istorja u l-identita' tagħna.*³⁰⁹

The Maritime Curators concisely explained the maritime collection as

a personal collection, an interesting collection with some very valuable pieces, a treasure trove of bits and pieces.

The other maritime-themed museum, the Betina, took a different and more practical approach to the message behind the collection. The Betina Curators stated that there was a vision behind the collection.

The museum's vision from the beginning was to attract public interest and to raise awareness of the importance of traditional wooden shipbuilding knowledge. All of the educational activities and the entire museum strategy is defined according to that vision.

At the Betina, this is accomplished by 'the use of modern media tools and innovative technologies that helped to create the ambiance' at each museum space. The Betina also organises several educational and creative workshops aimed at pre-school children to University students,³¹⁰ not to mention that the maritime theme also

³⁰⁹ Translation: "to care for our national heritage. The windmill is not only the building but the different bits and pieces which make our Żurrieq identity and to make children appreciate what their ancestors and what we at present are doing to preserve our history and identity."

³¹⁰ BMWS website.

fascinates an adult and senior audience. Through its collection, the Heraklion museum aimed to convey the ‘overall experience pertaining the local history, society and art beyond borders.’ The Acharavi Curator informed us that the collection wanted its visitors to have an

understanding of the labour that those people had gone through to establish our way of life, to show the connections between the needs, the difficulties and the craftsmanship that all people share, to contribute in the maintenance of memory and to educate and promote like a stakeholder our culture and recent history to local people and foreign visitors.

The Farmacia museum, with its focused collection, intended to ‘*far risaltare l'importanza artistica, scientifica e sociale della Farmacia all'inizio del secolo scorso.*’³¹¹ The Donnafugata Curator stated that the objective of his museum was to go further than the Castle’s structure and architecture, or any of its objects. He adds that

*voglio che la gente conosca anche il fatto che ci sono dei personaggi che hanno vissuto.*³¹²

as he believed that, if visitors are made aware and informed that real people had lived and gone through different experiences at the Castle, it helped to connect museum with visitor. The Donnafugata Curator’s view shows that the human aspect of a museum influences the visitor’s museum experience, and without which there might be no experience at all except a passive walk through. To enhance the visitor’s experience, the Curator integrated the new MUDECO into the Castello Donnafugata museum complex.

The Campailla and Murika Curator emphasized that the purposes which led to the two initiatives were both guided by specific principles. He stated that the possibilities offered in Italy by the formation of an *associazione culturale* (cultural association) made it possible for the enhancement of the unusual, the smallest and less noted sites and places. The *associazione* took many initiatives and organised activities in these unusual places, thus raising awareness of their existence and potential. This had led to the rise of more initiatives, groups, and numerous other cultural

³¹¹ Translation: “to highlight the artistic, scientific and social importance of the Pharmacy at the beginning of the last century.”

³¹² Translation: “I want the public to know also the fact that there were personalities who lived here.”

associations. He explained that they had managed to turn the museum from a visiting place into a living place full of cultural initiatives and activities. He mentions that even visits became dramatized, and through a tour of various social and cultural trails, visitors could experience a history in three stages: medieval history, ancient archaeological history and baroque history, represented in the plasticity³¹³ of the Murika. He felt that the *Casa degli Avi* together with the *Museo diffuso 'Murika' – Racconti di Pietra* they presented 'the paradigm of the history of the city' of Modica. It is the tripod of the cultural axis, the museum axis, and the hospitality axis represented in their most advanced modern form for the cultural good. The Campailla and Murika Curator shows that what may seem insignificant to establishment museums may have more value to the cultural aspect of the place and the represented community. Unusual places have the potential to attract the cultural tourist, raise awareness, increase visits to other adjacent or nearby sites and museums, increase economic activity in the area and its surroundings, help in the enhancement of the region, community development and self-esteem. This can be linked to the cascade effect which the Maritime Curators foresaw if their museum were to be promoted by local authorities.

The Virgadavola Curator explained that the message behind the museum collection was mainly a cry to safeguard the heritage of the Sicilian *carretto*. Simultaneously the collection includes various objects, tools and utensils of a peasant nature or associated with later farming families now quickly disappearing. The message behind the Virgadavola collection was referred to by the Curator as

salvando questo pezzo di cuore del nostro passato. E salvando questo pezzo di cuore, se la gente vuole visitare ritrova gl'anni quand'era piccolo,

because as the Virgadavola Curator explained

*non solo che ci riporta all'eta de piccolo, ma ce riflette negl'utensile che ci sono. Ecco vede la gente si sprona che retorna bambino e riflette nei ricordi che vede nel museo.*³¹⁴

³¹³ Plasticity with reference to museums can be defined as a variety of activities which may take place inside or out of the museum space and place because of or inspired by its musealia. It is the whole range of possible activities which may emerge from or in connection to collections, objects, images, symbols, art, architecture, theme, history, heritage, culture, art, science or else celebrated by the museum.

³¹⁴ Translation: "saving this piece of heart from our past. And saving this piece of heart, if people want to visit, they will find the years back when they were little. Why? Because people say, not only that brings us back to the age of small children but reflects us in the utensil that there are. Here you see people spurring you back as a child and reflecting in the memories you see in the museum."

The Virgadavola Curator stressed that, apart from the message, the collection succeeded in bringing back memories of childhood to the visitor. Thus, the Virgadavola museum, without technological gadgets, without the professional input, without the colourfully designed displays, succeeds in appealing to the emotions of visitors. The ability to connect between museum exhibits and visitor is a fundamental part of the museum experience, and the Virgadavola shows that it is not ‘brightlights’ that make a museum appealing but the emotional reactions that the museum, its exhibits, and its curator manage to elicit from the visitor during a visit. As both the Campailla and Murika Curator, and as the Donnafugata and MUDECO Curator believe, the ability to connect the visitor personally with the museum is an important factor for the final satisfaction of the visitor. A wonderful experience can wipe out all presumptions of visitors, generate more visits and more visitors.

The message of the Heraklion collection was closer to that embraced by the Razzett. The Farmacia’s message went deeper than all the others as it had selected a ‘social space’, the pharmacy, to reach its community and raise their awareness and knowledge of ‘the artistic, scientific and social importance of the pharmacy at the beginning of the last century.’ The role of the pharmacy may be traced back in the various ways and methods used by humans to cure their ailments from the beginning of time.

The Betina Curator stated that the mission behind the collection was as follows:

The Museum’s mission is to be an effective place for presenting knowledge, active socialising, information dissemination, entertainment and a centre for the island’s identity. The idea was to protect and collect shipbuilding knowledge still used in local shipyards, by local boat builders as holders of traditional knowledge, to promote it and to teach new generations about boat designs and production. The main purpose of the initiative was to give a new spirit to wooden boats, to popularise them and encourage their regular use in daily activities and new contexts alike.

She added that their ‘most important aim was to protect the knowledge of the skill of construction of the Betina *gajeta*.’³¹⁵ The Betina Curators present the message behind the collection as an example of a curatorship which visualises and understands the museum not just as a repository for inanimate objects but also as a dynamic place and

³¹⁵ The *gajeta* is a Croatian sailing boat. A video on the construction of the boat is provided by the BMWS at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGOpIVPEIxI>.

space where the community might come together, along with others from outside the community to build self-esteem and appreciate themselves and their heritage. The Betina museum aims to preserve both tangible and intangible heritage by using two different but complementary methods: the dissemination and transfer of knowledge and the practical building and use of boats. The Škrip Curator stated that with its collection the museum wished to convey to the public the message that ‘everything is possible, if you work hard and with love.’ This statement might be applied to most grassroots micro museums as they are each a true labour of love and hard work from their founders, curators and those who support them.

Conclusion

The evidence presented suggests that grassroots museums may be a free, empowering space and place for community enterprise.³¹⁶ They can be an unrestricted zone of expression - an emancipated space, a focal point and vehicle to vocalise the cry of represented communities not of the establishment. Grassroots museums are not bound by institutional objectives but are constrained instead by roles and responsibilities imposed by the commitment they assume for the represented community, even if the identified community exceeds the geographic boundaries of the place where the museum is situated.³¹⁷ Examples of such a broadening of the represented community outside the geographic boundaries of the location are mostly found among museums which represent a community of practice or interest such as the Tunnara, Razzett, Maritime and Italafrica museums.

The development of new museologies, or of branches of New Museology, as Sociomuseology intends to go further. Sociomuseology hoped for more direct participation from both visitors and communities, as distinct from the homogeneous image promoted by the establishment. This development has led to the birth and rise of grassroots initiatives which follow the footsteps of society as conceived by grassroots democracy.³¹⁸ Such initiatives arise mostly where communities are stigmatised, deprived and discriminated against by those in authority,³¹⁹ and where the community’s heritage is under threat. The founding objectives of all grassroots micro

³¹⁶ Bodo, Gibbs and Sani, 2009: 5, 7, 9, 16, 17, 20, 33 and 35.

³¹⁷ The Tunnara/Westreme Battery is a museum on tuna-catching in the seaside village of Mellieħa.

³¹⁸ Ekins, 1992.

³¹⁹ Cutajar, 2014.

museums as explained by their curators, together with the two national micro museum Curators at BistraCat and TaKola and of the Sicilian Curator of the Donnafugata, MUDECO, and Contadino, included the intention to save their community's heritage. More specific were micro museums, which represented or gave more relevance to a community of place: a factor which, despite being given much attention by most museums, does not reflect as the sole objective of any museum. However, curators of grassroots micro museums show that, despite their limitations but thanks to their autonomy, they can espouse a vision and act to achieve it.

Although curators like those of Tunnara, Razzett and ŽabSanct, did not claim that their museums were specifically established to make statements and voice their own community identities, they all insisted that their initiatives were intended to conserve, or raise awareness of, heritage owned by their community. It was only in the course of time that such museums opened for visitors outside the boundaries of the represented community and reached out to a wider audience. Such steps were mostly forced by circumstances and to help sustain the museum. Since its inception, the idea of grassroots micro museums has been to raise awareness of the unique heritage owned by a community. Yet, the study shows that the community is not strictly and only a community of place. All such curatorial roles bring with them other roles as the need exists for planning various other activities in which a museum may engage in, amongst which are pedagogic matters and sustainability issues.

Museums are increasingly becoming spaces for discussing community concerns and issues, which in turn generate further political debates among different museum audiences and visitors.³²⁰ Hence, narratives and texts about heritage become stronger in the meanings and imaginaries they convey to visitors and audiences. As society becomes more emancipated and less subjected to centralized power, the grassroots transform images and meanings produced earlier by the elitist museum, into new but contrasting and conflicting images and meanings from heritage.³²¹ National micro museum curators have denied engaging in social and political debates of contemporary society. However, as national micro museum curators attempt to construct narratives, they gradually acknowledge and recognise the diversities within

³²⁰ Karp, Mullen Kreamer and Lavine, 1992: 11.

³²¹ Gale, 1996: 296 refers to Samuel's wide definition of heritage and its texts.

the nation that become inclusive of the community of place. Such inclusivity is a sign of departure from the traditional curatorial practice. It compels the museum to engage in policies of recognition where national identity becomes unstable and dependent on various factors,³²² and undoubtedly, the recognition of diversity and practices of inclusion may lead to conflicting images and issues.

³²² McLean, 2005: 1.

CHAPTER FOUR – Curators and the represented Community

To interpret a community, a curator must first identify the differences which make the represented community distinct and different from the national identity and the identity of other communities. In order to do so, curators need to be deeply knowledgeable of both the so-called national identity presented at national museums and the identity of the represented community, and to be able to make explicit comparisons and present them through displays and narratives. They must be able to make explicit the distinctions in characteristics such as language, qualities, beliefs, ethnicities, traditions, culture, society, heritage and other areas of interest, from the imaginary national identity and other identities to displays and narratives. Although communities may be identified and defined by geographic boundaries (such as people living at a place), the findings showed that curators tended to extend the represented community beyond the defined place. A community of place, according to the curatorial viewpoint, appears to extend even to those members of the community of that place who had moved outside its geographic boundary, such as through a change of residence to another locality, through migration or changing relationships.

In 2013, curators in the United Kingdom showed concern when funds to independent small museums were cut. Their concern arose from the fact that small independent museums attract visitors from the lower socio-economic groups. This is attributed to the service that these accessible museums offer, amongst which are free admission and free participation in most of their activities.³²³ Many visit museums because they revive and recall childhood memories, and enable them to refresh their own past connections with the place. Meanwhile, the same exhibit can be interpreted differently by the same person at different times, or by different people. Studies suggest that interpretation depends on the cultural knowledge one builds up, one's life experience and the positionality or status a person adopts.³²⁴

³²³ A similar issue about independent museums was also raised by a curator in the United Kingdom in 2013, who argued that "I am concerned, however, that we will be unable to continue to provide, at no or low cost, some of the services which have ensured that we are a truly accessible museum and archive service and that, at some of our sites, over 55% of our visitors are from socio-economic groups C2, D and E, and that we can continue to serve and make a difference in the lives of our communities, some of whom are amongst the poorest in the country." *Museums + Heritage Advisor*, 2013.

³²⁴ Spencer, 2014: 19, 26, 35, 256 and 295.
Bourdieu, 2013.

Curators at the Razzett, ŻabSanct, BistraCat, and Italafrica museums complain about the infrequent visiting and lack of interest shown by the local community. Such lack of interest or low appreciation may not be completely blamed on the locals themselves. As the same Curators noted earlier, the community where the museum is located tends to acknowledge the museum's presence, but often its members do not visit or participate as much as curators expect. Curators note that those who visited became aware of their lack of knowledge about heritage in their locality or of heritage pertaining to their community. Although curators observe this with satisfaction, they would wish such persons to be more active and frequent visitors.

Another factor contributing to what can only be called *ignorance of heritage* on the Maltese Islands is the education system. Schools over recent decades have reduced school hours, relegated the importance of history as a subject, citing pressures to complete their annual national education curriculum. In the meantime, national education programmes include visits only to national museums and sites, thus excluding the promotion of non-State museums. Additionally, the better-resourced national agency promotes its museums and sites, and promotes schemes of free admission to schoolchildren and accompanying adults, again excluding non-State micro museums. Thus, national policies give the impression that, even in education, the system is more exclusive and supportive of a nation-state agenda, which, in this sense, is not so different from colonial times. Pedagogy that is not concomitant with the nation-state agenda is unwittingly excluded or not promoted. By excluding people from awareness and knowledge of their cultural heritage and diverse identities, existing power structures are more likely to remain unchallenged. As much as the promotion of a homogeneous identity suppresses the identity and self-esteem of non-national communities, the lack of education makes it easier for established power structures to erode and manipulate heritage and people. Likewise, the suppression of grassroots initiatives, such as grassroots micro museums, can silence the voice of non-national communities from gaining their rights, from safeguarding their heritage, from enjoying self-esteem and taking pride in their unique identity.

Today's weaker attachment to the nation-state has led to the rise of smaller communities, ethnic groups and minorities, nourished by the grassroots' 'new

intellectuals':³²⁵ i.e. those who will encourage the application of reason to convince others (in contrast to the use of force, threats or fear) to bring about change. Initiatives for community museums by individuals or groups within a community are characterised by their connection to the grassroots initiative, to local necessities and the development of community engagement.³²⁶ For this reason, if an initiative fails to voice the community's concerns and perspectives, it may remain aloof, detached and not representative of the grassroots. Unintentional exclusion of certain community groups is further possible as grassroots micro museum curators may exclude the negative and dark sides of the history of the represented community.³²⁷ Similarly, subordination does not ground a museum in a community.³²⁸ Whether grounding takes place or not, it depends more on the practices embraced and the benefits which the identity of the represented community gains from such museums.

Participant curators described their communities as perceived at the time of the museum's establishment, also as described by the initial objectives, and finally at the time of this research. Based on Watson's conclusions, participant curators interpreted their communities with the typology of the community originally targeted by their museum (marked X) and the type of community represented today (marked Y). (*Table 3*)

The Tunnara which started as a localised micro museum (vii) with a specialised theme (ii) of shared historical and cultural experiences (i), has since lost its localised representation. The Tunnara Curator described his museum community as a community mostly bound by both shared historical/cultural experiences (i) and specialist interest (ii) communities. He attributes this static situation to the nature of the exhibits and the venue, together with the fact that the community is now extinct, and tuna-catching a remote memory to most of those whose ancestors were once directly involved in the practice. Moreover, the Tunnara Curator complained that the state of the venue and its temporary buttressed appearance did not attract passers-by as most feared the instability of the military battery structure that the museum is

³²⁵ Macdonald 2003: 10 quoting Werbner, 1997: 12.
Rand, 1961.

³²⁶ Ocampo and Lersch, 2010: 145-146.

³²⁷ Ocampo and Lersch, 2010: 147.

³²⁸ Ocampo and Lersch, 2010: 149.

housed in. He also observed that visitors whose expectations might have been to encounter militaria from the Knights' era would be disappointed to find only part of a cannon on show, accompanied by recently made models of fire-arms, swords, a Knight's armour, shields and a handful of items from the Second World War. In contrast, the architecture and the view from the roof of the battery are two magnificent and unique features which were not well promoted or utilized by those involved with the museum. These could have contributed significantly to the visitor experience. Indeed, visitors who were being guided through the historical building and the roof, stayed longer, showed greater interest and showed more satisfaction on exiting the museum. This was observed even with occasional visitors whose interest did not have a specific interest in military history or architecture. These two features could boost attractiveness and provide a better experience of place, if the Tunnara remains a museum and if it became an interpretive centre. The Tunnara Curator observed that the delays in restoration and the absence of interested parties to carry out that restoration were hindering the appeal of the museum and its possible upgrade.³²⁹

The Razzett Curator describes his museum community as one which started with shared historical/cultural experiences (i) and a shared location (vii), but which later shifted to a community of a socio-economic type (iii). From a community described as a local group of enthusiasts, or a kind of parish group characterised by locality and the rural village environment, the represented community developed into a more national and international network, more cosmopolitan and less local. The Assistant Curator, who acts also as vice-president of the philanthropic group managing the museum, argues that it might be that the locals are visiting less often because they have already visited once some time before and so would not feel the urge to revisit. The ŽabSanct Curator shares a similar opinion that locals tend not to visit or revisit once they know about the museum or had once visited it. Nowadays the ŽabSanct museum attracts a community that comes from the locality or were connected to it in the past (vii), and those who seek it out as a special interest (ii).

The Xarolla which started as a museum with shared historical/cultural experiences (i) and a shared location (vii) shifted to one that has an international

³²⁹ Restoration started when this study was being concluded.

community which is characterised by specialist knowledge (ii). The Maritime museum started as an individual's specialised micro museum with a specialised theme (ii). Now it has an international community, with some local (vii) but mostly specialised interest (ii).

Table 3 shows that Maltese micro museums, which at their establishment aimed only to represent a local community or an excluded community, had by time attracted, or appealed more to, a community of people who share historical/cultural experiences and those having or seeking specialist knowledge. Golding (2013) acknowledges that the term 'community' can be used both for purposes of exclusion or for intercultural bridging.³³⁰ Yet the study shows that exclusion or representing an excluded community at a museum can also serve to bridge different communities and bring them together, even with the excluded community.

The represented community

Curators were asked to identify the community represented by their museums. When asked to describe their community, curators were at times perplexed. They viewed the represented community from different perspectives. Some curators found it difficult to describe their communities under a single category. Communities are not easy to describe especially in one word or phrase. At times they can be described with different adjectives; but the fear of inclusion or exclusion, of misrepresenting or stigmatising, is always present.

The Tunnara Curator, despite considering the tuna-trapping community as an extinct community, identified the represented community as those surviving relatives and descendants of the same old community of practice. Nevertheless, he regarded the community of Mellieħa as the community of place most connected to the old practice and the museum, and which extends to those who from nearby localities and communities engaged in the practice around the Islands.

The ŻabSanct Curators contended that the community represented was that of Żabbar, even if from a religious perspective. But they do not exclude that there

³³⁰ Golding and Modest, 2013: 20.

were those connected to the village and to devotion to the adjacent Sanctuary, but who lived elsewhere. They saw their community mostly as the local parish community whose devotion from a religious viewpoint might still bring them to visit the church and the museum. Others considered as a growing community of visitors were those interested in art and maritime Ex-Votos. The ŻabSanct Curator maintains that although the community represented is mainly a rural community it has become a mixed urbanised community. The Razzett Curator argues that despite the original parish group idea to represent the Mosta community, developments and occurrences led the museum to represent a wider and more open community: nation-wide and possibly international, and which has potential to grow. He maintains that the represented community is difficult to categorize as it is *an open-to-all community* and a *varied* one, inclusive of local villagers, Maltese and foreigners living around Malta. However, through the perspective of the folklore museum the Razzett Curator defines its village community as a rural urbanised community which extends to those who emigrated elsewhere, and others interested in the theme of the museum. The Razzett Curator does not see a specific category for its represented community as he claims that it is a *varied* community. Due to its location, the Xarolla finds the collaboration of two neighbouring Local Councils, which struggle to preserve their identity and connection with the windmill and the adjacent catacombs. Nonetheless, the Curator states that the museum does not actually represent the Żurrieq community alone as it is inclusive of the communities of surrounding villages such as Ħal Safi, Ħal Kirkop, Qrendi and Mqabba. The Xarolla Curator states that its present represented community is at its infancy, composed of an international array of people with an interest in windmills, as well as some from the surrounding villages who have become interested in the subject. The Maritime Curators identify the represented community as a wide community of people who have a maritime connection or interest as naval history, ex-naval personnel who worked at sea, on ships, on other forms of vessels, who had connections or had personal maritime experiences and who relate through the objects displayed. They also see a component of the Nadur village community represented as among the objects exhibited are ‘many things which came from locals here in Nadur’ states Nora, one of the three volunteer Curators. They maintain that thanks to donations from locals, the Nadur community is also represented, and that their maritime connection is still alive as persons from Nadur

are today employed on maritime vessels such as the Gozo ferry. Others bring along items which belonged to their ancestors or relatives when these worked with the Royal Navy or the mercantile fleets. However, the museum attracts more British and other foreign visitors than locals. The Curators consider their community as ‘one that is maritime in practice and in interest’ and ‘anyone who’s got a connection with the sea or the forces, especially the navy, fishermen, sailors.’ They consider their community as a community which is gradually being extended among all those sharing an interest or a connection with the maritime, and those who seek to learn about life at sea.

The State micro museum Curators interviewed have distinct views of the communities represented by their museums. The OldPrison, GranCastello Curator maintains that the museums are not an explicit representation of the Citadel and the Rabat (Victoria) communities, but mostly of Gozitan life and history more generally. The TaKola Curator perceives the represented community as that of millers around the Maltese Islands, thus with more of a national perspective than a localised. The TaKola Curator states that the national micro museum does not represent a specific community as such, even though the windmill is more associated with the Xaghra community. She explains that connections with the local community happen in connection to events held at the village, such as the annual local religious feast and cultural events or commemorations held by local government or local groups who choose the windmill as a backdrop to activities held at its adjacent spaces.

The BistraCat Curator, due to the location of the micro museum, maintains that even as a State micro museum representing the national community and tourists, the BistraCat is highly representative of the Mosta village community. Therefore, the represented community at the BistraCat is both national and local. Unexpectedly the State micro museum Curator shows more interest and vigour in representing the Mosta village community equally to the national, than the private Razzett, which started as a grassroots initiative and is run by Mosta residents. It could be that the re-naming of the private micro museum forced by national and political personalities had the intention to fulfil a different national agenda, of which the Razzett volunteers were not aware. It seems that the changing of the *Għaqda Talent Mosti* into a *Ċentru ta' Kultura Nazzjonali* (a National Cultural Centre) left its impacts on the local community's

perception of the museum.

The Farmacia, Bonelli Curator defines the community represented by the museum as '*noi di Tanit Scicli e tutta la città.*' [all of us of Tanit Scicli and all the city]. Therefore, the pharmacy and the Palazzo are spaces and places which connect all the aspects of the community of Scicli and society in history and to today. The Curator of the Donnafugata, MUDECO and Contadino maintains that the three museums represent different communities, all of which represent the Ragusan community, thus, the nobility, the poor and the peasants who worked for the nobles, personalities and the rural communities respectively. However, he argues that historically these were not distinct or separate from each other as they mutually supported each other. He explains that the Castle museum is representative of the personalities of the Arezzo family who owned the Castello di Donnafugata, but who with their lifestyle represented the whole community. They succeeded in uniting the nobility and the poor, as they supported and helped the poor to live a decent life providing food in winter, donating houses as a dowry to poor newly married girls, built hospitals and a nursing home which helped Ragusa Ibla to grow and the community to call them the *patrons of the poor*. He adds that when the Castle declined it still gave a livelihood to many, as many businesses on site today are employees of the Castle. He believes that the *Museo del Tempo Contadino* represents the peasants and rural communities which were and are still vital for society as they labour and cultivate the land and provide food for all. On the other hand, the *Museo del Costume* (MUDECO) is representative of the Sicilian community in its wider sense, classes, identities, culture and ages.

The Virgadavola Curator states that his museum does not represent a community but rather the Curator's family because, as he explains, it was thanks to his supportive family that the museum is what it is today. However, besides the *carretti* collection, the Virgadavola displays a great collection of tools and utensils used by the rural and farming community of which he forms part. Implicitly it is very much representative of the rural and farming community as the *carretti* served mostly to carry produce and objects from the countryside to the cities. Such observations were made by the Curator, by most visitors and those who knew about it or recommended it. Therefore, a museum, apart from what the curator or staff proposes and promotes

as the represented community, may implicitly be also representative of communities who visualise themselves in the collection displayed. This is in line with Candlin's (2016) observation that the presence of *instantly recognisable memorabilia* to which visitors can easily connect serves as a channel for re-visiting the past and to initiating a dialogue between visitor, musealia and others present at the museum.³³¹

These representations may not be perceived instantly by a curator. It takes a knowledgeable, experienced and observant curator to notice such occurrences. Once a curator notices the opportunities that a museum collection may bring, the curator can direct the museum's objective and activities to an audience that is more responsive and participant than the audience perceived through the community initially targeted and represented. Such a behaviour may portray the micro museum as exclusive and elitist, and thus a contradiction to the transformation which Gale (1996) anticipates from the grassroots.³³² Similar happenings can be seen in the experiences of micro museums like the Razzett. The matter of representation is not dependent on the curator, the collection displayed, the declared objective or the museum's activities alone, but on the response found from outside: that is, the connections which a community or communities visualise and embrace to connect with a museum and its musealia. Curators may therefore facilitate or repress such representations; and the Razzett Curators facilitated such representations at their micro museum. Nevertheless, the curatorial practices in such museums may be a factor of success or failure as such behaviours impact on the response of the different audiences. Thus, a restriction or a widening of a museum's representation does not guarantee an increase in visitors if the way in which the community's or communities' sentiments and concerns are represented, is not engaging and correct. Response and participation determine whether a represented community flows between a homogeneous and a heterogeneous community. An example is the Italafrica whose audience, the Curator stresses, is a heterogeneous worldwide community. This is surprising since the Italafrica presents a closed, restricted theme and a collection which is even given little importance in Italy. In contrast, the Curator of the Donnafugata, MUDECO and Contadino museums sees the wider community as a community represented by the totality of each museum, and

³³¹ Candlin, 2016: 125.

³³² Gale, 1996: 296.

thus representative of all and everyone in the community of today as much as they were in history.

The Campailla, Murika Curator states that the two museums represent the community of Modica and defines them as

*i luoghi della tradizione, i luoghi del cuore, i luoghi della storia della citta', ma fortemente pero' in entrambi questi musei in simbiosi con il nostro territorio e con la citta'. Cioe' la citta' tutto sommato e' all'interno di questi musei ampiamente rappresentata anche come dire nelle sue parti nobili. Quindi le sue espressioni piu' autentiche.*³³³

The Heraklion museum represents the Cretan community, its local history and culture from early Christian to modern times. The Heraklion Curator describes the community as 'mostly urban'. The Acharavi Curator was more explicit that the museum represents the people of Corfu: 'Corfiots and the way they lived in the past centuries.' The SantLluc Curator maintains that the community represented by the museum is '*el pueblo mallorquín*' [the Mallorcan people], who as a rural and insular community are culturally ancient, from one race/ethnicity and at the time experiencing huge changes. The Škrip's owner-founder maintains that despite being situated in a small village, his museum represents a Mediterranean community that is mainly rural and dependent on agriculture. However, it is inclusive of all 'people who produce olive oil in Dalmatia'. The Škrip Curator describes the present community as being 'culturally both ancient and new' and balanced age-wise. The Betina Curators state that nowadays the community represented is culturally growing and has a lot to bond it.

The State-owned museum Curators, at OldPrison, GranCastello, TaKola and BistraCat, were all aware that the national agency had the objective of representing the national population, and not a local community. However, they all felt that they had occasions where a connection with the local community was kept. All three State micro museum Curators maintain that they tried to include the local community in their events, but interest and visits from local communities were low.

³³³ Translation: "the places of tradition, the places of the heart, the places of the history of the city, but strongly, however, in both these museums in symbiosis with our territory and with the city'. That is, the city is all in all within these museums widely represented also as saying in its noble parts. Therefore, its most authentic expressions."

On the contrary, visitor volumes from around the world and thanks to the national free admission schemes were rapidly growing.

The State-museum Curators identified the represented community as a national community, but not all gave the same weight to the national. The Curators at the Gozitan State micro museums believe that their museums are more representative of the Gozitan community. The OldPrison and the GranCastello are more perceived as representative of the communities close to the Citadel, while the TaKola, like the Xarolla, is seen as a representation of the miller and the Xagħra community. Among the State museum Curators, it is the BistraCat Curator who expresses the highest interest in representing the local rural community through the museum, even if it lacks the folklore objects exhibited at the Razzett on the other side of Mosta. This contrasts with the other State museums and is surprising when such representation was initially more expected among private and independent grassroots micro museums. To different degrees, all the Curators of the private and independent localised museums, that is, the Maritime, ŻabSanct, Razzett and Xarolla, contend that their museum *is* representative of the community where the museum is situated.

The Heraklion Curator considers the community represented by the museum as ‘mostly urban’ and which is nowadays considered as a community experiencing some changes as ‘Crete is a multicultural society.’ The Acharavi Curator extends the community represented as Corfiots further into rural, coastal and mixed, and consider that today the community is culturally growing. It is an elderly community from one race/ethnicity nearing extinction. Now despite the presence of a mix of nationalities/races, there is still a lot to bond the community. Apart from the Sciclian community, the Farmacia Curator envisages a larger museum community which is a mixed and touristic community, culturally growing, balanced age-wise, and of mixed nationalities/races.

The Campailla and Murika Curator states that the Murika represents the wider collective context of the local community, especially that of the old town: Modica Alta. He also sees that all this leads to advantages and prospects which help the community and which

*sta contribuendo enormemente a valorizzare la parte alta della città'. Quindi in fondo è una prepista, che quindi un folando di aumento di presenze della presenza del turista a punto di vista che si muove nella comunità'. Un turista che intreccia e inevitabilmente mette i rapporti con agenzie esterne chiamasi negozi, chiamasi dolcerie, chiamasi prodotti alimentari, i supermarket, quindi è un volano, per come dire, a crescere il territorio.*³³⁴

In contrast, the Curator views the Campailla as a special interest museum which appeals mostly to professionals, medical doctors and students. Besides being well-known in the territory, it has no multiplier effect. This is partially blamed on authorities which did not valorise and enhance the small *Piazza* [square] in front: thereby confirming that the immediate context of a museum influences a museum's appeal and attraction. The comments of the Campailla and Bonelli Curators show that decisions taken at higher levels of authority may impact on the success and visitor volumes of a museum. The immediate context is a determinant in attracting or repelling visits. Collaboration between local authorities and museum curators is necessary as it is the curators who are the most knowledgeable of the context and how people react to it. Neglected contexts leave a negative impact, not only on a museum but also on its community and the local economy.

Curators were asked to mention the tools with which they make the public understand the represented community. The Tunnara Curator informs us that the museum has no tools, such as pamphlets, available with which to explain the represented tuna-catching community to the visitor. To attract visitors, the museum relies on earlier information sent to local councils and schools. However, the forthcoming transition to an interpretation centre now prevents the Curator from investing in such tools and material.

The Razzett Curator admits that it is his Assistant Curator, as a more up-to-date person on the agricultural community, who accompanies and guides visitors through the folklore exhibits and the venue. He explains that, since becoming a registered Voluntary Organisation and since the signing of an agreement with the

³³⁴ Translation: "is contributing enormously to enhancing the upper part of the city. So, basically it is a pre-runway, which is therefore a flurry of increase in presences of the presence of the tourist in a point of view that moves in the community. A tourist who intertwines and inevitably puts relationships with external agencies called shops, called sweets, called food products, supermarkets, so it is a driving force, in other words, to grow the territory."

Education Department, they no longer represent the Mosta community alone but the wider national community and its culture. He also explained that another mission of the museum is to be a tribute to artists both alive and deceased. The artistic community aspect of the museum is more observed in the personalities it presents to the visitor, in the activities it organises and promotes. This explains why the Razzett Curator considers the creation of a folklore micro museum as an added value. The Razzett Curators say that they rely on face-to-face communication with visitors. There is no information accompanying the folklore exhibits, and that leaves them no alternative, because, like the TaKola Curator, they believe that a knowledgeable explanation helps the visitor understand the museum.

The ŻabSanct Curator modestly asked his assistant Michael to reply as the Curator had neither origins nor residence at Żabbar. The Assistant Curator said that social media was an important tool through which people found it easier to contact the museum. For the same reason they removed the website. Although the theme of the museum revolves around the devotional, the displays go along with the development of the parish and its community. He observed that *‘bħala esebiti li jkollna u li kellna huma kollha relatati mal-mixja tal-Parroċċa.*³³⁵ The ŻabSanct Curator maintained that the museum offered other ways and services for understanding the community such as the provision of additional information, and the possibility of research through the museum’s library and parish archives. These include primary information and specialised publications on the formation of brotherhoods (*fratellanzi*) which served as the first guilds for different tradespersons, crafts persons and skills. Other informative publications relate about the museum, its collection and the community.

The OldPrison and GranCastello Curator states that owing to the small size of Gozo as an island, visitors are presented with the Gozitan community as a focus. However, the location of the museums and the Citadel are mostly connected with the immediate community of Rabat, known as Citta’ Victoria. An association of the museums, the Citadel and its suburb is easily made by whoever is guiding Gozitan and Maltese visitors around, but this connection is more difficult for foreign visitors to understand on their own. As observed, there is no explanation, information panel or

³³⁵ Translation: “as for the exhibits, they are related with the development of the parish.”

audio-visual which associates the two museums and their use to the community of the Citadel and its suburb, Rabat. It may therefore be taken for granted that, since the museums are State-owned, they are somewhat distant from references and associations of heritage to specific communities or localities. Taking such a stand may lead the particular curators, their museums and their national agency into conflict with the State, the State-promoted national imaginary as it threatens to fragment the imagined national identity; this arises because it opens a door for different communities to claim representation within the national museums, and fragment the nation-state and national identity imaginaries promoted at national museums. In such circumstances the role of the tour-guide (GSO) becomes more relevant to help visitors understand and associate the museum content and the community, both suburban and insular, even if the national remains central.

The above shows that the presentation of specific communities prevails in independent and private grassroots micro museums but much less so in State-owned micro museums. Curators at State-owned micro museums are bound by policies of the national agency, laws and regulations. The promotion of the homogeneous nation-state, as promoted by earlier colonial authorities, is still very much alive in national museums; and curators are expected to follow this agenda. It is through such practices that curators at national museums may feel at a disadvantage and bound as they cannot express specific community ties or different identities which emerge from such museums and collections. Alternatively, curators of independent and private grassroots micro museums may be regarded as much freer to represent specific communities, express community interpretations, define community identities and publicly present the differences or resemblances to the national found in State-museums. Despite this perception, curators at independent and private grassroots micro museums may also be subjected to certain restraints. Private micro museums are bound to observe the parent sponsor, such as the owner of the property and/or the collection, the legal regulatory entity, national laws and other commitments, amongst which are those related to national or regional (EU) funding. The benefits gained from certain private micro museums may be held as advantages when compared to the limitations faced by independent micro museums which have no access to national or regional funds. The study shows that independent grassroots micro museums are at a greater disadvantage than private micro museums when it comes to funds. However,

curators of independent micro museums have the advantage of being freer in their interpretation and presentation of exhibits, communities, identities and historic narratives.

The findings from this study contradict Livingstone's (2011) claim that non-public private museums have no 'concerns for the authenticity or cultural sensitivity of content presented.'³³⁶ Their credibility may however be higher as their interpretation and narratives, although at times in disagreement with what is presented at State or institutional museums, are based on the curators' own research, as well as published academic research and to original documents at national and institutional archives. Many of the narratives which they present often do not feature or are excluded at establishment museums. It is at this point that curators of independent grassroots micro museums, followed by those at private grassroots micro museum level, may arguably be considered at an advantage over curators of other private and State-owned micro museums. They are free to research, interpret their findings and present what they find to the public with less restrictions or censorship. Curators at private museums and mostly at State-owned micro museums must undergo the scrutiny of their parent organisation or institution, or the national agency established by central government respectively.

Communication media

The BistraCat Curator states that since the museum and its site are an integral part of Mosta village, the image that comes to visitors' minds is that of the famous large dome of Mosta's main parish church. Hence, the museum is committed to promote the idea that there are much more interesting things to see around the village than just the dome. Frequently, they find that even the villagers are unaware of the catacombs. The BistraCat Curator stresses the importance of raising awareness and increasing the residents' knowledge about what heritage exists in their localities. This matter was raised at every interview and observation as visitors sometimes exclaimed, even in Visitors' Books, that they were unaware of the museum's existence or heritage in their locality. The Maritime Curators inform that they use a flyer they prepared, the

³³⁶ Livingstone, 2011: 16.

information on social media pages and mostly the verbal narrative for the museum tour.

The Heraklion Curator describes the community to visitors by using ‘audio-visuals in the exhibition design for the selected objects/material.’ To describe and present the represented community to visitors and the public the Heraklion uses (a) authentic objects placed within their thematic context, (b) reproductions/models, (c) digital installations/multimedia, and (d) audio-visual material. The Acharavi Curators state that the media and museum tools (musealia) they use to describe the community to visitors are the same ones they use to describe the exhibits, i.e. ‘information labels in nine languages.’ They also point out that they are ‘trying at the time to add more such as Braille and Chinese.’ Other media they use are ‘books, music, new technologies such as the implementation of augmented reality, regular guiding hours, educational programs, flyers, participatory games’ and other items. The Farmacia Curator stated that they use their ‘*sito internet, social media, locandine,*’ [website, social media and posters], but above all they use the verbal explanations. This latter method is a choice of importance, likewise mentioned by the Curators of TaKola, BistraCat and Xarolla. However, the Xarolla Curator mentions that they plan to introduce a video which can help people with hearing disabilities to understand the windmill and its exhibits.

The Virgadavola Curator does not present any information labels or interpretative panels with the exhibits. He explains that the *carretto* has a license plate and other characteristics which can say it all. However, acknowledging that, as curator, he cannot keep all in his mind, the Virgadavola Curator notes that they have started to document all the exhibits as this was not possible earlier. The observation of the Virgadavola Curator calls upon authorities to help such micro museums to document their possessions and to hold a detailed inventory of such heritage. This is another matter for which curators of grassroots micro museums implicitly call for help, not only in Sicily but wherever they exist. Many of such collections may deteriorate and be lost completely if the museums in question do not own, or find, resources to conserve or restore their possessions. Once such heritage is lost, its loss is a loss for the whole of humanity, because, as the Donnafugata Curator remarks, ‘culture belongs to everyone without distinction’. The Škrip museum uses the guide and paintings to

describe the community to visitors and to the public. The use of paintings was a tool mentioned also by the GranCastello Curator, who used the same paintings which feature on a publication about Maltese folklore³³⁷ as visual aids at the museum.

Curators and Community: Inclusivity and Exclusivity

Curators were asked how they identified their represented community, and whom they included or excluded. The Razzett Curator states that with a varied community it is difficult to categorize who is in or out of the represented community. Similarly, it can be comprehended that museums which are open to a wider community than just a community of place, practice or interest, such as the Razzett and to a certain extent the Gozitan micro museums studied, may all be representative of the island's community. The ŻabSanct Curator states that they identify community members from the purpose for which they visit the museum. Some visit to identify relatives on photographs found at the museum. Others visit to see and show to other relatives and friends the Ex-Voto which their ancestors offered to Our Lady in the past. The BistraCat Curator was specific that even as a State museum it is targeting the local community and trying to be inclusive of them, as such a practice can help raise awareness of heritage at the same locality. She also mentions that the promotion of open days is a means of attracting those who do not normally visit museums. The Xarolla Curator maintains ensuring that the museum is inclusive of all villages and communities surrounding the locality of the windmill. Such a perspective helps the museum to instil ownership among more than the local community and be more inclusive.

The Maltese curators who were interviewed showed less specific attention to the matter of inclusivity, as opposed to the non-Maltese museum curators mention practices of inclusivity with some emphasis. The Farmacia Curator specifies that '*Noi non escludiamo mai nessuno, il nostro pubblico è variegato e non risponde a precise categorie.*'³³⁸ The Heraklion Curator asserts that the museum does not exclude anyone from its interpretive and narrative material about the Cretan community. The Acharavi

³³⁷ Lanfranco, 1983.

³³⁸ Translation: "We never exclude anyone, our audience is varied and does not respond to specific categories."

Curator claims that, even though ‘The community represented is very specific, Corfiots and their way of living in the past centuries,’ the museum tries to be as inclusive as possible.

As part of my curating and guiding I am trying to present all the parts of Corfiot history (nice and bad) but also trying to show the connections between Corfiots and others. Corfu has a multicultural history that is part of its persona and manifest through local dialect, customs, music, food, way of living, art, festivities, even sports.

The matter of inclusivity is a matter which the Acharavi Curator holds as an important factor for the role of the museum on Corfu’s multicultural history. The Curator believes that practices of inclusivity are best expressed by the curatorial practices and the narrative of the museum tour. All this implies that curators must be inclusive in the visual, in the verbal and in the symbolism presented at a museum. All three are intertwined in the displays, the narratives, interpretation and information presented to the public and the transmitted meanings and messages through personal contacts which the curator or other staff have with the visitor. An important factor of curatorial practices advocated among the private and independent micro museum curators is consistency in both verbal and non-verbal communication presented at the museum.

The Acharavi Curator makes the point that, with its wider community of Corfiots, the museum is inclusive of all the community of the island. From an internal perspective, the Curator argues that

Our museum is very specific about time and community, but also lets the differences to demonstrate the pluralism of that time. It is something that national or institutional museums do not follow. The management usually has as priority to promote a specific view of history/culture and it usually will not let room for dialogue.

This shows that curators want to move away from the exclusive homogeneous, formal history and culture presented at national and institutional museums; but in some cases, curators cannot decide alone and implement inclusive measures. Hierarchy, internal or external pressures and fears may inhibit their realisation. This further proves that curators at independent grassroots micro museums are in the best position to take measures of inclusivity of non-national identities and present them to the public as never encountered previously in national or institutional museums. Curators at independent grassroots micro museums are free from complex hierarchies, institutional pressures or fears of non-conformity, and mostly they make and

implement decisions on their own or within a very small group. They are also closer to the community and visitors, and can easily seize upon ideas and fill in gaps which visitors or the community, implicitly or explicitly, draw to their attention or about which they raise awareness. It is the lack of resources which mostly delay the revision, update or improvement of narratives and information panels and labels at independent micro museums.

The Farmacia Curator perceives no similarities or differences in the description and presentation of non-national communities in both his museum and national/institutional museums. The pharmacy theme may be a common reference to many communities at a time of need, and therefore on its own it is not a community-specific theme. However, the pharmacy and similar places, such as the small village shops, bars and service outlets, are implicitly social and cultural spaces which present similar and different roles and experiences to the community. They may not be so community-specific if looked at as a shop or an outlet from where people purchase items alone. Such spaces many times serve the community to talk about politics, matters of interest, the neighbourhood, to gossip, to congratulate each other or grieve together, to help each other and much more matters which are not specific to the function of the shop or outlet. Therefore, it is not the shop owner who promotes the shop as a community space, a cultural space or a social space, but the fact that people meet at the specific space for some time, which makes it a place for dialogue, exchange of experiences, salutations and more. The Farmacia seems to present the pharmacy as an object more than a community or a cultural and social space. The perspective therefore restricts the idea of the pharmacy and the addition of the community's perspective of the pharmacy may boost the image of the museum with both community and non-community visitors alike. While the pharmacy objects and furniture are detached from the visitor and the community, the addition of the role of the pharmacy space and place in view of communities may attract more interest and reflection about ways the Farmacia can be promoted. It may also extend the content for pedagogy outside the 'pharmacy' related sciences into social sciences and the humanities; and, indeed into traditional herbal medicine which is a rich tradition of community-based knowledge, not explored at the Farmacia museum.

The Acharavi Curator and the Gozitan museum Curators are all representative of non-national identities and communities as their islands are not the nation of which they form a part. While the Acharavi is a form of private museum, the Gozitan State museums act within the national agency and are accepted as such. Together with the BistraCat example it becomes apparent that the imaginary of the nation is fragile and unsustainable. Insularity from a mainland country, as for example in the instances of the museums at Ragusa (Sicily, Italy), Crete and Corfu (Greece), Mallorca (Spain) and the Brač and Murter (Croatia). The double insularity of the museums on Gozo, or of separate communities within an island state, implies different identities which are not represented in the traditional national museums but which seek representation in museums that are either situated within a locality or created by members of that community. The claims of the Gozitan State-museum Curators and the BistraCat Curator show evidence that even the national agency feels the importance of approaching non-national communities and that it somehow tries to include them and their identity at the museum. As explained earlier, the tools vary from interpretation panels, printed narratives, the guided tour narrative, information labels, and other musealia which relate with the community, and not the imaginary nation-state and its homogeneity.

Curators were also asked how the represented community was presented through the method they adopted in comparison with other communities. The Tunnara Curator sees no superiority or inferiority in the community which his museum represents. He maintains that the museum presents the community as any other community on the Maltese Islands, but which simultaneously identifies as a unique community in the north of the Island. The tuna-catching practice was characteristic of the north, but it was that of Għadira Bay (Mellieħa) that survived longest. Besides, even as a military battery it had a unique architecture and a triangular shape with a façade directly on the shoreline facing the sea and another facing landward. He believes that this was the only battery built so close to the sea and that it is the only one which through history served both military and fishing purposes.³³⁹ Its uniqueness

³³⁹ Author's note: Another battery which literally stands close to the water's edge is the Ferretti Battery at Birżebbuġa: a village in the south of Malta.

is in the experiences and history which make the represented community identify itself as singular.

The ŽabSanct Curator maintains that the museum has no influence on community matters, but that they try to keep it as inclusive as possible. He argues that the role of curators on community matters at the museum depends on the degree of involvement of volunteers and the attitude which parish priests may take vis-a-vis the museum. The Curator adds that the team of volunteers is always available to support where necessary or when asked by the parish priest. The ŽabSanct Curator and his Assistant add that while conducting the museum tour they try to be fair and indiscriminatory, particularly when speaking about people, historic events and other matters raised by the displays and the community represented. They stress that certain conflicts which existed in the past must be presented objectively, as nothing can change history. The Curator and his Assistant maintain that as curators, they must behave and be ethical when they guide visitors since their behaviour mirrors both the museum and the represented community. They emphasize that curators must be conscientious and cautious on matters sensitive to a community. Curators must also be aware of which exhibits carry significance to the people on the street. Although the locals are considered as a small part of their visitor demographic, the Curator gives importance to the interpretation and perceptions of ‘the people in the street.’ The ŽabSanct Curator and his Assistant claim that the community prioritizes the Ex-Votos and the *kartapestatur*: a papiermache moulding machine made from wood. The Maritime Curators maintain that, despite the maritime theme, the museum is representative of the Nadur community both through its founder and through the numerous exhibits donated by the villagers. However, through the maritime perspective they see a much larger audience dispersed around the globe.

The Curators of the Heraklion, Acharavi and Farmacia claim that their museums present the community as one which has a balance of similarities and differences with other communities on the island or country. The Heraklion Curator expresses no opinion on whether the method used to describe the represented community presents the community as superior, equal or inferior to other communities. Both the Acharavi and the Farmacia Curators agree that the method used to describe the represented community presents the community as equal to other

communities. However, the Heraklion and Acharavi Curators state that the method applied to describe the community shows differences existing within the same community, a difference which the Farmacia Curator did not envisage at his museum. The Heraklion Curator went further to explain that such intra-community differences are described after ‘in-depth scientific [or] interdisciplinary research and utilization of unknown - to lesser known - sources.’ The Heraklion Curator insists that this is important as the curator has the responsibility to present to the public ‘valid documentation not clichés of touristic or nationalistic shades.’ The Acharavi Curator sees that the differences identified in the description of the community are all about enhancing the ‘connection and pluralism’ of the same community. The observation of the Heraklion Curator is important also if a curator wishes to place the museum as a reliable source of reference and pedagogy, and as a tool for inter-communal cooperation.

The SantLluc Curator believes that his museum presents the represented Mallorcan community as a community which mostly resembles other communities on the same island and country. The Škrip presents its community as a community that has a balance between similarities and differences with other communities on both island and the country, and that, overall, it is equal to other communities. Nonetheless, it shows differences existing within the same community and compares it to other ways of survival in the past: a diversity dependent on the resources available or the means of earning a living on an island. The interpretation and description of the community in the museum are built on dialogue and have in common the objective of promoting peace among different people.

The above shows that curators at grassroots micro museums tend to put their sociomuseological considerations into practice. By taking a bottom-up approach they recognise the identities of the communities they represent and the communities around them, and give them place within the museum as communities distinct and different from the national homogeneous identity. Although curators tend not to use or emphasize differences which divide a community from the national, they promote the importance of the community and its distinctiveness as an important and indispensable factor contributing to national image and identity. However, curators also present the image of their community as a fluid community which is not restrained by geographic,

cultural or social boundaries. As most scholars of Sociomuseology maintain, these grassroots micro museums adjust to different conditions and circumstances, and act and respond to the needs and realities of local communities in contemporary society in an attempt to transform society around them, bring members of the community together, and also present musealia in order to prompt social action.³⁴⁰ As Stoffel and Victor (2016) maintain, curators of grassroots micro museums envision heritage as a means for inclusivity and negotiation with the community, an opening to innovation and diversity of opinion and culture, and to improve the museum's role in the context.³⁴¹ Curators, therefore have the ability to determine the course of their museums and by taking sociomuseological approaches and applying practices of inclusion, they allow space and give place to communities they interpret and represent.

The way a curator interprets the represented community may not be equally shared or accepted by the same community, visitors, the public or other communities. Curators were asked for their reactions regarding such negative responses. The Tunnara Curator states that visitors' reactions are mostly ones of satisfaction and reveal that the visit taught them many new things. The ŽabSanct Curators despite the villagers' awareness about the museum, complain that only a few appreciate the existence of a museum in their locality. They only show appreciation of it, and pride, when they speak to others about their locality. However, the same complaint recurs among all curators of public, private and independent micro museums. As the ŽabSanct Curator adds, people tend to appreciate things only when they become derelict or lost. The ŽabSanct Curator argues that there were many parish churches which attempted to establish a museum but very few succeeded. Only a couple of them managed to recruit sufficient volunteers to manage it and keep it on a visiting schedule all year round. Another complaint expressed was that some members of the clergy do not appreciate the presence of a museum and therefore they see museums as a luxury and prefer to spend on liturgical matters, vestments and other paraphernalia. The ŽabSanct Curator notes that through the comments left on the Visitors' Book, people

³⁴⁰ Stoffel and Victor, 2016: 412.
Assunção and Primo, 2010.
Moutinho, 1993: 5.
Dos Santos, 2013: 5-9.
Moutinho, 2010: 27.
Moutinho, 2016: 1-3.

³⁴¹ Stoffel and Victor, 2016: 412.

show appreciation for the work done, the volunteering efforts and the tour round the museum.

The Maritime Curator, Kerry, underlines the point that they kept the interpretation of the museum as Kelinu Grima left it: 'The collection is in no sequence, no logical division of what goes where, and there is nothing wrong with it as when it is put together it tells something and visitors like it.' Although the parish priest argues that they could plan 'to do something for the younger generation, something which is more pedagogical and educational. Like we will start from ancient times and going up to modern technology. The types of maritime activity from each era,' overall, the idea is not to change what Kelinu did and not to go to the chronological type of displays found in most traditional museums. A comment from a visiting English couple with years of service with the Royal Navy was that

it's good to have [things] in this order. I know my Navy stuff and I have been looking for so and so and got mixed up, I'm going there and now I am going where? I can go from one corner to another. This makes it more interesting for me rather than going round a boring museum. Leave it the way it is!

Curators express their own way of curatorship and set up displays with an objective they know of and wish to attain. Some curators may go further than the traditional curator and ask themselves 'Why should a curator follow the ways and practices of other museum curators?' Unbound as they are, they do their utmost to be innovative and original. They argue that once they copy, they become part of the usual museum curatorial model that is restricted to the traditional curatorial practices and enslaved to protocols and formalities. The interpretation at the Maritime was from a person inclined to collect maritime souvenirs and thus was a personal collection free from any conventions imposed from above. Since museums are perceived to address the public, the personal collection and the unconventional seem to confuse the understanding of a museum and the curator who takes care of it all. As emerged from the interviews, the curators of private and independent grassroots micro museums take more and very different roles under their curatorial umbrella. These are factors which could give curators of private and independent grassroots micro museums a different perspective of what makes a museum and a collection of exhibits. The way private and independent museum curators view themselves and their museums is completely

different from the way State and establishment museum curators see things. Even if they agree on certain matters, such as problems and challenges, each curator's interpretation may be different from those of anyone else. It is not easy therefore to decide on such interpretational matters, since providing a meaning (interpretation) depends on preferences, knowledge background, experiences, the living environment, the context and so much more.

The Heraklion Curator argues that 'apart from a few isolated cases, there is a general acceptance of the way the collections are presented' at the museum. Also, the Acharavi Curator says that

in all those years that the museum has been running, we had good/favourable feedback from locals, visitors, people that have contributed with donations of objects/artefacts, universities, researchers, schools, private sector and others.

Creating the community imaginary or identity in a museum may also be exclusive and divisive. Some may feel that they do not fit in; or given that society is dynamic and people change, they may feel that they do not belong within the museum's community imaginary and identity.³⁴² As curators aim to be as inclusive as possible, in their presented narratives, the sources upon which they construct the historic narrative about the community become of great importance. Curators were therefore asked to describe such sources.

Sources of information

The Tunnara Curator claims that sources are balanced between the written (which is scarce) and earlier recorded oral history narrated by people who formed part of the tuna-catching team. He says that, as curator and volunteers, none of them knew anything about the tuna-catching practices, the three types of netting used, the types of anchors used, and the size of the *xieru*: a boat used for the practice.³⁴³ This therefore

³⁴² Howard, Peter. 2016. The Routledge Research Companion to Heritage and Identity, Routledge: 419-420, 423.

Stashkevich, 2015: 14.

Macdonald, 2012: 276.

³⁴³ The term *Xieru* is derived from the Sicilian *Muciara del Rais*, a 9 metre long boat, it was in charge of upwind operations. The armament consisted of six oars, eight *scarmi* (useful to stop the oars held in the strops and then be able to manoeuvre them even while sitting at the benches), two long poles to lower the "*summu*" (surface cables to which the net is attached; it is kept afloat by the floats) during the movements, and the "*napi*" (ropes that served to open and close the doors of the

forces the museum to stand by old documentation and oral recollections recorded since 1993.³⁴⁴

The Razzett Curator states that they depend on previous research. Since the venue was a noble family's farmhouse, they focus more on information and photographs of the Mallia Tabone family, on publications about Maltese nobility, and how the family came in touch with the village: that is, what mostly connects the venue to the Mosta community. It is the folklore collection which tells us about the community; but at the time of research the curators had provided no information labels or interpretation panels. The only display which carried a type of biography was the permanent exhibition of distinct personalities and artists connected to the village.

Publications, reports, pastoral visits, archives and reliable documents were indicated as sources by the ŻabSanct Curators to acquire knowledge about the exhibits. Their own interpretation was added only where the Curators met with no documented information concerning the displayed exhibit. The ŻabSanct Curator stated that sometimes, after adding an information label, they manage to discover something new or incorrect. Correcting or updating information at a museum is an important matter, explained the ŻabSanct Curator, as research is always disclosing new material and knowledge earlier unavailable. When speaking about research and the need to update one's self, the ŻabSanct Curator remarks that

*Dawn kollha jieħdu siegħat. Dan trid tkun tagħmlu x-xogħol, u jsir bil-qalb. Kieku x-xogħol qiegħed nithallas tiegħu ma naħsibx li nkun daqshekk dedikat.*³⁴⁵

The voluntary contributions of curators and volunteers at private and independent grassroots micro museums are mostly not acknowledged by people and institutions such as the State. Their voluntary work gets them to undertake a lot of research which is rarely taken up by curators at State museums since the national agency runs its own research programme. The experiences and knowledge gained by

trap). This small boat was the one from which the Rais, during the slaughter, gave orders to the tonnaroti.

³⁴⁴ Bonanno, 2008: 7 (3.4).

³⁴⁵ Translation: "All this takes hours. This type of work must be done and completed with love. Otherwise if I were paid for such a work probably, I would not be so dedicated."

curators of private and independent grassroots micro museums are however an important and rare pedagogic resource with which to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge. Activities organised by museums like the ŻabSanct and Razzett are good examples of how such museums and their curators become pedagogic resources for the community and the public.

The BistraCat Curator accentuates the point that people have their own definition of working at a museum. Most ignore that there are many specialisations involved. She observes that State curators cannot do whatever they want, ‘not even hammer a nail on the wall.’ Although the perception of State-museum curators may be that curators at private and independent museums do whatever they wish, actually these consult a great deal with colleagues and volunteers, with external and internal specialists, with scholars with whom they may be in contact, and carry out a lot of research in published studies. Curators at private and independent micro museums must multitask as they cannot rely on the provision of expertise or other support which State-museum curators may have. Yet still there are ethics, values and various factors to adhere to and contemplate before presenting information, narratives or interpretation about a community to the public. A difference which curators at private and independent micro museums frequently display is that they must shoulder responsibility alone, dare and risk. The BistraCat Curator adds that at State-museums, curators and researchers conduct an integral part of the research at archives. She informs us that in any project at museums, the agency involves other teams and experts, such as restorers, architects, a team of scientists, someone for the research and printing of informative media and accessibility. She also mentions the importance of choosing the right text font which is easily and clearly legible by all, as it forms part of the display and interpretation. In contrast, at independent and private micro museums all such roles and responsibilities are carried by the curator alone or in collaboration with some family members or volunteers respectively: not excluding that some may seek expert consultation or help. The hardest role, in any case, remains that of the independent micro museum curator whose human resources are very limited even when compared to those at private micro museums.

The Xarolla Curator tells us that the source of reference was his predecessor George Sammut, who both as a curator and as a miller from a family of millers could

provide information accumulated through generations who knew the work inside out. The SantLluc Curator informs us that the sources upon which he constructs the historic narrative about the community are '*investigación, excavaciones, donaciones, referencias orales y escritas*' [research, excavations, donations, oral and written references]. The Škrip owner constructs the historic narrative about the community on research and oral lore. The Betina Curators state that the sources upon which they construct the historic narrative about the community represented are mainly 'storytelling from the living members of the community, research, archive photos and documents.' Despite stating the importance of oral history, no museum curator stated that he or she was recording, transcribing and archiving such information. Micro museums may not afford space but they may collaborate with libraries, universities, archives or other museums to safely deposit such records safely.

National museum curators are privileged due to the primary sources owned and accessible to the State and the national agency. The BistraCat Curator asserts that the national agency is very fortunate to have so much original information available such as personal diaries and sketchbooks of Maltese historians and archaeologists like Sir Temi Zammit to include in the research. She claims that the national agency would always focus on Maltese history and then make comparisons with other European contexts as a second step. These comments confirm the homogeneous focus of the national agency and the ownership of original documents about history and archaeological remains. Other advantages mentioned were the agency's access to the latest academic publications, theses and research papers, and direct involvement in archaeological digs on land and sea in the Maltese archipelago. While this gives national museums a huge advantage over private and independent micro museums, the ownership of such documents may at times be a deterrent for further research and innovative approaches. While curators of national micro museums find most of the research done for them by the different teams of the national agency, curators at private and independent micro museums must carry out all the research themselves or within the limited team members and active volunteers.

Reliance on sources of information such as those mentioned by the BistraCat Curator can however also be biased, exclusive or at times misinterpreted, the reason being that historiography was many times sponsored and sanitized. Curators of private

and independent micro museums may not have an equal access to resources or no resources available to keep in touch with the latest discoveries and published scholarly studies. Nonetheless some curators, staff or volunteers may even be researchers and scholars in areas useful to the museum. Although curators at private and independent micro museums may not possess tertiary qualifications in subjects related to museums, most of the curators met and their team members were far from being amateurish. Curators at State-owned micro museums are enthusiastic about their museums and displays, and went out of their way to offer the best service possible to their public. Yet, the hierarchical and bureaucratic system inherited from the colonial past may hinder their initiative and vision of the micro museum. Curators at independent and private micro museums have less internal hierarchical and bureaucratic stumbling blocks to overcome, but they still seek compromise and approval from the proprietor/s of the venue who at times may even be the owner/s of the collection. Most of the participant curators make the point that at independent and private micro museums there is always a formal or an informal discussion taking place among the volunteers prior to any decision. At private micro museums decisions take on a more formal approach as the managing committee or trusted persons require clearance from the owner or entity in charge of the museum and its collection. This means that private micro museums have a few differences in their administration models from the independent micro museums, since they depend on the ownership of the venue and/or the collection.

The micro museums studied show that the curator has the strongest say and decision-making power at an independent micro museum. This is possible because they are administered and managed by an individual or close family members and as their collections and venue are owned by the same curator alone or the family. Nevertheless, these circumstances present risks. Individual ownership may cause the museum to end up inherited by family members or relatives who do not care about the collection or the continuation of the museum activity, or in the case of no heirs the museum and its collection are absorbed by the State as government property: such as happened at the TaKola and the Xarolla. The risk of such collections ending up within the control of the State may not present a happy situation as most of the collections found at grassroots collections may, as O'Hare (2015) hints, not be objects which

qualify for display at State-owned museums.³⁴⁶ The problem with State-owned museums may be space, theme and priorities of the museum in question, and that would lead most of the collection to be simply deposited in storage places and no accessibility allowed at all. It is therefore not recommended that independent micro museums end up in the ownership of the State, since communities will then become deprived of exhibits which are dear to them (though not to the general public, according to the expectations of State-museums).

As curators inform us, they give importance to oral history as a source of information, even if formal and academic circles may not always give the same weight and validity to such a source. An example of a specific event involving a local community (Mosta) and capturing oral history and personal experience was that which the BistraCat organised and called ‘*Niftakar Ta’ Bistra*’ (Remembering Ta’ Bistra’).³⁴⁷ The Curator argues that

*L-ideja hi kif il-Mostin b’mod partikolari jiftakru dan is-sit għax dan ovvjament għadda minn żminijiet u tibdil fih. L-esperjenza tagħhom mhux neċessarjament storiċi jew li ltaqgħu ma’ xi artifatt, imma niftakru hawnhekk għelieqi, konna nilgħabu, konna nieħdu gost, affarijiet hekk biex aħna jkollna viżjoni, stampa holistika ta’ dawn in-nies. Għax aħna bħala ideja, storja, stampa storika ċara, imma ta’ dawn in-nies li forsi jaħsbu li mhux daqshekk importanti li fil-verita’ huma; aħna tinteressana immens. Dan l-event ‘Niftakar Ta’ Bistra’ dan hu l-għan tagħna li nagħmlu memory capture, data capture ta’ dawn in-nies fejn inkellmuhom u huma jaqsmu magħna l-esperjenzi tagħhom li kellhom hawnhekk. Hi x’inh. B’dak il-mod nagħmluh aktar relevanti għall-komunita’.*³⁴⁸

The reasons given by the BistraCat Curator show that the national agency targets the local community when it needs information which cannot be found elsewhere. By giving value to the oral history of a local community, the national agency shows that communities are actually relevant not only as promoters of the museum but also as

³⁴⁶ O’Hare, 2015.

³⁴⁷ Heritage Malta, *Niftakar Ta’ Bistra*, 2019.

³⁴⁸ Translation: “The idea behind the event is to capture how the Mosta community remembers this site as obviously it went through different ages and changes. The community’s experience is not necessarily historic or based on artifacts, but we remember here the fields where we used to play here and recreate ourselves. Things like these help us visualise and give a holistic picture of these people. Because we have a clear idea of the history and historic context, but we do not have a clear picture of these people which visitors may not believe were important but who for us are hugely significant. With this event ‘*Niftakar Ta’ Bistra*’ our objective is to capture the memory and data of these people where we can talk to them and they share with us the experiences they had over there. Whatever that is. In that manner we make the community more relevant.”

direct contributors to knowledge and information absent from the usual sources of reference: as historiographies and publications normally used.

Curators identify different things and factors which could help the museum bring changes within the community they represent. The Heraklion Curator argues that a ‘combination of funding and brilliant ideas’ was the key factor to help the museum bring changes within the community. The Acharavi Curator explains that they

are trying, to make our little place known to the rest of Greece by participating in conferences, and also to make partnerships with museums and artists from all over the globe. I believe that our love and hard work if it will be combined with contributors and more local engagement, it will be fruitful.

The Farmacia Curator argues that the most significant factor was ‘*La volontà nostra e della comunità di trovare dei momenti di interesse comune.*’³⁴⁹ The Italafrica Curator believes that a major increase in visitors can help the museum. He claims that if the media speaks more of the museum, it will help promote the museum and could generate more interest and increase visits.

Shared imaginaries: community and museum

Curators were asked to identify which imaginaries are pooled and shared collectively by the represented community and consequently by the museum. The Tunnara Curator believes that the community is almost extinct and that the museum has failed to gain all the information such as the imaginary they had of the practice and the sea. Certainly, it was a means of livelihood, and the seasonality of the practice would demand that they spent the rest of their year on other means of livelihood. The Maritime Curators insist that the imaginary projected by their museum is absolutely maritime.

The Heraklion Curator reminds us that

The island of Crete has a multicultural history and we try our best to present all the population groups with their joint or different set of values and symbols.

This takes place, despite the collective imaginaries shared among the community represented and acknowledged by the museum. The Acharavi Curator states that through the museum they try to share an ‘ethical code, values like hospitality, hard

³⁴⁹ Translation: “Our willingness and that of the community to find moments of common interest.”

work, giving, share, symbols for freedom, unity, roots, self-awareness, religion, vocabulary, and customs among others.’ The SantLluc Curator feels that the collective imaginaries shared among the Mallorcan community represented by the museum are the ‘*lengua (catalán-mallorquín), cultura, vestuario, arte (pintura, escultura, mobiliario), religión, artesanía, y historia.*’³⁵⁰ The Škrip Curator maintains that the collective imaginaries shared by the community represented are those of a Mediterranean culture which follows a Mediterranean diet and where olive oil is a significant ingredient.

Curators and visitors: the museum tour narrative

Curators were asked whether the content of the museum tour narrative about the community, if available, changes according to the type of audience or visitors being guided, and whether the narrative changes from that told to visitors from the community to visitors external to the community. The Tunnara Curator emphasizes that the tour narrative does not change according to the visitor, because the Curator needs only to describe the objects displayed, practices and the history of tuna-catching without running into unnecessary details.

The Heraklion and Acharavi Curators state that the description of the community and the narrative about it do not change according to audience or whether visitors come from the community or not. The Farmacia Curator tells us that only a few changes take place in the description of the community and the narrative about the museum, irrespective of the audience or their connections to the community. Likewise, the Škrip owner maintains that only a few of the narratives about the community change according to whether visitors are from the community or are external to it. The SantLluc Curator states that much, though not all, of the description about the community and the associated narrative changes when he guides visitors around the museum. However, it changes totally with visitors from the community and those who are alien to it. The Razzett, Xarolla and ŽabSanct Curators inform us that the tour narrative changes according to the audience. The Razzett Curator observes that, when visitors are emigrants one must go into some detail about the

³⁵⁰ Translation: “language (Catalan-Mallorcan), culture, attire, art (painting, sculpture, furniture), religion, crafts, and history.”

museum but then continue with the exhibits which then awaken old memories. The Razzett Curator points out that if the audience is made up of children, the narrative changes as children are mostly new to the exhibits and cannot bring many memories to bear. The Xarolla Curator argues that if the audience is composed of children the type of vocabulary and jargon used would also have to change. More information and more details are provided when the audience is composed of adults, as the perception is that adult minds can process and hold more information.

The ŽabSanct Curators state that the essential content of the tour narrative remains unchanged, but what matters most to the visitor from Žabbar is what happened to persons from Žabbar. The Vulcan accident exhibits, which have nothing to do with the main theme of the museum, are an example. The presence of several objects reminding visitors of the accident and its victims have become a most sought-after attraction to locals, relatives of the crew victims, and other servicemen who somehow were connected. This is an example where the community forced the museum to include an object which they valued as a mnemonic of a dark event in the history of the community. Although the Curators see no correlation to the theme of the museum, the community thinks otherwise and wants it to be displayed prominently. It has almost become an object of pilgrimage or a shrine as it is not only the people of Žabbar who ask to visit it, but also many relatives of the British crew, ex-servicemen or people who knew them while serving at the airfield and persons involved in the aftermath of the accident. The Vulcan objects related to the accident ended up being a place where to lay flowers, say prayers and even have wedding rings blessed. However, as the Assistant Curator remarked, some come for curiosity. This is where the grassroots micro museum comes close to what Samuel (2012) calls a *miniature historical shrine*³⁵¹ as the community turns the displayed into a memorial mostly of dark experiences which can stir emotions. The ŽabSanct Curator notes that a difference in the narrative and information given about the community occurs when the visitor is from the same village or has a deep knowledge of the village and its community. Visitors from the community are more acquainted with the place and therefore there is no need for repetition.

³⁵¹ Samuel, 2012: 27.

Curators and negotiation

Curators were requested to identify who is involved in the process of interpretation and presentation of the community at the museum. The ŻabSanct Curator maintains that in the process of interpretation and presentation of the community to the public ‘*Ikun hemm diskussjoni.*’ (discussion takes place). His Assistant tells us that ‘*Kwalunkwe riċerka jien u l-Kuratur l-iktar li nagħmluha. Jien qiegħed nieħu wkoll ħsieb l-arkivju parrokkjali, fejn hemm għandi dokumenti antiki,*’³⁵² which are a good source of information about the community in the past. Parish archives are an important source, as they provide demographic information, as well as details which drop hints about each family, their relationships, situations and circumstances within the parish boundaries, even if written from a spiritual viewpoint.

The SantLluc and the Betina Curators state that in the construction and description of the historic narrative about the community, they involve various experts and professional people. In contrast the Škrip Curator indicates that the only participant in such an exercise is that provided by a national source: the conservators from the Ministry of Culture. Although the practice of the Škrip museum might appear insignificant when compared to the list of participant experts and professionals engaged with other museums, it shows cooperation between the grassroots micro museum and a national authority. State-owned micro museums such as the TaKola, OldPrison and GranCastello have all indicated that, even if the national perspective is taken, discussions play an important part when it comes to interpretation and presentation.

Exhibits interpretation

Curators were asked to inform the researcher regarding how many of their staff members or volunteers were involved in the interpretation and presentation of the displayed exhibits. Under shared circumstances where the Curator is the only person caring for the museum, the Curator of the Tunnara informs us that he decides on his own. The Razzett Curator states that whenever there is something to be done at the museum there are always seven or eight persons involved. The ŻabSanct Curator,

³⁵² Translation: “Any research is mostly carried out by me and the Curator. I am also taking care of the parish archives where I have old documents.”

despite having a committee, claimed that such decisions fall on three persons who have an idea of museology. The Heraklion Curator notes that five of the twenty salaried staff are involved in the process concerning the interpretation and presentation of the objects exhibited and the community. The Acharavi museum has two out of the three persons running the museum involved in the interpretation and presentation of the displayed object. The Farmacia entrusts interpretation and presentation to the fifteen persons running the cultural association: a practice which resembles that of the Maltese State micro museums which rely and cooperate with internal resources provided by the national agency.

Curators were then asked about the degree of negotiation they allow with the community in the preparation of interpretation about the same community at the museum. The Tunnara Curator tells us that, given the shortage of sources from the community, the micro museum negotiates with visitors from outside the community, with academics, scholars and researchers from other European countries, University students studying related subjects, second and third generation descendants and relatives of those who formed part of the tuna-catching community. Any missing information, according to the Curator, was compiled from other tuna-catching communities and museums in nearby Sicily. The only primary source of reference alive at the time of writing (24 May 2020) about the community is a ninety-two-year-old.

The Razzett Curator maintains that they do negotiate with colleagues and volunteers at the museum. He observes that this happens frequently, even if exhibits have no accompanying information labels or interpretation panels. He argues that it is important that the curator and his colleagues agree on the information they provide, especially when and where visitors are concerned, or it will confuse matters and show a lack of professionalism. The Razzett Curator states that they cannot negotiate with the community because there is no actual specific community at all. He informs us that sometimes they consult and negotiate with professionals and academics about exhibits and interpretation, even if locals as donors are not excluded.

The ŻabSanct Curator admits that when it comes to describe to the community details of what existed in the past in the village, the curator has no other option but to

rely on the information and memory of the elderly. No-one can provide better information than they do on the houses, architecture, site toponyms, ancient remains, megaliths and other remains which have vanished. However, he added, there is an amount of research which may be conducted, but finding evidence is not guaranteed. The involvement of the local community is, according to the Curator of the State-owned OldPrison and GranCastello micro museums, a process which takes place during the research phase. He describes the process which can lead to the research objective as *contextual research through dialogue and communication* with the relevant persons who have lived through or experienced the age or practice.

The ŽabSanct Curator confirms that he negotiates with the committee and competent volunteers. He admits that it is not easy to decide what goes on display and what information should accompany the exhibits. People donate various things, but the Curator argues that a new arrival cannot be given priority or more importance than the other exhibits just because it is a recent acquisition. He acknowledges that objects donated have value and one must not discriminate on their cultural or artistic value there and then. Lots of thinking and evaluation must be conducted prior to exhibiting an object, publishing information about it, or giving an interpretation of it or the community represented or connected to it. The ŽabSanct Curator remarks that this is frequent with paintings donated to the museum. The Curator warns that the temptation is to give it more importance than the seventeenth century fresco and display it prominently. Some donated objects may at first appear unattractive, but it is their social and cultural value that the museum tries to promote and convey to the visitor. The ŽabSanct Curator warns that a museum may become like an antiques shop crowded with a multitude of items discarded or set aside by the people. The observations made by the ŽabSanct Curator, like the Xarolla Curator, indicate that curators must be selective in what they accept in their collection and what they put on display. Even if something is accepted as a donation, it does not mean that the object should at once become an exhibit. Another observation that the ŽabSanct Curator makes is that curators must explain to the donor that acceptance does not mean that the object will automatically be going on display. Even so, certain objects may find themselves on display when a museum holds a thematic exhibition. Thematic exhibitions may be temporary, but they allow objects which are normally held in a dark storeroom to come out on display. The ŽabSanct Curator declares that the way

of displaying objects is also another matter which offers challenges and demands negotiation. He observes that some people may think that a museum is a space where to hoard objects as much as possible in showcases, on walls, on floors, or hanging from the ceiling. He warns that displays must be easy to see and be relaxing on the eye; not giving a sense of confusion. The ŻabSanct Curator notes that he and his colleagues make a point of visiting various exhibitions held around Malta to learn from them. They also participate with other museums at collective temporary exhibitions by lending some exhibits from the ŻabSanct.

The ŻabSanct Curator notes that knowledge found at museums does not belong to the curator or the volunteers alone. It is knowledge which must be made available and shared. He argues that curators of private and independent micro museums would not have engaged in such projects if their initiative was not meant to be shared with the public and have a didactic purpose. According to the ŻabSanct Curator, the curator is not only a curator of exhibits but also of knowledge and wisdom from the community, and which consequently must be shared with younger generations. This shows that, as much as it is the right of the curator to accumulate knowledge for the museum, it is likewise the curator's duty to transmit that knowledge to the visitor and the community by means of the museum and its pedagogic tools.

The ŻabSanct Curator informed us on the wealth of oral history and wisdom which illiterate persons and people with no schooling may bring to the museum or contribute to knowledge where the written sources have not been found or do not exist. Such sources may not be museum visitors but found in the community itself, which curators and researchers must seek, identify and record. The Assistant Curator, Michael is of the opinion that while sometimes and on certain matters one must fully rely on the knowledge of such people, primarily it is very necessary to be objective. Persons from the community who may not be museum visitors may still be important sources for building knowledge and information at a museum. Oral history is an important source since much of the oral lore told by communities is fondly cherished. It is the responsibility of the curator to analyse and sustain by evidence, if possible. However, in such cases research cannot rely on the written document alone but on various sources and even multidisciplinary ones. In the provision of information labels, narratives and interpretation texts, curators need the input of professionals,

academics and scholars, as much as they need the contribution from the community and visitors. Curators cannot wait for such sources to go to the museum but often they must go and look for them themselves. Despite all they can get from such sources, curators must seek the objectives of each scholarly study or oral lore, and where possible research themselves to confirm the veracity of such claims and conclusions. These steps can help curators produce more authentic information and an academically acceptable narrative, even if it may not be easily accepted by the community. Without compromising the trustworthiness of the content and the conclusions drawn, the curator has the responsibility to be true to the objectives of the museum as a pedagogic tool. What can be sustained as authentic and what is not yet evidenced for must be made clear to the visitor. Such a stand can increase the visitor's trust in the museum. It would also contribute to the community's self-esteem and pride in the museum representing them, their identity and their culture.

The Xarolla Curator argues that there is no dialogue or interaction with the community or any group when preparing information or interpretation of either the exhibits or the community. He states that all, including research, is normally done by the curator, which at the Xarolla was conducted entirely by the late George Sammut himself. If there is anything new, that is left for the present Curators; while translations and design of information panels are assigned to third parties by the Local Council. The Xarolla Curator observes that negotiation happens mostly among the Curators engaged by the museum and the Councillor in charge. As the information labels and interpretation panels were already in place at the time of the former curator, the present Curators negotiate and discuss where it comes to different matters such as the treatment and restoration of the wooden parts of the windmill, the choice of what else could go on display, what should be accepted from donors, and what goes to the display or to the storeroom and similar matters.

The Italafrica Curator states that when it comes to the interpretation and information provided at the museum, he is the sole person responsible and therefore he must provide the information, all documentation, all illustrations and all the museal structure. The Škrip Curator declares that negotiation takes place 'many times' with the community and visitors from the community when it needs to prepare a description of the community or of objects displayed at the museum. Likewise, negotiation with

visitors from outside the community about the description of objects displayed at the museums happens ‘many times’ at the Škrip museum. Another type of negotiation which occurs ‘many times’ at this same museum is with staff. Internal negotiation happens in the preparation of descriptions about the community and the exhibits. Another type of negotiation which ‘always’ takes place at the Škrip museum is negotiation with professionals, academics and experts in the field of museums and related themes.

The Heraklion and Farmacia Curators state that they ‘normally’ negotiate with staff (volunteers or not) and the community represented whenever they need to prepare a description of the community or of objects displayed at the museum. The Heraklion Curator states that frequently they negotiate the description of exhibits and the community with professionals, academics and/or experts in museum studies, even if their museum is mainly composed of such experts and academics. The Acharavi Curator tells us that they always negotiate with the community for the same reasons. Likewise, they always negotiate with professionals, academics and experts in museum studies when preparing the description of objects and the community. For the Farmacia Curator, it was normal practice to consult with professionals, academics and experts in museum studies when preparing the description of objects and the community.

The Italafrica Curator confirms that he and the administrative staff take note of the comments left on the Visitors’ Book. Visitor comments are sometimes a valid tool for curators, as visitors provide opinions and ideas for improvement, mention what exhibits they like most, what impressed them, what emotions and reactions they have to the museum, its displays and other factors which they bring to the visitor’s mind. However, observation of Visitors’ Books at a few museums shows that not all comments left by visitors can be illuminating. Most are just expressions of gratitude to the accompanying or guiding person, the curator or just saying a word of appreciation for the project and nothing else. There are very few comments which can be considered as very helpful for improvement or innovation. Many entries show the name and provenance of the visitor and a simple phrase like ‘Well done!’, ‘Liked it!’ or ‘Great collection.’ Visitors’ Books, where available, were more helpful to trace the provenance of visitors than anything else.

The Heraklion Curator states that the final decision on what description of the represented community is presented to visitors at the museum and by virtue of its media (*ex. printed, audio-visual or verbal*), is dependent on the members of the Museum's Board, mainly the President. The Acharavi Curator explains that the final decision on what description of the represented community is presented, is a decision which belongs to the company and especially to the founders. Even as a company the Acharavi museum regards the word of the founder very highly. The Farmacia and Bonelli Curator informs us that the final decision about the description of the community to visitors, *'la prende insieme preventivamente l'assemblea dei soci dell'associazione.'*³⁵³ The Campailla and Murika Curator states that the interpretation is not explicitly provided by the museum and its Curator. He maintains that since the museums rely on an interactive visit between the guide, who can be the curator, and the visitor, the interpretation and information on objects, displays and the community are spontaneous in both museums. The interpretation and information emerge naturally as the visitor poses questions about whatever is in the museum and outside as community, society, history, churches, science, medicine, treatment cycle, hospitalization, and anything about the territory among other things. The Škrip owner states that the final decision on what description of the represented community is presented to visitors and through the media, in any form, is taken by himself and his wife. The Betina Curators say that the final decision on what description of the represented community is presented to visitors and through the media, in any form, is taken by the Director, who currently is also the Curator.

³⁵³ Translation: "the assembly of the members of the association takes it together in advance."

CHAPTER FIVE – Curators, collections and the bottom-up approach

As museums display collections, curators were asked to mention what means they use to make the public understand the exhibits displayed at their museum. The curators interviewed use different vehicles and have different opinions about what resources are available or absent from their museums. The Tunnara Curator informs us that his museum uses a few printouts which narrate (and provide information regarding) the history of the battery since 1716, and adds some information which tells of the French occupation (1798-1800) and when the battery served tuna-catchers. Photocopies of photographs, sketches and images are used as visual aids. At the time of the interview (July 2019) the Tunnara was also preparing a short audio-visual for visitors to understand the bygone practices of tuna-catching. The Curator informs us that currently they are in the phase of converting the museum into an interpretation centre, which will have many visual aids, modern technology and other advantages which come along with more conventional technology.

The TaKola Curator indicates that for those visitors who wish to obtain more information, a specific publication is available for purchase. She confirms that visitors seeking in-depth knowledge may opt for a quality publication rather than rely on anything else, and that such publications are also conducive to new and return visits.

The Razzett Curator remarks that, although they wish to provide tools with which to make the public understand the exhibits, there are no information labels or interpretation panels inside the museum as yet. The Curator complains that their procrastination is not a matter of negligence,

*imma tant ikun hawn xogħol hawnhekk, illi çans ta' xejn. Forsi 'l quddiem naghmlu labels fuq kull waħda illi jkun hemm. Tirrikjedi x-xogħol eh. Imma xi darba naghmluha.*³⁵⁴

The ŻabSanct Curator argues that

Aħna għandna captions. Jiena kont ta' l-ideja illi jkun hemm ħafna x'taqra. L-ewwel ħaġa in-nies ma jaqrawx. It-tieni ħaġa illi inti jkollok caption illi hija akbar mill-esebit innifsu ma tagħmilx sens. Allura id-deċiżjoni kienet allavolja nħobb il-Malti ħafna, li jkunu kollha bl-Ingliż. Min jidħol

³⁵⁴ Translation: “but there is so much to do here, that there is no chance of doing anything. Perhaps in the future we’ll put up labels on each exhibit present. It requires a lot of work. But some time we’ll do it.”

*hawnhekk ħa jkun kolt biżżejjed li ħa jkun jifhimha l-lingwa Ngliza. U m'hemmx għalfejn jidher kollox doppju.*³⁵⁵

The ŻabSanct Curator's perceptions confirm comments made by the Razzett Curators that visitors tend not to read captions and that museums are only for the 'cultured'. Based on his own experiences in museums both as curator and visitor, the author tends to disagree with the ŻabSanct and Razzett Curators' comments above and gives some credence to the concluding comment made by the TaKola Curator that there are different types of visitor seeking different levels of information and learning from museums. The Curator of the OldPrison and GranCastello State museums maintains that, in the absence of a tour guiding person, visitors at the OldPrison may easily leave dissatisfied if they lack imagination and do not read through the few interpretation panels or the flyer available. At the OldPrison the presence of only a few interpretational panels was intended not to distract the visitor from the experience. Although the information found in these may suffice, the visitor who seeks an in-depth knowledge of the few exhibits, the architectural features of the prison, the graffiti carved by prisoners, and the various markings left on the walls, really needs the accompaniment of an informed person such as the Curator or the GSO. The TaKola Curator shares the opinion that visitors are not inclined to read a great deal of text, and therefore curators shall only provide basic information which visitors can take away with them.

These comments lead to two main observations on visitors at museums. Visitors at a museum resemble people shopping. First, they tend to be selective of what interests them or raises their curiosity. If the museum is perceived as a place which can satisfy their expectations, they decide to visit. Secondly, once they have made a choice and enter the museum, they are attracted to exhibits and displays which appeal to their interest. No matter how much the curator presents a display with colourful panels or lighting or interactive media, the visitor makes choices. If the exhibit arouses curiosity and the interest to learn more than the visitor knows, the visitor, if literate, will read the information provided, and if illiterate they may seek

³⁵⁵ Translation: "We have *captions*. I was of the idea that there you shall find a lot to read. First of all, people do not read. Secondly, having a caption that is larger than the exhibit itself does not make sense. Therefore, the decision was, even if I love Maltese much, that all shall be in English. Those who enter here will be 'cultured' enough to understand the English language. And there is no need to have everything doubled."

dialogue or discussion with either those accompanying them, people present or museum staff as the curator or person conducting the museum's tour.

A second observation is that the use of the term '*kolt*' (cultured) for those who tend to visit museums is somewhat vague and possibly discriminatory. What makes one person 'cultured' in a community or a country does not necessarily make the same person 'cultured' in a museum environment or on a museum visit. Through his own experiences as a curator, the author acknowledges that visitors who sometimes accompany relatives, grandchildren or friends to a museum would not have had the least intention of visiting a museum alone. However, this is not the measure with which to label such persons as *uncultured*. Visitors who declared themselves as persons with no schooling but who worked for decades as stonemasons, farmers, fishermen, or practiced other manual work, traditional crafts or artisanship, or who just follow a particular interest, were all very knowledgeable about much which the curator was not even aware of or knowledgeable of, despite the education received and accumulated through time. Museums and their curators are traditionally perceived as the sources of an incontestable knowledge, but experience informs otherwise. Museums are therefore the keepers of knowledge accumulated from its represented community, visitors, those involved in its daily running and the non-visiting community. Curators at micro museums in contrast to traditional curators become themselves visitors, listeners, learners and recorders of histories and knowledge. Such knowledge makes them indispensable as they and their museums become means of knowledge-transfer from the community to the public.

The TaKola Curator believes that the best mode of understanding the windmill and its exhibits is through the guided tour and accompanying explanation. There are very few labels attached to the exhibits. The TaKola Curator explains that the purpose is more to direct visitors to 'visualise' the windmill, its living quarters and the activity which happened there. She makes the point that she is directing all her efforts to improve signage within the windmill, as in the absence of labels or captions the missing links are strongly felt. She remarks that the display at State-owned museums is not the responsibility of the curator alone but of a team within the national agency. Curators at State micro museums are obliged to work in teams, such as the Exhibitions Department team within the national agency, to ensure that there is an input from

different experts. After listening to the Curator's opinion, the agency's Exhibitions team suggests the ideal way for setting a display. Once this is agreed, the Curator is then able to work on the captions and information accompanying the display. According to the TaKola Curator this is an ongoing process. The input of expert opinion and the fact that curators at State-owned micro museums cannot decide on their own may be seen both as an advantage and a disadvantage. Availing themselves of expertise, which is mostly lacking as a resource at independent and private micro museums, can be considered an advantage. Curators of independent micro museums must often go it all alone, but it is not ruled out that some may possess the necessary knowhow themselves or that they refer to experts they know or who are available in their community. It is not impossible that some may have ties with other museums, with qualified people, or with academic experts. Matters are facilitated for private micro museums which owing to their higher number of volunteers may have more contacts and resources within the same group.

The TaKola Curator states that the museum depends mostly on guiding as an informative channel. She admits that visitors without a guided tour may find it hard to understand, though the brochure may help. She informs us that the publication may serve as a guidebook, but that involves an extra cost to the visitor. However, the use of such publications at a museum may be useful but not practical if no connections between publication, exhibits, and the museum are made. At State-owned museums guides (GSOs) must be booked ahead and available on special events. The curator is not expected to guide visitors, and they may refrain from officially doing so. In contrast, curators of independent and private micro museums provide tour-guiding themselves or share with staff available.

At the GranCastello more interpretation panels are found, and some exhibits are accompanied by captions or concise information. Huge electronic audio-visual displays are observed in most rooms of the museum inclusive of what now represents the living quarters. These are a mismatch and distract the visitor from experiencing the domestic life of the eighteenth century presented - when no electronic gadgets existed! When asked about the tools used to help visitors understand the exhibits shown at the two museums, the Curator informed us that 'the medium mostly used is

printed text such as information panels and labels. Then there are instances where this is supplemented by video presentations, especially in those parts of the Historic House where in fact there are only video presentations. Therefore, you can find either or both of the systems mentioned.’ The Curator maintains that where a museum as a site speaks for itself, the presence of more exhibits, interpretation panels and information could distract visitors from getting an authentic experience and sense of place.

At a micro museum with just four artifacts, the BistraCat Curator declares that the small collection and the museum’s best artifact, the catacombs, are explained by means of an audio-guide available in six languages. An audio-visual introduces the site and the village, thus informing the visitor about the context. The printed interpretation panels and information provided are intended to facilitate an understanding of the site when excavated and used as a farm. The BistraCat is one of a very few examples where a national museum provides information concerning the context from the social aspect of the village community. National museums rarely or never present the local community as they focus on the national. According to the BistraCat Curator, the three pillars on which the museum intends to transfer information and give an experience to the visitor are the audio-guide, the audio-visual and the actual artifact - i.e. the catacombs which visitors can access and touch though not entirely for safety reasons. The BistraCat Curator informs us that at present there is no guided-tour (GSO) service on site as visitor volumes are low and opening hours are infrequent.

The Xarolla Curator states that they rely on the guided tour which the three Curators engaged by the Council conduct themselves. The Curator starts with a basic explanation: the purpose of the mill, its history, construction phases and the miller’s work and how the rural communities around it were called to bring in the grain for milling. The explanation takes place inside or outside, depending on the size of the visiting group. Once inside, the Curator explains the different spaces and exhibits. The living quarters are shown to explain the simple life of the miller’s family. Once at the top of the tower, the Curator explains how the mechanism works, and how flour is packed into sacks. The Curator then tells of how, annually, the windmill is set with the canvas sails and allowed to function for some time depending on the wind-force, so that the mechanism would stay in good working condition. The Curator observes

that the event is not made public and it can only be enjoyed by those who happen to be near or whoever happens to know about it.

The Xarolla Curator informs us that interpretation panels, information labels and narratives are bilingual, in Maltese and English, to reach the local community and the international visitor respectively. Frequently, in Malta it is assumed that tourists and museum visitors are literate in the English language. Although national statistics show a 2,598,690 inbound tourist total for the year 2018, only 640,570 (24.6%) arrive from the United Kingdom, 47,170 (1.8%) come from the USA, and 45,859 (1.8%) from Australia³⁵⁶ and who are expected to understand some kind of English. The remaining 71.8% come from the rest of the world and may not be familiar with the English language. The plans for an audio-visual in the French language may be both helpful and a risk, according to the Xarolla Curator. Since the windmill's mechanism and displays are fixed, a kind of flyer available in different languages might be a better means of reaching and attracting more visitors from other nationalities. However, such decisions are made by the Curators and the Local Council who are more in touch with the realities of the Xarolla.

The ŻabSanct Curator informs us that they adopted English as the printed informative and narrative language. This presents a problem with those Maltese who are illiterate or lack a good understanding of English. The use of the Maltese language or the native language and vernacular vocabulary facilitates the pedagogic aspect of a museum with the community, and simultaneously helps to keep the local vernacular alive. The Maritime Curators inform us that currently the museum has no electronic gadget and that it is mostly by word of mouth that people promote the museum. They also use the personal experiences of some of their supportive volunteers such as 'Gary, an ex-Royal Navy gunner, so that he can tell some nice stories. The guy, we call him, Ken, was an ex-merchant mariner, so he can tell some stories,' says Kerry. The Maritime Curators inform us also that they plan to introduce a multimedia type of display which will feature stories from the Malta convoy, which they consider as 'a good story that is worth telling.'

³⁵⁶ NSO, 2019.

The Heraklion Curator tells us that they use information labels, a publication, interactive media, in addition to an audio-guide in various languages, tour guiding by qualified personnel, and on special occasions tours by the Curators. The Acharavi Curator utilizes information labels in nine languages, with the intention of adding more languages, books, music, new technologies such as the implementation of augmented reality, regular guiding hours, educational programs, flyers, participatory games and other, thus seeing interactivity as an important aspect of the museum function. Resources available to the Heraklion and Acharavi are absent at the Maltese private and independent micro museums. The SantLluc Curator mentions that the media used to make the public understand the objects exhibited are ‘*etiquetas o cartelas, guía de mano*’ [labels or posters, and a handbook].

The Curator of Donnafugata and MUDECO museums, currently set inside the same Castle, uses different approaches. Besides the bilingual downloadable depliant,³⁵⁷ at the entrance of the Castle a large bilingual interpretation panel briefly tells the origins of the Donnafugata toponym, the Castle and the family which inhabited it. On the other side the same panel describes the *Piano Nobile* of the Donnafugata Castle with a plan of the *parco*: a land reserved for pleasure and recreation. When conducting visitors through the Donnafugata the Curator relies on the personal contact between curator and visitors and the information is passed verbally as they tour through the different rooms and sections of the Castle. Rooms have bilingual panels, in Italian and English, briefly stating the function of each room or space of the Castle and anything exhibited there such as portraits. With regard to the MUDECO currently set up within the same Castle, the information is also bilingual. An unusual item of information observed accompanying the description of the clothing on display comprises the smaller panels which acknowledge the person responsible for the translation. Such small but important contributions or sources are many times unacknowledged and forgotten at museums. However, according to the Curator, this is nonsensical and he wishes to complement all or correct this. He sees that the current information can only serve as a primary information as it says nothing about the persons who lived there and the experiences they went through or their daily lives or anything which happened there at one time or another. The Donnafugata

³⁵⁷ MCDF and MUDECO, 2019.

Curator emphasizes the importance of the human contact and connection both personally and through the musealia provided. He believes that such stories should not remain tucked away in some archive but told to the visitor as these are occurrences connected to a specific space or room of the *Castello* and to which visitors can connect. Through an interactive system, he believes that the visitor may decide to listen to such interesting stories as an anecdote³⁵⁸ of that specific room or else switch off and walk on to the next room. Observation at the museums shows that visitors following museum tours showed more interest during the narration of such anecdotes since they connect the experiences of real historical people with their own personal experiences. The practice of curators conducting museum tours and seeking verbal communication with visitors is in line with the observations made by Candlin (2016) that such interactions help the visitor understand the museum better.

I am interested in the relationship between form and content, that is, how location, accommodation, and display techniques impact upon museums' narratives and the visitors' experience. An additional aspect of this infrastructure and the one that I concentrate on here is that the curators of micro museums often present information verbally. In these circumstances the 'museum's voice' does not only consist of the visual narrative constructed by the exhibition, but of spoken tours, stories, or conversations between visitors and members of staff.³⁵⁹

At a later stage of the interview the Donnafugata Curator added that such stories should not remain concealed as they formed an important aspect of a community's culture and he believed that culture must be transmitted through generations.

*Il mio concetto e' che la cultura non mi appartiene; non appartiene a me, non appartiene a nessuno. La cultura e' una cosa che ricevo e la devo trasmetterla e poi dopo se faccio un libro va bene, ma se no non e' detto.*³⁶⁰

The opinion of the Donnafugata Curator is supported by the curator's own museological experience, his interest to learn and accumulated knowledge. His vision of the museum – i.e. the venue, its location, its architecture, the exhibits, indoor and outdoor spaces, their embellishment, their histories, their personalities, their lives and experiences, their roles, relationships and contacts and other things - are all part and parcel of the museum experience. Therefore, it is not the exhibits on display or in a

³⁵⁸ Anecdote: a short amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person.

³⁵⁹ Candlin, 2016: 77.

³⁶⁰ Translation: "My concept is that culture does not belong to me; it doesn't belong to me, it doesn't belong to anyone. Culture is something that I receive, and I have to transmit it and then later if I make a book it's fine, but otherwise it isn't said."

showcase that make a museum, but the stories which the museum and its musealia can tell and convey to visitors. It is the human experiences connected to the place that make the museum and its content relevant and engaging for the visitor. Successful museums are not those which conceal the truth but those which disclose it to the public as it happened. As the Donnafugata Curator observes ‘culture does not belong to the curator or to anyone else but to all without distinction, and consequently museums and their curators have the responsibility to share ‘culture’ with those who visit the museum.’ This is a distinction which the Donnafugata Curator brings to light when he discusses the impacts of grassroots micro museums on State museums and the differences between them. The perception that State museums, as traditional museums, sometimes tend to stand aloof and seek to impose their interpretation on the visitor, might have forced grassroots micro museums, more often through their curators, to seek more communication with the visitors and to share their accumulated knowledge with them.

The Farmacia Curator states that the only media available on the spot are a book and a flyer in different languages which tells its history, since its limited space restricts the introduction of more media. The Farmacia Curator adds that the museum has no information panels attached to items or showcases as the objects on display are self-explanatory. He explains that visitors are verbally informed about the history of the pharmacy. After the visit at the pharmacy, the Curator led the author across the street to the Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane’ (MPBP). At the entrance of the Bonelli is a large interpretation panel highlighting the aspects which a visitor must acknowledge on walking through the different rooms, halls and spaces of the palazzo. The interpretative panel describes the Palazzo as ‘*Un viaggio nel viaggio, nella Sicilia nobiliare*’ and further describes the museum as ‘*Un palazzo unico con gli arredi originali. L’ultima testimonianza di una civiltà aristocratico-borghese. Un museo vivo che racconta la storia di Scicli.*’³⁶¹

Like the Donnafugata museum, the Bonelli provides bilingual informative panels describing each room and space of the Palazzo. The Curator adds that they lead

³⁶¹ Translation: “A journey in the journey of the nobility of Sicily. A unique palace with original furniture. It is the last testimony of an aristocratic-bourgeois civilization. A living museum that tells the story of Scicli.”

tours inside the Palazzo and that they consider them as the best method of conveying information in a pedagogic way to visitors eager to learn. The Campailla and Murika museums have a few interpretive panels and even fewer information labels connected to the displayed exhibits. Asked about the means by which they explain the exhibits and the community to visitors, the Curator informed us that visitors through the museums are constantly accompanied by a well-trained guide who can empathize with the visitor and satisfy the curiosity of the visitor. He explains it as

*Allora il visitatore in entrambi i musei e' sempre costantemente accompagnato da una guida. Una guida che ammonde e' stata formata per raccontare il museo entrando in empatia con il visitatore. Quindi non c'e' un racconto standardizzato, ma c'e' un racconto che parte dal bisogno dalla domanda che in quel momento il visitatore viene a mettere in campo. Quindi e' una visita diciamo empatica. Non una visita fredda. In questi musei tutte e due e' quasi vietato se volessimo usare questa espressione la visita in autonomia, perche non avrebbe senso. C'e', si perderebbe il bello della visita.*³⁶²

Likewise, apart from the information labels accompanying uniforms and a few interpretive panels, the Italafrica provides few labels to explain exhibits to the visitor. The Italafrica Curator explains that there are no such labels because

*dalla visita qui si va in giro quindi vocalmente, se noi siamo a disposizione ci spieghiamo l'andamento del museo, tutti gl'oggetti, li parliamo cosi' a voce.*³⁶³

The Škrip Curator states that the media used to explain the objects exhibited at the museum are the guide, web content and paintings which facilitate the explanation to visitors. The SantLluc Curator describes the media used to explain the represented community to visitors as '*medios interpretativos complementarios adjuntos al museo: audiovisual, y sala de interpretación del santuario.*'³⁶⁴

Curators were asked whether their museum holds additional objects which are not on public display. The Tunnara and Razzett Curators claim that all their exhibits

³⁶² Translation: Then the visitor in both museums is always constantly accompanied by a guide. A guide that admires has been formed to tell the museum by empathizing with the visitor. So there is not a standardized narrative, but there is a story that starts from the need for the question that the visitor comes to put on the field at that moment. So it's a visit we say is empathic. Not a cold visit. In these museums both are almost forbidden if we wanted to use this expression independently, because it would not make sense. We would lose the beauty of the visit.

³⁶³ Translation: "on the visit here, we tour with vocal commentary. If we are available, we will explain the progress of the museum, all the objects, we will go on orally like this."

³⁶⁴ Translation: "additional interpretive media attached to the museum: audiovisual, and interpretation room of the sanctuary."

are on display. The Tunnara Curator, however, remarks that things will not remain so once the interpretation centre project is realised. The Razzett Curator tells us that all objects are put on display as donors from time to time return and ask about the objects they donated. The ŻabSanct Curators inform us that the museum has a good number of objects which are not on display. These comprise items which are either duplicates or items which demand a high degree of safety and protection not met by the climate inside the current showcases or displays. The ŻabSanct Curators maintain that donors expect that their donated objects are immediately showcased and displayed. As a precaution, they never promise the donor that the item would go on display, and that gives time to the Curators to see the value of the object in relation to the theme and objectives of the museum. They explain that objects related to the Żabbar community take priority, as the ŻabSanct is representative of the Żabbar community as a parish. The OldPrison and GranCastello Curator states that there are objects kept in storage at State-owned museums. He informs us that the national agency keeps a reserve collection and keeps exhibits which are duplicates or not in good condition for display. Others are kept unexhibited as no space is available at museums or because they have no relevance to the displayed collections. He explains that such objects are however used for studies and research purposes, till an appropriate place or occasion for display is met.

The Xarolla Curator confirms the retention of objects in storage is mainly due to the shortage of space at the windmill. Other objects kept in storage are unrelated to the windmill and its mechanism - such as oil-lamps, tools and utensils which people donate. Both the Heraklion and Acharavi Curators confirm that they have objects which are not on public display. The Acharavi Curator informs us that they were currently planning the display of such objects. Like the OldPrison and GranCastello Curator, the Heraklion Curator explains that while they give priority to objects related to the exhibition theme, it is bad condition and having duplicates of the same item which prevent objects from being displayed.

The Farmacia Curator informs us that all objects pertaining to the pharmacy are on public display. The SantLluc Curator reports that there are no objects or exhibits that are not displayed to the public. The Škrip Curator informs us that the museum has additional objects which the museum has not yet put on public display. The reasons

provided are that the museum needs more space, and that extra space must be built to accommodate such exhibits.

There are different reasons why curators do not put objects on display. Some may lack material space such as rooms or showcases. Others may think that the object is not fit for display owing to its condition, safety, state of disrepair, conservation requirements or its intrinsic value to the public. Other curators may impose restrictions to the theme of their museum and displays. Despite the various reasons mentioned, museums may reserve objects likely to create conflict or disagreements with the public or the represented community. Objects which call to mind the dark or negative experiences of a community may not always be welcome by the public, and awareness of such impacts can force curators to keep such objects and memorials away from public display. To avoid repercussions, curators may resolve to present the positive and conceal the negative. Among the participant Maltese and Sicilian museums, none presented the dark side of the represented community or of its history. As observed at the Italafrica and as remarked by the ŻabSanct Curators, curators tend to exclude or minimise the importance of such negative or dark experiences as they fear repercussions.

The Campailla and Murika Curator adds that, besides displaying tangible cultural heritage, museums tend even to show the intangible side of things. The Curator argues that whoever guides visitors around a museum should have the ability to stimulate emotions, to engage the visitor and to meet the expectations of visitors seeking personal growth. He claims that the immaterial, invisible, emotions and sentiments evoked by a place are the most important aspects of the history and pedagogy of that place; but such abilities are only acquired through experience and the ability to read the expectations of visitors.

All this suggests that curators at micro museums are not born curators or experts in the field. They are grown and nourished as curators by their own experiences, by knowledge and abilities they acquire through time, the education they receive, by the social skills accumulated, and by much more which is not taught at schools or universities but through their own experiences, struggles and certainly their failures.

Once the selection of objects excluded from public display is settled, participant curators informed us about who is or who are the decision makers regarding what objects should go on public display. Decision-making at independent micro museums as the Virgadavola is totally in the hands of the founders who curate and manage matters daily. Decision-taking in independent micro museums does not require any formality since those involved are there to achieve a collective goal for the museum and the community. Decision-making in private micro museums is somewhat similar except that the nature of decisions may demand the input, opinion and endorsement of more persons from the organisation or association which manages, accommodates, provides the collection or the venue, or sponsors the museum. Private micro museums owing to their registration as a VO or an NGO must adhere to the relative codes imposed by law and the regulatory frameworks. Whether it is an independent or a private micro museum, participant curators maintain that an internal discussion always takes place. The Razzett Curator claims that such decisions are more reliant on the Curator and his Assistant. Likewise, the ŻabSanct Curator affirms that such decisions depend on him and his two Assistants as the committee of volunteers fully trusts them on museum matters. Similarly, the Tunnara Curator is trusted by the VO and the Council to decide on his own. The Maritime Curators say that any additions to the collection displayed happens after an informal discussion among the three Curators and the parish priest. The Xarolla Curator states that the previous founder-curator was trusted by the Local Council to decide on exhibits and to place them where he saw fit. Nowadays the Curators entrusted by the Local Council are obliged to consult with the Local Council which engages them. The Škrip owner states that it is up to the owners and conservators to decide which objects can go on public display and which not.

The OldPrison and GranCastello Curator explains that, in the case of the Gozitan State-owned micro museums the national agency has a ‘manager’ who deals with such matters. The manager at Gozo acts as a Senior Curator in Malta, who in the hierarchy of the national agency is higher than a Curator. It is up to them to take such decisions. The OldPrison and GranCastello Curator reveals that he has no authorisation to decide what goes on display. The hierarchy set at national museums presents a disadvantage for curators at State-owned micro museums. Though they may

have initiative, enthusiasm and innovative ways to perform curatorial roles and practices, the bureaucratic hierarchical system may hinder their initiative. While such a practice can reduce risks and failures which otherwise would cost the national agency and the micro museum money or even embarrassment,, it may cause such curators to feel frustrated and isolated. The attendant risks of innovation and initiative are more prevalent at grassroots micro museums as curators and volunteers have no other option than to experiment and hope for a better response. Both scenarios have their advantages and disadvantages, but State-owned micro museums have the advantage that, in the case of failure or bad decisions, there is always the parent organisation on which to rely. This also shows that curatorial roles and practices at grassroots micro museums are much wider and carry with them much more responsibilities than those at State-owned micro museums.

Decisions on what objects go on public display depend on the structure of the museum and the space that it allows. The Heraklion Curator maintains that decisions are taken by the members of the Board and the Curators. Likewise, at the Acharavi museum such decisions are taken by the founder and the Curator. The Farmacia and Bonelli Curator informs us that the entire Tanit Scicli association is equally involved in the decision-making process. Most of the micro museums show that the same collective effort applies whenever they discuss what information must accompany exhibits on public display.

All museums show that the participation of the curator in such decisions is significant, but depending on the structure of the organisation, not all give it the same importance. There are other factors which determine the weight of the curator's decision of what goes on public display. Certain museums, such as the Maltese State micro museums, the Razzett, ŻabSanct, Heraklion and Acharavi museums, rely on the collective knowledge of the group or organisation involved. The curator may in most instances have a major impact on a decision if he or she possesses the knowledge, education, and practical knowhow of the area. However, when the curator is supported by or equivalent to other experts within the museum or organisation, a concerted effort in decision-making is more likely. Best results can never be guaranteed by either of the decision-making processes, but it is acknowledged that the contribution of a wider expertise is more likely to lead to a better decision.

A further step which curators face is the information they place next to objects on display. Participants were asked to provide information on who decides what information shall accompany the objects placed on display. The TaKola Curator reports that curators at State-owned micro museums cannot interpret something displayed at their museum on their own. Curators at State-owned micro museums can carry out research on their own, prepare and finalise the content, but not decide on the way it will be displayed. Although a State micro museum curator enjoys a certain amount of autonomy, the national agency has an in-house department dedicated to displays and exhibitions which takes responsibility to produce printing, interpretation panels and similar matters. The TaKola Curator explains that a drawback arises whenever the national agency cannot provide the required support internally. Matters become complicated as the bureaucratic system implies several steps which delay the whole process to a degree that sometimes matters seem forgotten. Bureaucracy is therefore an obstacle often faced by curators at national micro museums.

The Xarolla Curator reports that earlier it was the previous curator who prepared all the information which accompanied the exhibits. Matters are facilitated as the knowledge of the founder was published in a book about the windmill and the miller's work, the function of the windmill and its mechanism. Likewise, the Maritime Curators state that, apart from the information prepared by the previous founder-curator, they prepare the information which accompanies newly donated objects. Therefore, once again the utilisation of the collective expertise of all those involved at the museum is a practice shared by all museums, irrespective of having formal or an informal administrative structure, of being a State micro museum, an independent or a private micro museum. Within independent micro museums such decision-making processes are less complex, as decisions are mostly taken by the curator alone or a handful of persons inclusive of the curator. The same practice is also noted at the Acharavi museum where the founder plays an important part.

Curators were asked to identify, in order of trust, the sources and information upon which they rely to describe the displayed exhibits. Both Razzett Curators declare that the source of reference they rely on for information about the exhibits is a specific

publication.³⁶⁵ Curators at grassroots micro museums therefore seek information and knowledge from which they can learn themselves and which they can then disseminate to visitors. Sometimes they collaborate with authors and researchers, students and academics who conduct studies about exhibits, architecture, social history, oral lore, traditions and folklore which are not found in historiographies or national museum narratives. This is possible as objects which are collected and displayed at grassroots micro museums are not met with at the national or institutional museums. Therefore, grassroots micro museums and their collections become unique sources of research created through the curatorial practices of grassroots micro museum curators. The Maritime Curators state that at present they have no source of reference and they intend to keep the original descriptions as left by the founder, for the reasons explained in Chapter Four. All the information about the collection was collected by the founder in an inventory, which documents objects according to their place in numbered cabinets. The Curators do not want to deflect or change much of the original display, and when they must they ensure that a note of all the movements is kept. Like the ŻabSanct Curators, the Maritime Curators observe that donors return as visitors and look for their donated items as they take pride in them. Such connections may not be possible or allowed in most national and institutional museums as their main objective is generic and addresses a larger community than the local village community.

Reliance on sources of knowledge to construct the description of exhibits is not common to all museums since themes may dictate the nature of knowledge and sources which the curator or the team may refer to. The Heraklion Curator informs that they rely on

a combination of knowledge and experience (curator/curators and scientific sources) and by evaluating the personal testimonies of individuals related to the object of the donation.

Therefore, a description may provide both the actual description of the object and its purpose, but inclusive of its utilitarian function. Over time, different owners may have used objects for purposes different from that for which they were invented. This practice allows the donor to participate in, and have voice in, the interpretation of the object alongside the expert interpretation. The practice is not allowed in State or institutional museums, where experts decide what goes on information tags or

³⁶⁵ Lanfranco, 1983.

interpretation panels. However, the exigencies of the BistraCat museum forced the national agency to move away from the strict practice of State museums and include the private and popular use of the catacombs alongside the original and main interpretation of the historic artifact itself. This example of the BistraCat museum indicates that the interpretation of an object, whether it is a small object on display or a large artifact such as the catacombs, depends on factors concerning the theoretical or authentic original intent for which the 'object' was created for and the actual utilitarian use for which people or community used it. Although the utilitarian use may not correspond with the original purpose of the object, its exclusion may lead to a detachment of the object from the community. Throughout history the re-use or recycling of site and objects by different people for different reasons have been common, and the exclusion of such events and history are an omission of history and human experiences which help connect the object to the visitor and the community. With regard to the BistraCat museum, the detachment of the catacombs from the farmer's use of the site would disconnect the immediate and recent link to the Mosta community. The rural experience of the farmer is less remote than the burial practices on site. Rural life is, so to speak, a tangible reality or an experience of parents and grandparents at village level. As the BistraCat Curator remarks, it is a museum where the social aspect is relevant. Alternatively, the burial practices at the catacombs are something of a remote past to which none of the community can presently connect, not even through ancestry. The personal connection is an important factor which grassroots micro museum curators seek to establish between their displays and visitors, especially those from the community. A factor which arises is whether curators strive to create an active or a passive kind of visitor. Therefore, curators may either seek to attract the visitor just to visit the once or on special occasions, or else to make the visitor indirectly own that cultural space or object and feel represented at the museum.

The source of knowledge relied on by the Acharavi and Farmacia Curators contrasts with, and conforms to, the nature of their museum. Curatorial choices may dictate the importance of sources to the same collection and visitor attraction. While the Farmacia Curator gives top importance to 'Personal experiences of those involved in the museum,' the Acharavi Curator places this at the end of the list. Both Curators prioritise the knowledge from 'Academic research and scientific publications.' An

equal share of importance was given to ‘Personal experiences of those involved in the museum’, ‘The community’s collective belief (which would not necessarily match the curator’s belief)’, and ‘An authority in the field (expert, academic, other curators not necessarily published).’ A lesser source relied on was ‘Customs and traditions (the community’s own oral traditions, legends and customs.’ These were followed by reliance on ‘Personal experiences of community members, donors and visitors’ and ‘What community members, donors and visitors think and believe (not necessarily shared by the curator).’ The Farmacia Curator rates highly the reliance ‘Only on what I as curator know’ and relies less on ‘Whatever I, as Curator from the community believe is right (because it is what we as community know, believe and recall).’ These two items did not feature among the sources of the Acharavi Curator. The Curator of the three municipal museums, Donnafugata, MUDECO and the Contadino, states that in the case of the Castle he relies heavily on the documentation found at archives. He blames the errors of authors copying previous authors who wrote whatever they imagined and who did not try to do research themselves among the documents and archives available. He points out that curators must be good researchers as they are responsible for finding and then presenting authenticity. The Heraklion Curator states that they give importance as knowledge sources to ‘A combination of knowledge and experience (curator/curators and scientific sources) and by evaluating the personal testimonies of individuals related to the object of the donation.’ This confirms the importance of the scientific sources, the knowledge of the curator/s and the information supplied by the donor of the object. Therefore, knowledge internal and external to museum staff is combined with the donor’s knowledge and information, as the three elements may help the curator bring expert knowledge closer to the visitor and the visitor closer to the pedagogy of the same object. Thus, the curator is a medium as much as the object on display.

Both the SantLluc and Škrip Curators maintain that the knowledge sources upon which they rely to construct the description of the displayed exhibits include (i) customs and traditions (*the community’s own oral traditions, legends and customs*); (ii) authorities in the field (*expert, academic, other curators not necessarily published*); (iii) academic research and scientific publications; (iv) personal experiences of those involved in the museum, and (v) personal experiences of community members, donors and visitors. While the SantLluc Curator adds as a source

the community's collective belief (*not necessarily the curator's belief*), the Škrip Curator adds reliance on whatever the Curator as a member of the represented community believes is correct, because it is what they as a community know, believe and recall. Both Curators omit sole reliance on their personal knowledge, on the community's collective belief, which may not necessarily agree with the curator's belief, and on what community members, donors and visitors think and believe, which may also not necessarily be shared by the Curator. The Curators' different degrees of reliance on knowledge sources seem also dictated by the collection and focus of the individual museum in question.

Curators were requested to state what importance do they attribute to the way others, such as staff, volunteers, community members, donors, visitors from within or external to the community, imagine or interpret a displayed object or an event in the history of the community. The Tunnara Curator maintains that, besides providing knowledge on how the Tunnara worked, one must explain the objective behind it. If the visitor is interested in rural life one may for example tell about the saltpans nearby and how they were connected to tuna-catching and the amounts of salt required to preserve the fish caught for later consumption. Depending on the visitor's interest or field of study, from a biological perspective one can tell about the life cycle of tuna, its respiration system, and the reason for which they enter the bay. Students of any age show deeper interest and ask challenging questions to why the netting was set up on one side of the bay and not on the other, and why inside the bay and not in open waters. However, these details in which the Curator must be well versed, are not the questions asked by the visitor who just roams around. The Razzett Curators maintain that it is important not to make any suggestion an indispensable fact, as logic must take priority and money in many cases must be provided or donated by the same volunteers. Among the suggestions from visitors was a canopy for large events, and this was actually taken up.

The Heraklion Curator claims that the whole process is rather polysemic as, everyone perceives and interprets the exhibit in their way when on a museum visit. The Acharavi Curator explains that

The Museum's mission applies to everyone, so we try to educate and inform our volunteers, even Company's people that are not so attached to

the Museum. We want to be sure that our visitors, donors and local community understand and embrace our vision. I (the curator) am constantly at the museum and I talk personally with everyone that enters to our Museum. This interaction has provided food for thought and improved our narrative.

The Acharavi Curator's practice mirrors the practice of many independent grassroots micro museum curators. Such curators accord great importance to personal contact with the visitor as the role is more than curating objects or guiding visitors at a museum. As a visitor observed during a conversation at an independent micro museum, such museums and their collections are more than a display: a passion of the founder and the persons who wish to carry on with the same museum. The Farmacia and Bonelli Curator argues that they, as an association, place great importance on the way visitors see and imagine the objects on display and the historic events of the community represented. Although participant curators show that nowadays they give a certain importance to the feedback and criticism of staff, volunteers, visitors and community members, under colonial rule matters were quite different for island communities.

Museums and the colonial experience

Left-wing museologists like Friedman, Dickenson, Harney and Hatton (1994), contend that museums are tools to differentiate the elite from the masses.³⁶⁶ Right-wing approaches to museology, such as that by Karp, Mullen Kreamer and Lavine (1992) instead have criticised efforts to 'democratise' museums and make them more accessible to the lower classes, as they assume that such a practice will endorse philosophies which reduce the significance of masterpieces and collections within museums.³⁶⁷ Once independent grassroots micro museums, as community museums, utilise their exhibits and displays to nurture a synergetic rapport with the local community,³⁶⁸ they become tools for the process of democratisation, empowerment and social advocacy. Traditional museology, by contrast, expects museums to voice the interpretation of a 'dominant class'.³⁶⁹ In the Mediterranean, colonisation

³⁶⁶ Friedman, 1994: 122.

Dickenson, 1994 (a): 100.

Dickenson, 1994 (b): 112.

Harney, 1994: 139.

Hatton, 1994: 149.

³⁶⁷ Karp, Mullen Kreamer and Lavine, 1992: 8.

³⁶⁸ Dos Santos, 2012: 21-22.

³⁶⁹ Ross Lichfield, 2004: 92.

happened both administratively and culturally, but not all island populations, communities and cultures reacted identically or suffered similar repercussions. History led them to construct images of their colonisation and colonisers in different ways. Some agreed with colonisation as it was perceived beneficial and full of opportunities, others considered it hostile and struggled fiercely to release themselves from it.³⁷⁰

Different colonial rulers ensured that historiography, interpretation and presentation of events were depicted in favour of the coloniser. The interpretation and presentation of communities were aimed to facilitate a form of hybridisation or submission to the colonising culture. Colonisation caused many indigenous communities to lose their lands, disband and disperse.³⁷¹ Communities experienced gentrification and practices of forced displacement,³⁷² to accommodate the coloniser's politics and projects. To maintain order and structure, colonial authorities sought to unify nations by promoting an abstract community and enforcing *cultural homogeneity* through symbols, values, traditions and principles.³⁷³ They drew measures to undermine the local individual identity and promote the coloniser's authority on the population.³⁷⁴ They excluded the colonised from their history and identity with an educational system which taught the coloniser's language, culture and history.³⁷⁵ Not all ex-colonised wanted to maintain links with their colonial past. Some removed and replaced colonial political images and in the process a form of symbolic decolonisation of urban places occurred. However, hybridisation and mimicry inherited by ex-colonised Mediterranean peoples and cultures did not depart with the coloniser.³⁷⁶ This is because those who inherited political and institutional power at the end of colonisation often maintained the same practices instituted by the coloniser.

³⁷⁰ Chircop, 2015, q.v. section on 'hybridization'.

³⁷¹ Hunter *et al.*, 2004: 1(Introduction).

³⁷² Gentrification is defined as the planned or unplanned process by which wealthy or affluent individuals in the middle class displace poorer individuals in traditionally working class or poor neighborhoods by purchasing property and upgrading it through renovation and modernization. Open Education Sociology Dictionary, 2019, see 'gentrification'.

³⁷³ Palmer, 2005: 6.

Anderson, 1991.

³⁷⁴ Spencer, 2014: xix, 2, 3, 11, 18-20, 26, 29, 79, 101, 103, 117 and 147.

³⁷⁵ Memmi, 2003: 151.

Chircop, 2015: 48, 49.

³⁷⁶ Cultural hybridization is defined as the process by which a cultural element such a food, language, or music blend into another culture by modifying the element to fit cultural norms. Open Education Sociology Dictionary, see 'cultural hybridization.'

Various risks and complexities are connected to the attempt to communicate ‘postnational, transcultural or “hybrid identity.”’³⁷⁷ MacDonald (2003) suggests that it is much better to start with the ‘object’ rather than ‘a community’ or ‘geographical area.’³⁷⁸ This might well be the case for interpretation by curators at grassroots micro museums within multicultural local communities. The museum as an acknowledged ‘recognising authority’ facilitates inclusivity. Inclusivity is achieved through the museum’s exhibitions which give space and voice to vulnerable groups or minorities; away from the political discourse but closer to a ‘measured scientific reflection’.³⁷⁹ It helps to ‘reconstitute’ and modify collective memory and received history ‘to incorporate the hidden or forgotten experience.’³⁸⁰

The perception of unity and harmony during colonial times was reproduced by museums soon after independence. They presented *fairy-tale* landscapes where society is perfect, where problems, conflicts or unruly behaviour were absent.³⁸¹ Museums became an ideal tool and place to present to the public this new paradise. Through their displays and narratives, curators helped to rebalance, re-imagine and raise awareness of the multiculturalism, pluralism and multiple identities present in the new independent ‘nation-state’. Despite all differences identified, the heterogeneity recognised had to succumb to a homogeneous identity.

The imaginary imposed and cultivated by the coloniser through institutions like museums and formal education, constructed and nurtured an identity which undermined the local ethos. It created divisions and differences between the sanctioned dominant identity and other existing different identities, but which were unwelcome in the nation-state. After independence national authorities used national museums to sustain the idea of a homogeneous identity, but this could no longer remain unchallenged with the advent of globalisation.³⁸² While some micro museums continued to promote the same homogeneous identity, others especially those

³⁷⁷ Macdonald, 2003: 9-10.

³⁷⁸ Macdonald, 2003: 10.

³⁷⁹ Stevens, 2007: 38.

³⁸⁰ Stevens, 2007:38.

³⁸¹ Wilks and Kelly, 2008: 129.

³⁸² Carnegie, 2006: 70.

Sobe, 2014: 313-318.

Williams, 2014: 1-9.

independent from State or institutional financing, could challenge it and promote alternative identities. Finally, it is the community and its members who decide which identity they wish to be portrayed with and to uphold.

Images and the past

Most traditional museums in colonised countries were established prior to independence. It was under British colonial rule that the first Maltese national museums took shape as places open for public visits than as a symbol of identity. They served as a tourist attraction, an economic asset and a place where to observe yet another culture within the British Empire. It is maintained that the imaginary was many times dictated by authorities rather than negotiated between authorities and the common people. This was based on an outdated historiography which is now proved to be politically constructed, biased, and in certain instances fake.³⁸³ To different degrees, this historical imaginary survived in most Mediterranean museums. Curators of institutional museums legitimised and promoted the directives of predominant political, religious or cultural authorities and institutions before and after independence.

Curators may find themselves in conflict with their role and ethics of curatorship when it comes to interpreting and presenting the community and its history. They may fall into the trap of interpreting and presenting the community and its history as flawless, with no negative or dark episodes or experiences. Such an analogy was observed at the Italafrica museum where the dark episodes of Italian colonisation history are unintentionally omitted. Curators have the responsibility to differentiate between the flawless imaginary and the authentic. Easier said than done, a curator must take decisions as authenticity may lead to conflict with some community members. There is nothing wrong in telling history as it happened, as the dark sides of history are pedagogic assets with which humanity is taught not to repeat earlier mistakes. Negotiation becomes imperative as interpretation and presentation involve the vehicles through which the museum reaches out to its visitors. The Italafrica museum, for example, by telling and presenting the dark events of Italian colonialism could help present an unbiased interpretation of history and be truly a

³⁸³ Chircop, 2015: 1, 34 and 49.
Duggan, 2020: 291-343.

space where visitors may engage with these dark and painful chapters in a process of grieving and healing.. Authenticity can help the museum attract visitors from the ex-Italian colonies as the colonised may relate through both the negative and the various benefits experienced notwithstanding the dark episodes of history.

Independent research by independent micro museum curators has the potential to present challenges to the institutionally recognised ‘historiography’, and consequently to the interpretation and presentation of the museum content: *musealia*.³⁸⁴ Existing historical imaginaries can be condemned by independent grassroots micro museums as they help promote alternative aspects of the imagined nation, and hence help fragment the idea of a national homogeneous identity. Fragmentation is embraced, though to different degrees, by museums which seek to recognise the uniqueness of communities or groups they represent as the latter seek recognition of their specific identity as distinct from attributed imaginaries. While some museums seem to promote a historical imaginary of a homogeneous community, which assimilates in all its aspects all parts of the region, others seek to undermine the idea of the nation.

On the Maltese Islands the research did not come across curators who challenge the homogeneous identity presented at national museums or who deliberately promote the heterogeneity of the Maltese ‘nation’. Even the curators interviewed adhered to the homogeneous image portrayed and promoted by the State as they saw very few differences between Maltese and Gozitan communities, even if a local or specific community identity was identifiable. The same homogeneity was also attributed by such curators to the Mediterranean region. Curators, of independent and private micro museums, convey the impression that they promote the same homogeneous image of their community, even if they are aware of the differences of their represented community. Reasons for such complacency may result from fears and repercussions

³⁸⁴ Maroevic, 1998: 128, 218, 239 and 281. Definition from Maroevic: Musealia is the collection or collections of original and authentic objects of heritage which put on exhibit in a museum reveal knowledge or achievement and inherited values They are objects which document reality even if transported to a museum from their authentic environment; and cultural goods which communicate meaning and information, which extend from the individual to the community type of exhibit, 1998: 14, 15, 129, 134, 135, 142, 144, 219, 281, 294, 345 Although the term ‘musealia’ originally denoted museum items of the heritage, identified as bearing of museality regardless of whether or not they are isolated in museal reality. It is questionable whether we may in this case consider them “cultural property” because they lack the element of selection which museum items have.

anticipated from those in authority. At museums dependent on a parent institution or funding body, taking such a position may compromise the museum's existence. With no alternative available they replicate and reinforce the homogeneous identity, even if they are aware of the heterogeneity of the past and present 'national' local communities. Another reason for this failure is that some micro museums still cherish certain myths about the past.

Grassroots micro museums may consequently be perceived as a challenge or a threat to the dogmatic positioning and the legitimacy of authorities and institutions in society.³⁸⁵ Yet this challenge is neither explicit nor implicit because in most cases curators, especially those whose museum depends on authorities or institutions, do not realise the potential to actually pose such a challenge, possibly because they are not aware of it, or perhaps because they may fear repercussions or victimisation from above. Similar conflicts may arise from the knowledge which grassroots micro museum curators present to the public. In the face of new discoveries and explicit conclusions, independent research by grassroots museum curators may have the potential to cause the institutionally sanctioned historiography to collapse or demand revisions.

All museums construct specific interpretations and presentations of history.³⁸⁶ The interpretation of history was always a strong political tool used to control society, gain political power, maintain high social positioning and to augment profits. The creation of place and space is, therefore, linked to social memory and the shaping of 'cultural and political communities.'³⁸⁷ Through the national imaginary, places of memory were intended to give a geographic definition to a perceived homogeneous people. The imaginary of homogeneity was intended to preserve 'social stability, existing power relations, and institutional continuity.'³⁸⁸ In an effort to promote a homogeneous state identity, certain museums, especially those controlled by the State, may in the process generate social divisions, gendered discrimination and exclusion of minorities. They depict other cultures and communities as inferior to the 'dominant' culture, or to the larger national identity recognised by those at national administrative

³⁸⁵ Janes, 2007: 230-231, 232-233.

³⁸⁶ Carnegie, Elizabeth. 2006: 70, quoting Evans, 1999.

³⁸⁷ Till, 2003: 292.

³⁸⁸ Till, 2003: 292.

levels.³⁸⁹ They present the ‘*national community image*’ recognised by the nation-state rather than the diversity enriching national culture.³⁹⁰

The practice of promoting a unique national imaginary and identity is exclusive, as homogeneity is, by far, very different from ‘reality’.³⁹¹ The unification of all elements such as culture, identity, ritual and symbols of the subdivisions of society or ‘*sub-alterns*’ under a single unifying representation is vested in the nation-state concept and its objectives to seek political legitimacy.³⁹² Once the dominated adopt the images and accept the standards of their ‘oppressor’, they become apprehensive of nonconformity.³⁹³ The objective of using history and culture to gain power and exclusion carries with it the risk of becoming entrapped in the past.³⁹⁴ The search for the ‘truth’ presents both a challenge and a struggle for power.³⁹⁵ Likewise, grassroots micro museums present a challenge to authorities and institutions in power as they seek legitimacy for the community they represent.

National museums, which in the past served to reinforce the identity fabricated by the colonial power and the State, are nowadays simultaneously threatened by the disintegration and decline of the nation-state identity. They are faced by the voices of various internal and external ‘separatists’ looking for representation of their alternate identities rather than being engulfed within a wider and larger nation-state identity.³⁹⁶ Since grassroots micro museums deconstruct the homogeneous national identity, curators and their teams may be perceived as ‘separatists’ within the museum world.

The bottom-up approach: social and political actors

Museums with a community-oriented objective are social actors. They attempt to make social interventions on behalf of the community they represent. They are envisaged as examples of ‘grassroots museums’, because structurally they adopt a

³⁸⁹ Macdonald, 2003:3.

³⁹⁰ Chircop, 2015: 33.

³⁹¹ Macdonald, 2003:2.

³⁹² Spivak, 1996: 203-235. The term ‘subalterns’ was used by Spivak.
Chircop, 2015: 49.

³⁹³ Freire, 2005: 47, Freire similarly argues that “[t]he oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom.”

³⁹⁴ O’Farrell, 2006: 68-72, 83, which also refers to through Foucault’s works.

³⁹⁵ O’Farrell, 2006: 68-72, 83, which also refers to through Foucault’s works.

³⁹⁶ Macdonald, 2003: 5.

bottom-up approach. Such museums and their curators are described as the ‘new type of activist’ and as social actors knowledgeable of society.³⁹⁷ This demands that the ‘actors’, namely the curator and the museum, are sensitive and empathise with the labouring classes and the ‘poor’ rather than aim for huge profits. They do so because their objective is to represent the needs and interests of the socially excluded. They do not support the agenda of the powerful but aim to transform society by giving empowerment to the powerless, in the hope that social transformations take place.³⁹⁸ Thus, the ideal tool for social transformation starts from small-scale activities:³⁹⁹ for example micro museums. These initiatives and their activities benefit the community and help it. They make and take decisions in respect of the community’s own development. They address and request answers to the community’s needs, thus starting a bottom-up process. A grassroots micro museum with grassroots objectives, such as the independent micro museum, can therefore be a tool which focuses on the locality as a community, that raises awareness among community members and strives to bring about change in public perceptions about that community.⁴⁰⁰ Such ‘democratisation’ poses a challenge to the institutionalised hegemonic structure and power hierarchy. The neo-liberal state, which tends to focus on economic rather than on social development,⁴⁰¹ led to the exclusion, marginalisation, dispossession and repression of certain groups in society.⁴⁰² Micro museums concerned with community issues and debates, alternatively, should not remain detached or indifferent: they should become active and support local communities which need a voice, empowerment, and change.⁴⁰³

Museology, as adopted in the nineteenth century, marginalised, excluded and silenced the grassroots. Nowadays various measures, pressures and policies of inclusivity give space and place to the grassroots. Another factor which has contributed to a decline of the past elitist and detached attitude of museums is the rise of diverse

³⁹⁷ Ekins, 1992: 136.

³⁹⁸ Freire, 1975: 16-19.

Freire, 2005: 38-39.

³⁹⁹ Ekins, 1992: 135-136.

⁴⁰⁰ Ekins, 1992: 135-136.

⁴⁰¹ Ekins, 1992: 135-137.

⁴⁰² Ekins 1992: 5-7.

⁴⁰³ Ledwith, 2005: 95.

Freire, Paulo, 2001 (a): xxix-xxx, 10, 13, 39, 44, 55, 104 and 110.

‘communities of practice’,⁴⁰⁴ both internal and external to the museum. These communities of practice create a multiplicity of representations which transform the museum, its approaches and practices. Ostracized groups come to regard independent museums as spaces for free expression. They regard the independent museum as a place where they can re-present themselves and get rid of negative images, social stigma, and stereotypes, imposed and cultivated by those in power.⁴⁰⁵

Micro museum curators who adopt a grassroots approach make choices on how to get actively involved in the community. Micro museums which tend to be socially and politically engaged may be easily misunderstood and seen as a challenge to those enjoying hegemonic dominance, huge profits and other favours from those in power.⁴⁰⁶ A museum’s pro-community or ‘grassroots’ stance is risky. In certain scenarios it poses challenges which suppress the museum’s sustainability or even its existence. It is easier for those in power to draft and to approve regulatory frameworks which explicitly or implicitly suppress actors of democratisation, such as the type of grassroots micro museums described, and which give a voice to different identities and histories of communities. Indeed, the subjective top-down thinking of those in authority and policy makers is more oriented towards securing power than at improving the existing cultural policies or increasing people’s participation in the making of cultural policy.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ A community of practice is defined as a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>.

⁴⁰⁵ Simpson, 2001: 3-4.

⁴⁰⁶ Staples, 2004: xv, 12, 50, 155, 156 and 271.

Hou and Knierbein, 2017: 13, 19, 52, 166, 183 and 235.

⁴⁰⁷ Gray, 2012: 512-514.

CHAPTER SIX: Curators, Community and the Mediterranean Historical Imaginary in Micro Museums.

*‘Aħna Mediterranji hux. Aħna t-temperament tagħna wkoll Mediterranju. Anka il-mod kif naġixxu u nitkellmu. Mediterranji aħna.’*⁴⁰⁸ (RMMT Curator)

The following Chapter provides definitions of the historical imaginary and the Mediterranean as found in literature and from the standpoint of interviewees. It describes concisely what the Mediterranean meant to different people and cultures, and to the communities represented by the museums studied. As a sea of interaction, the chapter discusses the relations which the represented communities had in the past with the Mediterranean, and the importance of such relations as perceived by the curators. The chapter then outlines how curators interpret the Mediterranean inside the museum and the way that the represented community imagined it in history. It tells how curators understand that their collection and musealia⁴⁰⁹ interpret and present the Mediterranean historical imaginary. Since curators rely also on other sources to construct the interpretation of the Mediterranean historical imaginary, curators describe how they construct such an imaginary. The historical imaginary constructed by curators is discussed in relation to the Mediterranean context and whether the context is taken into consideration by curators in their interpretation and presentation of collections displayed and of the represented community. The study asked what type of Mediterranean historical imaginary is presented by the museum and how the same imaginary is presented through information labels, narratives and museum tours, where available. Curators were asked whether their displays and narratives followed a calendrical/chronological order or whether they were presented according to the relationship of events or connections such as between exhibits. Curators were asked whether they made choices of inclusion, exclusion or minimisation of any aspects of the Mediterranean historical imaginary in their interpretation, information and narratives. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the dynamicity of the Mediterranean imaginary and whether curators perceive any changes between the represented community’s/communities’ own past and present perceptions of the Mediterranean imaginary. The colonial influences and the imaginaries of

⁴⁰⁸ Translation: “We are Mediterraneans, isn’t it. Our temperament is also Mediterranean. Even the way we act and talk. We are Mediterraneans.” (RMMT Curator).

⁴⁰⁹ Espacio Visual Europa (EVE), 2015(a).

homogenisation promoted by the nation-state are briefly discussed and compared with the curators' present practices at the museums under study.

'We are Mediterraneans' is a phrase expressed in different ways by most Curators. When asked how they interpret the Mediterranean in their museums, all curators of private, independent and State micro museums appeared puzzled and thoughtful. Being Mediterranean seems obvious to each curator, yet the obvious is frequently perplexing and not easily explicable. Nonetheless, all curators envisaged different aspects of the Mediterranean, its imaginary boundaries, its importance to the represented communities, the community's historical and present imaginary of the Mediterranean. Some curators found difficulty in connecting the collection directly to the Mediterranean, while others could even select objects and displays which, they believed, presented the Mediterranean historical imaginary at their museum.

The lexicographic definition of imaginary may mislead since it describes the imaginary as 'existing only in the imagination', thus unreal, fictitious or illusory and fabricated by the imagination.⁴¹⁰ Sociologists nonetheless define such intangibles as real facets of humanity. Thompson (1984) defines the 'imaginary' or 'social imaginary' as a corpus of values (i.e. 'creative and symbolic dimensions') through which human beings come together and represent themselves collectively, as a social group or a community.⁴¹¹ Scholars maintain that the social imaginary 'creates for each historical period its singular way of living, seeing and making its own existence' and 'which tie a society together and the forms which define what, for a given society, is "real".'⁴¹² Habermas (1996) describes the coming together of people through such imaginaries as the 'shared lifeworld contexts' to which 'consensus' is reached.⁴¹³ Horsley (1990) defines the historical imaginary as an involving narrative which historiographers produce and communicate to others with meanings, politics, conflicts of interest and other subjectivities which they intend to convey and present as realities.⁴¹⁴ Museums are equally a visual medium and as they convey images, meanings, and memories to their audience, they may find passive spectators and/or

⁴¹⁰ English Oxford Living Dictionary q.v. imaginary.

⁴¹¹ Thompson, 1984: 6.

⁴¹² Thompson 1984: 23-24.

⁴¹³ Habermas, 1996: 22, 322.

⁴¹⁴ Horsley, 1990: 22-24.

active interpreters who either agree or challenge the curator's interpretation and narratives.

The task of preparing and presenting interpretations and narratives at museums is not as easy as it may seem. Curators must be aware of many factors existing within the same represented community. Elsaesser (2013) points out that, to write the history of groups or individual experiences within the community or the State, 'one would have indeed to abandon notions such as influence and causal agent, and invoke the historical imaginary' of such groups or individuals inclusive of their culture, emotions and art, and, simultaneously question and challenge the historical imaginaries held by the larger community or the State.⁴¹⁵ Anderson (1991) insists that nations are an *imagined community* created with the intent to satisfy political interests, and as a 'cultural artifact' the nation imaginary is weak and fragile.⁴¹⁶

When making interpretations of historical imaginaries, such as those of represented communities, groups or a region as the Mediterranean, curators may face the risk of not differentiating between what Elsaesser calls the two concepts of 'historical imagination' and 'historical imaginary.'⁴¹⁷ 'Historical imagination' is attributed to the romantic historiography of the nineteenth century that emerged from the social changes brought about by the French Revolution (1789) and which applied to the later Industrial Revolution (1848), its terminology and vocabulary to make previous historic events better understood by their audience.⁴¹⁸ In the case of museums, curators are equally obliged to present interpretations which can be understood, shared and accepted by the community and visitors today, and by doing so they run the risk of presenting a historical imaginary and narrative which is again 'romanticised' by the time and space in which they are created. The same argument was advanced by the ŽabSanct Curator who maintained that formerly the few historians who had access to archives had romanticised history through their publications, but museums and their curators must depart from all such romanticisms. He stressed that

⁴¹⁵ Elsaesser, 2013: 428.

⁴¹⁶ Anderson, 1991: 4, 6.

⁴¹⁷ Elsaesser, 2013: 195.

⁴¹⁸ Elsaesser, 2013: 195;
Fogu 2003: 11.

*Fl-istorja trid tkun oggettiv u taraha anki fil-lenti tagħha kif ġrat.
Irrispettivament mill-opinjoni tiegħek fuqha.*⁴¹⁹

He observed too that there are numerous different opinions about national historic events. However a curator must rely on facts, even if as a historian he may provide an opinion. Above all, events cannot be detached from the context, the imaginary and the time when they happened. From observation, the museums under study present different venues, contexts, displays and spaces which could themselves lead visitors to construct different Mediterranean historical imaginaries, including the present and its relationship with the represented communities. The curator's interpretation and the museum tour narrative therefore become more important in some museums than in others. The same applies when it comes to define and describe the Mediterranean.

There are many definitions, past and present of the Mediterranean as a closed space or as a dynamic sea of interaction, of peace and conflict, of top-down political and economic interests, and bottom-up struggles.⁴²⁰ However, the Mediterranean region was identified as a cosmopolitan region arising from three historic factors: (i) contacts and networks between three continents mostly created by trade routes, (ii) the diversity of populations inhabiting islands, cities and coasts, which are both connected and divided by the elements of the three monotheistic religions, and (iii) the failure of economic or political powers to control the entire Mediterranean region.⁴²¹

The study found that much of these three historic factors is found in the curators' interpretations and presentations at museums. The factor of *contacts and networks between three continents mostly created by trade routes* emerges from the Maritime collection. All the souvenirs collected by the founder, and some newly donated items, bear witness to maritime vessels and people who travelled to the Islands on different routes and for different reasons. With a different perspective, the contacts between Mediterranean continents were mentioned by the Tunnara Curator as he explained that tuna-catching reached Malta and improved through contacts the Maltese Islands had with different Mediterranean cultures. The factor of *the diversity*

⁴¹⁹ Translation: "In history you must be objective and visualise it in the way it actually happened. Irrespective of your opinion about it."

⁴²⁰ Kousis, Selwyn and Clark, 2011: 1-12.

⁴²¹ Kousis, Selwyn and Clark, 2011: 1.

of populations inhabiting islands, cities and coasts, which are both connected and divided by the elements of the three monotheistic religions, emerges from the Farmacia Curator who argues that the differences which make a community recognisable are ‘cultural identities given by religious traditions and beliefs.’ Likewise, the Acharavi Curators observe that Corfu has a multicultural history. The basic gist of (iii) - the failure of economic or political powers to control the entire Mediterranean region - can be extracted from the observed narratives where curators mention the different powers and colonisers who historically ruled their islands and communities, political and economic instabilities and conflicts which disrupted the lives of communities, countries and Mediterranean regions.

Caution must be taken in attempts to explain the Mediterranean. Its complexity and its tangible reality are not bound by its geographical region or by its ‘cultural ensemble’. Arriving at meaningful conclusions is not easy, even if undeniably its different peoples have been in contact, interacted, visited and studied in the same space in the past or present.⁴²² Despite this, Mediterraneans perceive themselves as blessed with the virtue of hospitality towards others. In contrast, many non-Mediterraneans perceive the Mediterranean not only as a place of hospitality but equally as a potential source of regional conflict.⁴²³ Mediterraneans, though, do not tend to associate conflict in the Mediterranean with being caused by the Mediterraneans themselves.⁴²⁴ Even in the case of the Tunnara, the Curator blames the Japanese tuna-fishing in the Mediterranean as one of the main reasons for the decline of the Mediterranean tuna-catching industry. Yet, the Tunnara does not display or narrate any of the aftermath of the tuna-catching industry, either on the Maltese Islands or in the Mediterranean. The visitor is not taken a step ahead or helped to distinguish between the Mediterranean at the time of the Mellieħa tunnara and the following ages.

Interpretation and presentation of the museum and its content, are undoubtedly dependent on the curator’s decisions.⁴²⁵ The will and capability of the curator to liberate self and museum from past and present subjectivities to authorities in power

⁴²² Tozy, 2010.

⁴²³ Tozy, 2010.

⁴²⁴ Tozy, 2010;
Herzfeld, 2014: 123.

⁴²⁵ Vella, 2018.

may help position the self and the museum differently from curators following the traditional museum model. By engaging and cultivating a curator-community and a curator-visitor participation practice, museums may help present a more realistic and multi-perspective interpretation of the past and/or the represented community/ies.⁴²⁶

Events that seem familiar within Mediterranean history and culture, may not be equally welcomed in contemporary politics, or in modern times when the familiar is depicted as foreign and unwelcome, even though the Mediterranean mentality may allow such ‘interventions’.⁴²⁷ Elsaesser (2013) questions whether ‘imaginaries’ constructed at a time in the past will still be relevant at present or appeal to current imaginaries.⁴²⁸ Yet a major question arises as to whether perceptions of the Mediterranean at one place are similar elsewhere in the Mediterranean.⁴²⁹ History had a significant role in forging the ways people in the Mediterranean perceived themselves and ‘others’. It reflects why Mediterranean history is indispensable to an understanding of the rise and development of most contemporary societies.⁴³⁰ The Mediterranean, owing to its centrality and unity attributed to the sea itself,⁴³¹ is perceived by many as a ‘uniting element and the centre of World History.’⁴³² However the meaning of the Mediterranean in history meant many things to various island communities.

On the Maltese Islands, the horizontal spread of urbanisation since the 1980s has minimised the ability to identify the rural villages and towns from those nearer to the coast. However, from most places the visibility and ‘presence’ of the sea are always apparent to some degree.

Mediterranean coastal communities demonstrate different problematic situations and power disparities spanning one extreme to another. They range from centres of art and commerce to centres of poverty and neglect, but which owing to the different experiences encountered, cannot be either understood or even perceived

⁴²⁶ Vella, 2018.

⁴²⁷ Fogu, 2010: 20-21.

⁴²⁸ Elsaesser, 2013: 35-36.

⁴²⁹ Fogu, 2010: 21.

⁴³⁰ Tozy, 2010.

Ancient History Encyclopaedia q.v. Mediterranean.

⁴³¹ Hegel, 1975: 171-172.

⁴³² Hegel, 1975: 171-172.

today because of the influences of the West and the different contexts in which they currently exist.⁴³³ Braudel says that there is more than *a* Mediterranean Sea and that it is not homogeneous since social, cultural, economic and political geographies changed within brief historical timeframes.⁴³⁴ Although history shows three distinct movements where changes occur rapidly, slowly or not at all happens, scholars gave importance to long-term historical systems or structures rather than to temporary historical events themselves, and which were the main concern of the subjective historiography of chroniclers from past hegemonies.⁴³⁵

Not all Mediterranean communities and cultures may hold the same Mediterranean historical imaginary, since historical imaginaries are replicated and modified by past and present political and social history of the community or state involved.⁴³⁶ This is both due to the community's own constructed histories and experiences, and the imaginary histories imposed by the powerful through media like museums.

Archaic epic poetry gives two descriptions of the Mediterranean Sea. In epic poetry Homer describes it as 'the grey sea, looking forth over the wine-dark deep'⁴³⁷ and 'the wine-dark sea'.⁴³⁸ Literally, the word Mediterranean means the sea in the middle of the land or surrounded by land, but historically different cultures applied different names to identify it. The classical Greeks called it *Mesogeios* - the middle of earth - as it was considered to touch the shores of the three geographic continents known at that time: Europe, Asia and Africa. Persian literature reveals that authors used many names to describe the Mediterranean, amongst which the most common is *Bahr o Rum* (Sea of the Greeks) followed by *Albahr o shami* (The sea of Sham (Syria)), inspired by the Phoenicians, or *Bahr olmaghreb* (the Sea of the West).⁴³⁹ The Roman Empire called it *Mare Nostrum* and then *Mare Internum* when Rome started exploring the Atlantic and other seas. Among East Mediterranean cultures and the Ottoman Empire, except among the Persians, the Mediterranean sea was known as the

⁴³³ Baldacchino and Vella, 2013: 2.

⁴³⁴ Braudel, 1972.

⁴³⁵ Braudel, 1972.

⁴³⁶ Elsaesser, 2013: 437.

⁴³⁷ Homer, 1924: Lib. I, verses 349-350, 359-360.

⁴³⁸ Homer, 1919: Lib. I, verses 182-184.

⁴³⁹ Nabiloo, 2014: 10-11, 14.

‘White Sea’ since white represented the colour symbolising the West, while the Jews call it the Great Sea (*Yam Gadol*).⁴⁴⁰ Depending on their geographic and political position, Mediterranean people identified the Mediterranean Sea with the people or culture which dominated it in their age and memory, such as the ‘Sea of the Philistines’ or the *Bahr al-Rūm* (Sea of the Byzantines). The White Sea terminology was adopted by the Arab cultures who called it *Bahr al-Abyad* and followed with *al-Mutawassit* (the White Sea in the Middle) to remind themselves of the classical ‘middle sea’.⁴⁴¹ The Turks since the mid-1970s call it *Akdeniz* which means ‘White Sea’ and at present call the Aegean Sea *Ege Denizi*.⁴⁴²

Owing to its geographic position, the Mediterranean’s centrality contributed to historic events which characterised the growth, development and destruction of many cultures which inhabited its coast and beyond.⁴⁴³ Its history was well-recorded and was reproduced for generations from different perspectives, including the sanctioned and subjective. As Mediterranean peoples and cultures met others beyond the perceived region, memories and oral histories were communicated for generations and yet were excluded from museums and historical narratives, even if at the expense of objectivity and history itself. Smaller communities and community histories rarely feature in the historical narratives and displays reproduced within State and institutional museums, which is because the conflict between powers takes precedence in the region’s overall narrative of the sea itself, the interactions it enables and those whose lives depend upon it.

Overlaps and interactions between different cultures from different regions are common in Mediterranean history. Interaction between people and their environs led to a unified Mediterranean imaginary as a result of the region’s close maritime connections and networks, constructed along ages of trade, relationships and dependence.⁴⁴⁴ It is a sea where regions meet and come close together geographically and politically: an imaginary interregional space linking its cultures and peoples to

⁴⁴⁰ Abulafia, 2011: xxiii.

Nabiloo, 2014: 10.

Seirinidou, 2017: 80.

⁴⁴¹ Vizmuller-Zocc, 2005: 64-66.

⁴⁴² Kadmon, 1994: 2.

⁴⁴³ Sağlam, 2013: 22-24.

⁴⁴⁴ Fogu, 2010: 3.

others, transnationally and at a considerable distance.⁴⁴⁵ This is possible as the Mediterranean is both an inclusive and a restricted space which cultivated its own artistic expressions and knowledge, and perpetuated them through the human medium – the people who travelled and navigated, making it a contested space, politically, culturally and economically.⁴⁴⁶

Conversely history showed that peoples and cultures which were so close at a specific time became detached and divided at different eras in history. The Mediterranean geopolitical⁴⁴⁷ situation is very fragile. Politically, it is highly sensitive to what happens in neighbouring states, and yet maintains its post-colonial borders. It shows misinterpreted complexities and reshaping political geographies according to geo-cultural aspects, with people often repressed by official authorities and their unofficial supporters.⁴⁴⁸ This gives the impression that those who replace colonial authorities replicate the colonialist attitude once they come to power. Owing to the ever-changing situations in the ancient Mediterranean, communities become more abstract than tangible.⁴⁴⁹ Urbanisation creates physical and symbolic environments for both social and political change in opposition to the existing political hegemony, as communities seek equality and inclusion.⁴⁵⁰

Through urbanised places, such as cities, it is possible to follow a common pattern of history and events, whose location on continental shores or islands may contribute to different experiences. Even on small islands like the Maltese Islands, where events appear common and equally shared, history and historic events may still bring with them different experiences and interpretations to communities depending on their location close to, or distant from, the shoreline. Small islands situated geographically at the centre of the Mediterranean are hardly ever centres of power, and act more like cross-roads, being sometimes inactive and dormant in history, and yet sometimes becoming ‘dangerous places of mixing, where power is most visibly

⁴⁴⁵ Cooke, 1999: 290.

⁴⁴⁶ Cooke, 1999: 290.

⁴⁴⁷ Geopolitics is the analysis of how the geographic existence of places and peoples influences the power relationships (politics) and international relations between them.

⁴⁴⁸ Fregonese, 2012: 110-111.

⁴⁴⁹ Bierly, 2012: 6.

⁴⁵⁰ Fregonese, 2012: 111.

contested and where difficult choices must be made.⁴⁵¹ Islands took on different roles as they served as ports of call during times of stability and peace, and yet played a different role in times of conflict and transformations which changed the balance of power in the Mediterranean region and even at times beyond. Events left different impacts on island communities which were closer to activity centres - such as harbours since they were more susceptible to rapid changes and adaptations than those areas more remote and inland. Centrally located islands may also be perceived in two different manners resulting from the two main characteristics of human contact; tourism and immigration.⁴⁵² While tourism is the main objective for Europeans and north Mediterraneans to travel to the south and the eastern Mediterranean, economic migration induces southern and eastern Mediterraneans to travel north and west to European shores and further west.⁴⁵³

The perception of differences between the geographic north and south, their communities and their cultures, were specifically brought up by the ŻabSanct Curator. A comment he added to the perception of the locality and its community was that:

*Huwa tipiku ta' pajjiż tan-naħa t'isfel ta' Malta, tan-nofsinhar ta' Malta. Meta titla' aktar 'il fuq il-mentalita' tinbidel, anke l-attitudni jinbidlu. Hawnhekk naħseb għadhom iktar konservattivi.*⁴⁵⁴

The perception of the north being a paradise and the south full of problems is common among Mediterranean communities.⁴⁵⁵ Throughout the interviews, Curators mentioned instances where the community was influenced by its micro geopolitics and at times by the macro geopolitics.

Logically, the unclear distinction between imaginary regions may pose a question about the real meaning of the Mediterranean. Apart from its geographical factors, historical factors and cultural interactions may serve to bond countries and peoples to the Mediterranean imaginary rather than to anything else. Fogu (2010) supports a 'pan-Mediterranean' concept: unrestricted to the immediate Mediterranean

⁴⁵¹ Cooke, 1999: 296.

⁴⁵² Tozy, 2010.

⁴⁵³ Malta Tourism Authority, 2017: 6.

UNHCR q.v. Charts.

⁴⁵⁴ Translation: "It is typical for a locality in the southern part of Malta, of the south of Malta. Once you go further up north, the mentality changes, even the attitudes change. Here I believe they are more conservative."

⁴⁵⁵ Fogu, 2010: 9-11.

geography but extending its influence onto and from Europe and other non-European regions.⁴⁵⁶ The extension of the Mediterranean imaginary beyond its regional geography and the determined historic limits may nowadays be even attributed to the information and communications technology revolution. However, Mediterraneans went much further than the imagined regional boundaries of their sea in many ways physically and psychologically.⁴⁵⁷ Examples of an imaginary paradise extending from the Mediterranean are recorded as far back as ancient classical myths, legends, oral histories and stories which witness to an authentic but unrecorded history.⁴⁵⁸ Harnett (2011) argues that oral history of formerly excluded, ‘hidden and neglected’ groups ‘makes for a history which is not just richer, more vivid and heart-rending, but truer’ and thus it is a ‘people’s history’, in contrast to the top-down ‘establishment history’ of those in power, which can empower such groups.⁴⁵⁹

In contrast Mediterranean philosophy tends to destabilize the traditional understanding of centres and their boundaries, as well as the inseparability of ‘identity, language, culture and place’, thus obscuring the possibility of imagining the individual identities and the national on precise and recognised territory.⁴⁶⁰ The Mediterranean is compared to a dynamic space at the intersection of the ‘main waves of civilisation in time and space,’ where the waves come from all directions, meet and depart again.⁴⁶¹ In comparison to the technological argument, the Mediterranean imaginary is static and self-contained but simultaneously open to, and drifting in, different directions and away from its identity, thus bringing together people, cultures, and more to a central space of interactions.⁴⁶²

Though viewed in the past as chaotic, the sea is defined as infinite, unlimited and inviting humans to share its infinity, its limitlessness and to go beyond the nuclear world of their locality.⁴⁶³ The Mediterranean imaginary is perceived socially and culturally as a wealthy existence of ‘*senses and sensations*’ overwhelmed with history

⁴⁵⁶ Fogu, 2010: 9-11.

⁴⁵⁷ Cooke, 1999: 291.

⁴⁵⁸ Vella, 2015.

⁴⁵⁹ Harnett, 2011: 13-14.

⁴⁶⁰ Cooke, 1999: 298.

⁴⁶¹ Braudel, 1972: 4.

⁴⁶² Cooke, 1999: 297.

⁴⁶³ Hegel, 1975: 160.

and which owns a diverse cultural heritage.⁴⁶⁴ Simultaneously the Mediterranean imaginary is characterised by ‘the going out to sea in order to return to land’. Fogu however mentions three philosophies that emerge from the south.

These are

- (i) the rejection of all literal interpretations and strict adherences to any economic, religious or political principle: ‘fundamentalism’,
- (ii) the ‘slow Mediterranean time’ evolution of things as a symbol of ‘return to land from the sea’, and
- (iii) the sense of evaluation, precaution and standards.⁴⁶⁵

Nevertheless, considering the diverse Mediterranean experiences and reactions to events in history, the ways of thought mentioned may either be considered as a hindrance to, or a facilitation of, social growth and cultural development.⁴⁶⁶

The progress of certain communities, such as those of Żabbar and the Mellieħa tuna-catchers, was attributed to their ability to bring land and sea together and take the advantages offered by connections existing between land and sea: not by detaching them and thinking of them as incoherent, independent and separate elements.⁴⁶⁷ The Mediterranean has always been a network of countless interactions and connections.⁴⁶⁸ Mediterranean philosophy is constantly manifold, complex and inclusive, open to interaction, thinking is always multiple and open, always engaged in exchange, negotiation and dialogue occurring between its peripheries and numerous core centres.⁴⁶⁹

Curators identify different relationships between the community represented at their museums and the Mediterranean in history. Some noted strong ongoing ties which could affect the survival of the community, while others were common and generic ties without which no major differences would occur. The connections and relations acknowledged by the non-Maltese curators between the community represented at their museums and the Mediterranean varied between theme and time according to the

⁴⁶⁴ Braudel, 1972: 1-2.

Horden and Purcell, 2000.

⁴⁶⁵ Fogu, 2010: 14.

⁴⁶⁶ Fogu, 2010: 14.

⁴⁶⁷ Hegel, 1975: 162.

⁴⁶⁸ Cooke 1999: 295 Conclusion drawn from her analysis of Hegel’s (1975) thought.

⁴⁶⁹ Cooke, 1999: 298.

museum and its collection. The Heraklion Curator perceives the Mediterranean historical imaginary as the triangle of political history, culture and economy influenced by powers such as the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, and Venice. Set in a sea of conflict and power struggles, the Heraklion museum presents Crete as a victim of the Second World War struggle between the Allied and Axis forces. Culturally the Heraklion museum presents the Mediterranean historical imaginary as a wealth of arts, customs, religion, and lingual relations: relations which eventually led to economic activities. The Acharavi museum presents a recent historical imaginary of the Mediterranean, which according to its Curator focuses on connections established with other cultures in the region and in Europe. The Acharavi Curator therefore extends the Mediterranean imaginary into Europe. Connections and relations are also the imaginaries associated to the Mediterranean in the history of the pharmacy museum. The Farmacia Curator sees them expressed in the science behind the use of herbs ‘as well as the Italian and European artistic style of the Art Nouveau.’ The Mediterranean historical imaginary presented by the Farmacia, Heraklion and Acharavi Curators is that the Mediterranean was both a conflict zone and a sea for collaboration where people met and shared culture, art and knowledge in various ways. The Donnafugata, Contadino and MUDECO Curator sees great and longlasting connections between Sicily and the Mediterranean amongst which the connection between the Maltese Islands and the communities of the Ragusan Province (formerly the County of Modica) was very high. These are mostly reflected by the Donnafugata museum as the Castello had several connections with Malta, and hosted many personalities coming from there. The connections and relations that the Škrip founder-owner sees between the community represented and the Mediterranean in history is the ‘very common way to produce olive oil’. Such common and shared practices witness to the coming together of ancient Mediterranean communities. The Škrip museum presents the Mediterranean historical imaginary as ‘one part of its most characteristic images’ through the exhibits related to ethnography and rural agriculture. The SantLluc Curator admits that the Mediterranean historical imaginary is ‘*propriamente, no queda reflejado*’ [really, it is not reflected] in the museum’s collection. The detachment of the Mediterranean altogether is frequently excluded or forgotten in the interpretation, information and narratives found at museums, even if it contributed majorly to the identity of each community around it or dependent on it and its resources. The Betina Curators see great connections and strong relations between the collection and the Mediterranean.

Although the peak revolves around the maritime theme thanks to the shipbuilding theme and tradition, the museum sees connections through tourism, fishing, agriculture and craftsmanship.

The ŻabSanct and Razzett Curators explicitly perceive connections between their museum, the collection, their community and the Mediterranean. They assert: '*We are Mediterraneans. We're part of the Mediterranean and whatever happens in it we're there too.*' Therefore the Mediterranean imaginary in these museums is indirect, as an innate hidden presence which cannot be omitted even if not explicitly mentioned or presented to visitors. This shows that curators on Mediterranean islands may take it for granted that visitors are conscious and aware of 'the Mediterranean' and its historical imaginary. However the historical imaginary is only constructed with the musealia: the artifacts, displays, information accompanying them, the tour narrative, and sometimes the architecture and context of the same museum. Another connection envisaged by the ŻabSanct Curators is that inspired by the artisanship and craftsmanship of the exhibits, and here the influence of other cultures which reached Malta by sea. The Maritime Curators see the museum's Mediterranean connection through the collection as each item connects to the Sea and those who sailed to reach the Maltese Islands. The Xarolla Curator acknowledges a dearth of material or a very low presentation of the Mediterranean historical imaginary at the museum.

The connections and relations acknowledged by the Heraklion, Acharavi and Farmacia Curators between the community represented and the Mediterranean vary between theme and time according to the museum and its collection. The Heraklion Curator perceives the Mediterranean historical imaginary through the connections which their community made as part of its political history, cultural contacts and economic activities. The Acharavi Curator states that their museum presents a recent historical imaginary of the Mediterranean and gives importance also to the cultural connections which the community established with other Mediterranean cultures and Europe as an extension of the Mediterranean. The way the Acharavi Curator extends the Mediterranean into Europe is analogous to the fluid Mediterranean concept, expressed by Fogu (2003), Braudel (1972), Baldacchino and Vella (2013).⁴⁷⁰ The

⁴⁷⁰ Fogu, 2003:11;
Braudel, 1972: 17;

meaning which according to the Curator was given by the community to the Mediterranean in the past is described in the museum as ‘connections, trade relationships, rulers and occupators [occupying powers], wars, music and food diversity, vocabulary and so much more.’ Therefore the perception and meaning of the Mediterranean were connected: that is to say, the perceived Mediterranean became reality once it presented to the community the perceived image. Anything it did not present was neither perceived nor attributed a meaning.

The Farmacia Curator argues that the Mediterranean did mean a great deal in the past to the represented community. He sees connections and relations with the Mediterranean built through the pharmacy theme and explains the museum as the Mediterranean historical imaginary of the time through a relationship, namely ‘*La relazione è lo studio delle erbe e delle loro qualità oltre allo stile artistico italiano del liberty ed europeo dell'Art Nouveau.*’⁴⁷¹ However, the same Curator sees fewer connections with the Mediterranean at the Bonelli, except a family surname which connects the Palazzo to the Maltese Islands. The Mediterranean, therefore presents a meeting point of cultures, people, art, events, experiences and knowledge in various forms. The Farmacia, Heraklion and Acharavi Curators perceive the Mediterranean historical imaginary through historic aspects and musealia presented at their museums: thus the visual and linguistic expression presented by the curator.

Museums, like films, are a combination of visual and linguistic communication between the curator (as the creator of content) and the visitor (as a member of the audience) who receives information and meanings through the media displayed. This poses a question as to whether the Mediterranean historical imaginary is a construct of identities, cultures and events which different peoples and cultures have concocted through the historic events experienced through time and the space which we call or perceive as Mediterranean. If so, museums may be a space and a medium through which historical imaginaries are consolidated and immortalised.

Baldacchino and Vella, 2013: 1.

⁴⁷¹ Translation: "The relationship is the study of herbs and their qualities as well as the Italian and European artistic style of the Art Nouveau."

The Curators of the Heraklion, Farmacia, Bonelli, Donnafugata, Contadino, MUDECO, and Škrip museums rate the historical connections between the represented community and the Mediterranean as ‘very important’. The Acharavi Curator argues, however, that such relationships are important only to some extent. The SantLluc Curator maintains that both connections and relationships with the Mediterranean are very important for the represented Mallorcan community. Likewise, the Škrip Curator observes that the represented community felt it was part of the Mediterranean, was happy to be in the Mediterranean and looked at it as if it were a ‘fairy tale’ environment. The perceptions of *Mediterranean* varied among different communities, especially according to location, such as on an island. The importance of the Mediterranean, as a means of living or a gateway to the outside world, was deemed by Curators as ‘important’ or ‘very important’ for communities represented at the Tunnara, Maritime, Acharavi, Farmacia museums and to a certain extent at the ŽabSanct. However the Mediterranean had minimal or no importance at all to the communities represented by the Razzett, Xarolla and the four State micro museums.

The regional perception of the Mediterranean features also in museums. De Cesari argues that the geopolitical imaginaries which bind regions like Europe and the Mediterranean are met in museums: an example of which is the creation of the Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM), in Marseille, France.⁴⁷² De Cesari argues that although the MuCEM was intended to display Europe, political intentions ended up presenting the Mediterranean and excluding Europe, and the museum failed to bring together Europe and the Mediterranean but instead strengthened their ‘bounded and separated spaces.’⁴⁷³ De Cesari recommends that museums may survive if they were to rebrand by a *transnationalisation* of their content, and by being conscious of the local, national and regional memories which compose nationality.⁴⁷⁴

The Razzett Curator, in particular, seems to abandon the museum’s original objective as a museum of the Mosta community and now considers the museum’s

⁴⁷² De Cesari, 2017: 21.

⁴⁷³ De Cesari, 2017: 22-23, 26, 30.

⁴⁷⁴ De Cesari, 2017: 31.

community today as one that goes beyond the local, the national and the Mediterranean boundaries. Since the museum is frequented mostly by outsiders and less by people from the locality, he considers the museum's audience community as an international one of cultured people who appreciate art and heritage more than the locals do. A similar opinion was expressed by the Italafrica Curator at Ragusa, who states that visitors arriving from other countries are much more than those from the community, and therefore the represented community is heterogenous. Through their museum tour and the sparse information provided with exhibits, the Razzett Curators present a specific Mediterranean historical imaginary to the visitor. It is completely left to the visitor to associate the collection and in both cases the architecture of the venue to anything historically Mediterranean, romantically or factually imagined.

The Tunnara Curator maintains that the Tunnara describes and presents the Mediterranean historical imaginary from a maritime perspective, not from the tuna-catching aspect alone. The Tunnara is connected to the sea through the tuna-catching practices, through fishermen of later days and the battery's original objective as a coastal defence. As an example the Tunnara Curator mentions the Sicilian museums which combine and include the past tuna-catching practices under the umbrella of maritime or cultural themed museums.

The OldPrison and GranCastello Curator asserts that the Mediterranean historical imaginary is missing at the two State micro museums. He describes it as a lacuna met in most Maltese museums. This implies that the information and historical narratives at most museums may be in isolation from the Mediterranean context. The Curator believes that museums should start opening up on the wider Mediterranean context, as currently they are only thinking from a local perspective and in terms of the local context alone, but nothing seems to bring the local and the Mediterranean together and therefore the connection to the Mediterranean is not reflected in national museums. The presentation of the Mediterranean historical imaginary is reflected more in grassroots museums as the Tunnara than in Maltese State micro museums. The lacuna mentioned by the OldPrison and GranCastello Curator was also mentioned by the BistraCat Curator, who argues that the Mediterranean or the south (of Europe) *per se* does not feature much in her State micro museum as the focus is more on the village of Mosta and local history. She states that even the audiovisual focuses on the

site and the village, but not on the Mediterranean context as a whole, or even its southern seas. Even the Xarolla Curator perceives a minimal reference to the Mediterranean context at his museum.

A similar paucity or absence of reference to the Mediterranean historical imaginary and presentation of the Mediterranean historical context is also acknowledged by the Sicilian Curators interviewed. The Curator of the three municipal museums, Donnafugata, Contadino and MUDECO says that '*Il Mediterraneo qui attualmente nel museo non viene presentato che ogni tanto.*'⁴⁷⁵ He adds that among the missing information and narratives at the three museums are the close connections between the Ibleans and Malta. He maintains that such realities must be brought to the visitor not only through the verbal guided tours but also in the printed material presented to the public. Similarly, the Italafrica Curator argues that at his museum the

*Mediterraneo e' come lo spazio che ci circonda e di cui dobbiamo tenere conto. Ce non possiamo ignorare questo Mediterraneo come luogo. Il Mediterraneo e' tutto cio' che si trova nel Mediterraneo, le varie isole per esempio, Malta. Quindi, pero' ecco normalmente al visitatore non viene presentato qualcosa sul Mediterraneo.*⁴⁷⁶

He admits that normally the Mediterranean is not presented to the visitor. Likewise, the SantLluc Curator acknowledges the lack of the Mediterranean historical imaginary at his museum. When asked what connections and relations he does see between the community represented by his museum and the Mediterranean in historic times, he states that

*La relación con el Mediterráneo resulta obvia por ser Mallorca una isla mediterráneo. A pesar de ello este vínculo no queda explícito en el discurso museográfico.*⁴⁷⁷

Nonetheless, he adds that the Mediterranean historical imaginary

⁴⁷⁵ Translation: "The Mediterranean here in the museum is only presented now and then."

⁴⁷⁶ Translation: "Mediterranean is like the space that surrounds us and that we must take into account. We cannot ignore this Mediterranean as a place. The Mediterranean is all that is found in the Mediterranean, the various islands for example, Malta. So, however, normally here the visitor is not presented with something about the Mediterranean."

⁴⁷⁷ Translation: "The relationship with the Mediterranean is obvious because Mallorca is a Mediterranean island, Despite this, this link is not explicit in the museographic discourse."

*no queda reflejado excepto en algunas piezas puntuales (plato hebreo, trikonion griego, mueble maltés, pinturas de talleres italianos, etc.) pero no hay un discurso mediterráneo coherente.*⁴⁷⁸

Such an absence may arise from various factors. It can be missed unintentionally by the curator or excluded deliberately to remain secure in the microcosm and micro context of the museum and its collection. It may be the result of past or current experiences and an omission of anything which is secondary to the museum theme and collection. The absence of the Mediterranean historical imaginary at Maltese and Sicilian State micro museums may be related to the history of both islands. In Malta the endeavour to identify culturally with northern cultures and Semitic origins is an effect of the British colonial experience and Anglicisation of many aspects of society, but less with the historic cultural connections with Sicily and southern Italy.⁴⁷⁹ Similarly in Sicily, the *Nord* colonised the *Sud* when after the unification the populations of the *Sud* were ‘defrauded’ of their history, their cultural identity and occupied militarily, and consequently a cultural dominance imposing the Northern European hegemony on the *mezzogiorno*.⁴⁸⁰ It may even occur due to discriminations, preconception or perceptions inherited through family, community, society, country, culture, formal education and other environments which make a curator, or persons in charge of interpretation overcautious, fearful or reluctant to include the wider context of the museum theme and its collection.

The Tunnara Curator maintains that the community in the past imagined the Mediterranean as a source of survival, and contacts with the outside world especially with Sicilian tuna-catching communities. The ŻabSanct Curators described the community’s Mediterranean historical imaginary as an opportunity to earn a living but also a sea of perils and dangers, a space for meeting different cultures and creeds, and a place of conflict and collaboration.

The SantLluc Curator states that for the represented community, the Mediterranean historically meant

⁴⁷⁸ Translation: “is not reflected except in some specific pieces (a Hebrew dish, a Greek trikonion, Maltese furniture, Italian workshop paintings, etc.) but there is no coherent Mediterranean discourse.”

⁴⁷⁹ Pfister and Hertel, 2008: 22, 172, 173, and 176.

⁴⁸⁰ Giangrande, 2019: 198. 497-498.

*una conexión marítima intensa a lo largo de la historia con otras comunidades próximas (Levante peninsular, costas del norte de África, costas italianas y otras islas del Med occidental).*⁴⁸¹

The SantLluc Curator adds that the represented community saw and imagined the Mediterranean in the past ‘*como un medio de conexión comercial y cultural y como una fuente de recursos.*’⁴⁸²

The ŽabSanct Curator was quick to identify the Mediterranean historical imaginary presented by their collection: mostly in the Ex-Voto paintings collection, which from a religious perspective are only the fulfilment of a vow, but from a historical perspective, ‘are a treasure to the researcher who is interested in maritime vessels, attire, the Hospitaller Order, mercantile vessels and events since the seventeenth century,’ and an artistic expression and a visual image of real experiences on the Mediterranean waters. Thus they constitute an informative and pedagogic visual element which facilitates the visitor’s attempt to construct the historical imaginary depicted. The intensity of the Mediterranean historical imaginary is less discerned by the displays and narratives of the other religious and more mundane collections at the museum.

The maritime theme seems to facilitate understanding and construction of an imaginary of the Mediterranean context. Even if time has passed and many changes have occurred, the maritime theme - the sea as the dominant element - comes to the mind of visitors as an integral part of the Mediterranean imaginary. The Maritime Curator perceives the Mediterranean historical imaginary as a sea or crossroads of interaction totally reflected in the maritime collection, the navigational aspects and maritime connections made by vessels and people travelling or serving on board. During the tour, the Maritime Curator frequently uses the term ‘Mediterranean’ as a sea of communication between people through navigation for commerce and leisure, work and tourism, war and sports. The visual aspect of each exhibit at the Maritime evokes the sea - the experience of boarding on different types of maritime vessels, with people exchanging souvenirs and mostly never to meet again. From a visitor’s

⁴⁸¹ Translation: [an intense maritime connection throughout history with other nearby communities (peninsular levant, coasts of North Africa, Italian coasts and other islands of the western Mediterranean).”

⁴⁸² Translation: “as a means of commercial and cultural connection and as a source of resources.”

point of view the Maritime museum can present the Mediterranean historical imaginary both by the connections inspired from the visual appearance of the exhibits and by imaginatively personifying the collector amassing the collection. A closer observation indicates that the Maritime museum presents two perspectives of the Mediterranean historical imaginary. The first is the historical connections to which the exhibits are a witness. The second is the collector's personal efforts to create the collection, and which can be associated with many other collectors around the Mediterranean who have endeavoured to collect souvenirs of vessels, crews and fleets which visit a harbour. More than merely ship spotting, the collection displays the tangible souvenir of human contact.

The Xarolla Curator interprets the Mediterranean as a region which contributed to the development of windmills on the Maltese Islands. He associates the historical imaginary to the experiences of different cultures who ruled the Islands and brought along the technology and science they knew from their motherlands. He sees the Hospitaller Order, i.e. a combined Mediterraneo-European knowledge base, as the historical imaginary of the age when a combined knowhow designed and built the seventeenth and eighteenth century windmills on Malta and Gozo. An imaginary where cultures taught each other to benefit and improve life. The imagination of the Xarolla contrasts with the historical imaginaries of a conflict-torn Mediterranean and the perils of the sea revived by the Maritime and ŻabSanct exhibits.

The Campailla and Murika Curator like most others makes the point that 'We are in the Mediterranean' but most of all emphasizes how the Mediterranean has served humanity over many centuries. He maintains that the two museums represent the Mediterranean as a place of contact and a gateway between continents.

The Heraklion Curator highlights the point that it is through history and ethnography that the collection at her museum describes and presents the Mediterranean in history. Even the Acharavi Curator shares the element of ethnography, but adds to it such factors as trade relationships, among others. The Farmacia Curator did not provide a reply as he did not perceive a clear image of that in their museum. The term Mediterranean is sometimes difficult to explain but it seems

more difficult when a curator tries to describe and present it from a restricted theme such as that of the Farmacia, which is also a comparatively recent historical ‘object’.

The Mediterranean was for centuries imagined in the way outsiders had described it. Frequently, such interpretation conflicted with how the Mediterranean people desired to describe it themselves.⁴⁸³ Outsiders described and imagined the region in different ways from that desired or acclaimed by the Mediterranean people themselves as interests of either commercial, political or colonial nature played a vital role. Different imaginaries were promoted during times of domination, dictatorship or strong political movements. New imaginaries were promoted also with the establishment and growth of economic and political partnerships transcending traditional boundaries, such as the European Union (EU), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean. These perceived imaginaries are strongly knit with contemporary events in the Mediterranean. Owing to the transitions and changes brought about by the end of colonialism, the end of the Cold War and accession to the European Union, the Mediterranean is consequentially becoming strongly influenced, eroded and ‘liquid’ in its identity.⁴⁸⁴

European culture and history are nowadays presented as superior to the Mediterranean cultures they owe so much to. They exclude the wider Mediterranean perspective to homogenise them under a European image.⁴⁸⁵ The homogenisation of culture, language and history serves to enforce the common and shared identities of all those who fell under the nation-state umbrella; thus, a form of new colonialism mostly intended to strengthen the position of those who were once powerful in the region, but who are now powerful through supra-national structures such as the European Union.⁴⁸⁶ Events created by both Mediterraneans and non-Mediterraneans seeking opportunities beyond the north-Mediterranean coast, particularly in the EU member states, are one example. However the perception of a better north is also recalled on a smaller scale, as in the case of Malta where the ŻabSanct Curator

⁴⁸³ Fogu, 2010: 5.

⁴⁸⁴ Fogu, 2010: 7-8.

⁴⁸⁵ Herzfeld, 2014: 122

⁴⁸⁶ Herzfeld, 2014: 131.

maintains that people's mentality and attitude change between north and south, and the southern community of Żabbar is still conservative in many aspects.

Huwa tipiku ta' pajiż tan-naħa t'isfel ta' Malta, tan-nofsinħar ta' Malta. Meta titla' aktar 'il fuq il-mentalita' tinbidel, anke l-attitudni jinbidlu. Hawnhekk naħseb għadhom iktar konservattivi.

The history of the Mediterranean is made up by those who discover and control its geographical features, rather than by geography on its own.⁴⁸⁷ The Mediterranean imaginary is deliberately used either to control it or to set aside forms of power and call for equality.⁴⁸⁸ For all this, the image of coexistence is an unwelcome image to those who do not wish to see a unified Mediterranean. Though coexistence was common throughout most of the Mediterranean history, the image was gradually reduced to that of conflict.⁴⁸⁹

Mediterranean identity and culture are weakened with the images portrayed by supra-regional entities as the European Union, as they tend to eliminate or minimise the importance of whatever does not belong to, or originate from, the supra-regional entity itself.⁴⁹⁰ Thus the promotion of negative images on Mediterranean countries is considered as the strategy of a neo-liberal economy which promotes and advances the interests of the wealthy and its conformists at the expense of those excluded by stigmatisation and the production of stereotypes.⁴⁹¹ The present research has investigated how curators constructed the Mediterranean historical imaginary through the community it represented.

Different views of historic events may transpire as learned visitors, academics and curators see the larger picture unfold and as they become more distant from the reality and experiences of the past. People tend to reflect on historic events through their present imagination, but which is not however the authentic experience and viewpoint of the community who lived and participated in the same historic event. Interpretation therefore becomes fluid and flexible in a very short time. A community's interpretation of history may conflict with the imaginary promoted by

⁴⁸⁷ Braudel, 1972, 1: 225.

⁴⁸⁸ Cooke, 1999: 291.

⁴⁸⁹ Herzfeld, 2014: 126.

⁴⁹⁰ Herzfeld, 2014: 125.

⁴⁹¹ Herzfeld, 2014: 131.

authorities, or even museum curators, already from the day it happens. These factors create a more difficult scenario for curators to present an acceptable and an accurate interpretation of history as experienced by the community. Interpretation at a specific moment in time is different from the interpretation accepted by, and presented to, different audiences of the present. Although interpretations from the represented community may still contain inherited memories and elements from oral histories, legends and myths, curators may still confront lacunae in their endeavour to interpret history faithfully. It may therefore become quite a challenge for curators as they struggle to present the Mediterranean historical imaginary today at their museums.

The Tunnara Curator states that he acquires information and knowledge from academic papers, publications and documents found mostly at Italian and Sicilian libraries and archives. He mentioned sites on the internet which contain short films and documentaries on past tuna-catching practices and sessions. He complains that, despite the material available, the technical side of trap construction is rarely met on such sources.

The Acharavi Curator lists the sources and maintains that the Mediterranean historical imaginary is interpreted through exhibits, narratives and the guided tour:

We use maps, chronological events, photographs, guided tours, labels and everything else we can use to establish an informative and inclusive experience during the visit to our Museum. Everything has to accompany our main exhibition for the life of Corfiots in the past centuries.

The Acharavi Curator explained that the Mediterranean historical imaginary embraced by the represented community is built through

research, bibliography, inclusion of as many aspects and factors we have exhibits and/or other sources etc.

which means a dependence on different sources and studies, but also on information which comes directly from the community itself. However such sources and knowledge may not be considered as academic, reliable research supported by evidence. The challenge increases as the community may hold memories and oral histories which are neither documented nor supported by any sort of tangible evidence. Overall curators, whether at institutional museums, such as State or Church, or grassroots museums such as private or independent micro museums are unquestionably expected to respect basic common ethics and practices expected from

accepted universal curatorial roles. This helps the museum to maintain a certain degree of integrity and respect from the community it represents, and also from visitors and other museums around the globe.

The Škrip museum constructs the Mediterranean historical imaginary embraced by the represented community by conserving its heritage through time and opening it for viewing. The Mediterranean at the Škrip museum features also on information panels and labels accompanying exhibits, on printed narratives and during the guided tour. An example is the section dedicated to ‘Mediterranean Diet’, and which therefore does not limit its interpretation to the island of Brač, the Dalmatian region or Croatia.

Once visitors reach the Maritime museum there is a kind of imagination that Curators promote with the exhibits about the Mediterranean which extends the Mediterranean further into the Atlantic, and across other continents. Nora observes that

Everybody who comes in is connected to little little pieces here. You’ll be surprised and then like the other time we had someone; they were Jewish people from Israel. We had a question for them. “What is the teaspoon for?” and so they told us. You’re always learning from people too.

The Maritime Curators are also aware that, while museums are pedagogic for their audience, they are also places where curators and those involved can learn from visitors. Likewise the ŽabSanct Curators maintain that, as they aim to facilitate the understanding of their collection to visitors who show interest, they also try to understand or even question visitors about their area of interest, their background and what is that they are looking for from such a collection. The interaction between the assisting Curator and the visitor is both informative and pedagogic, depending on the depth of interest shown by the visitor.

Curators may encounter problems concerning the choices of interpretation and imaginary they are expected to follow, accept and reproduce in their museums. They may find themselves in a dilemma as to whether they should accommodate the interpretation and imaginary of past and present authorities or give more weight to the community. Current trends in society are influential on the interpretation of past

events, and such pressures may become more accentuated within situated micro museums as they bear the pressures of the surrounding and represented community. Curators and local communities may produce interpretations, displays and narratives intended to deliver a message today, where the local has become global.

The Mediterranean had lately been subject to a ‘counter-hegemonic’ trend in reaction to past Americanisms to reconstruct its image as a complex but coherent identity. Recent and postcolonial times led Europe to reduce its perception of the Mediterranean and Maghreb coast as an extension of Europe. It promoted politics of ‘forgetfulness’ about historic hegemonies of non-European origin in the Mediterranean. Despite all this, the Mediterranean was and still is a network of inter-relationships among peoples and cultures which surround it.⁴⁹²

Curator interpretation and presentation may therefore determine and impact heavily on the Mediterranean historical imaginary reproduced in a museum. Curators within micro museums may choose to replicate curators of the traditional museum model and repeat the interpretation and historical imaginary promoted by past hegemonies and structures. On the other hand, they may take agency and put aside the biases, prejudices and exclusions to interpret and present a more realistic and reliable version of the Mediterranean historical events which have impacted on the community and are consequently accepted by the represented community.

As countries struggle to maintain their distinct style and Mediterranean image in the global market, people are compelled to rethink or re-imagine the Mediterranean even within their own countries. Changes in the imaginary create challenges to curators as these are bound to reconcile the historical with the perception of present-day visitors whose origin cannot be determined by past ties and connections but by the effect of globalisation. In such cases the interpretation of history from the viewpoint of people who experienced the events differs drastically from the interpretation given by museum visitors.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² Fogu, 2010: 18-20.

⁴⁹³ Fogu, 2010: 7-8.

Experiences and imaginaries of Mediterranean history in museums become wider and more diverse as the physical and temporal distances increase. Distances and intensities of direct experience of historic events, as interpreted and presented within a museum context, increase and decrease as individuals or the collective community attaches or detaches itself from the historic event. Historical events are not simply historical as a consequence of time but are due to their being specific events which happened because of ‘what differentiates [them] from other periods’ in time.⁴⁹⁴ Moreover, in museums, the personal experience is surrendered to a generalised community-imagined historical experience, which may conflict with the personal perception of historic events at the time of visit or later.⁴⁹⁵

Participant curators did not envisage much of the Mediterranean perspective in the founding or current objectives of their museums. Curators may visualise no specific Mediterranean connection. Consequently, visitors may only associate with the Mediterranean if they are familiar or knowledgeable of its history. Otherwise visitors may find themselves hovering among old-time objects which tell nothing about their history and less about Mediterranean connections or the imaginary they created.

The Farmacia Curator said that the museum presents no particular Mediterranean historical imagination owing to the limitation of the theme as presented. Again the author is of the opinion that this might be enhanced and reached if the perspective were widened.

The ŽabSanct Curator, through the maritime perspective presented by the Ex-Voto collection, presents the Mediterranean as a busy thoroughfare where vessels navigated on routes between the three continents bordering the Mediterranean, met natural hazards, perils caused by incidents, enemies, pirates and corsairs. The religious aspect of the Ex-Voto as an act of appreciation for the intervention of the supernatural or deity is presented as a common occurrence among all religions, and especially among the monotheistic religions which clashed and came together at different times, places and events in Mediterranean history.

⁴⁹⁴ Maleuvre, 1999: 28

⁴⁹⁵ Maleuvre, 1999, 110.

Curators have their own ways and means of interpreting and presenting the Mediterranean historical imaginary of their community. Although in the Maltese archipelago the sea is never more than seven kilometres away, inland and coastal communities may differ in defining themselves. Curators identify the sea connection of the represented communities from the perspective, objective and theme of their museum. The Tunnara Curator identified the sea as the seasonal source of living of the past tuna-catching community and the present tourism industry at the village. The ŻabSanct Curator identifies the sea as a means of living to the rural community, who sold the produce and sought employment opportunities at the near harbour, dockyards or on mercantile and military vessels. The maritime imaginary is presented also by the Maritime Curators. They argue that their community imagined a Mediterranean which extended beyond its physical boundaries and offered various connections through vessels which visited the harbours. The Curators of the State micro museums OldPrison, GranCastello, TaKola, BistraCat and the Curators of the Razzett and Xarolla museums saw no direct relationship with the physical sea element however they recognised that their communities were a Mediterranean community affected by anything which occurred on islands and their shores.

The Heraklion Curator refers to the Mediterranean as a long built process of political, cultural and economic history. The Acharavi Curator views it in the multicultural connections resulting in recent history in the Mediterranean and Europe. The Farmacia Curator sees it through the microcosm of pharmaceutical practices, i.e. the progress of science, the use of herbs as a product available at pharmacies, the contacts made to import certain ingredients and art which decorated the social space where the community met in times of sickness and the need for remedies to their illnesses. Apart from presenting the imaginary, curators were asked how they presented the Mediterranean historical imaginary through the information labels, printed and verbal narratives at the museum.

The ŻabSanct Curators note that it is difficult to explain the historical scenario presented by the Ex-Voto paintings to the non-Mediterranean visitor or to visitors who are not familiar with Mediterranean history. However they use the Ex-Voto paintings as a means to help the visitor build an own Mediterranean historical imaginary today.

The Tunnara museum therefore becomes a channel to help the visitor construct a Mediterranean historical imaginary from the exhibits displayed, the interpretation and the well-informed narrative recounted by the curator. Photographs and some prints at the museum provide visual and pedagogic material of experiences and knowledge: none of which can be experienced authentically today. Through museums and displays such as those of the Tunnara, the curatorial practice of seeking personal contact with the visitor and conducting the museum tour becomes indispensable as the curator's knowledge shared during the guided tour with the visitor is nowhere else retrievable. The curator's guided tour becomes a means, if not the only means, by which the visitor can reconstruct the Mediterranean historical imaginary today while at the museum. It was observed that the curator seeks interaction with the visitors on tour. The curator does not produce a monologue. He does not expect the visitor to listen and be silently passive but to interact and ask questions. This may be a reason why the curator at the Tunnara museum is happy with the number of visiting students and why he keeps reading and informing himself about any new studies on the tuna-catching industry of the past and the present. Although most themes and collections present historic objects and items from the past, curators may present collections and events either chronologically or as related to objects and events in history but not necessarily in strict calendar sequence.

The guided tour by the Maritime Curators is fragmented. It does not follow a chronology or a theme which develops and unfolds gradually with the narrative. The Maritime Curators do not agree about a fixed route to see the displays, as it is up to the visitor himself to build the Mediterranean historical imaginary. Thus the curator's narrative as an audio medium and the observation of exhibits as the visual medium are the means to an end. Nevertheless, the interpretation and presentation of the Mediterranean historical imaginary in museums may as well depend on the curator's knowledge, agencies and/or subjectivities and the capability to negotiate upon the imaginary embraced by the represented community: a factor which is absent in museums where the curator or assisting staff lack such knowledge.

The Heraklion Curator said that the historical imaginary of the Mediterranean presented 'is based on a chronological order.' Likewise the Acharavi Curator also presents the Mediterranean historical imaginary chronologically but states that it is

also dependent on the events which it narrates. At the Škrip museum the Mediterranean historical imaginary is described according to the relationship of events, objects, people and places, not chronologically.

The Tunnara Curator states that the narrative at the Tunnara is built according to calendar time. He explains that this is possible owing to the fact that they can tell all the story of the *tunnara* till it ceased being practiced. The Xarolla Curator said that there is no systematic chronology followed at the museum. The exhibits are mainly divided according to their composition material, such as metal, wood, and pieces which tie the windmill mechanism and structure together. The ŽabSanct Curator says that they maintain a certain chronology in the exhibits on display, even if there are no exhibits which could be attributed to one particular century or age. The collection mostly kept to a chronological sequence is the Ex-Voto collection with its span of around four centuries.

The Razzett, Maritime and the State-owned micro museums OldPrison, GranCastello, and TaKola, do not present their collections and displays in a chronological manner. It is only their information and interpretation panels that refer to some dates, years, centuries or ages. These dates or years are provided only from the perspective of the venue and/or collection displayed. However the BistraCat Curator said that at the moment they are only focusing on the chronological sequence of events as they are still gathering information about the site itself.

The curators interviewed claimed that the Mediterranean historical imaginary at all the non-Maltese museums is described according to the relationship of events, objects, people and places. It was only the Heraklion's Curator who included the chronological in her description of the Mediterranean historical imaginary. For various reasons curators may choose to include or exclude aspects of the Mediterranean historical imaginary.

The Tunnara museum as a coastal battery and because of its connections with the tuna-catching industry and fishermen, is bound to the sea element. Its military function and its connection to fishing and trapping tied it to the sea as a source of food, of earning a living, of defence from seaborne attacks and survival. The ŽabSanct

exhibits are strongly related to the religious aspect but as objects they are a reflection of Mediterranean craftsmanship and artistry. However the strongest aspect of the ŻabSanct is its collection of eighty-five Ex-Voto paintings, and this is a detailed almost photographic witness of Mediterranean maritime experiences for around four centuries (1617-2012). The ŻabSanct Curator underlines the fact that the museum cannot eliminate aspects of the Mediterranean historical imaginary. He mentions the strategic importance of Malta for trade routes, transportation and commerce which existed between Malta and North African countries, the Levant, other countries and continents.

Likewise the Farmacia Curator gives credit to the *religious traditions and beliefs* as they helped to form cultural identities of people in the Mediterranean. The element of the monotheistic religions as contributor to *the diversity of populations inhabiting islands, cities and coasts* was also listed among the three historical factors mentioned earlier.⁴⁹⁶

The TaKola Curator perceives the Mediterranean historical imaginary in the development of windmills which historically and presently connects the Maltese Islands to other Mediterranean islands.⁴⁹⁷

An aspect of the Mediterranean historical imaginary included and promoted at the Škrip museum is the Second World War with the purpose of showing visitors that finally 'love always wins'. The Škrip museum therefore uses such historic events to convey messages to its public. Nonetheless, it tries neither to exclude nor to minimise the importance of any aspect of the Mediterranean historical imaginaries.

The exclusion or promotion of certain aspects of the Mediterranean historical imaginary was another factor about which the curators were asked. The Tunnara Curator states that his museum does not omit anything, especially if it is connected to the cultural and touristic aspect, the tuna-catching practices and the Second World War as the last military connection experienced by the battery. The Tunnara museum

⁴⁹⁶ Kousis, Selwyn and Clark, 2011: 1.

⁴⁹⁷ The Malta Independent, 2007.

therefore tries to attract visits by appealing to persons interested in more than the tuna-catching aspect of the collection. This provokes further thinking about the suitability of the museum's name as *Tunnara Museum* as it is exclusive of the other aspects which such a heritage and collection carries with it.

The ŻabSanct Curator underlined the fact that the museum cannot eliminate aspects of the Mediterranean historical imaginary in its presentation. As an example, he mentioned that the museum cannot exclude the commerce which existed and still exists between Malta and the North African countries or the Levant. The ŻabSanct Curator argues that, as Malta was a strategic and important maritime port in history, it remains important for other routes of transportation and commerce between countries and continents. He compares its past maritime activity to the present crowded scene of air transport at busy airports. Another aspect mentioned by the ŻabSanct Curators which cannot be omitted is the contact with Islam in the North African countries through the Ex-Voto collection. Although the events painted describe an escape from the Islamic authorities it presents the realities of history where Christians and Muslims came into contact and at times cooperated to escape slavery. A later aspect found in the Ex-Votos is the arrival of mercantile vessels. Additionally, the ŻabSanct Curators could not omit the connections inspired by the different artisanship and craftsmanship displayed at the museum, which show the influence of cultures that reached Malta across the sea and which also tell a maritime history. These are aspects which the museum cannot omit or exclude, stressed the ŻabSanct Curators.

According to the SantLluc Curator, there is a missing aspect of the Mediterranean historical imaginary in his museum and he explains that

no se trata el mundo islámico que, en Mallorca, fue muy relevante (s. X-XIII) [the Islamic world which in Mallorca was very relevant, is not treated (10th to 13th Centuries)].

Despite the inclusions and exclusions made a characteristic of the Mediterranean imaginary is that it is rarely static but frequently dynamic.

The homogeneous and stereotyped Mediterranean historical imaginary as promoted, taught and presented in museums, especially for reasons of colonialism, has

been both condemned and refuted.⁴⁹⁸ The Mediterranean in its restricted and wider geographic encapsulation, evolved from the traditional presentation of a homogeneous Mediterranean by colonisers and authorities in power, to a Mediterranean presented as a myriad of cultures and diverse communities. Together they construct the Mediterranean as a unique, dynamic and fluid region rather than a static, restricted and monotonous region. From a servant to powers and colonisers the Mediterranean changed evolving and alternating cultures as it created and recreated itself into a distinct region wealthy of diversities that make it unique in all its aspects even at the micro level as that of small communities on small islands.

Herzfeld does not see a future for the present ‘commodification of the Mediterranean’ identity.⁴⁹⁹ The postmodern scenario has witnessed contrasting reactions such as the rise of nationalism in opposition to the neo-liberal West, and the rise of heritage which, while promoting uniqueness and distinction, is simultaneously showing visitors the various degrees of similarity and shared history.⁵⁰⁰ The paradox is that the promotion of distinct identities by the heritage industry contributes to a widespread consciousness of homogeneity, since it follows and relies on literature produced by the West and its philosophy: as such, it revitalises the stereotypes and expectations of those same powers which had colonised the Mediterranean.⁵⁰¹

None of the Curators interviewed stressed that the community represented by the museum had an identity that was distinct from the national identity, the homogenic and stereotyped identity promoted by the state and its collaborative institutions. The Curators of the Razzett, the ŽabSanct and the Tunnara museums had all stressed that their communities shared a Mediterranean identity. They recognised minor differences between their community’s identity and the national identity, amongst which were characteristics like the rural in the case of the Razzett, the ŽabSanct and the Tunnara museums, and the devotional in the case of the ŽabSanct museum alone. While identities survive for long, imaginaries may change within shorter times.

⁴⁹⁸ Baldacchino and Vella, 2013: 4-5.

⁴⁹⁹ Herzfeld, 2014: 132.

⁵⁰⁰ Herzfeld, 2014: 132.

⁵⁰¹ Herzfeld, 2014: 132.

Curators were therefore asked whether the community's imaginary of the Mediterranean past and today were similar or not. Changes of the Mediterranean imaginary from the past to the present were not perceived by most curators interviewed. The Tunnara Curator perceived an increase in communication between communities of the Mediterranean thanks to better and faster transportation systems which keep communities connected and more knowledgeable of each other. An example of continuation he mentions is that many Maltese still go to Sicily to eat tuna the Sicilian way.

Illum, naħseb jien, permess tal-kumdita' ta' l-ivvjaġġar sirna iktar. Fil-fatt hemm ħafna Maltin iżuru Sqallija u kważi il-basin tal-Mediterran kollha. Kull Malti kważi mar Sqallija. U kull Malti mar Marsazemi jaraw il-mużew tat-tonn jew fejn kienu jaqbdu t-tonn, jew kielu t-tonn f'ristoranti li kienu tunnara.

The Acharavi Curator is of the opinion that the idea of the represented community about the Mediterranean changed from the past to that of today. In consequence the Acharavi Curator said that such a change places demands on the curator in a way that 'Now we know, and we are trying to understand those connections deeper, doing research etc.'

The SantLluc Curator is of the opinion that the idea of the community about the Mediterranean today has changed from that of the past. He described the change as

Ahora el contacto es más por vía aérea que marítima (mayor rapidez, frecuencia y menor coste) e incluye los grandes flujos turísticos [now the contact is more by air than by sea (quicker, more frequent and lower cost) and includes large tourist flows].

Distinctions however exist between Mediterranean islands and communities which through their history experienced colonisation, occupation or dependence on another island, a mainland country or power.

The Razzett Curator argues that since 'we are all Mediterraneans,' there are few differences between the past and present relationships that the community had with the Mediterranean. Through the maritime theme and collection, the Maritime Curators perceive that through the maritime the community is still directly and deeply connected as much as it was historically. While ex-naval crew members and maritime people relate directly to the exhibits, the younger community relates more through the

exhibits donated by their families as memories of ancestors. Since through such collections the colonial presence and influence emerges significantly, the colonial is thought to be present not simply among the maritime themed museums but also at any other museum and its musealia.

On some formerly colonised Mediterranean islands, an acceptance of the imaginary promoted by the colonisers was facilitated by the colonised themselves. For various reasons, sections of the colonised wished and endeavoured to compare and assimilate themselves to the coloniser's perceived image.⁵⁰² They attained the distinct political agenda of the colonised while accommodating the political agenda of the coloniser. Despite its 'hospitable people', the Mediterranean, may at times demonstrate the same characteristics attributed to the colonisers. People or cultures which previously were welcome and seen as a relief to the economy were later perceived as a threat to the interests of the local population and culture.⁵⁰³ The Mediterranean is therefore presented more as a conflict zone irrespective of whether conflicts happened due to the coloniser's interests or due to actual disagreements between Mediterranean peoples or cultures themselves. Museums may after colonisation find themselves re-affirming the same coloniser's imaginary of conflict and division rather than of hospitality and mutual interaction.

A Mediterranean-type museology and curatorial practices may however be identified among museums in the Mediterranean and among museums of insular communities. A Mediterranean-type of museology and practices is emergent from the communities themselves and their curators as they seek to free themselves completely from the ex-colonising West, other powers and their media, formerly practiced and promoted by the national or regional substituting authorities on such islands. Though this may sound utopian, the grassroots museums under study and their curatorial practices contribute to the identification and establishment of a Mediterranean-type of museology and curatorial practices which witness to the myriad of peoples, cultures, heritage and histories that the Mediterranean embraces. The diversities and similarities among Mediterraneans past and present may serve as a unifying factor that counters the historical images of divisions and conflict promoted by those for whom the

⁵⁰² Vella, John, 2014 (unpublished).

⁵⁰³ Hart Robertson, 2006: 29.

Mediterranean is not their home but as it is with the communities and the grassroots micro museums under study.

The curatorial approach to interpretation and presentation of the Mediterranean in history is both cautious and adventurous. In the absence of objective and in-depth research about individual non-national communities, curators tend to present the Mediterranean historical imaginary as established by former subjective historiographies and formal sources promoted by the colonial authorities or the establishment. Curators who dare to go the extra mile present the different imaginaries alongside the imaginaries promoted by the nation-state and the institutions. Although curators at State micro museums cannot prioritize the imaginary of the local community over the national imaginary promoted by the State, curators such as that of the BistraCat museum show that even national museums may sometimes and in certain contexts reach a point where they must be inclusive of non-national communities. Curators of private and independent micro museums show that they rely on both the formal sources and the community's input. However private micro museum curators are more cautious as they are accountable to the parent organisation or institution. Concurrently they cannot risk to exclude the community which they represent. It is the curators at independent micro museums who have the freedom to dare go further, challenge the formal historical imaginaries, and present the imaginaries of the represented community. Such community-led imaginaries can be found in the displays, the accompanying narratives and the museum tour narrative. It is the different contexts in which the curator operates that determine the frequency of exclusion or inclusion of the historical imaginary of the community represented in a museum.

Whilst some museums may attribute minimal importance to the sea element within the interpretation of their community, some of the museums studied may regard the maritime factor as a vital element of their community or even as their main museum theme and the main source of living or survival for their community. Connections to the maritime theme of the Mediterranean were encountered under different forms within the museums under research. Permanent and tangible witnesses of maritime connections came through architectural features and structures such as the Westreme Battery (Tunnara museum), the graffiti found on walls of the Old Prison

museum, and artifacts found in-situ, left by former residents or donated by community members such as the Maritime museum collection. Among other museums, exhibits of objects connected to the maritime theme were the Ex-Voto paintings found at the ŻabSanct museum and the Maritime museum, both of which present the thalassic aspect under different forms of individual or community expression and experiences which remind of distinct past events, such as tragedy, survival, thanksgiving and faith in times of distress or natural disasters. The maritime theme as found at the Tunnara museum presents the sea as a source of earning a living, as a gateway in and out of a country, harbour or place and as a communication to, or with, the world as understood from the Maritime's collection. The sea element presents different types of communities and maritime functions, such as naval dockyards, military, arsenal and industrial harbour communities; fishing communities, ports and villages; mercantile or commercial ports and communities; and communities whose connection with the sea may be tourism or simply aesthetic.

Conclusion

Mediterranean islands and their communities, irrespective of their size and dependence on the sea, are always connected to the Mediterranean image and its historical imaginary. Both Mediterraneans and non-Mediterraneans maintain and express perceptions, and hold interpretations of the Mediterranean, its communities, cultures, history and places. Although the images of the Mediterranean met in museums are reminders of the historical imaginary as perceived and understood today, curators in collaboration with the communities represented have the role to facilitate the understanding of the Mediterranean historical imaginary as ancestors imagined it and understood it in their age and when it happened. This is no easy task for either the museum curator or its community, and challenges abound as such historical imaginaries are presented and conveyed to visitors, to the various museum audiences and the public.

Above all, it emerged from the study that micro museums find it difficult to present the Mediterranean historical imaginary at their museums. There seems to be many opportunities being lost in micro museums today to critically explore constructs of the Mediterranean, even if they are aware of their Mediterraneanity: that is, in the

culture and history, the collections, and narratives about the represented and/or local communities they present. The micro museums studied in Malta, in particular, demonstrate a certain naiveté in their approach to the question, and appear poorly prepared or disposed to engage critically with such issues.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Visual Observation and Recommendations

This chapter concisely provides descriptive observations using visual research methodology,⁵⁰⁴ followed by recommendations emerging from the study. Observations at the museums were undertaken to collect data on display layouts, namely, how exhibits are placed and presented to visitors. Notation was made of text and information where these were available, and whether the content expresses cultural or symbolic power, using semiology and ethnographic discourse analysis. Observations took into consideration salient interactions between curator and visitors. This enabled the comparison between information collected from interviews and that from observed practices. Another observation was of any interactions between visitors and the musealia if these occurred. The information gathered was compared with other museums and literature concerning micro museums.⁵⁰⁵ The concluding recommendations intend to urge actions which demand changes or revisits to existing practices, policies and theories. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that further research may be required in areas or contexts excluded or insufficiently covered by this study.

Visual research was restricted to the nineteen micro museums personally visited on the Maltese Islands and in the Ragusan Province. The objective was to identify curatorial practices concerning objects selected for display, displays and meanings or symbols they tried to convey. Scholars maintain that *the local museum is a repository of local meaning, as the eye is receptive to feelings transmitted by material objects as well as humans, and buildings and other artefacts as all transmit ideologies as well as sentiments.*⁵⁰⁶

Observation of text concerns mainly text used on interpretative panels, information labels or panels and printed narratives. Observation of the verbal narrative, and verbal interaction it produced, occurred mostly during museum tours conducted by curators, where available, or dialogues conducted between curator and visitors at the museum. Electronic gadgets containing audio-visuals were excluded as

⁵⁰⁴ Pole, 2004.

⁵⁰⁵ Candlin, 2016. Candlin's research on *micromuseology* was undertaken in the United Kingdom and its findings published during this study.

⁵⁰⁶ Allatt and Dixon, 2004: 84, 85 and 90.

the focus was on curatorial practices, not on one-way impersonal communication. The visual observation therefore looked at:

- a. which exhibits are put on display,
- b. how they are displayed, and
- c. for which objective.

During this exercise notation was also made of

- d. text and information,
- e. display layouts, and
- f. what cultural or symbolic power they display. (ethnographic discourse analysis was used for this purpose).

The researcher acknowledges that observation time and circumstances met may have imposed limitations and situations which could affect the outcome of this part of the research, or that certain elements were beyond the control or observation of the researcher. Each observation was intended to provide information on four main topics, mainly

- whether artifacts are ‘positioned’ in a way that they create a disparity between them or the community/ies they represent, for example, material which takes precedence over other;
- whether historic events were presented in a way which somehow excludes, discriminates or minimizes community/ies or others on matters, factors or criteria of, for example, race, political or religious belief, taboos, ethnicity, poverty or social issues;
- whether displays (temporary/permanent) highlighted certain factors more than others; and,
- whether exhibits, displays and narratives were interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator, setting (context) and visitor.

The collection and display of material culture are one of the first things which come to mind when people think of museums. The display of material culture is intended to tell visitors what people and cultures used, invented or produced, and how they lived. Displays can define an identity of the represented, as they are visual representations of cultural practices and the social life which people lived and experienced in the past. However, museums evolved beyond displaying or showcasing

cultural objects. The museum became a combination of visual media, a channel for information and formation of opinion, imaginaries and a challenge for the mind.

Objects are nowadays displayed in showcases of different forms, sizes and design. Objects can be stand alone in large spaces or accompanying a multitude of other exhibits. Colours and lighting feature as a channel to the creation of different feelings and emotions, such as warm or cold displays and environments.

Photographic material has evolved from the traditional framed photograph to wall-sized prints and panels in monochrome, colour, or both. A mix of media and materials is used to connect objects, create spaces, atmosphere and emotions. Light, or its absence, helps to create atmosphere and direct attention to selected exhibits or other musealia, thus giving prominence or importance to objects over others. The display of photographs as objects from the past can serve both as a visual medium and as evidence which goes beyond the photograph. As Martin and Martin (2004) maintain,

photographs constitute valuable evidence not only for historians but also for social scientists across a broad gambit of disciplines. Photographs provide a fascinating starting point for looking at the past, although they often come no nearer to the definitive version of it than any other source.⁵⁰⁷

Photographs provide the visual dimension which the verbal and written can explain but not show. Curators use visual aids to communicate an authentic visual record of an event, place or persons in history. Nonetheless photography may be skewed to what the photographer wishes to convey to his viewers. Choices made by the photographer may therefore be exclusive or provide an unreal or an incomplete view of the authentic. As Harrison (2004) observes:

What is worthy of being photographed, displayed or stored, reveals ontological choices that confirm values, social relationships and identities.⁵⁰⁸

This is because curators (or those setting displays, interpretation or information panels, and exhibit such visual aids) may, like photographers, select what should be exhibited or excluded. Photographs at museums alternatively need some accompanying

⁵⁰⁷ Martin and Martin, 2004: 21.

⁵⁰⁸ Harrison, 2004: 37.

information or interpretation since not all visitors may be familiar with what is shown on such visual aids. Text therefore becomes important as a dialogue between the visual image and the viewer. At museums it is the curator who communicates with the viewer and, in the absence of the curator, text must provide the verbal narrative and help the visitor create an imaginary.

Text has become another visual medium by which to convey messages. From the simple standardized readable text which accompanies exhibits in a showcase or next to an exhibit, museums present texts printed in different sizes, colours, fonts and directions. Large text is sometimes used as if telling visitors to read the phrase and keep it in their minds. The visual in all its forms is an important medium by which curators choose to communicate messages and knowledge, to evoke feelings, memories and emotions, and to make their objectives heard and effective. Text is frequently accompanied by images to enhance the visual and facilitate understanding. The way words and text are presented helps to change meanings and messages communicated by images.⁵⁰⁹ Studies make the point that ‘images may play a variety of different roles in these interactions. Images may record, reveal, elicit, illustrate, demonstrate or evoke meanings.’⁵¹⁰

Observation of the interplay of text and images, drawn or photographic, as presented by curators, is another factor worth deeper study. Where text alone accompanies the object, the exhibition of material culture transforms the objects displayed into ‘interesting objects of visual culture.’⁵¹¹ Therefore, at museum displays, the main elements of visual observation stand on three factors: the exhibit, the text and/or visual images accompanying the exhibit, and the atmosphere or context which closely surrounds it in that exhibition space. These elements were considered in this brief visual observation and analysis.

The descriptive observation of the visual research applied involved the visual observation of displays and their contexts. The positioning and mode of display of exhibits were all an expression of curators and whatever they wished to convey to the

⁵⁰⁹ Feistead, Jewson and Walters, 2004: 118.

⁵¹⁰ Feistead, Jewson and Walters, 2004: 118.

⁵¹¹ Wagner, 2011: 72.

visitor. Curators make choices and within their practices of display and presentation of material objects and other visual musealia their biases, preferences or subtle exclusions may emerge. They may also assert their objectivity and do their utmost in their search for authenticity. In such practices, curators may be influenced and subjected to pressures and taboos imposed by the establishment or the represented community. Such production of the visual is the channel which paves the way to the 'symbolic, nonmaterial dimensions of culture and social life' and which lead visitors to build ideas, judgements and 'think about their history, time and place, the universe, children and adults, work, play, life and death, family and community.'⁵¹² It is nonetheless acknowledged that whatever the researcher visualises in a museum display, and derives from it, may not necessarily agree with the curator's viewpoint. Curators may unintentionally set up displays which are unwelcome, otherwise interpreted or misunderstood by visitors. Likewise the researcher acknowledges that any such observations made here for academic purposes and for the improvement of curatorial practices may be contested.

Starting from the external context, the micro museums studied are situated in different places and environments. Through visual observation, the study briefly attempts to provide information concerning the following:

- location and directional signage
- the venue and its architecture
- entering the museum
- material culture: cultural objects and bodies exhibited
- boundaries: sense of place (*Table 9*),
- identities: social divisions and relationships. and,
- representations: social construction of reality.

The Maltese grassroots micro museums

Żabbar Sanctuary Museum

Among the Maltese micro museums studied, the ŻabSanct is on a busy road and quite visible. Built adjacent to the parish church, it overlooks an urban square. It has the only venue among the museums studied that was purpose-built as a museum

⁵¹² Wagner, 2011: 72-73.

with large windows to permit light during the day. At the front yard stands the only sign which indicates its presence and opening times. Its exterior presents a post-war neo-baroque architecture on three levels. Its open plan permits flexibility and maximum utilisation. The entrance is raised from street-level and reached by a flight of steps. At the entrance a room serves as a reception area and a souvenir shop.

Once one leaves the reception area, and enters the wide open-plan hall, a well-lit continuous and modern showcase which runs along most of the walls captures the eye. Since there are no signs to follow, arriving visitors may feel confused once they reach the large space alone. It is only if the Curator or a volunteer approaches the visitor, or is requested by the visitor, that a kind of museum tour takes place. The length and course of the tour, and the time that the guiding person spends with the visitor, depends on the interest shown and the level of interactivity allowed by the visitor.

To start with, the museum presents a relic very close to the heart of the Żabbar community: a sixteenth-century fresco rescued from the old church of Our Lady of Graces. Located at what is intended to be the start of a walk through the museum, its position makes it easy to miss for visitors if not accompanied by a knowledgeable person. This exhibit, of most value to the community, to devotees, art-admirers and historians, begs for a more prominent and central position. However, the fresco may be compromised and lost if its repositioning and conservation are not professionally carried out.

The material culture displayed mainly concerns religious objects connected to religious ritual, practices, devotion, tradition, celebration and past parish events. It shows that religion is also a means to the creation of art and crafts which, despite the religious function, give a sense of what the community was able to produce itself or through artists, artisans and craftspersons to satisfy devotional, religious rituals and external festive events of the community. Other secondary themes in the display are archaeological finds, artistic works and a section connected to the great misfortune of the 1970s: the Vulcan tragedy. A few archaeological exhibits which ended up at the museum give a rough background to the historical imaginary of this once rural village which started from a couple of hamlets known as 'Il-Biċċieni' and 'Tal-Bajjada' also

known as 'Il-Misraħ'. A small showcase displays some archaeological artifacts, mainly pottery found in tombs and around the village. No indication of their provenance is provided because as, the Curator explains, most were found while digging the foundations for houses or working in the fields, and since Maltese laws led to a confiscation of property, people feared that the authorities would confiscate their land or means of living without compensation.

The long, modern and well-illuminated showcase at eye level along the walls displays various religious objects connected to the religious aspect of the collection, and some ethnographic objects related to the locality. These are accompanied by some information labels and photographs but avoiding details. The labels printed in small text provide sufficient information to understand the practical use of the displayed object or its connection to an event. Most objects are presented side by side on shelves, hung or displayed on smaller shelves within the same showcase and mostly are accompanied by monochrome photographs and informative texts in English. Some event-related objects, photographs, pictures and documents are presented with a coloured background which visually identifies the specific section. An overall observation is that prominence is given to objects connected to the church and religious practices. Artifacts such as pottery found at the village, other lay artifacts and several paintings which formerly were in the church or the sacristy do not receive such prominence or attention during the museum tour.

In the middle is a wooden platform (*tribuna*) used for the crowning of the image of Our Lady (2 Sept 1951), the panels of which belonged to the RMS *Alcantara*, a 1926 Royal Mail Lines ocean liner. Traditional-type showcases are placed in the arched spaces of this platform to create an enclosed space used temporarily as an art gallery and for small gatherings. A small space created by the same *tribuna* and the section beneath the staircase is dedicated mostly to the Vulcan tragedy. A section of the fuselage takes prominence over other related and unrelated exhibits displayed in the space. Overall, there is no object which catches the eye as a main exhibit.

The upper level is reached by a wide staircase or a lift which the committee recently introduced to accommodate visitors with mobility problems. The upper level is dominated by the Ex-Voto paintings. Sedan chairs, a plague cart and other objects of

folkloristic and historic value also enrich the space. A wooden platform which runs round the same space permits visitors to better appreciate the Ex-Voto paintings at the second level. Displays at this level are easily followed by visitors, even if no signs are provided or visitors are unaccompanied by museum staff.

The sense of place is strongly linked to norms, culture and adversity, in turn related to devotion, religious belief and hope in times of adversity. Secondary are those connected to celebration and storytelling, such as the local devotional feast and thanksgiving for divine assistance in times of adversity. Examples are the Ex-Votos and objects sponsored or donated by the community to the church. Although the building itself is relatively new, its connection to the parish church and to its Żabbar-born founder give the museum a sense of place. The Curator explained that members of the parish community, even if they do not visit much, show and express pride in its existence and function.

When it comes to identities, the exhibits highlight no social divisions. Past social divisions emerge from the Ex-Voto paintings. They show that those who afforded to commission a renowned artist could offer a finer work of art. The museum presents the community as one with a common identity that of *Żabbarin*, excluding the heterogeneity existing within the same locality. The museum is a place of coming together without differences or divisions, thus it represents a mature approach to promote unity in the wealth of diversity rather than in divisions. The museum constructs a reality which, despite the divisions or piques expressed mostly during the village festas,⁵¹³ comes together in times of adversities and need.

- Artifacts at the ŻabSanct are ‘positioned’ in a way that they create a disparity between them or the community/ies they represent. Religious material takes precedence over non-religious artifacts coming from laypersons.
- Historic events are presented in a way which somehow excludes the roles played by other institutions, social groups or different communities within the

⁵¹³ Author’s note: The present Żabbar community still manifests sympathies identified with the earlier communities of the two hamlets (known as ‘Il-Biċċieni’ and ‘Tal-Bajjada’ also known as ‘Il-Misraħ’) which formed the village. The establishment of the two band clubs in 1883 by the same band-master led to a consolidation of the former division of identity which was from then on expressed through sympathy for a particular band club and the events it celebrates. However the Marian devotion and locality-belonging brings all together.

homogenic community presented at the museum. Since it is a museum within the parish church it gives secondary or minimal importance to anything not connected directly to religious belief or the parish church. Social issues and debates concerning the community are absent at the museum.

- Displays highlight religious and devotional factors more than others.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives are interlinked with the positionality and location of the parish church more than with that of the curator. The visitor is expected to understand or have some knowledge of the context, i.e. the village and its community through time.

The Two Windmill Museums: Xarolla and Ta' Kola

Two micro museums quite visible and close to a main road are the windmill museums Xarolla and TaKola. The Xarolla is indicated on traffic signage and a Bus Stop bearing its name. Nothing indicates the main entrance except for a small sign showing opening times, a telephone number and fees applied. Interpretation panels outside are available. The TaKola has no Bus Stop next to it bearing the same name. It is indicated by signage along the road and a small sign looking on the road indicates its entrance. The interior of the two seventeenth century windmills is quite similar. However the State-museum, TaKola, has a small reception desk also displaying some merchandise, missing at the Xarolla.

Material culture at the Xarolla is limited to the windmill mechanism at ground level and a rather speculative reconstruction of a living quarters at the upper level. There is also a collection of shards and pottery found at the adjacent catacombs. The Xarolla gives prominence to pieces and parts of the old mechanism and to the pedagogic aspect by interpretation panels. Some folklore items are exhibited on the floor around the two levels. While the living quarters are what was left by the previous curator-founder, items mostly of similar use are crowded in the smaller spaces of the windmill. Exhibits at the TaKola are not totally focused on the windmill. The TaKola features also a folklore collection showing a weaving loom, a carpenter's workshop, recent baking equipment and machinery, and other utensils. The living quarters are a mixture of furniture and items used in everyday life by the miller's family, tools and objects not normally connected with living quarters. While the Xarolla has interpretive and informative panels prominently placed at ground level, the TaKola has none

except panels informing about the last miller, bread, grain collection and supplies, baking, grinding, threshing, cultivation and harvesting. The towers of both windmills present similar features and the mechanism is presented as the main focus of both museums. The living quarters are both presented as a familiar space to which visitors may easily relate. However duplication does limit the visitor's sense of authenticity.

Moreover, the experience of the living quarters at the Xarolla, and the Ta'Kola Windmill museums, present an idealised and idyllic domestic environment, which is presented as 'the past' without quite pinning it down to a specific period. Both museums, actually present a medley of artifacts from many different decades, and which the visitor is meant to accept unquestioningly as 'the way things were'.

The sense of place at the Xarolla revolves around the theme of the miller's heritage, storytelling, and the windmill as a symbolic landmark. The sense of place attached to the TaKola is that of both heritage and symbol. Despite any divisions or differences in identity, the Xarolla brings together the communities of surrounding rural villages. The TaKola however finds it hard to bring the younger local community to identify with the now State-owned museum: even if the older generations do remember Ġużeppi Grech known as Żepu Kola, the first curator-founder who was also from Xagħra.⁵¹⁴ The two museums construct a reality based on past practices where the miller called the peasants with the *bronja* and they carried their grain to be ground for them.⁵¹⁵ This brought together different people to the windmill on specific days. The TaKola is not so specific as to what it aims to represent, and the reality constructed is a mixture in one place of crafts, traditions and agricultural products connected to the windmill, the different abilities required to build and produce the mechanism, the windmill's services and the miller himself.

- Artifacts at the Xarolla are 'positioned' in a way that the artifacts linked to the mechanism or collected by the previous curator and miller take precedence over those not related to the windmill. This is not similar at the TaKola where the artifacts connected with the windmill are fewer in number and presented

⁵¹⁴ Based on information by Heritage Malta found at the museum on a panel titled 'L-Aħħar Tahħan tal-Miħna ta' Kola' (The Last Miller of ta' Kola Windmill).

⁵¹⁵ The *bronja* [bron-ya] is a large sea snail shell, known popularly as conch, seashell horn or shell trumpet which the miller blew to call the peasants to bring their grain for milling. Lanfranco, 1983: 37.

as one of other crafts related to the windmill and rural life more than specific to the windmill. The reconstruction of the living quarters at the two windmills however present a random collection of furniture and utensils from different times which are only displayed on site without a particular focus on use or age.

- The historical events presented at the Xarolla are those connected to the windmill and history on matters is excluded. The TaKola presents historic events from the administrative and political perspective – i.e. the importance of bread production in the Maltese diet, the role of the Università' in building the windmills, feeding the population and survival during such adversities as the Second World War and the Cold War.
- The Xarolla displays highlight the windmill and the miller's role and residence more than anything else. The TaKola displays highlight ancillary crafts which the miller would have required to keep the mill functional – i.e. carpentry and blacksmithing.
- All the Xarolla, exhibits, displays and narratives are interlinked with the positionality and location of the miller and in the context of the windmill. The visitor is positioned as a learner, which places the curator at a topdown position. At the TaKola, the curator is again presented as the knowledgeable source and the visitor is the student. However at both museums the tour narrative and explanation of the curator is indispensable to understand most of the displayed. In both museums, the exhibits at the living quarters are a random collection of furnishings and utensils.

Razzett tal-Markiz Mallia Tabone - Folklore Museum

Signage to the Razzett is at some distance, on a road close to the main village square. No other sign was met on the way. The venue, despite its rural house architecture, stands alone surrounded by new urban buildings. The sign on the façade states *Talent Mosti - Ċentru Nazzjonali Kulturali*, but provides no indication of the folklore museum. The entrance is an arched doorway devoid of any decoration on a bare wall with a few smaller apertures. The door leads to an outdoors space, a yard from where all rooms on both sides of the yard, the upper level and a large back garden, are reached. A staircase open to the elements leads to the upper level. The busts of prominent artists and personalities capture the attention of the visitor entering the venue. It might disorient the visitor as their presence is not easily associated with

folklore. Nonetheless, the museum succeeds in connecting the cultural and the functional, the tangible tools, utensils and belongings to the people to which they belonged and those who donated them.

The folklore exhibition room, considered as the 'folklore museum' presents a collection of tools mainly connected to agricultural practices, quarrying and construction, carpentry, trades and crafts, mostly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most exhibits connected with agricultural practices are hung on the walls. Different household items are set around the floor next to these walls. No information labels or panels accompany these exhibits. The Curator maintains that these exhibits are intended to make visitors appreciate the skills of ancestors upon whom the present is built. Another two connecting rooms on the first floor, presented as the permanent art exhibition, include a collection of pictures, paintings and sculptures donated by local and other artists. This collection includes showcases dedicated to renowned artists. One room is used as a committee meeting room. Further exhibits, such as busts of personalities from the locality, sculptures and some artifacts, are spread around the yard and open spaces of the same venue. Although these are highly visible, they attract little attention. It appears that visitors, alien to such personalities or works of art presented, consider them more as decorations rather than as exhibits.

The support of museum staff is crucial for visitors as the former are the only medium able to provide an understanding of the place, its exhibits and its historical imaginary. The venue and the exhibits relate more to the locality, its local traditions, trades and crafts and personalities than to a national or a wider regional or Mediterranean audience. Even if some exhibits are equally known among nationals, Mediterranean and European visitors, it is difficult to understand the function of such exhibits if no explanation is provided.

The material culture revolves around rural practices but includes various utensils and tools from the twentieth century. A noticeable factor at the folklore museum is the lack of space, which is because other rooms are used for temporary exhibitions. This means that if the collection increases, more spaces at the venue will have to be sacrificed for the permanent museum exhibition.

The sense of place at the Razzett is one which requires some effort to inspire an imaginary of the past rural character of the site and the village. The village was historically surrounded by vast stretches of arable lands, grazing lands and some small rural hamlets. Nowadays, the adjoining school building and surrounding new houses and apartments overshadow the venue and it cannot be totally appreciated and experienced as a rural house detached from the urban setting of the former village which has grown into the third most populated locality on the Islands. The sense of place or *topophilia* of the venue is deeply felt and shared by the volunteers, but not so much by visitors who, as remarked by the Curator, come from different parts of the Island and the world. They show more a sense of appreciation for the conservation and protection of such a structure than an attachment or a belonging to it. The sense of place at the Razzett is bound to architecture in its simplest form, the venue as a public space, heritage, storytelling, tradition and hardships (adversities) through the collection, a symbol of the old rural village. It also provides a sense of lifestyle of rural life and identity of the old village. From the type of visitors described by the Curator, it can also be linked to the sense of place defined by tourists: that is, the visitor coming from places outside the geographical village. The social division of identities attached to the collection is mainly refers to two types of people: the nameless agricultural community and the named personality presented as a glorified role model for present and future generations. Class is however reflected in such divisions, since the rural community is only present through its utensils and tools.

The identities represented at the Razzett may be divided into two main types mentioned - i.e. the so-called *nameless* common people represented by the agricultural, trades and crafts' exhibits on one hand, and on the other, the distinct personalities who are distinguished by their names, belongings and achievements. This is a contrasting factor within the Razzett as pride in one's locality and community are not expressed in any narrative (nor were they at the interview). However, pride in the achievement of local personalities is expressed in the museum tour and the exhibits representing such personalities. There is no connection expressed about the relationship of those who step into the limelight and those who remain outside it.

The social construction of reality at the museum is that which reflects such a division in society, and this may be the reason for the Curator to argue that *culture is*

not for the common people. Thus the collection at such a micro museum, its activities and attendees have changed the perception of the Curator, who after all wishes and expects the local community to visit and participate irrespective of their background, class or status.

The representation of the two types of people present in the community reflects difference and disconnection. Although the division between the working class and the professional class was quite visible in the past, even in such localities as Mosta, this is not addressed in the Razzett's displays. The folklore and the arts exhibits are disjointed. Giving prominence to achievers and artists and simultaneously demoting the grassroots can turn off people who consider themselves as commoners even if their contributions to society are no less worthy than anything related to either art or anything valuable in the eyes of the *cultured* elite. An observation which arises from such museums is whether grassroots museums started by common people do remain cognizant of the grassroots objectives and the value of the grassroots in society. The comment that 'culture does not belong to the common people' is an alarming statement as this may reflect several significant issues in contemporary Maltese society.

The issues raised may reflect probabilities, which may or may not be fully confirmed. An assumption is that the grassroots are not well-educated enough to appreciate and enjoy cultural heritage. If this were true, members of the grassroots would have never taken such initiatives (as those of founding museums) on their own, and dedicated so much effort, time and money to them.⁵¹⁶ Therefore, the grassroots feel inhibited from appreciating and enjoying cultural heritage because of their limited means and circumstances.⁵¹⁷ Their retreat from such initiatives, or even their abandoning them, depends on resources and situations which they may prefer to use on more important matters such as food, family, residence and other daily needs.⁵¹⁸

Another reality is that the entrepreneurial spirit of the grassroots is often discouraged by the amount of bureaucratic, legal and regulatory burdens imposed by authorities and the systems on the Maltese Islands. None of the Curators interviewed declared that they either break even or make a profit from their museum admissions

⁵¹⁶ Kisić and Tomka, 2018: 12, 36-40.

⁵¹⁷ Smith, 2006: 30, 36-38, 44, 206, 211, 237, and 306.

⁵¹⁸ Smith, 2006: 4, 35, 67, 187-188, 206-208, 211, 228, 234, 239, 273-274, 281, 298, 302 and 305.

and activities. Thus, the situation on the Maltese Islands at the time of research discourages members of the grassroots from taking cultural heritage initiatives which could promote interest among community members and contribute to raise awareness and pedagogic activity for the community.

A parallel truth is that if a grassroots museum attempts to engage in pedagogic activity to educate and raise awareness among the grassroots, it cannot afford to engage tutors or provide material free-of-charge to students. Grassroots museums may not qualify for certain funding schemes as a consequence of their legal status. Their financial and human resources are insufficient, and support from either public or private funds is minimal or totally absent. Therefore, the only solution is to abandon all pedagogic projects intended for the community, inclusive of activities addressed to persons who cannot afford them and who then lose interest in visiting or participating in the activities of the larger museums, even if for free.

The assumption that the grassroots are not sufficiently well-educated to appreciate and enjoy cultural heritage is true however when one looks at the educational system on the Maltese Islands. State and private schools do not dedicate enough to promote interest or education in local cultural heritage and history. Schools dedicate more time and effort to other subjects. Some schools even omit the choice of history as a curricular subject, let alone a compulsory one. This is ridiculous when one considers that most tourists choose the Islands as their holiday destination for history and heritage.

Another truth is that State museums present the ‘national identity’ and what authorities have in the past labelled as ‘national heritage’. The grouping of the different identities and communities under one homogeneous national identity and community presented an unrealistic image of the Maltese and Gozitan local communities which differed from each other. These differences, however, are still ingrained in the different communities. These are witnessed to by their local heritage, language/dialect, and characteristics as noted by the interviewees. An overall truth is that when it comes to cultural heritage – local, national and Mediterranean - the Maltese Islands require a serious revisit of the educational, legal and regulatory

systems. A departure from the colonial government mentality of exclusion, homogeneity and much discrimination is a must.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, observation was intended to provide information on four main topics (here provided in a bulleted list), mainly the positioning of artifacts and whether they create disparities between them or the community/ies they represent; whether the historic events presented somehow exclude, discriminate or minimize community/ies or others; whether displays (temporary/permanent) highlighted certain factors more than others; and, whether exhibits, displays and narratives were interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator, setting (context) and visitor.

- At the Razzett artifacts and art are ‘positioned’ in a way that they create a disparity between the personality and the community/ies represented. The work of art by artists, objects pertaining to famous personalities or objects representing the artist are representative of the individual achievements, while the objects representing the community are nameless.
- Historical events at the museum are minimal and presented in a way which somehow speaks more about the person than the community. However some historical events concerning the Mosta community are indirectly connected to the church, religion and faith and come up through a few objects kept at the museum and artworks connected to the locality.
- Temporary displays highlight the arts, while the permanent displays highlight art and folklore above all other factors.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives are intertwined with the cultural positionality and location of the personality or community presented, with the curator acting as facilitator. The setting, i.e. the museum’s immediate context and that of the location, come through the interactions of the curator and the visitor through the tour or the explanation of the exhibits.

Nadur Maritime Museum

The Maritime is another micro museum located in a quiet urban area. Once a visitor reaches the village, locating the museum depends a great deal on where the

visitor stops and the means of transport used. On the outskirts, around the village and at the main square, one meets panels and signage installed by local and central authorities through EU funding, which indicate attractions at the village, but not the micro museum itself. It is only a pair of small rudimentary black on white painted signs made by the same Curators and fixed at the ends of the same side street which indicate the presence of the micro museum. Although Local Councils are bound not to support private initiatives, there is nothing which impedes them from providing signage to cultural and heritage attractions within their locality. Initiatives started by the grassroots must have the recognition of local governments, not to exclude central authorities. Besides being a pedagogic tool, the activities of micro museums render services and benefits to the community, to the tourism industry, to society and to the economy of the locality and the island. There is no specific signage as such, but people in the village were quick to indicate the way to the museum. Outside the museum, an anchor placed as a symbol of the maritime museum cannot be missed.

Although the Maritime is absent from government promotional brochures,⁵¹⁹ it is mentioned under its earlier name on the ‘Museums’ page.⁵²⁰ Inconsistency regarding the museum’s name and opening schedules is noticeable on webpages like TripAdvisor, Facebook, Google Maps and the official site of the Gozo Tourism Association.⁵²¹ Though mostly referred to as *The Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum*, it is also mentioned as the *Maritime Museum*, and the *Maritime Museum Nadur*. Such inconsistencies may confuse prospective visitors who are not familiar with the history of the museum.

The exhibition rooms present a well-lit environment, except for a long hallway at the rear of the museum. The backyard and the upper level are inaccessible since they are currently used by the parish priest. The way the collection is presented is very irregular to the visitor, who expects a traditional or formal type of display. As the

⁵¹⁹ Ministry for Gozo, 2018.

⁵²⁰ VisitGozo webpage, 2018. The text reads “The privately owned Kelinu Galea Maritime Museum in In-Nadur is one man’s extraordinary collection of maritime memorabilia gathered over a period of 65 years. Highlights include You can find rare and priceless items such as original pieces of timber from Lord Nelson’s ship “HMS Victory”, the first US warship – the “Constitution”, battleships and also one of Lord Mountbatten’s gold epaulettes which was worn during his duty in the Mediterranean. There are also many models, uniforms, photographs and maritime objects, along with 300 ship’s crests that adorn the museum walls.”

⁵²¹ Gozo Tourism Association, 2019.

Curators maintain, and as visitors commented on pages like TripAdvisor, the collection follows no protocol. It is a private collection where objects are simply exhibited. However as with any other personal collection, objects are grouped according to preferences and ways perceived by its collector. On closer observation, the showcases do present a systematized display. The founder, Kelinu Grima, presented what can be termed as connection-based sub-collections within his overall collection. He divided them into sections such as personal correspondence and the connected object about which the correspondence speaks. Souvenirs such as cups and saucers are grouped according to the type of vessel – i.e a cruise liner, a mercantile, or military fleet. Accompanying such exhibits are paintings, postcards, models of ships and photographs. Photographs, drawings, postcards and even stationery used for correspondence at the Maritime are objects which

act as an *aide memoir*, as a “trigger” to memory. They become material repositories that allow people to engage in forms of “memory work” that is both individual and collective whether or not the past is their own.⁵²²

What Kelinu Grima tried to convey with his own personal collection is his personal experience of searches, expectations, encounters and memories of whatever it entailed to reach a vessel, its crew and, with luck, to acquire a souvenir for his collection. It is not simply Kelinu’s collection but a portrayal of all the experiences of different collectors worldwide, who dedicate so much time, effort and money to start and build such collections. In the image of Kelinu and his collection, there are envisioned the innumerable collectors and their collections which gave birth to museums worldwide. The Maritime Curators express their intention not to change much of how the founder presented each showcased display and what was hung on the walls. The Maritime is visually a representation of such collectors’ collections, most of which remain in private houses. The concern is again that of legacy. What happens once collectors become too old to curate their collections, and eventually pass away? The Maritime as a model of such collectors and collections is also envisioned as an appreciation of collectors and their collections. Collectors, like Kelinu, may not follow the traditional curatorial practices but present a personalised type of curatorial practice which can inspire curatorial roles. Formality can be broken, because creativity and innovation have no boundaries or limitations. Likewise, curatorial practices, especially in the mode of display and presentation, have no strict rules to follow except those which the

⁵²² Harrison, 2004: 37.

museum and its curator wish to present. If it is a personal collection which the museum wishes to present then none can blame its nonconformity on the traditional or conventional.

The venue, originally built as a one-storey residence for the village parish priest, had a unique character when it first housed the collections of Kelinu. However, the need to accommodate the parish priest has recently required the construction of another floor on the original building. It did not impact negatively on the venue as externally it kept the architectural features of the original building, but offered no further space to the museum. The entrance hall of the museum offers a rare experience as it presents a decorated and painted ceiling which is more reminiscent of a nineteenth century or earlier high class family houses than a rural village dwelling.

The sense of place connected to the museum is primarily that of a public space and community since the house serves also as a parish house. The museum and its collection are relegated to second place in the eyes of the community as it is locally connected to the element of storytelling and to visitors, mostly tourists, as a visitor attraction.

The collection shows the rich relationships which collectors such as Kelinu succeeded in establishing and cultivating worldwide, even from a tiny island like Gozo. It is the personal initiative and constant endeavor which make grassroots initiatives materialize. However, the conception of relationships does not stop with the collector or the opening of collections for public viewing. Museums are themselves a space for starting and cultivating relationships.

The museum is a channel for the creation of a cultural imaginary.⁵²³ It depicts the Mediterranean during the past three centuries from a maritime perspective as imagined primarily by its collector and founder. Nonetheless, it hints the cultural imaginary owned by most Maltese and Gozitans whose lives and livelihoods depended on military and mercantile fleets, the harbours and the dockyards when the Islands were colonised.

⁵²³ Froggett, Muller and Bennett, 2019: 162-176.

The social aspect of the Maritime can be viewed and interpreted from different perspectives. The perception of the museum relies mostly on the reality perceived by its founder-curator, who both as collector and school teacher viewed the didactic and memories which such things may carry with them into the future. As a Nadurian, as an islander, and as a person who lived through the transitional period from colonial rule to independence, the founder-curator saw the collection from the point that, once the British were gone, the contact with the outside world would have changed and the presence of so much vessels from the British military and merchant navies would have gone too. Although aircraft transport was available at the time, it was not so frequent and efficient as it is nowadays. Therefore he saw maritime connections as a better way through which to convey a message about his times to future generations.

- Artifacts at the Maritime are ‘positioned’ and given preference in the way that the collector chose and preferred. Since all material is maritime, no large distinctions are observed. Size and space available seem to have dictated most of the displays inside the showcases. An implicit distinction could have been made between the personalised souvenir and the casual souvenir, but this is not evident.
- Historic events concerning the Maltese Islands and naval experiences are presented in conjunction with the other exhibits. There are no exclusions, discriminatory or minimizing ways of presentation.
- Displays reflect the higher presence of British naval and mercantile vessels more than others. However, passenger ships are also featured.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives are interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator as collector. Although the setting was that of a personal collection and therefore the collector’s home, the setting (context) – i.e. the parish priest’s house, the village and the island - had forced the collector-curator to think of the visitor too. This could be criticized by the traditional curatorial practice, and yet not, considering that after all this was a personal collection.

Ta’ Bistra Catacombs Museum

Another micro museum on a busy road is the BistraCat. It stands on the outskirts of Mosta adjoining a rural area. Despite its visible modern structure on one

side of the road and the old building on the other, few seem to know about it. Though at the time of the interview the Curator complained of the absence of a Bus Stop close to the museum, at the time of compiling this study Bus Stops with the name Bistra were introduced on both sides of the road, a short distance away. The visitor enters the museum at street level. Its reception space, apart from the ticketing window, presents four small artifacts in two small glass showcases attached to the wall. On three walls are large wall-mounted monochrome photographs from the days when the site was discovered and used as a farm. Text, which describes briefly the context, history and excavation, is bilingual: Maltese and English. The size of the text in black and bold varies between the heading and the description below. The heading is four times the size of the same Arial font used in the descriptive lower text. Information labels connected with the four showcased artifacts are on the outer panes of the glass showcases: they are bilingual and of smaller but similar font. At the lower level, there is a smaller sized wall-mounted monochrome photograph to which is attached a brief explanation of the *Re-use and Abuse* of the site. Set on a moderately sized wall-mounted photograph background are a plan and an elevation view of the catacombs in colour, and a bilingual text in black describing concisely various features of the site, excavations and original layout in the same but smaller font as that used upstairs. No further interpretive panels or items of information are present on the first part of the catacombs walk. In a section which goes under the road and divides the site, there are two large panels showing in colour the plan and elevation of the catacombs' complex. On the whitewashed new walls beneath the road there is a colour photograph hinting at various conservation issues. In the second section there are bilingual informative panels accompanied by colour photographs of the re-use of the site in recent times prior to conservation: the funerary cubiculum,⁵²⁴ the 1933 excavations and other features. The railing along the path is an eyesore, but as the Curator explained it was an unavoidable necessity to prevent visitors, especially children, from falling into the rocky part. The modern walls, apertures and overhead metal structure in white contrast with the weathered yellowish limestone of the catacombs. The new structure over the catacombs creates a dissonance with the site and its context. A better and harmonious material could have been substituted for the moulded material (concrete) used over the catacombs. The last section of the museum, which presents the *stibadium*⁵²⁵ (which

⁵²⁴ A type of funerary bedroom where the corpse was laid to rest.

⁵²⁵ A 'stibadium' is a rock-cut circular couch and table for funerary banquets.

the text calls *triclinium*) and the quarried area, was a major fright to the observer. The elements of the modern structure dwarf the remains as the main focus of the museum.

The material culture presented at the museum consists only of four artifacts. However the focus, as the Curator observed, is on the catacombs considered as a celebration of the Island's main natural resource: the soft workable limestone. Elements such as history and heritage come as a secondary sense of place to the community.

The sense of place which people attach to the BistraCat is that it is a public space and a heritage. However, the sense of place, as linked to visitors, lifestyle, history, storytelling and mostly of community, is missing or very low. The relationships expressed are those in history which see a connection to the Rabat community a few kilometres away and the coastal harbour further down the valley. The relationship with the local community is still in its infancy. Social divisions are not explicit as there can only be a historic type of division extracted from the main artifact. It suggests that besides the community at Rabat, a community at the Mosta site shared common burial rites and practices, but where the one at Mosta was different. The recent social history of the site is represented by the photographs as it is the only visual means available from the recent past.

- Artifacts at BistraCat amount to four showcased and the actual catacombs. However, artifacts which are not considered as artifact *per se* are the large reproductions of photographs. These are 'positioned' in such a way that they create a contrast between them and the four artifacts showcased. Although the Curator tends to include the local community, the community is not yet represented except by the introductory audio-visual or the community/ies they represent. Precedence, though in a negative light, is given to the farming family as representative of past unawareness and misuse of historic places. It is the archaeologist who found and recorded the site who receives praise and acknowledgement over the community which hewed and used them.
- As for historic events presented, the BistraCat somehow excludes information on community matters connected to the site. In the absence of the written record, oral lore is being collected. The museum once again lacks information

on the race, practices, beliefs and social matters which concerned the catacombs community. These are not yet presented.

- The four showcased artifacts highlight burial practices. However, the photographic and printed content highlight the structure, its misuse, excavation and re-excavation, conservation challenges, but not its community and their practices or lifestyle: an element missing from the excavation reports.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives are constructed with the positionality and location of the State-museum curator but as the Curator remarks, that prior to the presentation of the context (i.e. the setting) to the non-local visitor, it is necessary to have the input of visitors from the local context (i.e. the locality and its community).

Tunnara Museum - Westreme Battery

The Battery built under the Hospitaller Order was originally used for defense purposes. In 1748 Grand Master Pinto, introduced the Tunnara known as the ‘*mattanza*’ – a Sicilian word indicating the killing or beating to death of tuna fish and Mellieħa bay was one of those northern bays chosen for tuna-catching.⁵²⁶ The Tunnara is situated at a tourist hot spot, a popular summer bay, with tourist accommodation facilities, almost touching the shore and not far away from the main road. The museum is visible from the entire bay but not from the old road which comes down from the village centre. The site known as ‘It-Trunciera’ touches the sea. Signage and Bus Stops on the road bear the same name *Tunnara*. Other signage at the site is that installed by the Mellieħa Local Council. It is only when one reaches the site perimeter that large signs indicate the presence of the museum. The two signs indicate with capital letters the ‘Tunnara Museum’ and with smaller sized lettering the ‘Westreme Battery (1716)’. Underneath there is a short text which reads ‘The Locality of Mellieħa awarded as ‘European Destination of Excellence’ by the European Union’. Smaller ad hoc signage is at the corner with the main road among other third-party adverts and indicators.

At the time of the interview, the first impression of the Tunnara was not so welcoming as the battery was buttressed with huge concrete blocks to prevent its cracking outside walls from collapsing. The main entrance was literally buried

⁵²⁶ Historical information provided in this chapter was retrieved from Fenech, 2019.

between two high walls of concrete blocks. On the doorway is a wooden 'Tunnara Museum' sign beneath the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Perellos. A bilingual interpretive panel, in Maltese and English, had its English language section partially hidden behind the concrete blocks which rest against the exterior wall.

The inner structure presents a military architecture from the 18th century. Barrel vaulted spaces constructed prior to the exterior walls provide the interior structure. Once the top courses were reached the roof was covered at an incline with beaten earth to prevent rain-water from seeping inside the barrel vaults and the fill.

On entering the museum the first space presents a small table used as a reception desk. Around and with no signage are objects found on site, and various replicas connected to military use, models of the bay and the battery, and an authentic part of a canon found on site. A few descriptive printed papers provide information about the battery. No elegant interpretive panels or informative labels are present. The generic labels carrying information are printed in small but readable Arial font in black on white paper. Text size varied according to the fit which the space available on the paper size permitted. Monochrome photographs were reproduced by photocopies on paper. The Tunnara Curator was the one who, despite having no volunteers on site during visiting hours, stood up and went to initiate dialogue with the visitors. Although not all visitors sought dialogue, those interested were eager to follow the explanation and narrative. Numerous objects are not showcased but displayed on wooden shelves and tables. However visitors appeared more satisfied as there was no barrier between them and the objects. Visitors could touch the exhibits. The closeness of the exhibits seems to immerse the visitor in the world of the Tunnara days. In contrast, no military object, perhaps understandably, could reflect the battery context. Visitors showed more awe when they ascended to the roof of the battery as the view from there is an experience in itself. It is hoped that the restoration that has started and the change of use into an interpretive centre, will enhance the place and attract more visitors. However a major concern stands with the future of the exhibits which were displayed at the museum at the time of the present research. Will they find a new home in the same village?

The Tunnara presents visitors with three types of material culture: military, tuna-catching artifacts and other fishing objects. The appearance of the exterior architecture is easily associated with its military and defensive past. Eighteenth century architecture and additions for machine-guns and a searchlight from the Second World War are evident. The first room which the Curator indicated as a showcase of military and defensive objects is minimal as there is only one partial artifact: the original cannon. The remaining exhibits representing the military character of the battery are reconstructed models of the fortification and eighteenth century armour such as fire-arms and swords. A few artifacts connected to the Second World War are an infantry helmet, some cartridges from the bullet belt of a machine-gun, an army clasp knife and a pair of binoculars. No interpretive panels or information accompanies these artifacts. A few faded printouts or photocopied papers are placed next to the models in glass cases or leaning against the wall.

The lack of military artifacts at the reception room could be supplemented with the models or printed visuals to enhance the interpretation concerning the military and defense aspect of the museum. The lack of resources and the intention to transform the museum into an interpretive centre together impede the Curator from upgrading the existing interpretive panels, providing easy-to-read and attractive narratives and information labels to accompany the artifacts exhibited.

The presentation of artifacts found inside the water-well and items recovered from the battery when used as a fishermen's store are incompatible with the military character and exhibits. The way these objects are exhibited on and inside an old kitchen cupboard attracts no attention. A few printed labels describe a few items or their provenance but they do not tell a story. This happens only when the Curator interacts early with visitors and is in a position to guide them from the doorway. This does not happen when the Curator is sitting at the reception table or already accompanying other visitors inside the museum. Therefore the objective of the first room is in most cases lost.

The other two rooms display a wide range of artifacts and images. The display is divided between the tangible objects and visual images presented in drawings, printouts or photocopies of original material from photographs supplied by

descendants and relatives of the tunnara community or publications. Exhibits related to the tunnara are sometimes presented alongside those related to the fishing community. The main focus of the museum from the tuna-catching perspective is the model of the trapping-nets at the centre of the large room. An unexploited attraction of the museum is the architecture of the battery and its construction phases and techniques.

The sense of place expressed by the Tunnara is that of heritage, storytelling and tradition. However, the dominance of the battery over the bay and its visibility make it a landmark and a symbol of the place. The other element – visitors - is more perceived by the locals than anyone else.

The connection that emerges from the Tunnara narrative is a Mediterranean historical one. Although the Mellieħa tuna-catching community and its practices might give an image of a remote and isolated community of practice, it was strongly connected to other tuna-catching communities on the Maltese Islands and their Sicilian counterparts.

People define daily circumstances according to their respective backgrounds and life experiences. The Curator describes the tuna-trapping community and their practices based on oral lore and knowledge acquired from relatives of the old community, publications, and other sources met at museums and conferences related to the theme.

- Artifacts inside the battery are ‘positioned’ in a way that they create a disparity between the tuna-trapping community and the other communities represented. Fishermen are less represented, and those who played a military role at the battery are much less represented or almost excluded. Artifacts connected to the tuna-trapping activity take precedence over others not connected. The only genuine military artifact, a cannon, is presented alongside militaria reproductions which minimise its importance.
- Historic events connected to the tuna-trapping practices are presented in a way which somehow minimizes the activities of the fishermen community/ies and those involved in the coastal watch of the bay.

- The focus of the museum discriminates. This is because displays present the tuna-trapping community as having possessed more importance than any others involved with the battery, both when it was used as a fishermen's store and as a military post. These may be balanced if the interpretation centre project is developed professionally and is inclusive of such communities and persons. The display highlights the *mattanza* practices more than the rest of the annual practices even within tuna-trapping, but these however are well-compensated for by the Curator's narrative during the museum tour.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives at the Tunnara are interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator since he is the best source of information at the museum. The setting facilitates understanding as it helps the visitor to imagine the activities connected to tuna-trapping and defence of the bay. The displays helped by the explanatory tour narrative of the Curator are very well constructed to involve the visitor's imagination and interaction, even if no media or modern gadgets are used. At the Tunnara, the personal contact reduces and even eliminates the difference between the positionality of the Curator and the visitor.

The other Maltese State micro museums

The Old Prisons (OldPrison), a State micro museum, may shock the visitor as expectations and reality are two quite different things. As a museum, it has only a few artifacts in a showcase displayed at the reception area, which includes the ticketing desk and museum shop. The rest is a corridor round a block of prison cells and a courtyard where a few interpretive and informative panels are hung on the empty walls. Visually the Old Prison complex may not be so attractive, but since it is not furnished with mannequins and other modern gadgets, it gives the visitor an authentic experience of what an austere prison environment looked like. Confinement was not a happy experience and the OldPrison can still offer the experience. However the aid of the Curator or a knowledgeable guide is useful. The small interpretive panels in the yard show white bold text on a black background in Maltese and English, with a picture in between showing related items such as an old key. The main attraction and material culture at OldPrison are the cells, in particular those accessible. Entering cells is an experience which the Curator encourages as he explains life in prison and

provides information about the place and its inmates. In the absence of the Curator or a knowledgeable GSO, the visitor's experience of place may not be met.

Identities at the OldPrison are mostly combined with the sense of place as adversity, i.e. convicts, the accused or persons awaiting trial. It is the graffiti on the walls that reveal more of the identities of people who experienced prison in past times. There is, however, nothing left with which to associate the place with those who watched over prisoners or cared about them. Relationships expressed at the State micro museum are as stale as that of the prisoner in confinement. Nevertheless prisoners had contact with other people, even during their days in prison. There is nothing about the relationships which prisoners had, or were forbidden to have, during their incarceration.

The social construction of reality is one mostly left to the imagination of the visitor. Yet the Curator does invite visitors to enter one of the cells and experience what it felt like being confined in such a small space for a long time. The sense of abandonment, of rejection by society, of being wrong and being condemned or awaiting punishment, was a way to several negative emotions and experiences which are not easily expressed by the interpretive panels or tour narrative or experienced by the visitor. It is a reality mostly reliant on one's imagination fed by knowledge, fact and fiction.

- Artifacts at the OldPrison, as at the BistraCat, can be similarly divided into two: the movable and immovable. There are only a few artifacts displayed in a table showcase supposedly connected to prisons. The prisons do not create a disparity as a museum experience but a secondary imaginary can lead visitors to perceive the prisoner's alienation from society.
- Historic events are not the main focus of the museum. History is only presented to tell about the origins of the building and how Gozo was used as a place of punishment through the ages.
- Displays are limited to a few objects connected to imprisonment but not found on site, and a number of graffiti reproduced from those graffiti existing around the Maltese Islands, some of which are from the same site. It is such graffiti that highlight the connection of prisoners with maritime vessels and faith more than others.

- The few exhibits at the OldPrison present no positionality except that of the didactic museum. However the printed narratives present the museum and its curator as the source of information and knowledge. The setting of the museum, adjacent to the law courts, is helpful to the visitor as it presents the law and punishment at a prominent and central spot of life at the Citadel. The square which happens to be the only square at the Citadel is dominated by the Cathedral church as a symbol of religious heirarchy, the law courts as the symbol of power, and the prisons as the place for those who refused to conform. Nonetheless these are imaginaries which visitors must be helped to perceive.

National folklore museums

Another State micro museum under the same Curator is the GranCastello. In December 1981, a National Folklore Museum opened at the upper floor of the Inquisitor’s Palace (Vittoriosa) but it failed to attract visitors and closed by the end of the same decade. It reopened as the National Museum of Ethnography in 1992, inclusive of the offices of the ethnographic section of Heritage Malta.⁵²⁷ In Gozo, a state-owned museum dedicated to Gozitan folklore opened in 1983. Spread within three interconnected sixteenth century houses, and renamed as the Gran Castello Historic House (GranCastello) in 2016, it displays traditional rural and agrarian trades and skills, agricultural implements, stone-masonry tools, a carpenter’s workshop and domestic furniture which shaped everyday life on the island for centuries. It also showcases a large selection of tools and items related to crafts, hobbies, attire, clay models and items connected to religious belief.⁵²⁸

Gran Castello Historic House

Accessed through a narrow side street on the left of the Citadel’s Cathedral, the three houses with their façades raise few expectations. It is only a small sign hanging at the lower corner of the street that indicates the museum. At the entrance is a ticketing desk and a rack with publications for sale further inside. The house presents a staircase leading to the first floor and arches support the walls and the ceiling. The

⁵²⁷ Gambin, 2003: 32-33.

⁵²⁸ Heritage Malta, 2019. see Folklore museum; Visitmalta website, 2019, see Folklore museum.

bare limestone walls give a first impression that the focus is on architecture. However it is a folklore museum and a complex of three houses whose architectural design, techniques and features are worth observing. No house is similar to the other two. Each shows that houses were more a product of practical use and spaces than of aesthetics and design. The bare or painted stone indicates different times in history and shows the different social statuses of the residents. A late twentieth century habit of restoration on the Islands was to strip walls from plaster and paint. Such practices, if not recorded, strip historic houses of history and painted decorations which residents did or commissioned ever so often. The spaces at ground level are ample and exhibits are well displayed. Text and pictorial prints in black on white paper describe the exhibits in Maltese and English. However, interpretive and informative panels do not follow a standard style. On some, the Maltese text is totally printed in capitals while the English text is not. On other labels and panels normal text is used for both languages. For example, a panel describing *Maltese weights* has the title in both languages but no conversion or equivalent to Maltese weights. There is no conformity in either interpretation or information panels around. Each room has its style, design and presentation of information and visual images. Variation and conformity can have different impacts on visitors and the image of the museum. Interpretive and informative panels vary between almost naive rudimentary black and white text and pictorial simple prints, to what can be considered as professional, sophisticated, colourful designs and explanatory text and pictorial printed matter. A dissonance at the museum is created by the audio-visual apparatus found at most rooms. Moreover, there are no indicators or a route to follow through the museum.

Although the material culture at the GranCastello resembles that at the Razzett, the GranCastello collections are much larger and expand into costume, furniture and other areas. A combination of material culture at both museums may give a very good impression of Maltese folklore in its various perspectives and directions. The space at the GranCastello allows related objects to be exhibited together: a factor missing at the Razzett where exhibits are too crowded.

The sense of place at the museum includes architecture and history. Storytelling, heritage, lifestyle and identity emerge through the collection rather than by means of the venue. The identities represented by the houses are those of high-class

families who could afford the protection of the Citadel and property within its walls: something not enjoyed by poorer rural families. The relationships shown by the houses and the costume collection are those of detachment between the poorer rural families and the wealthier families inside the Citadel. However the various tools and exhibits depicting crafts, rural and agricultural activities, could be used to show the dependence of the wealthy families on the poorer classes. The lower classes worked as peasants, farmers and supplied produce and other food to the richer classes. They worked as servants with the wealthier, who depended almost entirely on their services and labour. These are the social constructs represented by the museum and its collection, even though they are not articulated in the display.

- Artifacts at the GranCastello are ‘positioned’ in such a way that they create an implicit disparity between the rural community/ies and the nobility or the higher classes represented in the folklore collection. Unlike the Donnafugata they do not bring together the two communities as dependent on each other but rather as distinct.
- Historic events on the other hand are not presented in a way that somehow excludes, discriminates or minimizes others on matters, factors or other criteria.
- Displays highlight factors concerning folklore, residential spaces and the servants’ quarters; but there is nothing about the history of the actual residents, which contrasts with the information provided at the other State micro museums - TaKola and BistraCat, and the Sicilian Donnafugata.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives at the GranCastello are interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator as representative of the State topdown approach. They are however not all connected to the context and the visitor may be misled or confused by the sense of life led in the houses of the Citadel and the folklore objects which are out of context.

Observation at the Sicilian micro museums and comparison

Visual observation at the Sicilian museums presents various both similar and different factors from those met at Maltese micro museums. The geographic proximity and yet distance of the two peoples and cultures is key to the things they have, and do not have, in common, as reflected at the various museums.

Antica Farmacia Cartia

The Farmacia is at the heart of the UNESCO heritage site within the city of Scicli. Although a pharmacy, it presents itself as a local history museum. Originally, in 1902, it was on a rented ground floor of the Palazzo Porcelli-Battaglia-Veneziano-Sgarlata, but in 1985 it transferred to Palazzo Spadaro, where the Cartia family bought two rooms. The furniture, a masterpiece by Emanuele Russino, a worker in ebony of Scicli, is a copy inspired by the Spadaro-Ventura pharmacy of Catania: which the newly graduated Guglielmo Cartia (founder of the Cartia pharmacy) loved. The Art Nouveau painting by Gentile on the main mirror behind the counter is a feature which draws the attention of visitors and inspires relief, tranquillity and protection in keeping with the expectations of customers seeking the pharmacist's help. The pharmacy closed in 2002, but the sign is still prominent on the baroque façade. Along the way, touristic signs indicate churches but not museums. The interior gives the visitor a chance to immerse himself in the past in just one room. The early twentieth century pharmacy has nothing to do with modern pharmacies. The hundreds of jars and containers marked with labels naming the content harks back to the time when pharmacists and apothecaries were able to prepare remedies and recipes from herbs and natural products. Everything in the wall-showcases is left as the Cartias left it. The counter showcase is a masterpiece in wood on its own. In its lower section, it exhibits ceramic containers and on top are temporarily weigh-scales, an old adding machine, a piggy bank, and other items such as small ointment jars. An unexpected gift for visitors was a small plastic container with aromatised salt from Sicily: an unforgettably multisensory souvenir to remind one of the visit.

The material culture presented is all connected to the everyday necessities of the pharmacist and his clients. Nevertheless, the glass jars with syrups and natural ground minerals, the ceramic maiolica jars decorated as maiolica or with art nouveau images of herbs, the tin boxes, the marble mortar and pestle, the carved wood of the counter, the poisons' cabinet, and other equipment normally used at the rear room of the pharmacy by the pharmacist, are all representative of the artistry, craftsmanship, and trades connected to the production of such objects. It is not just a pharmacy but a mirror of early nineteenth century Scicli and southern Sicily. Sense of place is evoked by those times of adversity during which people sought help to relieve their illnesses or discomforts. Secondary is the sense tied to architecture, such as façade, public

space, commerce, history, heritage and tradition. Identities expressed by the micro museum and its collection are witness to the relationship between the pharmacist as service provider and the customers as recipients. Social divisions are only reflected in a collateral concept where clients demanding the pharmacist's service were those who could afford such remedies, while those who could not were excluded as they did not even seek help. The reality constructed by the pharmacy shows the comfort of having a pharmacy at the centre of a city, but simultaneously demands what kind of remedies would people on the outskirts and in rural areas have sought. Or would they have found the remedies themselves from Mother Nature?

- Artifacts at the Farmacia are 'positioned' in such a way that they create a historic disparity between the pharmacist and the clients. The showcased natural ingredients are representative of the herbal and natural healing being above that of belief and superstition. Precedence is not present among the displays though it can be argued that the most commonly used and those in smaller containers take visual precedence over other jars and containers.
- Historic events are only presented through the art, crafts and pharmacy architecture. Exclusions can only be visualised through members of the community who had access and could afford the services and products of the pharmacist and those who did not. Thus the factors or criteria distinguishing trust in either belief, superstition, or natural remedies, accessibility, affordability and poverty, are all implicitly present at the pharmacy.
- The displays at the pharmacy highlight the natural remedies as more important than the commercial and artistic nature of the pharmacy and its objects respectively.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives at the Farmacia are interlinked with the positionality of the visitor as a client of the pharmacy. The Curator's narrative facilitates the experience, and the context facilitates the visitor's imaginary of the pharmacy at the centre of a dynamic city like Scicli.

Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patané

The Bonelli is a palace of elegance witnessing the Sciclian aristocracy. It is among the most sumptuous in the UNESCO World Heritage city and the only one which can be visited. It preserves all the original eclectic and Liberty-styled furnishings, classic and Liberty-styled paintings, which help the visitor to experience

the everyday life, splendour and sensibility of the Bonelli family as the ancient owners and residents. The façade is not as much decorated as the palazzo opposite, which hosts the Farmacia. It seems to hide its interior splendour on purpose to surprise visitors once they step inside. The façade presents a large main door which gives the idea of the classical-art-nouveau manner of architecture. The reception space gives a first taste of the palace, but it is an introduction to what lies ahead. The impressive characteristic of the reception area is the view of the main staircase leading to the upper floor, as if the family did not allow its visitor to the ground floor, mostly reserved to the servants and their services. It is an invitation to join the aristocratic family at its level. The surprise of splendour starts as the visitor, guided by the Curator ascends the stairs. Visitors are lost as they look up and around to admire the paintings of the staircase. The naturally lit staircase presents a wonderful experience when the sun shines from behind its windows. The views from the ballroom balcony on to the street and that from the back terraces give the visitor two different aspects of life at Sciacca: the daily hectic street-life of the city and the silence of the rural and hilly landscape which merges with the late baroque architecture of the city. Text and interpretive panels in Italian and English at the reception area are designed to combine with the colours and noble appearance of the palace. Smaller bilingual information panels at the different rooms provide details about the room, its use, furniture, and the art decorating it. Text on the information panels is printed in black on white paper, and is simple and easy to read. Although the information provided satisfies the curiosity of the average visitor, it was noted that the presence of a well-informed guide, such as the Curator, enhances the visitor experience further, as human interaction is irreplaceable. The Bonelli enjoys no directional signs which lead visitors to it, not even on the façade.

The sense of place communicated by the Bonelli is architecture of a unique type, artistic heritage, symbols found in the artwork of furniture and decorations of the palazzo, lifestyle and identity. The identities reflected by the venue are those of the aristocratic family and the servants: two distinct classes who depended on each other, even if they lived different lifestyles. The personal relationships of the aristocracy at the Bonelli, like those of the Donnafugata, had also reached the Maltese Islands. The social reality constructed is one which gives an imaginary of society of a bygone era, which visitors can hardly understand today as they have never experienced such a life.

Imagination must be aided by the Curator or the tour guide, to immerse the visitor successfully into what living at the time of the Bonelli meant to both classes. Visitors may think that everyone at Scicli lived the life of the Bonelli and forget about servants and lower classes.

- The Bonelli artifacts are ‘positioned’ in such a way that they create no disparity between them or the community and families represented by them. It is the love of art and aristocratic living that is presented with all its splendour. The profane takes precedence over anything else, including the religious or reality existing outside the doors of the palazzo. However the major disparity can be shown between the rooms and spaces where the aristocratic family lived and the spaces where domestic service was hidden from eyesight or laboured during the day. However at the time of research the servants’ quarters were not yet presented and explained to the visitor.
- Historic events feature the resident family and are presented in a way which excludes most of what happened among the lower classes of society outside the palazzo and in the rural areas of the city. It is only through the Curator’s narrative that such are included.
- The displayed art and furniture highlight the different worlds which existed among the aristocratic bourgeoisie but not those outside such circles. The Bonelli family is presented as a representative of the wealthy class of the city.
- The Bonelli’s exhibits, displays and narratives are also divided between the movable and immovable, and were constructed with an indication of positionality and location of the represented family and the world in which they lived. The curator is positioned as a facilitator for understanding the family more than that of a know-it-all who teaches visitors. The Curator at the Bonelli facilitates understanding, the imaginary, and above all the experience of such a lifestyle.

Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla

The Campailla presents an austere façade and architecture, originally having been built as a hospital. Signage was only met at the corner of the main street and the main square a few metres away from the small square in which the museum stands. The museum offers no sophisticated presentation or displays. The Curator leads visitors to the upper floor where the exhibition and medical equipment are gathered.

Everything is presented as it would have been at the time it represents; that is, from the early eighteenth century onwards. Furniture and utensils exhibited are connected to the profession and the practices of a medical doctor. No special arrangement is sought as all is set to give the impression that life still goes on, and that facilities and objects are still in use. No modern information or interpretation panels are present. The information provided is typed on paper from a bygone era, which helps the visitor go back in time. Photographs are another aid to the visitor, even if they do not go back to the Campailla days. The two vaults at the ground floor, once the anatomy theatres, accommodate an extension of the exhibition and the offices of the association *IngegniCultura*, which manages the museum. Here, the exhibits are presented differently. A large show case against the wall contains several objects and equipment related to the profession and its practices. These are all accompanied by informative labels in Italian. Poster-sized panels with photographs explain the use of the spaces with white text on a black background. Other photographs and drawings are presented to the visitor to explain what occurred inside those walls. While the remaining spaces of the *palazzo* are used by the local government authority, not the museum, some spaces are shared for cultural and pedagogic activities.

The material culture exhibited at the Campailla is totally connected to the medical profession and especially to the treatment of syphilis. As a sense of place, the museum inspires a sense of adversity met also at the ŽabSanct and Farmacia from devotional and pharmaceutical points of view respectively. The Campailla, like the Farmacia, shows the medical personnel as the service provider and the patients as beneficiaries. Syphilis as a disease does not select its victims by class or social standing, and the relationships which cure it are once more between the medical personnel and the patient. From a medical side, the relationships of the Campailla went beyond Italian territory. The social construct of reality is once more like the Farmacia's where those suffering from a medical condition such as syphilis would have sought comfort and cure from the medical doctor and his hospital.

- The artifacts displayed at the Campailla are 'positioned' in such a way that they create differences met at the Farmacia where the clients (i.e. the sick) are in adversity dependent on the services and abilities of the medic. The medical takes precedence over anything else. The exhibits are entirely related to the same profession.

- The historic events presented are those related to medical and hospitalisation needs and achievements from the times of Campailla till recent times. In a certain manner it includes and excludes the sick as they are represented at the syphilis chambers and as recipients of medication and treatment, but excluded as to their histories. Again, the Campailla bears witness to exclusions of those who mistrusted the medical profession and its services owing to their lack of financial resources or awareness and knowledge of how to cure themselves through the medical services offered by the hospital and medical people. Some were also excluded as they mistrusted medical intervention and placed their trust more in religious belief, superstition, and their own fabricated cures.
- The displays highlight mostly the Campailla's success at curing the syphilis patients more than others. A secondary highlight is that of the anatomy laboratory where students were instructed and trained on dissected human bodies.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives are interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator, as visitors who have little or no knowledge of medical history and practices cannot understand the museum on their own. The setting (context) is supportive, as the ex-hospital was positioned at the bank of a canal: once the city's thoroughfare of activity. The visitor is however faced with a topdown approach as it is indispensable to the type of museum and its content: most visitors are not familiar to the medical objects and practices presented at the Campailla.

Museo Murika - Racconti di Pietra

The Murika curated by the same Curator, presents a totally different type of museum, exhibits, context and visitor experience. Aimed at providing visitors with an experience of life of ancient rural communities, the museum occupies completely a private cave-house. As declared on the Murika's website, the 'goal is to celebrate the rural communities of the County of Modica using as the main theme the local stone and the achievements through it: walls, vaults, floors, artifacts, furnishings as well as the folklore, the fabrics, the furniture, and music.'⁵²⁹

⁵²⁹ Simoutique, Murika - Racconti di Pietra museum website, 2019.

The place can easily go unnoticed as there is no decorative façade but a modest arch with a wrought iron gate and *Le Case degli Avi* in black-painted capitals welded on a simple iron rod at the top of the gate. It leads into an open-air yard covered with hard limestone slabs, plant pots, upon which doors open and windows look. No sign indicates the museum, but the large coach-room door is inviting, and stepping inside leads visitors into a different world and age. The cave dwelling has a sense of welcome and warmth. Even its constructed sections are amazing and conform with the limestone cave. The artifacts which visitors see, laid around without information attached, since the effect intended by the Curator is that of an inhabited place. Despite the artifacts scattered around the museum and its living quarters, it is the stone (and all its natural and manmade features) that are the focus and attraction of the museum. Furniture added to the museum complex is chosen from the past and is intended, according to the Curator, to complement the world of long departed ancestors. There is no special arrangement of artifacts in showcases, as artifacts are placed where normal rural life and residents would have left them or placed them. All in all, the museum aims to provide visitors with the unique experience of an eco-museum: a museum where one can live the life it presents, even if the city and its community outside are no longer that much rural. Through the museum there are few informative or interpretive panels describing for example the use of herbs and tisanes from the surrounding countryside but they are not specific to the architecture or the collection. The Curator explains that to the residential experience they have added the possibility of experiences as the making and drinking of tisanes, herbal teas, wine, and other liquids. Nonetheless the entrance vault is used for several cultural and pedagogic activities.

The material culture presented focuses on the different uses of the local limestone as natural rock, hewn, quarried, or built. The visitor's imagination is aided with old artifacts used by the rural ancestors of the Curator, but there is furniture of recent age to provide the experience for those who opt to visit or reside for a few days at the museum. No route is indicated as visitors are expected to discover the place and spaces on their own, but a guided tour of the museum does facilitate understanding of the ancestral use of different spaces. The identities presented are those of an ancient rural community that used what nature provided to make a living. Its members used caves as dwellings and embellished them to become safer, to meet their needs, defend themselves in the eventuality of invasions and survive hard times with the collection

of rainwater. The implicit division that the museum presents is that the rural community was closer to nature and its resources than the urban community who enjoyed luxuries unthinkable within the rural context. Survival was a main concern for the ancient rural communities, and it preceded aesthetics, extravagance and any superfluous possessions.

The social construct of reality is living a simple life among what nature provided but which concurrently required effort and sacrifices inconceivable today. A return to basics is a reality which can be lived at the museum by visitors who opt to do so and experience aspects of life of the rural ancestors of the Curator and his family at Modica Alta.

- The artifacts at the Murika are ‘positioned’ in a way that they create no disparity between them and the rural community they represent. However the presence of recent furniture and objects may distract the visitor as the residential aspect takes precedence over the display of objects from the rural past. At the Murika it is the immovable which deserves precedence, while objects and furniture facilitate the visitor’s experience both if resident or not.
- Historic events were presented in a way which excludes what could be found at historical, archaeological or other types of museum. It focuses on the tangible and immediate immovable and movable heritage of past residents and their lifestyle, and is devoid of the wealth found in palazzos or urban settings.
- Necessity and basics are highlighted over the comforts and extras offered at urban residences associated with higher and richer classes, although wealth cannot be calculated with a common denominator between the urban and the rural families or classes.
- The Murika’s exhibits, displays and narratives are interlinked with the positionality and location of the resident and the context in history. The curator is a facilitator for understanding the spaces within the museum. It however is left to the visitor to position himself in the ancestors’ experience of life and engage with the museum and its heritage.

Museo del Carretto Virgadavola

The Virgadavola’s venue neither conflicts with nor complements the collection and the architecture of the building which houses it. The large shed at the *Fiera Emaia*

is part of a fair ground which simply creates an exhibition space, and that is the objective of Giovanni Virgadavola: to exhibit his life-time collection of *carretti* and rural heritage. There is nothing which can distract the visitor from the exhibits. No signage was met on the way to the grounds and the museum was only indicated by a handmade sign once one steps inside the large shed. The *carretti* are the focus of the museum symbolically and culturally: they are the main material culture promoted, but which could be better presented and admired if more space and better lighting were available. The sense of place at the museum is connected to culture, history, heritage and storytelling, community, lifestyle and the later concept of visitors as the *carretto* became a means of transport and souvenir, in miniature, even for tourists. The *carretti* represent Sicilian rural communities and identity as something quite different from the homogeneous identity promoted by the nation-state. However, it is aided with the collection of numerous tools and utensils used by ancient rural communities, other carts, paintings by the Curator, cinema posters, newspaper cuttings and other featuring the *carretto siciliano*. There are no interpretive panels or informative labels attached to exhibits. The Curator is always present and tries his best to answer the questions of curious visitors passing through.

The museum presents the realities of rural life through its tools, utensils and *carretti* in particular: as the *carretto* was the only means of transport available and served rural communities to carry their produce from the fields to the city, happy, singing, storytelling and satisfied after the hardships met to raise their crops, vegetables, poultry and herds. The *carretto* served several purposes for a long time until it became a tourist attraction and a museum object, represented in souvenirs of Sicily and now preserved at the Virgadavola and a few other similar collections.⁵³⁰

- Artifacts at the Virgadavola give prominence to the *carretti* as the name of the museum indicates. They take centre stage as they represent Sicilian rural communities, even if surrounded by numerous utensils, tools and objects connected to rural practices, trades, crafts and other. Art and printed media connected to the *carretti* is also presented as secondary though ancillary to the *carretti*.

⁵³⁰ A documentary about the MCIIV can be found at <https://it-state.com/v/pZGXeNStgs6zbpY/documentario-museo.html> .

- Historic events are presented under a form of art complementary to the decorative art found on the *carretti*. They feature historic personalities and their roles in history, belief, legend, and other such as operatic figures and scenes from Italian and Sicilian literature. With these the Curator attempts to bring together all that happens within the rural communities. However the displays exclude the homogeneous and subjective history presented at State museums which do not feature much about rural communities except for the Contadino.
- Displays feature the *carretti* and their uses and crafts connected to their production more than anything else, but without excluding the rural community.
- The exhibits, displays and Curator's narratives are interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator as a member of the rural community and a hands-on descendant of such families. The context is unfortunately not so complementary as the *Fiera Emaia* is just a temporary setting which seems to last too long, preventing visitors from experiencing the rural collection as fully as they might.

Museo L'Italia in Africa

The Italafrica is housed at the basement of the *Comune di Ragusa* offices. This was a vacant space which the *Comune* offered to the collector and Curator to display his collection of uniforms and items connected to the colonial experience of Italy in Africa. No signage is found distant from the street of the museum, but the *Comune* proudly displays professional signage indicating the museum at both ends of the street, visible to traffic and pedestrians going through the adjacent streets. A small colourful plaque is next to the main door. The door has no special architectural features as it was originally a basement space. Nevertheless, the contribution of space to the Curator by the *Comune* is to be applauded. What lies inside the museum is totally amazing even if the space has now become too small. The material culture focuses on uniforms which are accompanied by a substantial volume of exhibits from the same colonial age. The arrangement of uniforms can certainly be considered as the work of a professional. The other exhibits displayed, however, require a better place and more space, which up to now has not been available at the *Comune*.

The information labels used to describe uniforms are consistent in design and text. They show the name of the museum, two uniform caps used as symbols of the museum on one side and the emblem of the *Comune di Ragusa* in colour on the other. They are stylish, legible and very well positioned next to the uniform described. A disadvantage to the visitor is that they are all in Italian, even though there are leaflets in different languages. A few showcases display dolls, coins, postcards, maps, books, medals, and other small items connected with the historic age presented. Many other exhibits are on the ground or hung on the walls. Accompanying them is a large collection of photographs from the same age, which helps visitors form a visual impression of the period. Some items lack an information tag as it is assumed that they speak for themselves, but since the language is Italian the need for a translator or a guide who can speak the visitor's language is important. The museum also has large interpretive and informative panels/posters printed in white text on a crimson background with some photographs to help visitors go back in time. The restricted space does not allow for much of a route through the museum, but it is very well presented to walk through. The Curator and his assistants are all very helpful and they try their best objectively to help visitors understand the historical age and what happened in the colonies and in Italy. The Italafrica does not only tell a story but it presents to the visitor authentic, well-preserved objects used at that time. Although from a symbolic and historical sense of place it presents Italian colonisation in Africa as a beneficial and constructive experience to the colonised, the extent to which the Italian State benefited and learnt from the colonisation experience is not to be found. There is nothing about, for example, the suffering of the colonised and the sufferings of Italians who found themselves far away from home. The aftermath and what resulted from the relationships and experiences, positive and negative of the countries, peoples and cultures involved is missing. This museum would be much more interesting if different perspectives and histories were included. Colonisers and colonised can cooperate sixty years after the end of Italian colonisation as there will still be a good deal of oral history still remembered but undocumented among those who lived the experiences themselves or heard ancestors narrate them.

The museum presents a one-sided vision of the historic events, and the identities presented are those of the colonised and the coloniser. The coloniser in the colonial mentality is the provider, the civiliser and the superior, while the colonised

are the recipients, the uncivilised and inferior. The relationships between the Italian State, Italian people and culture, and the colonised people and cultures, were not simply those of imposition as the collection shows that there were many more instances of collaboration and cooperation for a Europeanisation of the colonised African communities. Therefore, even the social construct of reality presented requires a revisit to reflect authenticity as experienced by both coloniser and colonised, even if presenting it today at the museum involves several challenges.

- The Italafrica positions uniforms as the most important artifacts of the museum. They represent the participants of the Italian colonial experience quite well. However the disparity is in the protagonists: coloniser and colonised. They create a disparity between what was the community/ies in the eyes of the coloniser and the reverse. These different perspectives are absent at the museum.
- Historic events as portrayed and experienced by the colonised are excluded or absent. Although the museum's name indicates the presentation of the coloniser in the colonised lands of Africa, a better approach to the realities of history would be to include the different perspectives, experiences and histories of both coloniser and colonised. Another factor not so much treated is the experience of Italians who settled in such lands. It is important to tell the histories Italians told about their own colonial administration, experiences they had in the colonised lands, the relationships which grew from such presence and the presence of the colonised in Italy.
- Displays highlight the positive aspects but not the dark ones which were experienced by either sides. A balance is desired to make the museum more authentic.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives as the result of a personal collection, like the Maritime position the collector as the main source of information. The context, although that of Ragusa, can be promoted more effectively if it were to be connected to any heritage of the colonial era in the same city. Then visitors might connect with, and experience, what colonial times meant even to this southerly region of the Italian State, such as for example in architecture, which has become rare in the Italian territory. The visitor can therefore become participant in visualising such histories, not simply be a listener or a student.

Museo del Tempo Contadino

The Contadino is at Ragusa Ibla just a few metres away from the Italafrica. It is a corner building with baroque characteristics. The eighteenth-century palazzo is known for hosting the *Raccolta Civica C. Cappello* marked by a plaque besides the main door. A small less noticeable sign states that the building includes the *Museo del Tempo Contadino*. Opposite is a signpost saying that this is the Palazzo Zacco. The façade and the side have baroque balconies resting over highly decorated consoles. The main door is imposing with two neoclassical columns supporting the main balcony. A noticeable feature of the building are the unusually shaped windows on both sides of the main doors.

From the reception area the museum gives the impression of visiting a nobleman's house but the groin-vaulted level at which the Contadino is displayed provides a different context. The Contadino exhibits are very well displayed in a relaxed manner and design. Instead of showcasing objects, the museum presents exhibits along a continuous board alternating with interpretive and informative panels set on the walls at eye level. Lighting is comfortable on the eyes. Altogether, the Contadino presents a professional display with the calendrical pedagogic element describing the farmer's activity and rhythm of the agrarian year. The interpretive and descriptive panels, all at eye level, are printed in monochrome and colour with text and photographs to facilitate visitors' understanding. Panels introduce each month with embossed wooden large letters spelling the Italian name of the month. Text is printed in white text over a dark grey background. Likewise, the grey background is used for designs in white for utensils and other agricultural visuals. The grey colour matches with the metallic panels where related objects are hung to facilitate understanding. Some text panels are printed in black text over a white background: some of which include a few images in colour. Next to these wall panels are also single blank flax-coloured wooden panels or a wide side-line which interrupts the monotony of the white and grey panels. Smaller information labels accompany the utensils and tools displayed on the low platforms beneath the wall panels. The visit through the museum is facilitated by the arrangement and by the month indicated at the start of each section. A problem for the visitor is that most of the readable information provided is only in Italian. The interior architecture is an important feature of the museum, and this enhances the experience. No single exhibit is set as the focus or

attraction of the museum. The venue is also an exhibition space for the artistic collection of Maestro Carmelo Cappello and other temporary exhibitions.

The material culture at the Contadino is totally relevant to rural practices of the past when mechanised agriculture was still unthought of. However, the exhibits alone could not provide visitors with the experience if they were not accompanied by the narrative found on the panels. At the time of research, no museum tour was offered to visitors. Meanings at the museum are attached to commerce, heritage, tradition, hardships (adversity) and lifestyle. The element of community emerges in the identities and relationships represented by the farmer's annual cycle of work which is then enjoyed by those who purchase the produce or benefit from it. The social construct of reality is therefore the dependability of society and the economy of a place on the hardships of rural communities engaged in farming and agriculture.

- Artifacts at the Contadino are 'positioned' in such a way that they create no disparity between them or the community/ies they represent.
- The Contadino presents no historic events except the annual cycle of the agricultural year, which is both history and present. However, the absence of historic events creates no exclusions or discriminations of communities or others.
- Displays highlight the labour and hardships of rural communities more than anything else.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives are interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator as an intermediary between the rural or farming community and the visitor. The curator is not the direct source but a voice for those who are represented (without being present) at the museum. The setting (context) however is not an ideal one, though the architecture gives a hint of the rustic architecture found in the countryside.

Museo del Costume - MUDECO

A second museum overseen by the same Curator is the *Museo del Costume* known as the MUDECO. At the time of research most of the collection was displayed at the upper level of the *Museo Castello Donnafugata* (Donnafugata) and therefore the visual observation is here discussed as part of the visit to the Donnafugata and within the same context it was observed. The MUDECO exhibits are distributed along the

Castello's upper level rooms and halls. Most of the costumes from the nineteenth century are presented to the visitor in glass showcases. There are no signs to indicate the presence of the MUDECO or its exhibits at the Castello or along the way. The current informative panels describing the costumes are in Italian and English. They are white A4 paper printed in black bold Times New Roman font. Titles are in capitals while the description underneath is in lower case, also in bold. The collection has sufficient description for the normal visitor; but the Curator's narrative does involve more than just a description of the attire. During the museum tour or interaction with visitors, the Curator explains the use of such costumes and some stories connected to personalities and characters who wore such attire.

At the Maltese museums an exhibit of costume was only displayed at the GranCastello, but the contexts differ immensely even if they both served as residences. The decorative art and architecture found at the Ragusan Bonelli and Donnafugata are superb examples of the Sicilian aristocratic-bourgeois style, while the Gozitan GranCastello shows nothing of such art and architecture as the houses were built in a different century, with different ideas, for different lifestyles and circumstances which permitted no such luxury. The material culture presented by the collection is that of costume and fashion. The sense of place attributed to the collection is mainly that of lifestyle as the costumes are out of context. Attire is also a symbol of identity and demonstrates the social divisions of the past. The relationships expressed by the collection are only implicitly acknowledged if the visitor or the museum tour guide reflects on the persons involved in the preparation of the textile from its original source to the tailored dress. However, this is not explicit in the display as none of these such persons are mentioned.

- Artifacts are 'positioned' in such a way that they create a disparity between the communities represented at the venue: the Castello. The attire displayed is that of the well-off people but not the peasantry. The attire is presented as a representation of the status of those who wore them but not as identified persons connected to the place or event in history.
- Historic events are indirectly presented by the exhibits in a way which excludes those who wore them or made them. It is not an explicit decision of the curator but drawn by the nature of the artifacts available within the collection.

- Displays highlight the attire worn by the upper classes more than any other factor connected to the attire as the making of the textile, the persons involved in the designing and sewing of the pieces worn and who made history with the same dress. Although some are attributed to persons who wore them, the persons are there to give value to the dress not the other way round.
- Exhibits, displays and narratives are interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator as a collector and a source of information. However the best source at the time of the study was the Curator's own tour narrative as very little is written and presented to the visitor as yet. The setting (context) of the Castello suits the collection exhibited as it complements the attire, age and stories behind them. The visitor currently is the recipient of few items of information in a traditional topdown manner.

Museo Castello Donnafugata

A third museum, managed by the same Curator of Contadino and MUDECO, is the Donnafugata Castle Museum (Donnafugata). As regards surface area, it is the largest museum met by this study within the Ragusan Province. It enjoys a particular architecture: a palatial villa giving the impression of a fortified castle. Signage to the Castello starts far away on the main road. The museum can also be reached by train as a railway station named Donnafugata is close by. The museum has ample parking space for visitors and is approached through a street flanked by farmsteads and buildings which served as stores and other facilities when the Castello and its farming community were still active. Some of these stores and structures are nowadays part of the attraction of the Castello. Some are now restaurants, souvenir outlets and other types of commercial activity, while others are still in a bad state and awaiting restoration. The entrance to the museum is through one of the large doors at the semi-circular courtyard in front of the Castello. From there the visitor enters the reception area and proceeds through the Castello's central courtyard into the museum. The museum is reached through an entrance space prior to a staircase. In this space is a large three-sided panel which on a red background describes briefly in Italian and English the Castello, its park and provides a plan of both. At this level are a cart and a model of the Castello. The splendour of the Castle is admired once one reaches the upper level. Information is provided in Italian and English. Text is printed in black on white paper describing the function of each room and furniture on display. A few small

showcases display items connected to sewing and bobbin lace, buttons, thimbles, and other accessories. Information provided with these displays is inside the showcases and appears to go back some decades. Items are numbered and named in the accompanying list. The library is another room open for public viewing and intended to give an experience of what it looked like to have a library at home, how books were grouped and how the shelves were reached when required. At the Castello, visitors can follow a route which takes them through a score of rooms out of the 120 rooms scattered on three levels. Each room at the Castello presents a peak of grandeur and artistry not normally met in museums. The Curator expressed it as a dive back into the Sicilian Renaissance, the change from the Bourbon monarchic rule to the Unity of the Italian states: an age described as the *gattopardi*.⁵³¹

Observation shows that the museum experience can be further enhanced by more information via an audio-guide, the Curator's tour or a tour by a knowledgeable museum guide who can provide visitors with more information than that already supplied in the panels and stories which happened to real people at the same Castello, its park and labyrinth.

The material culture at the Donnafugata, like the Bonelli, is both movable and immovable. In contrast, the Donnafugata presents rooms furnished with pieces from the era of the Arezzo De Spuches family and the late nineteenth century. The rooms furnished in different styles and for different purposes are decorated with, amongst other *trompe l'œil* paintings, the coat-of-arms of Sicilian noble families, two suits of armour of the Hospitaller Knights of Malta, stuccoes, and neoclassical art by Luca Giordano.

The sense of place evoked by the museum, exclusive of the MUDECO collection, is that of architecture, heritage, lifestyle, symbolism (the Castello is a landmark of the area), and a representative of the Sicilian nobility cooperating with the rural communities, but dependent on each other. A secondary but important sense

⁵³¹ The term derives from the historic romance *Il Gattopardo* written by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. Published posthumously in 1958, it deals with the years 1861-1910, describing the changes occurring in the Sicilian renaissance and the Unification of Italy— known as the *Risorgimento*.

of place adds the elements of community or communities, rural and noble, who met at the Castello and its lands, personalities and important figures featured in storytelling narrated in archived documents and present narratives about specific events which happened at the Castello, its history and historic roles played by the residents in times past. At present, the Donnafugata can also connect to the sense of place attributed to nature and landscape which also attract visitors, who after all define the Castello as a tourism destination.

Like the Bonelli, the Donnafugata expresses the identities of a noble family and the surrounding peasant community. However, in contrast to the division between aristocracy and servitude expressed at the Bonelli, the Donnafugata presents a higher degree of relationships between the two classes, as the resident families afforded space and place to the peasant community within their lands and therefore a sense of cooperation. The social construct of reality represented at the Donnafugata can be easily reached as the context did not change from that experienced by the family and peasants of two centuries earlier. A visit to the Donnafugata is considered as the best among the museums studied to help visitors understand and experience the full historical context.

- Artifacts at the Donnafugata are both movable or immovable. Furniture and art create and represent a disparity between the noble families who owned the Castello and the surrounding lands and the peasantry of the rural areas. The exhibits representing the peasants are absent at the Castello.
- Historic events are presented by the Curator during the museum tour in a way which excludes, discriminates or minimizes no community/ies or others. Although not presented in printed form, the Curator's tour narrative is currently the only way to learn about matters, factors and criteria which divided the nobility from the peasantry and the various personalities attached to the history of the Castello. The narratives about the lifestyles of the same personalities show the various aspects of politics, religious belief, leisure, strange events, poverty and other social matters concerning the communities of that past age.

Visually representing the community

Observation showed that Maltese micro museums provide minimal or no

visual historical narrative at all about the community they represent or where they are located. The absence of historical narratives about the represented or local community was unexpected, but circumstances and problems may dictate such a gap. Participant non-State micro museums were expected to include what is excluded from the national museums' narrative. Considering that curators at national museums are bound to promote and portray the national community and its collective history, the historical narrative and the Mediterranean historical imaginary must reflect the historical narrative and imaginary endorsed by authorities (i.e. the State and the establishment). In contrast to the curatorial practices at national museums and the museums under study, the autonomy of independent micro museums permits their curators to practise a type of inclusivity and focus on the local community, its history, its cultural heritage and its own Mediterranean historical imaginary, which is excluded at other museums. The absence of such narratives at the participant museums could result from various factors, such as an apathetic conformism to the stereotyped history and imaginary promoted by the institutions in power, or an unvoiced disengagement from the homogeneous identity of a community, which may only be told in the verbal narrative of the touring curator but not presented publicly and permanently alongside exhibits and displays.

Museums may present the visitor with a narrative which focuses on the represented or local community's history, cultural heritage, social, religious and political events and objects used within the locality or the community. This focused attention (to present the community as much as possible as a distinct and heterogeneous identity) may be due to the theme of the museum itself, as indicated by the name. Among the participant museums, the name of the locality is found only in the Maritime, ŻabSanct, Acharavi, Donnafugata museums, and in the name of the organisations managing the Razzett (*Għaqda Kulturali Talent Mosti*) and the cultural associations managing the Farmacia (the *Associazione Culturale Tanit Scicli*), the Bonelli's *Associazione Museo Diffuso di Scicli*, the Association of the two Modican museums, the Campailla and Murika. The names of the Tunnara, the Xarolla, the four Maltese State micro museums (i.e. the TaKola, OldPrison, GranCastello and BistraCat), the Razzett and the Farmacia are all site specific. The Historical Museum of Crete (Heraklion) name refers to the whole island of Crete but not to the community of Heraklion where it is situated. Other grassroots museums not under study but

mentioned present a name which is collection specific, such as the Wickman Maritime Collection (WMC) at Xgħajra and The Agricultural Heritage (AGHM) at St. Paul's Bay (Malta). It is uncommon on the Maltese Islands to find micro museums which focus specifically on the community where they are based.

It is acknowledged that certain fears or restrictions may be felt more among curators who are dependent on large institutions, supported or seeking the support of a parent organisation or seeking funds from national or regional funds. Private micro museum curators may therefore choose to avoid conflicts with the formal historiography and keep to the homogeneous imaginary and identity promoted by the establishment and institutions in power, exclusive of the represented or local community. Independent micro museum curators, who do not depend on a parent organisation or who do not expect support from an institution, may find more freedom to express themselves and be inclusive or even determined to make public the heterogeneous identity and history of the represented or local community.

The theoretical assumptions and findings

The study provides answers to the initial premises that have been tested. It was assumed that (a) *curators of independent grassroots museums adopt curatorial practices which promote the needs and interests of the community they represent*. This was proved right not only with several independent grassroots micro museums but also to different degrees with private grassroots micro museums. However, the degree of involvement and action depends on resources available, the type of community represented, demands and pressures made by the represented and/or local community, the level of involvement which the curator or the museum allow, and the perceived impacts expected from the community and authorities. Curatorial practices at grassroots micro museums seek not only to present a community in their displays but also to be indeed closer to communities, to engage with them, and support them where and when necessary. They provide space for communities which are deprived of space, voice, representation and identity in most national or institutional museums.

The second premise, which stated that (b) *by finding out what these curatorial practices are and how these curatorial practices take place, a different museum model*

*and philosophy*⁵³² *emerge from the museums under study both in a national context and as part of the Mediterranean*, led to the recognition of a model which uses

- (i) multitasking curatorial practices which sometimes are equally shared with other staff to counter the limitation of resources;
- (ii) uses different themes or types of collections to reach community objectives;
- (iii) represents different types of communities, not only communities bound by geographic location or boundaries;
- (iv) extends activities and objectives which may reach further communities than the represented community to reach the museum's objectives and sustainability; and
- (v) are free to act as much as its curator/staff allow themselves to be released from past perceptions of colonial, bureaucratic or hierarchical authorities.

Recommendations and Implications

This study leads to several recommendations which call for specific actions concerning grassroots micro museums. Actions must be taken to change the current adverse and disadvantageous circumstances which hinder such micro museums from realising objectives and achieving more activities which benefit society and communities, especially those formerly excluded, disadvantaged, discriminated against or stigmatized. These recommendations may require actions to be taken in matters concerning policies, practices and theories, inclusive of research in areas which extend beyond the parameters of this study.

Primarily, it is recommended that there shall be further similar studies conducted with a focus on grassroots micro museums situated on Mediterranean islands but not reached by this study. More participation can provide more room for comparison and to capture characteristics, practices, challenges and problems common on specific islands, neighbouring islands, islands belonging to the same country or different countries, or continents from specific areas of the Mediterranean. Having personal contacts or friends on the islands targeted by the research will help

⁵³² Candlin 2016: 2.

increase and secure participation and acceptance. By extending similar studies to other regions or seas of the globe, such research can help reveal differences between, and similarities with, curatorial practices adopted by different grassroots micro museums especially in ways of interpreting and presenting communities. The research can also serve to discover new or hybrid museological models and historical imaginaries upheld at different islands and regions.

Two types of recommendations emerge from this study: generic (i.e. applicable to all) and those which are specific to a museum. The full list of generic and individualized recommendations which apply to specific micro museums are presented in *Appendix VI*. Generic recommendations which emerge from the research and apply to all or most of the micro museums are here briefly presented for action.

It is acknowledged that the objects collected and displayed at grassroots micro museums, independent and private, do not necessarily qualify for display at State or establishment museums. Therefore State/institutional and grassroots micro museums should seek ways to cooperate and promote each other as their collections complement each other.

National cultural heritage authorities, local and national government authorities should recognize and support the efforts of grassroots initiatives such as grassroots micro museums as otherwise the country risks losing such unique collections and cultural heritage. Authorities should also support grassroots micro museums to sustain their pedagogic activities as they help to raise awareness, instil care for cultural heritage and raise interest in education among different levels of society, not easily reached by establishment museums.

By providing the proper sustainable circumstances for grassroots initiatives like grassroots micro museums to reach their objectives, pedagogy and community improvement, the State and the economy may also benefit.

In the case of the Maltese Islands, it is recommended that the national agency should enter into dialogue with curators and staff of grassroots micro museums to propose a revisiting of existing laws and regulatory frameworks and to release all

grassroots micro museums from being considered as a *for-profit* activity, and to ensure that grassroots micro museums are not discriminated against.

The State, in collaboration with the national agency, shall ensure that grassroots micro museums enjoy the same opportunities enjoyed by national museums and the national agency (e.g. funding, exemptions, promotion, restoration, conservation, documentation, inventory compilation, directional signage and other support).

The national agency and national cultural heritage authorities should seek ways to make national and/or regional (EU) funding opportunities and projects available, eligible and applicable to grassroots micro museums individually, collectively or in tandem with museums of the national agency. However, finances concerning such opportunities or projects can be administered by the national agency to ensure transparency.

The study recommends that Curators and staff at grassroots micro museums should be helped to further their education, to share knowledge and experiences by participation at meetings, conferences, seminars and other museum-oriented events in the country and abroad, as this helps them improve their product and service to the community and society.

Local and national authorities responsible for cultural heritage should engage curators or knowledgeable staff from grassroots micro museums in matters concerning cultural and community heritage as their knowledge of local and/or community tangible and intangible cultural heritage is unique and they can help authorities and the State to avoid negative repercussions resulting from bad or unwelcome decisions.

There are also a few common recommendations emerging from the study which are addressed to the micro museums on the Maltese Islands and within the Province of Ragusa alike, and nonetheless to the authorities at local, regional and national levels.

- First, all micro museums shall seek to meet and unite in a common network or association to present their demands to local and central authorities.
- Secondly local and central authorities involved with and responsible for the cultural sector, but mainly with museums, should discuss matters with the curators of such museums and propose amendments and updates to the existing laws and regulations to liberate all micro museums and allow them to practice activities which can generate revenue to enable them to maintain and sustain their museums, collections and pedagogic activities.
- Thirdly local authorities should provide adequate visible and legible signage in accordance with international signage codes which facilitate finding the way to museums in their localities.
- Fourthly, national authorities/agencies responsible for cultural heritage must seek ways how to identify, access and get funds for the qualitative improvement of grassroots micro museums: the upkeep of their collections, restoration, conservation, inventories, health and safety measures and signage among others.
- Finally, local and national authorities shall promote grassroots micro museums equally and alongside with State museums.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusion

Several conclusions emerge from this study. To start with, the major sub-division of *grassroots micro museums* consists of *independent* and *private* micro museums. A clear distinction is made between the terms *independent museum* and *private museum* and consequently of their sub-types. On the whole curators envision the micro museum as an effective place for presenting knowledge, active socialising, information dissemination, entertainment, a centre for identity, for pedagogy and a means to protect and safeguard heritage and the knowledge of the community.

Grassroots micro museums on the Maltese Islands and in the Ragusan Province (Sicily) have a low presence of female curators. The presence of female curators was higher at Maltese State micro museums and at Greek and Croatian grassroots micro museums. The presence of female curators is higher at State-museums (Malta) and non-State museums where the job is a full time salaried job (Croatia). In the Maltese Islands and in Sicily, women are less evident in volunteering posts but more active as supportive volunteers where they play significant and indispensable secondary roles.

Theories and claims of earlier research

In contrast to claims of earlier research, the ‘rule of thumb’ that all micro museums have ‘fewer than 1,000 objects on public display’ is a common factor among most micro museums, but it is an untenable and arbitrary guess. The findings contradict earlier studies⁵³³ as they show that curators of grassroots micro museums have concerns for the presentation of authenticity and are aware of the cultural sensitivity of the content presented. Curators moreover maintain that an important practice is consistency in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Curators at independent grassroots micro museums, more than those at private ones, enjoy greater freedom in their choices and decisions for the museum and its activities. They are free to research, interpret their findings and present to the public what they find without restrictions or censorship. This implies that, among other curatorial practices, curators at grassroots micro museums are also researchers, readers and analysts of published works and original documents. The freedom to research on their own, refer to published academic research and original documents available at national and

⁵³³ Livingstone, 2011: 16.

institutional archives, gives the interpretation and narratives presented more credibility, even if such content is usually excluded from, or in disagreement with, what is presented at State or establishment museums.

With regard to the initial assumptions, the study concludes that *(a) curators of independent grassroots micro museums adopt curatorial practices which promote the needs and interests of the community they represent* was proved right in many of the cases examined. Nevertheless, these may be restricted owing to limited resources, choices, limits and decisions made by the curator and other dependencies of the museum. Not all curators succeed in this endeavour or have mixed success. Others miss this important opportunity.

Curatorial practices at grassroots micro museums are a form of modern philanthropy which aims to improve the quality of life of a community. While not all curators allow or engage equally in such practices, some exceed the boundaries of philanthropy and become a social, a cultural, an environmental, an economic and above all a political actor for the community and on behalf of the community. As the community is inclined to associate museums and their curators to political issues and concerns of the community, curators practice such mediation with caution and responsibility, and tend to avert themselves from anything of a partisan political nature. Today curators are called, and call themselves, by different terminologies as they act as platform providers to their audiences, and as they are expected to ‘address timely artistic, social, cultural and political issues.’⁵³⁴

Curators of grassroots museums tend to facilitate mobilisation and action for individuals and their community, mostly at local level. They are also active lobbyists with authorities and policymakers for the public good with a focus on their community’s welfare and heritage. Like the sociomuseological curator, they take a bottom-up approach to museums and museology, which qualifies them as grassroots initiatives for a grassroots movement. Grassroots micro museums are truly the labour of love and hard work of their founders, curators and supportive staff, paid or volunteers. Grassroots micro museum curators are also adept protagonists who have

⁵³⁴ Fowle, Kate. Who cares? Understanding the role of the curator today. *Cautionary tales: Critical curating* 2007: 16 [10-19].

the potential to voice the concerns of their communities both inside and outside the museum, act and bring about change.

As in Sociomuseology, curators following grassroots museology strive to listen to suppressed voices, diverse histories, identities, cultures, to recognise them and present them in the museum space and place. In so doing, curators facilitate social transformations for the welfare of represented communities. Curators at grassroots micro museums cultivate ongoing and reciprocal relationships and communication with the represented community or the community around the museum. Nonetheless, grassroots micro museums may also implicitly be representative of communities who visualise themselves in the collection displayed. The presentation of specific communities prevails in grassroots micro museums, however some State-owned micro museums (such as the GranCastello and the BistraCat) tend to do so too. Curators of grassroots micro museums are regarded as free to represent specific communities, express community interpretations, define community identities and publicly present the differences or resemblances to the national presented at State-museums. Curators of independent grassroots micro museums, followed by those at private ones, are perceived as having the advantage of being more free in their interpretation and presentation of exhibits, communities, identities and historic narratives. Such an advantage is perceived by curators of State and institution-owned micro museums. Grassroots micro museums as grassroots initiatives have the potential to challenge the homogeneous nation-state imaginary and give space and place to the representation of different communities and their identities within the nation-state. This potential is not fully realised, however. Matters of inclusivity, exclusivity and image may however still be found in some museums, their displays and narratives. Curators and staff, volunteers or not, at grassroots micro museums have pride in their own creation: the micro museum. They build attachment with it, its content, its activities, its visitors, the community and others, more than those at establishment museums.

(b) the curatorial practices and methods of grassroots museum curators lead to the emergence of a different museum model and philosophy both in a national context and as part of the Mediterranean is partially proved as the study led to typologies presented as alternative museums.

Grassroots micro museums often share objectives found in the reflexive sociomuseological museum model.⁵³⁵ Curatorial practices at grassroots micro museums may however extend the sociomuseological model further than the community of place⁵³⁶ to reach other communities such as communities bound by practices, common or shared interests and themes reflected in collections, or who come together to take *action* and strive to cause change, or who assemble through *circumstances* and situations normally external to them.⁵³⁷ As Sociomuseology is a development of New Museology, grassroots museology proposes a model which can be considered as a postmodern approach to museums and curatorial practices. Curators at grassroots micro museums see the museum as a dynamic place and space where the community may come together among themselves and other people from outside the community to build self-esteem and appreciate themselves and their heritage. They can exceed the boundaries of the traditional curator, as their autonomy gives them more freedom to do so. Nonetheless, an element of interest in engaging and being closer to the community was also met among curators interviewed at Maltese and Gozitan State micro museums.

Private micro museums show few differences in their administrative models to those practiced at independent micro museums. Differences mostly occur as a result of the ownership of the museum's venue or the collection, or both.

Attitude and behaviour (Philosophy)

With their presence, grassroots micro museums act as 'contact zones' that allow voiceless communities to seek curatorial and museal practices which voice their concerns and issues. Although no curator declared specifically that their micro museum was established to take action and strive to bring about change, most of them

⁵³⁵ Moutinho, Mário, 2016. *From New museology to Sociomuseology*, 24th General Conference of the International Council of Museums in 2016, Milano 4 July 2016, Joint meeting MINOM/ CAMOC/ ICOFOM, 2016: 1 [1-3].

⁵³⁶ Ramsey and Beesley, 2007: 850. "The 'spatial community' is that which is defined by geography (e.g. municipal boundary, health region)".

⁵³⁷ Schulz, Sebastian. *Communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing in the course of the digital era: An examination of virtual communities as organizational units and their impact on capitalizing on collective intelligence and work efficiency using the example of "Communities of Practice"*, GRIN Verlag, 2013: 8.

Leese, Peter. *Britain since 1945: Aspects of Identity*, Macmillan International Higher Education, 2006: 199.

do take on board the objective in relation to matters concerning their community/ies and local heritage, borne out of circumstances which asked for action.

Grassroots micro museums, especially those displaying ethnographic collections are appealing to the senses. They can help communities raise awareness about their identity, their past, their collective imaginaries, and their unique culture and heritage: all of which may lead to engagement with the museum, to pedagogy and actions which socially and politically benefit and safeguard the community and its identity, but always distinct and far off from the political perspective of partisan politics. Curators at grassroots micro museums try to connect the visitor with the museum and elicit different emotions from visitors during a visit. Curators therefore adopt practices for personal interaction with visitors as they believe that such practices have the ability to stimulate emotions, to engage the visitor, to enhance the visitor's museum experience and to meet the expectations of visitors seeking personal growth. Curators are generally aware that caution and a responsible attitude are always fundamental as the contrary can bear negatively on both the museum and the represented community. It is not the exhibits on display or in a showcase that make a museum, but the stories which the museum and its musealia can tell and convey to the visitor. It is the human experiences associated with the place that make the museum and its content relevant and meaningful to the visitor. Successful museums are not those which conceal the truth but those which disclose it to the public as it happened.

Most of the success or failure of a museum does not depend only on the tangible resources available. At different levels it depends also on the human element of those trusted with its curatorial role. Curatorial practices do not limit themselves to the tangible objects and exhibits or activities that the museum organises, but also to the contact which curators establish with staff, other curators, visitors, the community and the public under various circumstances both within and outside the museum walls. Curators at grassroots micro museums contend that it is their responsibility to use both tangible and intangible heritage available to guide the visitor through a singular museum experience. They consider that the knowledge, background and experiences they accumulate as curators have potential to attract visitors' attention to listen, learn and immerse themselves in the experience, irrespective of the volume of exhibits,

museum size, technical aids and other non-human factors, as it is human interactions that count above all else.

The importance of human interaction, mainly between the knowledgeable curator or guide and the visitor, were deemed important by curators of both grassroots micro museums and State micro museums. This curatorial practice was common among most participant independent and private grassroots micro museums, as they believed that the human aspect of a museum had an effect on the visitor's museum experience, without which there might be no experience at all except a passive walk through. The experiences and knowledge gained by curators of grassroots micro museums is however an important and rare pedagogic tool with which to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge. This is why curators tend to be present whenever visitors enter the museum and why they try to interact and enter into dialogue with visitors. Curators of grassroots micro museums consider their presence at the museum as important all the time.

Curatorial practices, community and visitors

A common quintessential objective shared by most grassroots micro museum curators is the intention to help the community in which they are embedded or the community which their museums represent. As in Sociomuseology, curators of grassroots micro museums seek to reach out, to be socio-cultural actors and initiators of positive community development. They therefore seek and create interaction with the community and visitors. They are consequently required to own good 'diagnostic skills' to help their community, be good 'thought leaders', be capable of bringing different people together, to organise 'community dialogue', forge and sustain partnerships, be creative, innovative, open to 'new ideas and critical feedback.'⁵³⁸

Curators at grassroots micro museums should seek not only to present a community in their displays, but also indeed to be closer to communities, to engage with them, and to support them where and when necessary. Through the inclination to help and be at the service of the community, the elimination of prejudices or discrimination emerges as an important element of the curatorial role and its practice.

⁵³⁸ Brown and Tepper 2012: 19-25

Those who have space and place available were eager to offer such facilities for community use, particularly to communities which were deprived space in establishment museums.

Curatorial practices and collections at grassroots micro museums have become unique sources of research, knowledge and pedagogy created by the grassroots themselves. Curators and museums are not a one-way pedagogic process but they can be a source for receiving information and sharing knowledge, which could in turn be passed on to visitors. Curators at grassroots micro museums value visitors also as a source of information and pedagogy. Curatorial practices at grassroots micro museums show that curators cannot ignore knowledge and experiences which visitors bring along. Curators at grassroots micro museums are aware that visitors tend to give more importance to those exhibits with which they connect, than to those given importance by the curator.

They allow the represented community to participate in the construction of interpretation, information and narratives. By allowing the input of various contributors, curators facilitate different forms of pedagogy and allow for internal and external knowledge to reach the visitor via the museum, its displays and activities. They adopt negotiation practices with the community, donors and visitors in order to construct and present interpretation and presentation with both community and visitors. They allow donors of objects to participate and to have a voice in the interpretation of objects alongside the expert interpretation. Negotiation on what the museum presents to visitors about the community, its identity and images, is a curatorial practice which facilitates shared understandings and improves relationships between the museum, visitors and the represented community.

Curators acknowledge that oral lore owned by non-national communities holds much knowledge and history which can nourish and clarify gaps met in the narratives and knowledge found at national and institutional museums. Although they value oral history as an important source in the construction of narratives about the community, curators at grassroots micro museums still analyse and aim to bolster such oral records with evidence and reliable supporting sources. The use of the local vernacular facilitates the pedagogy of the museum with the community.

Objects which remind us of dark or negative experiences of a community may not always be welcome by the public, and awareness of such impacts can force curators to keep such objects and mnemonics away from public display. In order to avoid repercussions, curators may resolve to present the positive and conceal the negative. Curators may miss opportunities to address these dark or negative experiences which the community needs to address, to learn from, and grow.

The establishment of grassroots micro museums and their curatorial practices have succeeded in drawing cultural activity out of capital cities and their museums to bring cultural activity nearer to the grassroots and those communities excluded from the homogeneous establishment museums. Curators at grassroots micro museums try to facilitate accessibility by offering free admission or open days, but even that does not guarantee visits from less-privileged socio-economic groups. Perceptions cultivated by society for centuries are not easy to change, and if people not only within a lower socio-economic class but also from any other stratum of society do not determine a value to a museum visit, they will not visit. Curators of grassroots museums therefore need to devise other channels and strategies to attract such people to the museum. Culture, heritage awareness and other pedagogy can therefore be indirectly transmitted through various other channels and activities. Edutainment, tuition on life-skills and other activities which may help a person find a decent job or improve a lifestyle can be channels to make a person enter a museum and gradually become curious about what the museum is all about. Accessibility, as discussed, may not be dependent on the museum or the curator, but on the perceptions and the importance given to museum visits by the prospective visitor or the family. This therefore implies that curators must also think from the viewpoint of such people as doing so would reduce the exclusive images and practices of museums.

Sustainability

MINOM's (2013) demand for the liberation of museums from any form of sanctioning and oppression imposed through social, economic and political frameworks is echoed strongly by the demands of participant curators with regard to national laws and regulatory frameworks which currently burden and inhibit grassroots micro museums from achieving more and benefitting their communities. In

Malta, the laws and regulatory frameworks are a major obstacle for both private and independent grassroots micro museums. Independent grassroots micro museums are actually at a greater disadvantage than private micro museums when it comes to funds.

With regard to economic sustainability, curators of grassroots museums tend to generate revenue in similar ways to establishment museums, i.e. through admissions and events. Nevertheless curators of independent and private micro museums must play more roles and frequently do a great deal on their own. Revenue generation is not an easy task for curators of grassroots micro museums. Curators at independent grassroots micro museums must struggle and find ways in which to compensate for their disqualification from funding opportunities and find further ways to sustain their museum and its activities. They must be more creative as they cannot rely on a parent organisation or several volunteers, and generally they must provide from their own pockets. Likewise, curators of private micro museums have instances where they must contribute personally, but they can count on some support from within, such as through memberships, volunteer donations, patrons, a parent organisation or supportive partner, an institutional subdivision (e.g. a parish) or a local authority.

Curators of private and independent micro museums have an additional challenge which they must totally, or mostly, face alone. When funds are not available, projects must either wait much longer to be realised or be shelved altogether. The lack of, or limitations in, finances forces curators to be more inventive and creative in providing for projects related to the micro museum, its collection, venue and passing needs, inclusive of community-oriented projects. Although visitor volumes may not equal curators' expectations, or even be desired by them, the revenue gained from such visitors impacts on factors such as opening hours, the revenue afforded for promotion and implementation of projects, pedagogic activities and many other activities which could benefit the community. Curators at grassroots micro museums struggle to find ways which compensate for low visitor volumes and concurrently keep the museum and its activities alive. A further issue that they face is the maintenance of their collections for posterity. While curators of private micro museums may sometimes rely on a number of volunteers, curators of independent grassroots micro museums are the most prone to leave their museum closed since they have very few or no volunteers who could open the museum when they cannot.

Inclusivity

Curators at grassroots micro museums practice inclusivity through their various musealia, such as the content of the verbal tour, visual displays, and symbolic content presented. Even if not overtly, grassroots micro museum curators provide evidence for the promotion of a heterogeneous identity within the nation. Nevertheless, curators at independent grassroots micro museums are in the best position to promote the inclusion of non-national identities and present them to the public in a way never encountered in national or institutional museums. Curators at independent grassroots micro museums are free from complex hierarchies, institutional pressures or fears of non-conformity, and frequently they make and implement decisions on their own or within a very small group. They are also closer to the community and visitors, and can easily pick up ideas and fill in gaps which visitors or the community, implicitly or explicitly, draw to their attention or make them aware of. Frequently it is the resources that cause delays in the revision, updating or improvement of narratives, information panels and labels at independent micro museums.

Collaboration not competition

Collaboration between State and non-State museums will benefit everyone much more than competition. Grassroots micro museums complement State museums as they present collections which do not feature in State museums. Although they apply similar mechanisms used at establishment museums to select which objects should go on display, even when these objects are donated, they display objects dear to communities not the general public. Private and independent grassroots micro museums are more concentrated on specialised or specific themes which do not appeal to the general public but to particular audiences. They therefore attract only visitors who have a specific or special interest in the collection or theme on show. Within such circumstances, grassroots micro museums cannot be considered as competitors to establishment museums, but much more as complementary to what establishment museums offer. Whenever such objects and museums end up within the remit of establishment museums, they lose their quality of community-representation and communities feel that they have been deprived of their heritage.

Curators of grassroots micro museums are frequently involved in implicit practices which temporarily connect them to other museums and curators. However they themselves do not consider that such informal meetings and discussions with museum experts increase their knowhow of curatorial and museum practices. Besides the need to maintain their museums, curators and staff of private and independent micro museums normally pay totally from their own pockets to participate in local or foreign museum-related conferences, courses and seminars or similar events. Yet they are neither acknowledged nor compensated for their contributions to the nation and the economy by either national, regional or local authorities. Likewise, while the State and its agency refer to independent and private grassroots micro museums and their curators for help, to support in building up informative and interpretive panels, to lend exhibits, and much more, the State does not always return the favour.

The participation of independent and private micro museum curators in activities abroad can contribute to society and the economy on a national scale as they establish contacts with different authorities and people involved museologically, pedagogically, economically, touristically and politically in various areas related to museums. Thus curators of grassroots micro museums, apart from contributing to their museum, their immediate context and the represented, potentially and practically contribute to the wider national scale.

Wider roles and multitasking

Grassroots micro museum curators may be defined as all-rounders⁵³⁹ with a wide range of knowledge and ability, who take a pragmatic approach to their tasks, and are *flexible persons, able and willing to run a one-man/woman show*.⁵⁴⁰ This flexibility inevitably makes them the source of various initiatives, innovations and creativity through the museum world.

Curatorial roles and practices at grassroots micro museums are much wider than those of the traditional museum curator and carry with them many more responsibilities than they would at State-owned micro museums. In contrast to

⁵³⁹ Ball, 2008: 1.

⁵⁴⁰ Ball, 2008: 1.

traditional curators, they also become visitors, listeners, learners and recorders of histories and knowledge, as such knowledge makes them indispensable to transfer knowledge from the community to the public. Alongside the curatorial practices associated to the traditional curator, curators at grassroots micro museums manage people, administer resources, plan and set up displays, prepare interpretation and narrative material, carry out maintenance, cleaning and multitask in different ways and play different roles. For most curators at grassroots micro museums curatorship is more than a job: it is a passion by which they aim to help the community. Such tasks are also shared by their staff, family members and volunteers, who learn mostly by experience, and through their interest and love do more things better and better. Curators at private and independent grassroots micro museums, in most cases, do all the planning, carry out all the research on their own and think alone or discuss within the limited circle of team members and active volunteers, relatives or staff available.

Curators at private and independent micro museums must multitask as they cannot rely on the provision of expertise or other support as enjoyed by State-museum curators. Even so, there are ethics, values and various factors to adhere to and contemplate before presenting information, narratives or interpretation about a community to the public. Owing to limitations of staff and resources or other necessities, they frequently assume or combine the roles of museologist with museographer,⁵⁴¹ which combined with their practices may qualify them as ‘museum professionals.’⁵⁴²

The study has shown that roles and practices of curators at national museums may be perceived as more ‘comfortable’ in comparison with the curator’s roles and multitasking at private and independent micro museums. It also demonstrates that what is considered as curatorial at private and independent micro museums may not qualify as a curatorial at national or traditional museums. Views of curatorial roles and practices differ between curators at grassroots micro museums and curators at State or establishment museums. Even though it may be the limitations of staff and other resources at grassroots micro museums that command such curatorial practices and

⁵⁴¹ Desvallées and Mairesse, 2010: 52-56.

⁵⁴² Espacio Visual Europa (EVE) , 2015.
Ruge, 2008.

roles, it cannot be equally understood by all curators irrespective of where they are working.

Curators as a resource

The museum can be a catalyst in raising awareness and interest. When authorities as local government or scholars make use of knowledge and material available at museums or from their curators, they can generate some of the best examples of evidenced historiography and social history from the grassroots. Museums are repositories, but researchers can bring exhibits to life again and again through their studies. Curators can turn exhibits from showcased items into objects through which the community can visualise itself. Objects in a museum can bring back memories and build connections with childhood, parents, grandparent or elderly relatives and distant ancestors whose oral traditions were mostly handed down through the generations. Grassroots micro museum curators consider the personal connection to be an important factor. They seek to establish connections between their displays and visitors, especially those from the community, and to make visitors indirectly 'own' that part of the museum or object and consequently feel represented at the museum.

Often, curators of grassroots micro museums have a deep knowledge of the cultural heritage that is present in a locality or owned by a community. They can contribute to the compilation of locally or community based inventories, to guarantee a stronger safeguard and administration of cultural heritage and its assets, and perform a function which other local or national organs fail to perform. Collaboration between local authorities and curators is necessary as curators are highly knowledgeable of the museum's context and how people react to it. The success and visitorship of grassroots micro museums are impacted by decisions taken at higher levels of authority. The immediate context of a museum determines how far it attracts or discourages visits. Neglected contexts leave a negative impact not only on a museum, but also on its community and the local economy. Museums give life to communities and places. They can bring the community together and enhance cooperation and social interaction.

Most micro museums are established in unusual places. Unusual places have the potential to attract the cultural tourist, raise awareness, increase visits to other adjacent or nearby sites and museums, increase economic activity in the area and its surroundings, help in the enhancement of the immediate area, and promote community development and self-esteem.

Mediterranean Historical Imaginary

This study has made a point of recognising Mediterranean people and the Mediterranean itself, yet it has also shown that curators find it difficult to describe these things. Curators at micro museums, inclusive of State micro museums, frequently omit making connections or references to the Mediterranean at their museums. However, they *could* provide an interpretation and an imaginary of the Mediterranean in history and what it meant to their communities, even if that community was not directly connected to the actual sea itself or dependent on it. The Mediterranean connection and its importance to the community in history and today was seen to vary according to the museum and the theme it presented. And it was all the more difficult to describe and present from the perspective of curators with a restricted museum theme. The curatorial interpretation and presentation of the Mediterranean historical imaginary is both cautious and adventurous. Finally, in their desire to depart from the past colonialisms, from the homogeneous identity and create a new heterogeneous identity, curators may be haunted by, and face repercussions from the communities that they serve, when they have different expectations, as well as from the establishment. They will also find themselves challenged by the dearth of research and objective historiography on the subject of their own hitherto unregarded communities.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Participants/respondents and their Museums.

Appendix II: Questionnaire (used to guide the face-to-face semi-structured interview).

Appendix III: Author's guide for the visual research and observation phase.

Appendix IV: Introduction Letter and Consent Form.

Appendix V: Sustainability, laws and other museum matters.

Appendix VI: Specific recommendations applicable individually and /or collectively to participant micromuseums.

Appendix VII: Establishment, founding objectives and other information on the participant micromuseums.

Appendix I – Participants, Respondents and their Museums.

Maltese micro museums

- **Tunnara Museum - Westreme Battery**, Mellicha, Malta.
 - Mr. Tony Valletta, Curator.
- **Razzett tal-Markiż Mallia Tabone**, Mosta, Malta.
 - Mr. Joseph Bartolo, President and Curator,
 - Mr. Louis Vassallo, Vice-President and Assistant Curator.
- **Żabbar Sanctuary Museum**, Żabbar, Malta.
 - Mr. Ġużeppi Theuma, Curator,
 - Mr. Michael Buhagiar, Assistant Curator.
- **Xarolla Windmill Museum**, Żurrieq, Malta.
 - Mr. Dorian Baldacchino, Curator.
- **Nadur Maritime Museum** (ex-Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum), Nadur, Gozo, Malta
 - Mr. Kerry Evison, Curator
 - Ms. Nora Evison, Co-Curator
 - Rev. Parish Priest Joseph Xerri
- **Old Prison Museum and Gran Castello Historic House**, Rabat, Gozo.
 - Dr. George Azzopardi, Principal Curator.
- **Ta' Kola Windmill**, Xagħra, Gozo
 - Ms. Daphne Sant Caruana, Curator.
- **Ta' Bistra Catacombs**, Mosta, Malta.
 - Ms. Janica Buhagiar, Curator.

Museums in the Province of Ragusa (RG), Sicily, Italy.

- **Antica Farmacia Cartia and Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane'**, Scicli (RG), Sicily.
 - Vincenzo Burragato, (Associazione Culturale Tanit Scicli and Albergo Diffuso of Scicli).
- **Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla**, Modica (RG), Sicily, and **Museo Diffuso 'Murika' – Racconti di Pietra**, La Casa degli Avi, Modica Alta, (RG) Sicily.
 - Dott. Giovanni Mario Incatasciato, Curator (*IngegneriaCultura* and *Silviculture*)

- **Museo del Castello di Donnafugata**, and **Museo del Costume**, Donnafugata (RG), and **Museo del Tempo Contadino**, Palazzo Zacco, Ragusa, (RG), Sicily.
 - Arch. Ing. Giuseppe Nuccio Iacono, Curator-Director.
- **Museo del Carretto Virgadavola**, Vittoria (RG), Sicily.
 - Sig. Giovanni Virgadavola, Curator,
 - Sn. Silvana Virgadavola.
- **Museo dell'Italia in Africa**, Ragusa, (RG), Sicily.
 - Sig. Mario Nobile, Curator.

Participant museums from other Mediterranean islands

- Historical Museum of Crete, Heraklion, Crete, Greece.
 - Dimitra Stefou, Curator and staff, Society of Cretan Historical Studies (SCHS)
- Folklore Museum of Acharavi, Corfu, Greece.
 - Elena Vasilakis (Eleni Vasilaki), Curator, Content Creator Management Specialist & Digital Strategy.
- Muzej Uja (Olive Oil Museum), Škrip, Brač, Croatia.
 - Krunoslav Cukrov and Kate Cukrov, Curators.
- Muzej betinske drvene brodogradnje / Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding, Betina, Croatia.
 - Kate Šikić Čubrić, Curator-Director,
 - Mirela Bilić, Marketing Manager and Guide.
- Museo Santuari de Lluc, Escorca, Palma, Mallorca (Spain).
 - Enrique Bolado Ferreras, Curator.

Appendix II: Questionnaire (used also to guide the face-to-face semi-structured interview).

Title: *Grassroots Museums: How Curators of Micro Museums interpret and present their community - Mediterranean Historical Imaginary.*

NOTE: You can type in your replies in English, Italian, Maltese, French, German or Spanish. Save and attach to an email and send it to me on john.vella.13@um.edu.mt. Thank you.

NOTA: Puoi inserire le risposte in inglese, italiano, maltese, francese, tedesco o spagnolo. Salvare e allegare a una e-mail e inviarlo a me su john.vella.13@um.edu.mt. Grazie.

REMARQUE: Vous pouvez taper vos réponses en anglais, italien, maltais, français, allemand ou espagnol. Enregistrez-le et joignez-le à un email et envoyez-le-moi à l'adresse john.vella.13@um.edu.mt. Je vous remercie.

HINWEIS: Sie können Ihre Antworten in Englisch, Italienisch, Maltesisch, Französisch, Deutsch oder Spanisch eingeben. Speichern und an eine E-Mail anhängen und an john.vella.13@um.edu.mt senden. Vielen Dank.

NOTA: Puede escribir sus respuestas en inglés, italiano, maltés, francés, alemán o español. Guarde y adjunte a un correo electrónico y envíelo a john.vella.13@um.edu.mt. Gracias.

Part I

01.0: The Museum

1. Name of museum: _____
2. Town/Village: _____ Country: _____
3. Year established _____

02.0 The Initiative

1. Who's initiative was the museum/collection?

2. Is the museum bound to any other public or private entity?
Yes No
If 'Yes', which?:

3. What was the objective for founding the museum?

4. Does your museum present a particular community?
Yes No

If 'Yes', which community does it represent?

If 'No' what does it represent?

03.0 Venue and Administration

1. Whose property is the museum's venue?

2. Who manages the museum and its activities?

3. Is there a group that helps in the museum somehow?

Yes No

If 'Yes', describe:

04.0 Opening schedules

1. What are the normal opening schedules?

2. Are there any other special occasions on which the museum opens for the public?

Yes No

3. Does your museum accept visits by appointment outside the normal schedule?

Yes No

4. Are there any times during the year when the museum closes (*ex. shutdowns, holidays...*)?

Yes No

5. Since the museum's establishment did you ever change the opening times or days?

Yes No

6. Since the museum's establishment, the public opening hours

Increased Did not change Decreased

05.0 The Curator

1. Name of Curator _____
2. Age: _____ years
3. Gender: Female Male
4. Do you own an academic qualification (tertiary) related to museums?
Yes No
5. Does your family have a link to the community presented by your museum?
Yes No
If 'Yes', describe briefly:

6. Do you live at the same locality where the museum operates?
Yes No
7. How many years have you been curator of this museum? _____ years
8. Did you have other experiences with other museums before?
Yes No
9. I am a volunteer curator or a paid (salaried) curator
10. Apart from the work done at the museum:
 I am an employee with another museum
 I am employed within a different job (not related to museums)
 I am currently unemployed and looking for a job
 I am a pensioner / retired by age

Part II

01.0 The Collection

1. Explain briefly the collection of your museum.

2. What is the message you wish to convey to the public with this collection?

3. How many exhibits (objects) can the public see at your museum?
 Less than 1000 Between 1001 and 5000 More than 5000
4. As Curator what medium do you use to make the public understand the objects exhibited in your museum? (*example: information labels, guide, book, interactive medium...*)

5. As Curator what medium do you use so that the public can understand the community represented by your museum?

02.0 Persons engaged with the running and decision-making of the museum

1. Number of persons involved in the day-to-day running of the museum
_____ (Total)
Out of which _____ are Female _____ are Male
Out of which _____ are Volunteers _____ are Salaried.
2. How many of these are involved in the decision process concerning the administration of the museum?

3. How many of these are involved in the process concerning the interpretation and presentation of the objects exhibited in the museum? _____
4. How many of these are involved in the process concerning the interpretation and presentation of the community in the museum? _____

03.0 How do you sustain the museum (sustainability)

1. Entrance to the museum is
Admission at a fixed price
Admission free and a donation optional
Admission involves a fixed donation
No admission fee or fixed donation

2. How do you finance your museum apart from the above? (*ex. activities, museum shop, personal earnings, family earnings, membership...*)
-
3. Is the above mentioned enough to cover the annual expenses of your museum?
- Yes and the museum makes a profit
- No, not enough and it ends at a loss
- It breaks even
4. In the last five years, the income of the museum
- Increased Decreased Did not change at all
5. Does your museum receive any financial assistance or other support from another organisation? (*ex. from local government, non-government organisation, religious institution, central government, European Union*)
- Yes No
6. Does your museum receive support from any restoration or conservation entity?
- Yes No

04.0 Museum pedagogy

1. What pedagogic (educational) activities do you intend to achieve with your museum and its exhibit?
-
2. Which ages and persons are targeted by these pedagogic activities?
-
3. Does your museum reach out for schools and educational institutions within the community/communities represented by your museum?
- Yes No
- Why?
-
4. Do schools and educational institutions found within the community/ies or the locality/ies where your museum is located promote visits to your museum during the year?
- Yes No

Why do they do/Why don't they?

05.0 Visitorship

1. What was the approximate number of visitors to your museum in 2018?

2. The number of visitors in the last five years shows:

An increase A decrease No change at all

3. The percentage of visitors from the community in the last five years was roughly ____%

4. Do members of the community organise activities at your museum?

Yes No

If 'Yes', what type of activities? (name them)

06.0 The museum at your country

1. Does your museum operate under a legal or regulatory framework?

Yes No

If 'Yes', state which (*ex. commercial entity, voluntary organisation, partnership ...*)

2. Since the museum's establishment, did you ever change the legal/regulatory category under which your museum operates? (*ex. from a voluntary organisation to a commercial entity,...*)

Yes No

If 'Yes' what was the former category? _____

4. In your opinion, the change was -

For better For worse Nothing changed

Explain why:

5. How does the Law in your country affect museums like yours?

Very good Good Not much Bad Very bad

Why?

07.0 Facilities at the museum for the Curator and staff, if any, involved with the museum

1. What facilities do you have at the museum which help you achieve the curatorial work? (*List those available*)

None

08.0 Spaces and facilities accessible to the public (*Accessibility*)

1. Which spaces does your museum offer to the community/the public?

None

2. Which of the following does your museum offer to visitors (*tick those available*)

- Multilingual guide in addition to those printed in the museum
- Facilities for disabled persons (*ex. ramps, lifts, ...*)
- Information in Braille for blind persons
- Sign Language or Fingerspelling guide
- Interactive guide/WIX/Digital guide in different languages
- Play area for small children
- Baby changing room
- Basic sanitary / restroom

- Kitchenette (basic food / beverage provision /heating point)
- Others (*name them*) _____
- None of the above

The Community and the Museum

09.0 Location of the museum

1. The community represented by your museum is
 - spread on all the locality where the museum is located
 - spread on a small part of the locality where the museum is (*ex. neighbourhood, hamlet,*)
 - spread also outside the locality (*in other villages/cities/regions of the same country*).
 - spread on the whole archipelago / country
 - spread in other countries too (*ex. emigrants in other continents ...*)

2. The locality where the museum is located is considered as a
 - Capital city City (non-capital) Large village Small village
 - Other (*describe*) _____

3. The locality/localities/region where the represented community is found is considered as:
 - Urban Rural Maritime Coastal Industrial
 - Docks Commercial Harbour Fishermen Mixed
 - Touristic Other (*describe*)

10.0 Community interpretation (context)

1. Who is the community represented by your museum?

2. How do you describe the community represented at your museum? (*tick those applicable*)
 - Urban Rural Maritime Coastal Industrial
 - Docks Commercial Harbour Fishermen Mixed

Touristic Other (describe)

3. As Curator, from which factors do you recognise the community, who do you include and/or exclude (*if any*)?

4. When you describe the community and compare it with other communities, which of these applies to the method used at your museum? Choose.

The museum presents the community as a community totally different from other communities in this island/country.

The museum presents the community as a community which mostly resembles other communities on the same island/country.

The museum presents the community as a community which has a balance of similarities and differences with other communities on the island/country.

The museum presents the community as a community which has less similarities but more differences from other communities on the island/country.

The museum presents the community as a community which is totally similar to other communities on the island/country.

a. The method used to describe your museum community presents the community as: *superjuri, indaq jew inferjuri għal komunitajiet oħra?*

Superior to others Equal to others Inferior to others

Do not know

b. Does the method applied to describe the community show differences existing within the same community?

Yes

No

How?

Why?

c. How is the method with which you describe your community, accepted / refused by the same community or by other communities who agree/disagree with your museum's description?

How?

Why?

5. How much do you negotiate with the community represented when as curator you need to prepare a description of the community at your museum?
- Never Almost never Some times
 Normally Many times Always Do not know
6. How much do you negotiate with visitors from the represented community when as curator you need to prepare the description of objects/exhibits displayed at the museum?
- Never Almost never Some times
 Normally Many times Always Do not know
7. How much do you negotiate with visitors from outside the represented community when as curator you need to prepare the description of objects/exhibits displayed at the museum?
- Never Almost never Some times
 Normally Many times Always Do not know
8. How much do you negotiate with staff (volunteers or not) when as curator you need to prepare the description of the community represented or objects/exhibits displayed?
- Never Almost never Some times
 Normally Many times Always Do not know
9. How much do you negotiate the description of objects/exhibits and the community with professionals, academics and/or experts in museum studies/areas?
- Never Almost never Some times
 Normally Many times Always Do not know
10. Who takes the final decision on what description of the represented community is presented to visitors at the museum and through its media? (*ex. printed, audio-visual or verbal*)
-
11. The community represented by the museums is nowadays considered as a community that is: (*tick those applicable*)
- Extinct/Dead Nearing extinction Threatened to disappear
 Culturally ancient Culturally growing Culturally recent/new
 Static Experiencing some changes Experiencing huge changes

- Old Adult Young Balanced age-wise
 From one race/ethnicity Mixed nationalities/races
 Has a lot to bond it Has a lot to divide it
 Other (*describe*)
-

12. What makes the identity of the community represented different from the national identity presented in national/institutional museums? (*ex. dialect, cultural heritage/history, traditions, religious creed, race,...*)
-

11.0 The tools that describe and present the community (*not promotional*)

1. What museum tools (musealia) do you use to describe and present the museum's community to visitors and the public? (*mention them*)

None

2. When you accompany/guide visitors around the museum, does the description of the community and the narrative about it change depending on the audience/visitor?

Yes, totally Yes, much changes but not all
 Yes, but only a few changes No, nothing changes

3. When you accompany/guide visitors around the museum, does the description of the community and the narrative content change between visitors from the community represented and other external to it?

Yes, totally Yes, much changes but not all
 Yes, but only a few changes No, nothing changes

12.0 Interpretation of historic narratives and construction of the imaginary (representation)

1. On which sources do you construct the historic narrative about the community? (*ex. research, oral lore, publications...*) Name them:

2. Who participates in the construction and description of the historic narrative about the community at the museum?

3. What importance do you attribute to the way others (*ex. staff, community members, donors, visitors*) see/imagine the objects exhibited and/or historic events of the community represented?

4. Which collective imaginaries (*set of values and symbols common*) are shared among the community represented by your museum?

13.0 Impacts of grassroots museums on the represented community and other museums

1. What positive and/or negative impacts do museums like your museum leave on the community represented?

Positive (*if any*): _____

Negative (*if any*): _____
2. What can help your museum to bring changes within the community?

3. What can impede your museum from bringing changes in the community?

4. Does your museum exchange ideas, practices, information or other with similar museums around the Mediterranean?
Yes No
Describe:

5. What relationships does your museum have with similar National/Institutional museums on your island/country ?

14.0 Non-National Museums and Communities

1. In your opinion, how much did the practices of museums like yours, force the National/Institutional museums open to small non-national communities?
Opened a lot * Opened a little * Almost none *
None at all Do not know

*If they opened a lot, a little or a few describe how:

2. What similarities or differences exist in the description and presentation of non-national communities in museums like yours and national/institutional museums?

3. Why do you think non-national communities described in museums as your museum, are not found in small national/institutional museums?

15.0 Interpretation and Presentation of exhibits and displays (Curator)

1. Are there other objects/exhibits which the museum did not yet put on public exhibit?

Yes No

If 'Yes, what holds them from being exhibited?

2. Who decides on what objects have to go on public exhibit in the museum?

3. Who decides what information has to accompany the exhibits put on public display at the museum?

4. On which knowledge sources do you rely on and construct the description of such exhibits? (*number in order of precedence*)

- ___ Only on what I as curator know
- ___ On the community's collective belief (*not necessarily the curator's belief*)
- ___ Customs and traditions (*the community's own oral traditions, legends and customs*)
- ___ An authority in the field (*expert, academic, other curators not necessarily published*)
- ___ Academic research and scientific publications
- ___ Personal experiences of those involved in the museum
- ___ Personal experiences of community members, donors and visitors
- ___ Whatever I, as Curator from the community believe is right (*because it is what we as community know, believe and recall*)
- ___ What community members, donors and visitors think and believe (*not necessarily shared by the curator*)
- ___ Others (describe)

16.0 Interpretation and presentation of the Mediterranean Historical Imaginary (*how people imagined the Mediterranean*)

1. What connections and relations do you see between the community represented by your museum and the Mediterranean in historic times? Describe.

2. How important were these connections/relationships for the represented community in the past?

- Very important
- Important
- Important to a certain extent
- Not so important
- Had no importance

3. What did the Mediterranean mean in the past to the community represented by your museum?

-
4. How did the community represented by your museum see/imagine the Mediterranean in the past?
-
5. Did the idea of the represented community about the Mediterranean change from the past to the idea they have today?
Yes No Do not know
- If 'Yes', describe the change?
-
6. How does the collection of exhibits at your museum describe and present the Mediterranean in historic times? (*ex. ethnography, maritime, ...*)
-
7. What historic imagination of the Mediterranean does your museum present? (*ex. a replica, an innovative idea, an ever-changing idea, chronological, events dependant, ...*)
-
8. How do you construct in your museum the Mediterranean historic imaginary embraced by the represented community? (*sources, include, exclude*)
-
9. How do you describe the Mediterranean historic imagination in the information accompanying the exhibits displayed, on printed narratives and the museum guided tour?
-
10. How is the Mediterranean historic imaginary described in your museum?
Chronologically according to date or year as they happened
According to the relationship of events, objects, people and places
11. Which aspects of the Mediterranean historic imaginary do you as curator include and promote at your museum (*if any*)?
-
12. Which aspects of the Mediterranean historic imaginary do you exclude or minimise importance in your museum? (*if any*)
-

17.0 The museum and community politics

1. Does your museum participate in social and/or political debates concerning the represented community?

Yes No Do not know

If 'Yes' how? (Describe)

2. Why does your museum participate / recede from participation in debates and matters concerning the represented community?
-

Thank you. Now please Save, Attach to email and Send to john.vella.13@um.edu.mt

Appendix III: Author's guide for the visual research and observation phase.

Osservazzjonijiet tar-riċerkatur (*Researcher's observations*)

Descriptive observations using *visual research methodology* conducted at the museums under research. This will enable me to find out

- a. **which exhibits are put on display,**
- b. **how they are displayed, and**
- c. **for which objective.**

During this exercise notation will also be made of

- d. **text and information,**
- e. **display layouts, and**
- f. **what cultural or symbolic power they display.**

(Ethnographic discourse analysis will be used for this purpose.)

Presentation observed by Researcher

- a) Are artefacts being 'positioned' in a way that they create a disparity between them or the community/ies they represent? (ex. religious material takes precedence over artefacts coming from laypersons).

Yes No

If 'Yes' Explain: _____

- b) Are historic events presented in a way that somehow excludes, discriminates or minimizes community/ies or others on matters, factors or criteria of for example, race, political or religious belief, taboos, ethnicity, poverty or social issues?

Yes No

If 'Yes' Explain: _____

- c) Are displays (temporary/permanent) highlighting certain factors more than others?

Yes No

If 'Yes' Explain: _____

d) Are exhibits, displays and narratives interlinked with the positionality and location of the curator, setting (context) and visitor?

Yes

No

If 'Yes' Explain: _____

Appendix IV: Introduction Letter and Consent Form / Ittra ta' Ntroduzzjoni u Formola ta' Kunsens

John Vella,
89 St. George's Street,
Cospicua, Malta
99273276
Email: john.vella.13@um.edu.mt

_____, _____ 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

As PhD Candidate researcher with the Mediterranean Institute of the University of Malta, and under the guidance of Profs. John Chircop I am carrying out a research on independent micro/small museums in Malta and Gozo. Your museum was chosen among others as a basis for this study. It will be presented as a PhD thesis. The information you supply will be used in the studies of the researcher and with your consent you, as Curator (no personal names will be used in the study), and your museum/collection will be mentioned. This will also serve as a promotion to your museum/collection.

For this purpose, I shall as soon as possible (a) conduct a face-to-face interview with you (which will be audio-recorded), (b) observe visitors anonymously, and (c) observe the displays and narratives at your museum. The researcher reserves the right that you may also choose not to reply to any of the questions during the interview.

If you agree please inform me or contact me as soon as possible and provide the best times/dates for carrying out the interview with the Curator. The Consent Form provided below will be collected when we meet.

Thanks in advance.

John Vella

Għażiż/a

Bħala kandidat għal Dottorat fi ħdan l-Istitut tal-Mediterran, fl-Universita' ta' Malta, taħt id-direzzjoni tal-Prof. John Chircop, jiena qiegħed nagħmel sħarriġ dwar mużewijiet żgħar indipendenti f'Malta u Għawdex. Il-mużew tiegħek hu fost daww magħżula għal dan l-istudju. L-istudju se jkun ipprezentat bħala tezi ta' Dottorat. It-tagħrif li tagħti se jintuża fl-istudji tar-Riċerkatur u bil-permess tiegħek, int bħala Kuratur/Kuratriċi (ma jidhrux ismijiet personali fl-istudju), u l-mużew/kollezzjoni tiegħek ikun msemmija. Dan iservi wkoll ta' reklam għall-mużew/kollezzjoni tiegħek.

Għal dan il-għan fl-iqsar żmien possibli (a) se nagħmillek intervista wiċċ imb'wiċċ (li tkun awdjo-rrekordjata), (b) nosserva viżitaturi b'mod anonimu, u (ċ) nagħmel osservazzjoni tal-wiri u n-narrativi użati fil-mużew tiegħek. Ir-Riċerkatur iħares ukoll id-dritt tiegħek li tista' tagħżel li ma twegibx għal xi mistoqsijiet.

F'każ ta' qbil, jekk jogħġbok infurmani jew ikkuntattjani dwar il-ħinijiet u l-jiem li fihom nistgħu nagħmlu l-intervista mal-Kuratur/Kuratriċi. Meta niltaqgħu tingabar ukoll il-'Formola ta' Qbil' hawn meħmuża.

Nirringrazzjak bil-quddiem.

John Vella

Consent Form / Formola ta' Kunsens

Name of Researcher/Riċerkatur: John Vella

PhD Candidate at the Mediterranean Institute, University of Malta, Msida.

Address: 89 St. George's Street, Cospicua, Malta ___ **Phone No:** _99273276_

Title of dissertation / Titlu ta' l-istudju: Grassroots Museums: How Curators of Micro Museums interpret and present their community - Mediterranean Historical Imaginary.

Statement of purpose of the study / Għan ta' l-istudju: To explore how curators of micro museums interpret and present their community. / *Biex nistħarreg kif il-kuraturi ta' mużewijiet ċkejknin ifissru u jipprezentaw lill-komunita' tagħhom.*

Methods of data collection / Kif se jingabar it-tagħrif: By means of a face-to-face interview (questionnaire) and audio recording (which will be transcribed) and observation at the museum. / *B'intevisti wiċċ imb'wiċċ irrekordji w osservazzjoni fil-mużew.*

Use made of the information / Użu tat-tagħrif: For the dissertation and research studies conducted by the researcher above mentioned. / *Għat-teži u riċerka magħmula mill-awtur imsemmi.*

Guarantees/ Garanziji: I will abide by the following conditions / *Nintrabat mal-kundizzjonijiet li ġejjin:*

- (i) Your real name will not be used in the study. Only position/role within the museum will be used. / *Ismek propju ma jintużax fl-istudju. Jintużaw biss il-pużizzjoni/sehem tiegħek.*
- (ii) You are free to quit from the study at any point and for whatever reason. In the case that you withdraw, all records and information collected will be destroyed. / *Int hieles tabbanduna li tiegħu sehem meta trid għal liema raġuni tkun. F'dan il-każ, it-tagħrif u r-recordings ikunu meqruda.*
- (iii) There will be no deception in the data collection process. / *M'hemm l-ebda qerq fil-ġbir tat-tagħrif.*
- (iv) The interview will be audio-recorded. / *L-intervista tkun awdjo-rrekordjata.*
- (v) The recording will be destroyed 3 years after the interview takes place. / *Ir-recordings ikunu meqruda 3 snin wara li l-intervista tintemm.*
- (vi) A copy of the research will be handed to you electronically should you request it. / *Kopja ta' l-istudju tkun mgħoddija lilek elettronikament jekk kemm-il darba titlobha.*

I agree to the conditions / *Jien hawn iffirmat/a naqbel ma' dawn il-kundizzjonijiet:*

Name of participant (in BLOCK LETTERS): _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____, _____, 20__

I agree to the conditions / *Jien hawn iffirmat/a naqbel ma' dawn il-kundizzjonijiet:*

Researcher's Name: ___John Vella___ Researcher's Signature: _____

Tutor's Name: _____ Tutor's Signature: _____

Date: _____, _____, 20____ .

Appendix V: Sustainability, laws and other museum matters

Since Maltese administrations and authorities tend to mimic laws and systems applied by the former coloniser – that is, Britain – it was necessary to take a look at what the British were doing. England, through its Art Council England (ACE), has joined in its support of independent museums, by making the *National Portfolio Funding* available also to independent micro museums. The ACE recognised the role of independent museums and made national funding available to such museums starting from 2018. The ACE stated that independent museums, which form the majority of museums in the United Kingdom, are a vital part of the Council’s aim “to make great art and culture available to everyone.”⁵⁴³ In contrast to its past stand where “museums held by private individuals are not accepted as true ‘museums’ at all,”⁵⁴⁴ the ACE, similar to Germany, also recognised that small independent museums “play crucial roles in their communities.”⁵⁴⁵

Economic sustainability

Candlin (2016: 2) observed that such micro museums and their curators follow no binding policies or managerial logic when it comes to raising funds.⁵⁴⁶ Micro museums tend to have less staff. The staff available needs to be able to multitask, such as carry out maintenance, conservation and restoration of objects and venue, management, event planning, event management and more. Livingstone (2011) argued that privatised public museums and private ‘for-profit’ museums tend to promote the interests of shareholders, that is profit-making, rather than look out for the interests of other sectors of the community.⁵⁴⁷ The demand for increased profit may consequently lead to increased admission fees. Livingstone (2011) questioned whether museums are there to make profit, and/or to make heritage accessible to all. Although the business perspective of the Maltese national agency proves Livingstone (2011) correct in saying that privatised public museums tend to promote the interests of shareholders

⁵⁴³ Association of Independent Museums [AIM], United Kingdom – AIM Blog for Independent Museums and Heritage Sites, Sassy Hicks, 11 October 2016, How will the changes to the Arts Council England Investment Portfolio benefit the sector? We talk to John Orna-Ornstein, Director of Museums and East of England for Arts Council England. Accessed 16 October 2016.

⁵⁴⁴ Hagedorn-Saupe and Ermert, 2007: 10.

⁵⁴⁵ Tanner, Matthew. 18 March 2015, Is this the age of the independent? *Arts Council England Blog*, UK. Accessed at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/age-independent> .

⁵⁴⁶ Candlin 2016: 2.

⁵⁴⁷ Livingstone, 2011: 20.

(i.e. the State and the agency), the findings from this study show that the museums she called *private 'for profit' museums* have different objectives. They tend more to consolidate Moutinho's (2016) claim that such museums from the grassroots aim and act to help the community.⁵⁴⁸

With regards to economic sustainability, curators of grassroots museums tend to generate revenue in ways similar to those used by the national agency museums, that is, through admissions, the selling of merchandise and events. Revenue generation is not an easy task for curators of grassroots micromuseums. Besides thinking of generating revenue for their museums, curators of independent and private micro museums have many more roles to play and must do a lot of things on their own. Curators of independent micro museums must be more creative than other curators elsewhere. They cannot rely on a parent organisation or many volunteers, and most of the time they must provide from their own pockets. Although curators of private micro museums shall sometimes also contribute personally, they can count on some support from within the group: such as membership fees, volunteer donations, patrons, a parent organisation or a supportive partner, an institutional subdivision (e.g. a parish) or a local authority. An advantage they have is that they might qualify for funding which facilitates the sustenance of their museum. State-owned micro museums have a fixed admission fee agreed by the national agency. There are instances when free admission or a reduced admission rate are applied: such as a scheme for school children and two accompanying persons, and another one for senior citizens.

The TMWB had no admission fee, but as the Curator explained, the micro museum was paying only for the upkeep of the place. Water and electricity bills were paid by the local council. The TMWB Curator maintained that the only income at the moment was from donations: which do not break-even with the basic expenses of the museum. The RMMT Curator said that they hold a free admission policy; but donations for the upkeep and maintenance of the place are always welcome. He informed that the RMMT museum generates some revenue from activities organised

⁵⁴⁸ Moutinho, Mário, 2016. From New museology to Sociomuseology, 24th General Conference of the International Council of Museums in 2016 (Milano 4 July 2016), Joint meeting MINOM/CAMOC/ICOFOM, 2016:1-3. Accessed at http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/camoc/PDF/Newsletters/Minom_02.pdf.

by the organisation and from a fixed donation applied to the use of facilities (e.g. for holding a temporary art exhibition). The ŽBSM Curator informed us that admission to the museum is set as a two-euro donation for adults and children over thirteen years of age. The donation is waived for groups of over twenty-five persons. Admissions for temporary art exhibitions is however free. Besides admission fees, the ŽBSM museum accepts donations by means of a donation box and a souvenir shop which sells religious souvenirs and publications connected to the Marian devotion and the village. Both the XRWM and the NDMM Curators admitted that their museums have a fixed admission fee and accept donations.

The HMCC, FMAA, MUSB, BMWS and AFCS Curators declared that they sustain their museums with a fixed admission fee. The MMTC and MRDP Curator maintained that the MMTC has an admission fee which is insufficient to sustain the museum. He claimed that the MRDP is financially more sustainable than the MMTC. He explains that

Il Museo Campailla e' un museo che il cui mantenimento, non si puo dire che la sovrintendenza venga attraverso il ticket che pagano i turisti. Perche questo ticket si rivela insufficiente. E allora c'e' l'azione dell'Associazione e i soci che la compongono. Onestamente pero' bisogna dire che non ci sono spese che si guardano l'illuminazione, il riscaldamento, e i locali in se perche il Comune mette a disposizione questo, fatti eccezione per la pulizia dei locali che e' a carico dell'Associazione. Per quanto riguarda il Museo Murika, il Museo Murika e' dal punto di vista culturale e' l'elemento preponderante, dal punto di vista finanziario e' chiaramente al carro della attivita' complessiva che si svolge all'interno della Casa degli Avi. Quindi non e' ' l'attivita' preponderante la finanziaria del museo. Quella culturale, si.⁵⁴⁹

The MLIA Curator maintained that even if the exhibits are a private collection, the total sustainability of the museum depends on the *Comune* of Ragusa as it is housed

⁵⁴⁹ Translation: The Campailla Museum is a museum whose maintenance, it cannot be said that the superintendency comes through the ticket that tourists pay. Because this ticket proves insufficient. And then there is the action of the Association and the members that make it up. Honestly, however, it must be said that there are no costs that look at lighting, heating, and the premises itself because the Municipality makes this available, except for the cleaning of the premises that is borne by the Association. As for the Murika Museum, the Murika Museum is from a cultural point of view and is the predominant element, from a financial point of view and clearly to the cart of the overall activity that takes place inside the Casa degli Avi. So the museum's financial activity is not predominant. The cultural one, yes.

in a property which belongs to the same *Comune*. Therefore, the *Comune* pays for the services (such as electricity and water supply) and other necessities of the museum (such as the mannequins, maintenance, cleaning, organising and promotion). The MSDL Curators informed that a fixed admission fee, the museum applies a waiver for group visits.

Financial Sustainability

The TMWB Curator maintained, that apart from the optional donations, the museum has no other way of financing itself. Moreover, it cannot employ staff. In addition, the acquisition of an EU grant forbids the application of admission fees to the future interpretation centre. When the interpretation centre is completed it stands to the Local Council to decide about admissions, as the VO will only be curating the micro museum. Any decision shall then be taken by both VO and local council jointly and in respect to the EU funding conditions. The RMMT Curator informed us that their museum enjoys the contributions of sponsors and contributions from advertisers on the VO's annual publication. Other sources of fundraising include activities as the annual musico-literary evening held at the hall of the adjacent school: currently attended by around four hundred persons. The ŽBSM Curator remarked that sponsors are not guaranteed and their acquisition arrives only for some sort of restoration. Artists holding temporary art exhibitions at the ŽBSM, like at the RMMT, are a source of income. IN contrast to the RMMT, the ŽBSM volunteers did not agree about a fixed admission rate and resolved to an optional donation. The selling of souvenirs, merchandise and publications is a small source of income at the ŽBSM. Although attendance to activities such as public lectures and presentations at the ŽBSM are not tied to an admission fee, a donation box is always placed at a visible spot hoping for a contribution from attendees. The ŽBSM Curators informed us that with such contributions they were able to order the maintenance of the existing wooden apertures and some restoration or conservation works on a number of exhibits. The Assistant Curator of the ŽBSM mentioned that frequently maintenance works are carried out by volunteers. The Curator maintained that the major annual event which attracts a good number of visitors and helps to contribute the majority revenue is the local festa in September. He explained that during the three festa days many traditionally pay a visit to both church and museum: it's almost a custom!

The State-owned TKWM Curator noted that her museum depends mostly on admission fees. Much smaller amounts are generated from the sale of merchandise and the fees paid for a couple of private events during the year. She said that visits by groups in after-office hours would bring extra revenue, even if it is not kept by the museum itself. The OPRM and GCHH Curator maintained that any EU funds accessed are totally spent on a specific project. In addition to admission fees, the two museums generate some revenue through after-office hours' activities: mostly by invitation and against payment. The sale of merchandise, such as publications and souvenirs, were mentioned as another source of revenue. Moreover, these State-museums present donation boxes targeted to receive contributions from visitors coming to the museum on free admission days, events and schemes.

By taking into account the volume of visitors, the number of opening hours, and the volume of revenue generated, by State-owned micro museums, the volumes received by independent and private micro museums are considerably dwarfed. The income generated by independent and private micro museums is microscopic when compared to that generated by State-owned micro museums. Their income becomes even smaller when compared with the sustainability requirements of such micro and considering that they are in many ways at a disadvantage: that is, in human resources, revenue, time, supporting volunteers and other. The TBCM Curator stated that there are events which generate considerable revenue, but at present the Passport Scheme for children and other events are attracting visitors who contribute a small amount of additional revenue. A particular activity which the TBCM Curator mentioned was a public event addressed to the Mosta community. She intends to capture oral lore, social history and childhood experiences of locals about Ta' Bistra in the past. She called the community to visit and participate by telling their stories and experiences of the site, artifacts they remember on site, and tales about the site, and more. Such events are hoped to generate revenue as the site could become promoted by the same community. The NDMM Curator saw the museum's additional revenue coming only through the donation box. There is no other source of income right now for the NDMM declared the Curators.

The HMCC Curator informed us that, besides the admission fees, their "Museum has income from the HMC Café, the HMC Shop and e-shop, the events it

organizes (music, performing arts, speech events, etc.), from government grants and donations, from rentals, from memberships and educational workshops.” Revenue generating activities at the HMCC are numerous when compared to the activities held by private and the independent micro museums on the Maltese Islands. The HMCC finances its museum in a way much similar to the Maltese State micro museums, as both use their assets and resources to the maximum. The FMMA Curators tell that apart from admission fees, they operate a museum shop and a museum cafe, and at the same time they rely on ‘personal and family earning by the Company and donations.’ The FMAA in this respect is closer to the Maltese independent micro museums, than the private micro museums whose curators also maintained that at times they should donate or spend from their own money. The FMAA’s reliance on ‘personal and family earning by the Company and donations’ however resembles that of independent micro museums which rely mostly on internal resources, optional admission donations, a few activities, and the sale of merchandise. The FMAA acts as a Company or a business, but with the exception that Greek law, the regulatory framework, and the State recognise such museums as *non-profit*, in contrast to what happens on the Maltese Islands. The AFCS Curator said that the pharmacy museum is financed solely by the admission fees of visitors. The MCDF Curator informed us that since 2018 the museum succeeded to reach an agreement with the Regional Council to launch a package ticket with reduced prices: with which different persons can visit more than one site.⁵⁵⁰ The MUSB, apart from admission fees, finances its museum with a museum shop and ‘tastings’ events with olive oil as the main culinary theme. The BMWS Curator informed us that

The Museum is nowadays financed on a monthly basis by Tisno Municipality funds. The Museum provides 30% of its own income by selling souvenirs, admission fees and by presenting expert guidance service both in and outside the museum. Considering our current projects, we apply regularly for the Ministry of Culture funds, Šibenik region funds and tourist boards’ funds, and are awarded money according to their decision.

The BMWS is probably advantaged due to the fact that the venue (similar to the MLIA and the XRWM) belongs to the municipality (local government), however funds are allocated according to the performance of the museum. Therefore, since reliance is not

⁵⁵⁰ Ragusa H24.it - Dove la verita' fa notizia, Volete visitare il Castello di Donnafugata? Ora si paga di meno, 28 January 2018, <https://www.ragusah24.it/2018/01/28/104664/> .

totally dependent on municipal funding, the museum staff should do their best to provide both the *30% of its own income* and provide for any expenses incurred by the museum.

Profit, Loss or Breakeven

All curators of micro museums interviewed - independent, private and State-owned – except the TKWM, declared that on an annual basis their museums make no profit or do not break-even with the expenses: but operate at a loss. The TKWM Curator gladly stated that since the restoration of the windmill, visitor volumes increased, and the windmill on its own is not operating at a loss. State-owned micro museums even if operating at a loss could still rely on the global income made by the national agency: that is the revenue generated from all museums, sites and other activities. Since independent and private micro museums cannot rely much on external support their improvement and success is staggered. The RMMT Curator maintained that most of the needs of the museum are met by the volunteers themselves: inclusive of the Curator and his Assistant. He complained about the lack of volunteering and declared that

It cannot be. Without hesitation I tell you that volunteering has become hard, and you cannot blame anyone today: as everyone tries to cope with two jobs.

He also stated that at times they are constrained to request the exhibiting artists to open the museum themselves or else the venue would remain closed. If the problem of volunteering were met by private micro museums, such resource would be lesser at independent micro museums which have none to turn to. Therefore, if as remarked by the RMMT Curator in the absence of volunteers a private micro museum remains closed, independent micro museums are more prone to remain closed whenever the handful of staff they have are not able to open the museum due to old age, illnesses or any other mishap concerning them or their families. Apart from leaving a negative impact on the micro museums themselves, not keeping to a published opening schedule impacts on other matters of the museum such as image, credibility, income, visitor numbers and activity generation, which among other will also have repercussions on the represented community and the local economy. This implies that

curators of independent micro museums face more challenges to keep their museums open on a regular schedule. It also means that they have to rely much more on a close number of relatives to compensate for their absence. On the other hand, when a museum depends on the curator alone, the only option is to close the museum. This was the case with a number of independent micro museums on the Maltese Islands which this study came across but could not interview as they closed for good, such as the AGHM. Another worrying factor is the future of such inestimable collections once no one else could take care of them. In circumstances as those of independent micro museums, action must be taken to facilitate their existence and self-sustenance. No longer shall such micro museums be regarded as a *for profit* when actually they never or rarely make profit. While the State and private micro museums studied are recognised by Maltese laws as *non-profits*, it is discriminatory to consider independent micro museums (and their self-sustenance activities) as *for-profit*, or worse as a commercial activity. These are issues which Maltese authorities resolve; or as remarked by the RMMT Curator, volunteering, grassroots initiatives and enterprise will face extinction on the Maltese Islands. It was common for colonialism to suppress grassroots initiatives, but it is no longer acceptable within a self-governed country which pretends to be part of the European Union. The huge differences met between discourse and practice makes such micro museums suffer.

The ŽBSM Curator said that in spite of their efforts to attract more revenue, they never succeeded to make profit or breakeven on an annual basis. He informed us that even restrictions on expenditure, made it impossible to secure the necessary revenue. He observed that the restoration and conservation of museum objects are too expensive. He maintained that

Insibu l-aħjar restawratur li hawn fil-pajjiż mhux tal-ħabba gożż. Dawn kollha iggradwati minn Bighi u kollha mqassmin, karta, għandna pittura, għandna hadid, ġebel, et cetera. Jigifieri kollha għandhom il-qasam tagħhom. Kollox huwa irrappurtat ukoll. Nitolbu rapport ma' kull haġa li ssir biex għall-inqas inkunu nafu l-intervent eżatt x'sar u ma sarx u liema per eżempju adeżivi ġew użati, liema teknika ġiet użata, u kollox irid ikun reversibbli.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵¹ Translation: We find the best restorers on the Island not a jack-of-all-trades. All are graduates from Bighi (the National Restoration Centre) and all are specialised in specific materials such as paper, art, metals, stoneworks, and other. Everything is recorded and compiled in a report. We request a report for every object treated so that we understand what interventions were made or not in detail, and for example what glues were used, what technique applied, and that all is reversible.

The Assistant Curator said that at times the restoration of one or two Ex-Voto paintings could drain the whole annual income or even more. He informed us that they try not to ask for money from the Parish, the Parish is already paying water and electricity bills of the museum. The Curator adds that with the introduction of photovoltaic panels on the roof, the expenditure on such services was lately minimized and eliminated. Projects, such as restoration, conservation, or the introduction of energy-saving measures, are however unattainable to other private, and to most independent micro museums which have limited resources. This suggests that collections at independent micro museums are at a higher risk than those at private micro museums. Both the TMWB and the RMMT Curators expressed concern about their collections as restoration and conservation demand huge sums of money, which they could never raise.

The TBCM Curator informed us that at present the museum generates sufficient revenue but the challenges ahead would make it difficult. She argued that people tend to choose the St. Paul's Catacombs (Rabat) since these are easier to reach, popular, central, and the largest complex owned by the State. She added that people, such as the individual tourist and the interested person would find it difficult to transit from Rabat to Ta' Bistra (Mosta), a few minutes away, to see something similar but smaller. The time and money involved would discourage tourists, above all, from visiting. It is only those who have a particular interest in the site that would go to the museum on purpose. Added to the issue of similarity, she remarked, the museum is not at a central spot in the village and reaching it by public transport is difficult.

The XRWM Curator said that at present the museum manages well, but sometimes expenses exceed the revenue gained. Circumstances and unexpected damages from stormy weather were mentioned as examples when expenses would exceed the revenue generated alone. The Curator informed us that when expenses inflate, the Local Council should seek support from either central government or EU funds. Since the windmill belongs to the State, it would be easier for them to access EU funding. This is not common among private and independent micro museums which are ineligible or find it difficult to access such funds. Worst of all are non-State micro museums and/or collections as they could not rely on another entity or make ends meet. Consequently, they would discard applications for funds as their legal status might disqualify them. This shows that the divide between State, private and

independent museums is wider when it comes to financial or other forms of support. These inequalities would prevent them from maintaining their museums and their collections. They would also restrict their ability, among other, to organise cultural events and pedagogic activities for their communities. This would bear negative consequences on the social, cultural, and economic environment which surrounds them.

The AFCS Curator maintained that with around 6,000 visitors a year, the revenue gained allows them to cover the annual expenses of the pharmacy museum and make some profit. In contrast, the FMAA Curator informed us that with an annual 600 visitors, there is insufficient revenue generated to cover the annual expenses: and the museum operates at a loss. The Curator of the HMCC, where staff is salaried, maintained that even with 33,600 visitors a year, the museum manages to only to 'break even' financially, but it does not generate a profit or end up with losses. The MUSB Curators stated that admission fees, the museum shop and the tastings provide sufficient money with which to finance the museum and make some profit. In spite of the funds allocated by the municipality and other regional sources, the BMWS Curator informed us that the museum manages to break even.

Changes experienced in income in the last five years

Curators were asked about the changes experienced in the museums' income in the last five years. State-owned micro museum Curators reported an increase at all of the micro museums.⁵⁵² They attributed the increase to the improvements and initiatives taken by the national agency to upgrade the participant museums. The TKWM has registered the best increase. The restoration of the windmill and the new mechanism raised curiosity. The increase in visitor numbers was greatly attributed to the windmill's proximity to, and its visibility from, the Ġgantija Temples.

The RMMT Curator did not report changes in the income of the museum for the last five years. He maintained that a major purchase was the canopy which costed them quite a lot. He maintained that it was thanks to all the volunteers who donated money; as no fundraising activity was organised for the project. Donations for the

⁵⁵² Heritage Malta, Annual Reports. (2003-2018) All reports are accessible on: <https://heritagemalta.org/about-us/annual-reports/>)

canopy were also collected during the *FestArti* activity and the names of the donors were publicly acknowledged. The ŽBSM Curator informed us that revenue varied in the last five years. He said that best sources for revenue are good participation to activities and art exhibitions held at the museum. The Assistant Curator however maintained that there is no trend or pattern over which one may forecast or plan ahead, as people are unpredictable. He informed us that an increase in tourists resulted as tourists go to the museum on their own while walking around the village. Another factor which increased visits from foreigners was the opening of some guest houses at the village. The Curator maintained that the annual number of visitors is also dependent on the date of the village festa. He explained that when the date coincides with festivities and activities connected to the feast of Our Lady of Victories (8 September), the number of visitors decreases. The Curator and his Assistant agreed that the number of visitors was unaltered or increased to an annual of around 1,200; however, group bookings vary from one year to another.

Most curators and persons involved in the tourism industry on the Maltese Islands complained that the tourism sector suffers owing to a few service providers who request commissions or remunerations for taking visitors or tourists to certain places (such as a museum, a site, a restaurant or else). Although both sides may agree to boost up numbers and gain more money together, it could ultimately impact heavily on the receiver (such as the museum, site, restaurant or else) as carriers or service providers (such as vehicle drivers, guides, tour operators) might decide to switch to more profitable places. The latter may blackmail the receiver and even stop the flow or divert it elsewhere. These were factors which Curators complained about as they could severely damage tourism, the museum, its community and the surrounding economic activity. They might also force the museum to reduce opening times or close permanently. This shows that curators of independent, private and even State-owned micro museums should not deal with such service-providers as sooner or later it would backfire. Such matters should however be suppressed and ideally stopped by national authorities as such practices are highly damaging to the tourism industry, society and the economy.

The XRWM Curator claimed that revenue increased, or decreased, according to seasonality: tourists are at a low in the summer months, but tend to increase by

September or October. The NDMM Curators maintained that in the last years the revenue generated remained unaltered. They attributed the stand still to the fact that the museum has been closed off for a while. The curators who report an increase in their income for the last five years were those of the HMCC, FMAA, MUSB and AFCS. The BMWS Curator declared that the income of the museum increased in the last five years. As mentioned earlier the location of the museum and its proximity to other popular sites can affect visitor numbers and the revenue which a museum generates.

Financial Sustainability - Financial aid or other form of support from any other organisation.

Curators were asked whether their museums receive any financial or other form of assistance from another organisation (such as local government, other NGOs, institutions as the Church, central government or the EU). The TMWB Curator said that the only help the museum receives is from its parent VO. He maintained that although it would benefit from EU funds, as an interpretation centre, it would no longer function as a museum in the traditional sense. Therefore, the Curator did not envisage the aid as an aid for the museum itself. The RMMT Curator and his Assistant declared that their museum never benefitted from any other source or from EU funds. They said that once one of the local banks sponsored two museum activities; but that did not happen again. The ŽBSM Curator and his Assistant complained that the bureaucracy involved (e.g. to go through the eligibility stage of EU funds) was too much of a headache and a waste of time (e.g. a huge amount of paperwork), that they abandoned the idea of ever retrying. On the other hand, it was too expensive to engage a third party to do it for them - in the absence of human resources. The Assistant Curator, Michael, remarked that since all were volunteers, they had to catch up with various other responsibilities (such as house chores, family matters, work and other). They said that in contrast, the national agency had staff assigned for researching, accessing and managing EU funds - which is unlikely within private or independent grassroots micro museums. The Curator remarked that in spite of the number of volunteers listed, only a few might be able to handle matters delegated to them. He argued that, on the other hand, volunteering has today become a strange thing - no one does anything for nothing - and you cannot oblige people to come to the museum

everyday just for nothing. The same comment about volunteering was repeated by the Curator and Assistant Curator of the RMMT. The absence of volunteers was also mentioned by the TMWB Curator who claimed that he ends up all alone at the museum. During the observations in all three cases it was always the same handful of persons or individual who were present during the opening hours. The ŽBSM and the RMMT Curators mentioned localities (such as the Žejtun parish church museum) where huge investments for a similar museum were made, but the museum never got off the ground; even with an available venue and a showcased collection. Volunteers are hard to find and this presents another challenge to private micro museums. Though they appear well-equipped and backed by a great deal of volunteers, only a very few make themselves available or participate in administrative or curatorial roles.

The NDMM parish priest explained that although

ultimately everything [in the parish house and thus the museum] is administered by the *Curia*, we have the principle of subsidiarity.⁵⁵³ This is the house of the parish priest. It is a parish house. This was the parochial house. The house of the parish pastor, of the parish priest, but it was hardly ever used because parish priests in my time were always from the village (Nadur), so the parish priest would not come to live here, they would stay with their family. So, it was the parish house, but it was never used as a parish house, except in the forties [1940s). In the forties it was as there was one [parish priest] from Ta' Sannat so he lived here. But the rest they lived in their own homes. This was used more as a centre for [teaching] Christian doctrine. So I remember I was with Bishop (Nikol) Cauchi when they decided to transform this into a museum. I remember the Bishop telling them “All right, you can transform the parish house into a museum, on the condition that you build a flat or a house for the parish priest who will come in the future and live here. So, they opened the museum but prior to that they built a flat here. Just above there is a parish hall and a parish flat, where I live upstairs. The parish hall and the flat were built on the ground, on the garden of the parish house. This is owned by the parish and expenses are incurred by the parish.

The NDMM Curators however explained that the principle of subsidiarity takes priority even from the Church's hierarchy in Gozo. Apart from housing the museum, the NDMM Curator, Nora, confirmed that the parish church does more than that as

⁵⁵³ Dictionary.com: The definition of subsidiarity, in the Roman Catholic Church, is ‘a principle of social doctrine that all social bodies exist for the sake of the individual so that what individuals are able to do, society should not take over, and what small societies can do, larger societies should not take over.’ Likewise, in political systems, subsidiarity is ‘the principle of devolving decisions to the lowest practical level.’

For the electricity, for the water, it's all covered by the church, by the local parish. We are not getting any visitors. They just call the parish even though we have the telephone here.

Therefore, the parish church through the parish priest is giving more than just the spiritual or religious services to the community. It is also providing a social and cultural function which is in line with the principle of subsidiarity mentioned by the same parish priest. This is an example of subsidiarity in practice which must be applauded.

In contrast, the attitude of the State in relation to initiatives as independent and private micro museums is worrying, as the State does not indicate the minimal signs of conformity to principles of subsidiarity or even democracy. Micro museums on the Maltese Islands suffer from subtle exclusion, receive no national or regional funds, and some are still considered as commercial entities and as competitors. This is absurd in a State which boasts of adherence to twenty-first century democratic principles, and a member of the European Union where principles of democracy and equity should take priority on other matters.

The TKWM Curator informed us that in reality the windmill never got any other help. The restoration project was totally financed by internal funds from the national agency, Heritage Malta. If the national agency found it difficult to tap funds for the restoration of the Ta' Kola Windmill museum, then the difficulty to tap funds would be greater for private and independent grassroots micro museums. The difference between the State-owned and the private or independent micro museum is that the latter two have none to turn to and finance their projects. This means that the curators of private and independent micro museums must meet additional challenges, which they must face mostly alone. When funds are not available projects should be delayed, postponed or shelved for ever. The lack of finance or its limitation forces curators to be more inventive and creative in providing for projects related to the micro museum, its collection, its venue and the needs they bring along. The TBCM Curator maintained that in contrast to private and independent micro museums, the national agency benefits from various EU funds.

Hafna mis-siti ta' Heritage Malta infatti jkollhom assistenza mill-fondi ta' l-Unjoni Ewropeja.

The TBCM Curator said that apart from the financial aspect, they try to get the site closer to the community.

Pero apparti mill-aspett finanzjarju, ahna nippruvaw kemm jista' jkun li rridu ngibu s-sit qrib tan-nies.

Curators at the State micro museums felt the importance of local community participation in heritage. This shows that the success of a museum depends on the participation and the amount of ownership which a community takes of a museum and heritage it aims to safeguard - inside and outside the museum - even if the museum is not their personal property or collection.

The XRWM Curator maintained that the museum did not receive help from any other entity and the only source of income was the admission fee. There are no souvenirs, merchandise or activities which could generate revenue. EU funds were only applied for when the windmill required major restoration works, and, if the funding criteria matched the action or works needed, but not for the museum or its collection. Maintenance works, such as the maintenance of doors and windows (apertures) were done by volunteers, but restoration works (such as those on the mechanism and the building) required the engagement of an expert restorer by the Local Council. The Curator informed us that the national agency, does not participate or help in such projects, even if the property belongs to the State. This shows that even at the XRWM, an amount of voluntary work is done by third parties; special restoration works are assigned by the parent (Local Council) to specialised persons; c) and, the national agency does not provide its services or support on restoration works. Even if it is a government property (trusted to the Local Council), it is the Local Council and community revenue that is spent for the museum's maintenance and restoration. In contrast, when the national agency reconstructed the mechanism of the Ta' Kola Windmill at Xaghra (Gozo) (TKWM), it referred to the expertise of the miller and curator of the XRWM, George Sammut, who went several times to give advice and information on mechanism reconstruction and functionability, now available at the same museum. This is another instance where the national agency had sought the help and support of the individual founder and curator of a former independent micro museum to replicate something for the State. The reprehensible about the State is that while its agency requests support from curators of such independent and private micro museums, State museums tend to compete with them, and the State and national

agency never return the favour. It is in a way comprehensible that the national agency tries to present the best museums to the public, but it is weird that it demands the help of the non-State micro museums to compete with them. Since the input of such independent and private micro museums and their curators was so important to the existence of most national micro museums, not to mention the larger ones, the State has the responsibility to take action to reduce the burdens faced by such museums and help them gain support to maintain their venues, their collections and improve their pedagogic activities to the public and their communities. It is thanks to the initiatives and efforts of such individuals and volunteers that most State-owned museums and collections around the world exist. It is no surprise that the NDMM Curators complain altogether that

‘Nothing, from the government neither. Government helps us on nothing!’

Sustainability: Restoration and Conservation

The HMCC Curator reported that it receives financial assistance or other support from another organisation. The FMAA and the AFCS Curators informed us that they receive no financial assistance or other support from other organisations outside their own. However, all of them maintained that they receive no support from any restoration or conservation entity. This means that non-Maltese museums face similar problems to those met by Maltese private and independent micro museums, i.e. when it comes to restoration and conservation of their collections or heritage owned. In both cases, Maltese private and independent micro museums and non-Maltese museums studied in this research, had to pay for such services, or else, put their own collections at risk of irreversible damages or loss.

A recommendation which emerges from this is that: in all cases, the State or national agencies must seek ways which might help such museums to restore and to conserve their collections as these collections are not simply the property of the museum alone, but a heritage which belongs to all humanity, and which can be a tool for several didactic purposes. Once an artefact is lost it is lost forever and for everyone.

The MUSB Curator maintained that no other organisation provides them with financial assistance or support, but they receive support from a restoration or conservation entity. In contrast the other Croatian museum, the BMWS, receives

financial or other assistance from other sources, but no assistance for restoration or conservation from other entities.

On the museological level, another issue micromuseum curators face is the maintenance of their collections for posterity. Their objects and collections are mainly self-collected, inherited, donated, acquired and/or bought from third parties. Most of the objects or collections found in micro museums may not qualify as objects for display at large institutional museums.⁵⁵⁴ Private and independent micro museums tend to collect and exhibit cultural objects which the larger museums do not. Such collections are mostly exhibited within houses belonging to an individual or the family who established and takes care of the museum. The stereotyped assumption that only institutional, officially, administered and funded museums have a worthy collection or have a significant mission,⁵⁵⁵ is proved wrong. One must also remember that many national and institutional museums around the world started as a private collection or as a personal ‘cabinet of curiosities’.⁵⁵⁶ Examples of such collections and museums are numerous, as for example, the British Museum in London.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ O’Hare, Michael. Museums can change – Will They?, *Democracy, A Journal of Ideas*, Spring 2015, No. 36. <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/36/museums-can-changewill-they/> .

⁵⁵⁵ Livingstone, 2011: 20-21.

⁵⁵⁶ Desvallées, André and François Mairesse, 2010: 27.

⁵⁵⁷ Anderson, Steve. 255th Anniversary of the British Museum: Google Celebrates Institution’s Opening, *Independent*, UK, 15 January 2014. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/255th-anniversary-of-the-british-museum-google-doodle-celebrates-london-institutions-birthday-9060397.html> .

Sloane’s Treasure, The British Museum website, 2017.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/all_current_projects/sloanes_treasures.aspx .

Other examples are:

- a) the Booth Museum of Natural History at Brighton Booth Museum website introductory page 2017. See <https://brightonmuseums.org.uk/booth/> ;
- b) the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford see Holthusen, Peter. *The Pitt Rivers Museum*, *OX Magazine*, Oxford, UK. <http://www.oxmag.co.uk/The-Pitt-Rivers-Museum.asp> .
- c) Planetarium Zuylenburgh in Oud-Zuilen see Boerhaave Museum discovers unknown Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Microscope, Planetarium Zuylenburgh website, 27 May 2015, <http://planetariumzuylenburgh.com/en/uncategorized-en/boerhaave-museum-discovers-unknown-antoni-van-leeuwenhoek-microscope/> .
- d) the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, Netherlands see Teylers Museum, *I Becoming Dutch*, 25 Nov 2017. <https://ibecomingdutch.wordpress.com/2017/11/25/teylers-museum/> .
- e) the Deyrolle in Paris see Naissance : la famille Deyrolle, *Deyrolle* website, 2017. <https://www.deyrolle.com/histoire/historique-de-la-maison-deyrolle/naissance-la-famille-deyrolle> ;
- f) the Fondation Calvet, Avignon, France see Fondation Calvet, website. <http://www.fondation-calvet.org/avignon/en/origins> ;
- g) the Grünes Gewölbe in Dresden, Germany see Green Vault, *Atlas Obscura*, 2018. <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/green-vault> ;

A significant responsibility which curators assume is the maintenance of objects held in the museum's possession. However, matters as maintenance, careful cleaning, restoration and conservation demand huge sums of money. When asked about whether they receive any help for restoration or conservation, all the curators of private and independent micro museums replied that they did not. The TMWB Curator maintained that even with funding opportunities a percentage (30%) of the expenses had to be made by the Local Council as the applicant for the project. The ŽBSM Curator informed us that from time to time, and when funds are available, they purchase restoration projects from the Bighi centre which belongs to the national agency. However, when the money collected from volunteers and revenue raised by the museum do not suffice, the parish priest might help from parish funds. The same Bighi centre was also mentioned by the State-owned micro museum Curators. It is the central place where all the restoration and conservation projects of State collections are made. The RMMT Curator claims that they do not afford to pay for restoration or conservation works and wherever possible they try to mediate and solve matters themselves.

In addition, independent micro museums run as a small family business or a commercial entity (even if their objective is not focused on profit) may easily find themselves at the mercy of financial and administrative burdens imposed by laws and regulatory systems under which they operate. Based on over twenty-five years of experience in running an independent micromuseum, and the experiences narrated by other curators, it is clear that the measures imposed by the State and its authorities perceive such initiatives as profit-making and therefore attribute to such museums profit-making nomenclatures.

Since independent micro museums might not receive State funding, they could select what to display. Such choices are mostly dependent on the curator's interests and objectives. However, grassroots museum with grassroots objectives would focus

h) the Kunstkamera in St. Petersburg, Russia see The Kunstkamera: all world knowledge in one building, 2018. http://www.kunstkamera.ru/en/museum/kunst_hist/01/ ; and,

i) the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan, Italy see *"New light on Botticelli's beauty: Discoveries at the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan"*. *University of Sydney*. 2017. <http://www.museopoldipezzoli.it/#!/en/discover/from-house-to-museum/>.

on community issues and debates. These choices might also affect the number of visitors who decide to go to the museum and perhaps donate some money. Most independent micro museums started during the late twentieth century⁵⁵⁸ are still sustained by individual or family earnings, a few sporadic activities and some optional donations. Although some independent micro museums might operate on free admission, their visiting hours might further restrict the number of visitors and revenue. Among the museums studied it was noted that some museums were during the time of study opening only for a few hours a week or limited to visits by appointment: thus, reducing further their accessibility.

Accessibility

Accessibility is another matter of concern to museum curators. While conservators of heritage argue that controlled accessibility impacts less on a heritage site and its artifacts, micro museums depend on the flow of visitors. Independent grassroots micro museums would therefore survive in a market-oriented world only by creating ways and means which help them, at least, make ends meet.

Museums whose key objective is to promote cultural awareness and heritage appreciation might offer free admission. At the same time, studies suggested that offering free admission does not always guarantee an increase in the number of visitors.⁵⁵⁹ However, the recent experiences of State museums on the Maltese Islands showed that visitor numbers for each museum did shoot up on days when admission was free.⁵⁶⁰ Nevertheless, offering free admission might not act as a means with which

⁵⁵⁸ Candlin 2016: 1.

⁵⁵⁹ Klein, Becky, and Dr KariAnne Innes. "Admission Fees As Barrier To Entry: Joslyn Art Museum." (2015);

Rushton, Michael J. "Should Public and Nonprofit Museums Have Free Admission?" *Browser Download This Paper* (2016);

Martin, Andy. The Impact of Free Entry to Museums, MORI, London, March 2003: 4, 6 and 10.

Cellini, Roberto, and Tiziana Cuccia. "How free admittance affects charged visits to museums: An analysis of the Italian case." (2017); Rushton, Michael. "Should public and nonprofit museums have free admission? A defence of the membership model." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 32, no. 3 (2017): 200-209;

⁵⁶⁰ Mule' Stagno, Luciano. June 5, 2009, New museum fees sensitive to needs, *Times of Malta* <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20090605/letters/new-museum-fees-sensitive-to-needs.259809> .

Micallef, Keith June 17, 2017, Record visitors to Malta museum sites in 2016, *Times of Malta*, <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20170617/local/record-visitors-to-malta-museum-sites-in-2016.650859> .

Heritage Malta, advertising free admission events. Accessed 31 January 2018 <http://heritagemalta.org/?s=free+admission> .

to reduce exclusion.

Maltese Law and Regulatory Frameworks

The Maltese laws and regulations discussed in connection to the participant micro museums are mostly those concerning the Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap. 492) and its Subsidiary Legislation (S.L. 492.01). This law exhausts the interpretation of the terms "*non-profit making*", "*not for profit*", "*non-profit*" and *similar phrases* and provides details as *principles, rules and guidelines in the First Schedule to this Act*. Under Article 38 of the same Act, is clear that any enrolled Voluntary Organisation cannot indulge in profit-making activity and it shall establish a separate and distinct limited liability company. This is what the national agency had to do, but which is also criticized by their curators and staff. Although the Act aims to allow certain remunerations to members of the VO for their services, it does not state what should happen with those initiatives which were formerly registered as limited liability companies, or where all the efforts and expenses of the initiative were, and are still, carried by the founders, curators or family members owning the museums. There are also other anomalies in the same Act. Article 2 attributes under 'philanthropic' and 'social purpose' different forms of activities and characteristics met in the practices and objective of grassroots micro museums. Article 3 and the rest of the Act however do not recognise the existence of initiatives as those mentioned in this study as 'independent micro museums.' While it is disadvantageous for them to register as VOs, they are also disadvantaged and discriminated to be considered as commercial entities, since they share most of the objectives for which philanthropic organisations are established. It is also disrespectful to consider the founders, and those who invested in such initiatives for the community, as profit-makers. According to Maltese law concerning VOs "*revenue*" means *any income, donations, grants and any other funds raised through activities or fundraising that are received by the voluntary organisation in the relevant financial period, net of expenses which are directly*

Though access is restricted, public attendance for free to national museums and sites on events as the Notte Bianca, Science in the City and other events or festivals at Malta is promoted.

Times of Malta, 29 September 2016, Last chance to visit Fine Arts Museum at Admiralty House – Valletta and Vittoriosa museums free for Notte Bianca, Accessed at <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20160929/local/last-chance-to-visit-fine-arts-museum-at-admiralty-house.626462> .

*related or connected to the income, donations or grants.*⁵⁶¹

Through the research exercise, the author acknowledged that there are several micro museums which have started as grassroots initiatives. However, among them are museums which despite their establishment by the grassroots, or by a strong input from the grassroots, have nowadays become part of an institution in order to survive and receive support: as is with some of the State-owned, independent and private micro museums participant in this study. This research found that in order to access national or EU funds, the TMWB and the RMMT were compelled to change their legal status, register as a Voluntary Organisation (i.e. as a *non-profit*) and consequently accept changes to the official name of their organisation or function as a museum. The situation of the RMMT can be questioned since, being a National Cultural Centre, it can be explicitly in breach of the VOs Act (Article 3(2)a-c) which compromises the independence and autonomy of the VO.

The ŽBSM and the NDMM which function as an autonomous parish group and a volunteer group respectively under the patronage of the local parish priest, did not do register under a regulatory system. They recognised that becoming a registered VO or an NGO would not have benefitted their museum. On the contrary, the Curators maintain that it would burden their museum with a great deal of regulatory red-tape and expenses (such as the submission of annual accounts and auditing through a legally recognised accountant, auditor or a firm, hold formal annual general meetings and keep minutes, and other legal and regulatory demands which breed further expenses) even if some records and accounts are already kept by the committee.

Moreover, the RMMT and the TMWB Curators complained that despite their registration as a VO they did not benefit much. By becoming a VO, or by shifting the micromuseum under the umbrella of an existing VO, they would lose their autonomy, and would still be too far from acquiring any benefit. All the curators interviewed complained that accessing national or EU funds was too hard and burdensome for their micro museums. For the TMWB, the shifting of the museum function under a VO

⁵⁶¹ Laws of Malta, S.L. 492.01. Voluntary Organisations (Annual Returns and Annual Accounts) Regulations.

meant the end of the museum, as the successful qualification to the EU funds had conditioned the VO to change the micro museum into an interpretation centre. Interpretation centres are normally an alternative for the insufficiency to establish a museum: which was not the case of the TMWB. The objective of interpretation centres is not to collect, conserve and exhibit objects but to raise awareness, to communicate and to educate on the importance of heritage in an interactive way.⁵⁶² Therefore, as the TMWB Curator disgruntedly remarked the museum collection will no longer be available at the Westreme Battery.

The RMMT Curators also complained that, despite being registered as a VO, the possibility to access funds had become a nightmare. They complained that even just filling the eligibility forms was too much of a headache for them, so they decided not to seek any such funding opportunities. The same complaint was raised by the ŽBSM Curators as the amount of paperwork necessary for simply checking eligibility was unbearable: so they said it was better to forget about such funding schemes. The ŽBSM purchased restoration and conservation interventions on art and artefacts exhibited at the museum from own generated revenue: mainly from visitor donations, the sales of souvenirs, merchandise, publications and revenue raised by donations made at activities (such as public lectures and temporary exhibitions).

The AGHM, formerly registered as a cooperative, had by the time of this research closed for good. One of its ex-curators maintained that they could no longer sustain the museum and its activities. As a family initiative all expenses depended on family money and resources; inclusive of those charges and fees related to legal and regulatory requirements. These, according to the curator made it impossible for the museum to survive on revenue by the same museum and its activities. Such circumstances led to one option: to close the doors and forget about the nightmare they had to experience after so many sacrifices and efforts.

Current legal options not solutions

Those initiatives established prior to 2007 had no other option except to register as a private liability company (Cap. 386). They were thus classified as a

⁵⁶² Izquierdo Tugas, Pere; Juan Tresserras, Jordi; Matamala Mellin, Juan Carlos, eds. (September 2005). "[Heritage Interpretation Centres, The Hicira Handbook](#)". Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona. Accessed 25 June 2019

business enterprise and considered as a '*for-profit*'. This prevented them from qualifying for funds or schemes designed for the cultural or the tertiary sector as they were, and still are, considered as a commercial entity.

In 2016 a new law called the Family Business Act (Act XLVIII of 2016) was launched. It offers a new form of registration to all those family businesses formerly registered as limited liability companies (Cap. 386. Part V of the Companies Act), as partnerships *en nom collectif* or partnerships *en nom commandite* duly formed and registered in terms of Part III and Part V of the Companies Act, as private foundations established for a private interest and registered or otherwise recognised as legal persons in terms of the Second Schedule to the Civil Code and as 'trusts' (Cap. 16) in terms of the Trusts and Trustees Act (Cap. 331). Although this facilitates the transfer of businesses within families as part of the capital transfer after the death of a family member, it does not facilitate any other matter in connection with family initiatives in the cultural sector as are independent museums. It does not offer any form of incentive to those family businesses who operate in the cultural sector. Most laws are cosmetic as their motive is aimed at collecting fees and taxes, incurring other professional charges for just switching from one to another form of registration.

Initiatives registered from 2007 onwards, had the option to register as a Voluntary Organisation (XXII, 2007). However, the VO law is only applicable and fitting for groups of unrelated volunteers who decide to team up and put a collection of exhibits (being it their property or trusted to them) on public display as a museum. The VO law carries with it many burdens which are only marginally different from those of businesses or *for-profits*. Although VOs are considered as *non-profits*, they could hold fundraising activities, and remunerate persons or members providing services to the VO. They could not however share profits among their members. Income has to be regenerated within the same VO. VOs, like foundations are a democratic form of association where none of the volunteers is an owner. Persons, inclusive of the founders, could be elected or removed from the administration of the same VO, and therefore, of the museum. Such a practice could easily remove the presence of the founders and rightful owners from the administration of the initiative. This is evident, if the founders and/or owners were to register their museum activity as a VO, a foundation (NGO) or under such trust types of registration. The VO

registration framework is unfit for individual or family initiatives such as independent museums. Through a VO, a foundation (NGO) or a trust, members can totally wipe out the founders (individuals, families or even a group of relatives) who started and invested all their time, effort, money, resources and love to establish an independent museum.

The VO, foundation (NGO) or trust frameworks are appealing to some extent for private initiatives as private museums. This study identified as private museums those museums established and/or managed by a group of unrelated volunteers or persons (such as those belonging to an institution or a legally recognised group) who agree to establish and/or manage a collection of exhibits, to open it for public viewing, and to engage in various ways (cultural, social and pedagogic) to sustain the same museum. Although such activities may also constitute the activities of independent museums, through the VO, foundation and trust frameworks these are not considered as *for-profit* activities. This shows that legal frameworks in Malta apply double standards. They discriminate individuals, families or groups from the grassroots who take initiatives, such as the establishment of a museum. Despite all their sacrifices and efforts such initiators are ‘legally’ punished instead of being acknowledged, encouraged and rewarded. The Maltese legal system does not acknowledge the contribution of such persons who take initiatives with their limited resources for the welfare of the community around them.

Owing to such a situation, they cannot benefit from funds and all the expenses have to be incurred internally from their own pockets and resources. Although some may choose not to operate under a legal or a regulatory framework, others may at their start take the business ‘*for profit*’ route, even if they never succeed to make a profit or at least break-even. Such grassroots museums, identified by this study as independent museums, are normally set up inside the property of an individual or a family, is supported totally by own finances, and where all staff involved is multitasking and volunteering. Persons giving their best on a full-time 24/7 volunteer basis at independent museums are not recognised for their efforts and sacrifices. Any revenue generated by independent museums, (such as admission fees, the sale of merchandise or funds raised from activities) are considered as a commercial activity by a commercial entity. This contrasts greatly with the exemptions enjoyed by the national

agency where these are not considered as *for-profit* activities. The present Maltese law does not provide a tool with which to recognise such grassroots initiatives and categorise them as '*not-for-profits*' as in the Italian 'cultural association' type. The findings of this research show that neither the State-owned nor the private and independent micro museums make profit or at least break-even with what they manage to get from admission fees (if they charge an admission fee), from donations and/or from other fundraising activities they hold.

Private micromuseums as a non-profit

The second type of museums met in this research are those which despite their being established by an individual or a group of non-related persons, had by time sought to operate under a '*non-profit*' legal or regulatory framework and under the umbrella of an institution, a company or a '*not-for-profit*' parent organisation as established by the local legal system: such as a registered VO, a NGO, a foundation or a cultural association. This was not applicable if the museum were still run by an individual or a small number of people who are not recognised by law. This type of museum is here identified as a private museum, in spite of their '*not-for-profit*' it might generate financial gain through its activities. However, profits should be regenerated into the same museum: a practice which implicitly takes place also at independent micro museums. At such museums, neither the curators nor volunteers are paid, but they may employ external staff or people to do the 'work' and pay them from the revenue generated. Unlike the owners of independent micro museums, the private micro museum administration has the advantage of turning on supporting members and/or volunteers to finance a project. Independent micro museum owners must provide money themselves or else delay or forget their projects. Meanwhile, private micromuseums due to their '*not-for-profit*' recognition by the law may apply and access funds and schemes made available for arts, culture, education and other projects (such as restoration), which the independent micro museum cannot. Independent micro museums which are not registered under a legal or regulatory form may open their doors, but they can never apply or access funds due to their not being recognised. On the other hand, independent micro museums which back in time have registered as a '*for-profit*' (i.e. a business, a company) – in the absence of a social enterprise law – are subjected to various financial and bureaucratic burdens which normally apply to the large and resourceful businesses. It is unsuitable to put all the museums in one

basket, but it is by far more erroneous and discriminatory to put any of the independent micro museums – or even private micro museums – under the ‘*for-profit*’ or business categories.

In spite of their setbacks and legal burdens, independent micro museum curators and their families contribute much more time, effort and money to keep their micro museums open and in good condition for visitors to enjoy and as a pedagogic tool for the community they serve. Both private and independent micro museums are acknowledged by scholars as important contributors to the economy, to the community where they are located, and to society in general. However, up to the time of writing neither the Maltese authorities nor the legal and regulatory system approved by Parliament had ever attempted to facilitate their existence and their efforts. The current laws and regulatory frameworks threaten the existence and creation of more grassroots initiatives. Although this is worst felt among the independent grassroots micro museums, the curators of private grassroots micro museums had likewise complained about the problems and challenges that the Maltese law and regulatory system presents to their museums.

All this leads to a recommendation that: the liberation of such independent and private grassroots micro museums from legal and regulatory burdens shall help their Curators and volunteers, to become better contributors to society and the economy. Their recognition by government and Maltese cultural authorities shall help them gain access to national or regional funds in order to sustain their museums, in the conservation of their collections, in restoration, venue upkeep and the organisation of pedagogic activities for the communities they serve. Overall, and in spite of their great contribution to society, it is the independent grassroots museum that faces most challenges for survival.

Once an independent micro museum relinquishes its individual or family ownership, it may move to a private micro museum status. Nonetheless there is no guarantee that any volunteers may team up to continue caring for and managing such collections and venues. The change carries with it a change in the role of the curator and the management team. At independent micro museums curators are fully – sole or with a few relatives - owners involved in the administration and management of the venue and the collections. At private micro museums, curators become managers of

the venue and/or the collections, and they must adhere to the decisions of the administrator such as a parish priest, local government or a registered VO which could be administering and managing a third party's property and collection/s such as the State or another large institution as the Church. All this shows that the VO definition is not fit to all types of grassroots initiatives as independent micro museums. The difference is that the VOs model applies only to those venues and collections which have an owner as an administrator or act on behalf of a large institution; but who trust their management of the venue and/or collection or its objective to third parties such as volunteers or paid persons inclusive of someone vested with curatorship. VOs are considered as democratic groups which may elect a committee, hold meetings and annual general meetings, report to the owner-administrator and at the same time own nothing of the museum and/or its collection. They are bound to submit annual accounts and audits to national authorities and pay fees – all of which according to most curators make their life miserable. For such a reason, some of the private micro museums studied, even if managed by a group of volunteers, seek not to join the registered VOs status. They maintain that it is burdensome and inhibits the grassroots initiatives and enthusiasm normally shown by volunteers. The choice of the ŻBSM and the NDMM was therefore the right choice for the two museums as they enjoy much more autonomy and freedom than the private museums managed by a registered VO.

A similar scenario is found among independent micro museums. Independent micro museums on the Maltese Islands have few choices. The options are that they may

- (a) stay out of the legal and regulatory frameworks and open to the public as if the owners are having an open day at their own home;
- (b) opt to become a for-profit commercial entity as any other business;
- (c) become a social enterprise; or
- (d) join the VOs, Foundations or NGOs, with all its demands.

In Malta, all such situations currently have presented risks, burdens and setbacks which discourage or do not recognise the efforts and sacrifices made by the persons behind such grassroots initiatives. There are therefore different scenarios

through which museums might open.

Scenario A: Opening a museum at one's house/property to the public on a free admission policy may not encounter problems but demands taking precautions for third parties (such as visitors);

Scenario B: Opening a museum at one's house/property to the public on a free admissions and optional donations may encounter problems as it may be considered an income;

Scenario C: Opening a museum at one's house/property to the public against an admissions fee would encounter problems as it is considered a commercial activity;

Scenario D: Opening a museum at one's house/property to the public on a free admissions policy but wishing to sell even a postcard or some product or service at a cost will encounter problems as it is considered a commercial activity;

Scenario E: Opening a museum at one's house/property to the public against an admission fee and wishing to sell even a postcard or some product or service at a cost will encounter problems as it is considered a commercial activity;

Scenario F: Opening a museum at one's own house/property to the public and registering the activity under the registered VOs law, would put the initiative at risk of being totally lost to outsiders who could at an AGM vote out the owners from the museum and its collection.

Scenario G: Opening a museum at one's own property/house and trying to act as a Social Enterprise, is impossible as the drafted law had been withdrawn for some reason or another.

Scenario H: Opening a museum at one's own house/property to the public and registering the activity as a PCO (Public Cultural Organisation), would also put the initiative at risk of being totally lost to outsiders. As most initiatives are established by one or two family members it will not qualify for registration and the engagement of a third person may prove fatal to the initiative, as the trusted person is human and may do anything to the owners, the museum and its collection since the law look at him/her/them equally.

Actually, there is no law in Malta which protects individual or family initiatives as those of independent grassroots micro museums. At the time of research, a type of private or independent cultural association or activity of two or less persons could only take the form of a *for-profit* or stay away from any regulatory framework. All the above scenarios call for a revision of Maltese laws and the regulatory systems, as the current situation suffocates grassroots initiatives such as those of independent micro museums: which after all, do not cost government a single Euro and which contribute at their own expense to the communities, to society and the economy.

The museum's venue or property

Another factor which might pose problems to grassroots micro museums and their activities is that of venue/property ownership. State-museums as the TBCM, OPRM, GCHH, and the TBCM are set up in property totally owned by central government and their management trusted to the national agency. There are some micro museums (such as the XRWM, the TMWB and the RMMT) whose property belongs to central government. Some micro museums as the NDMM and the ŽBSM are in a venue which belongs to an institution, such as the Church or its parishes. Others are in property owned by cultural organisations either on their own or in association with private owners. A few micro museums are however in the property of their founders, curators or the family responsible for them.

The NDMM Curators informed us that the collection was given the space at the parish priest's house which was in disuse since most Nadur Parish Priests lived at their family-home. The Curator of the MCDF, MUDECO and MDTC said that all three museums are in property which formerly belonged to noble families and which now belongs to the *Comune* of Ragusa. The AFCS and the MPBP which also belonged to families are now jointly belonging to the respective families and the Tanit Association of Scicli. The MRDP is a private property belonging to the curator's family. The MMTC is housed in the old hospital '*della Pietà*' which is now property of the *Comune*.

The FMAA belongs to private citizens. It is bound to the private company named Historic & Folklore Company of Northern Corfu, which manages more than one asset. The MUSB owner-founder stated that the museum belongs to his family. It

is managed by him and his wife, and there is no group of people who help the museum in some way.

Choices: Private, Independent or other, for profit or not

The TMWB Curator said that originally the museum was listed with the tourism authority as an attraction. Once the Voluntary Organisations Act was drawn, it registered as a VO, and it never engaged in revenue generation (such as selling souvenirs). Likewise, the RMMT, which started as a volunteer parish group, decided to register as a VO. In contrast, the ŻBSM and the NDMM decided to maintain the museum's autonomy, Even if they form part of their respective parish church, they enjoy the full participation and decision-making of volunteers. In both cases, the parish priest, although presiding the group of volunteers does allow a great deal of voice to the curators and supporting volunteers. The ŻBSM Curator said that they enjoy autonomy and are more like a parish group. When, for example, the Curator and committee of volunteers see the need for restoration of some exhibits, the matter is referred to the parish priest for approval in the form of meeting minutes. The Curator said that the procedure of taking a group decision and informing the parish priest is more a matter of respect than a bureaucratic procedure or a hierarchical practice.

The FMAA, as a private company, may be assimilated to Maltese independent micro museums which the regulatory system classifies as commercial entities and therefore '*for-profit*'. In Corfu, where Greek laws and regulatory frameworks apply, the FMAA is however considered as a 'non-profit organisation', even though it operates as a private company and is supported by volunteers. The FMAA can be considered as a hybrid example of private and independent micro museums: which even if registered as a private company is considered as a '*non-profit*'. The HMCC, the FMAA and the AFCS respectively enjoy a '*not-for-profit*' status, even if registered as a foundation, an organisation or an association. Once their main objective is cultural (as a museum), they qualify automatically as a '*not-for-profit*' activity; absent in the Maltese Islands. This handicaps all such initiatives in the Maltese Islands. Local authorities and the State should try more to help such initiatives than try to compete with them or replicate their initiatives in order to make profits. The AFCS as a cultural association formed by local people (*dei propri locali*) is also considered as a 'not-for-profit cultural association'.

The MMTC, MRDP, Curators explains that

L'Associazione e' nata come una grossissima aggregazione di soci. Nel tempo come accade per tutte le cose, la presenza dei soci e' diminuita anche perche molti dei soci che si trovavano all'interno di questo gruppo hanno costruito altre associazioni. La costola che e' poi venuta fuori e' Simoutique e' l'ulteriore associazione pero questo Simoutique e' col tempo, anche un'aggregazione familiare, e quindi da qui e' nato anche un marketing e noi come dire sostegnamo fortemente l'Associazione anche come famiglia. Perche mentre il Museo Campailla e' allocato in un luogo di proprieta' del Comune e quindi sostanzialmente le botti sono un bene gia presente in quella struttura, gli altri beni in parte sono anche di proprieta' dell'Associazione culturale. Non lo stesso discorso devo fare per questo museo che e' il Museo Murika. Questo e' un museo privato perche la mia famiglia e' la proprietaria di tutto l'immobile quindi sostanzialmente qui noi mettiamo, come dire, la nostra azione, la nostra iniziativa a disposizione della citta', fermo prstando [prestando] il principio che siamo proprietari al cento per cento di tutta l'iniziativa e siamo l'ideatori di tutto il progetto. Possiamo dire fondamentalmente che la rete museale che e' stata costituita, e' una rete di tipo privata perche va bene che il Museo Tommaso Campailla svolge la propria azione in un palazzo Comunale, pero' il brand complessivamente e' di tipo privato. Perche sostanzialmente escluse le botti, tutto il resto la progettualita', la proprieta di alcuni beni che si trova all'interno del Museo Campailla sono di esclusiva pertinenza uoi [che] dell'Associazione IngegniCultura uoi [che] della proprieta' della mia famiglia.⁵⁶³

For profit and Not for profit – State museums' circumvention

The TKWM Curator elaborates that the national agency Heritage Malta and the State have found a way, legally, how to go around the *for-profit* and *non-profit* operations of State-owned micro museums, museums and sites. The property and collections which belong entirely to the State who established the national agency, Heritage

⁵⁶³ Translation: "... the Association was born as a very large aggregation of members. Over time, as happens for all things, the presence of members has also decreased because many of the members who were within this group have built other associations. The rib that then came out is Simoutique is the further association but over time this Simoutique is also a family aggregation, and therefore a marketing was born from here and as we say we strongly support the Association even as a family. Because while the Campailla Museum is located in a place owned by the Municipality and therefore substantially the barrels are an asset already present in that structure, the other assets are also partly owned by the Cultural Association. Not the same thing I have to do for this museum, which is the Murika Museum. This is a private museum because my family is the owner of the whole property so basically here we put, as we say, our action, our initiative at the disposal of the city, stopping by lending [the principle] that we are one hundred percent of the whole initiative and we are the creators of the whole project. We can basically say that the museum network that was established is a private network because it is okay that the Tommaso Campailla Museum carries out its action in a Town Hall, but the brand as a whole is private. Because substantially excluding the barrels, all the rest of the design, the ownership of some of the goods located inside the Campailla Museum are of exclusive relevance to you [that] of the IngegniCultura Association you [that] of my family's property. "

Malta, to manage such sites and museums.⁵⁶⁴

“The organisation shall afford to the Minister facilities for obtaining information with respect to its property and activities and furnish him with returns, accounts and other information with respect thereto, and afford to him facilities for the verification of information furnished, in such manner and at such times as he may reasonably require.” (Heritage Act 1996, Establishment of Heritage Malta, Part II, 3(3)).

Government had endowed the national agency with all responsibilities and functions related to the running of its museums, collections and all forms of cultural heritage.⁵⁶⁵

Government is therefore leasing these cultural heritage assets to the national agency. The same Act (Part II, 4(2)a) provided the same national agency with the faculty to *raise such funds and receive such contributions which may from time to time be necessary for the carrying out of any of its functions or for its operations*; but this conflicts with the present situation of most private and independent small or micro museums. While the national agency was legally protected from being seen as a *for-profit* entity, this did not likewise apply to non-State museums. In principle, all museums shall be considered as *non-profits*. It was and still is the responsibility of the national agency to inform the Minister and ensure that *all* museums, State-owned, private and independent are with immediate effect excluded from being registered or considered as *for-profit* entities, irrespective of their owners, management style or activity. Frequently private and independent museum should struggle to survive and maintain their museums and collections, to promote them, and to make them visible. The complete liberalisation of such museums could help communities to take initiatives to promote their cultural heritage and identities. It could help such museums indulge into more pedagogic and community-oriented activities.

The national agency was also vested with the responsibility ‘to advise the Minister on all matters relating to cultural heritage’ (*Act, Part II, 4(f)*) which does not seem to happen in view of the problems faced by the different private and independent micro museums, owing to the measures imposed by Maltese laws and regulatory frameworks, and matters such as the accession to national or regional funds and schemes.

⁵⁶⁴ Laws of Malta, Heritage Act 1996, Part II, 3 (3).

<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=26628&l=> .

⁵⁶⁵ Laws of Malta, Heritage Act 1996, Part II, 4(1) a-k.

The 'corporate' term mentioned in the 1996 Act (Part II, 5(1)) puts the national agency on similar grounds to the registered VOs and NGOs. Yet, the Cultural Heritage Act (Cap.445, Part I, (2) page 4) states that

"Non-Government Organisation" means any voluntary organisation the objective of which is the promotion of cultural heritage and may include the conservation, restoration, management, presentation and, or study of cultural property and which has been duly provided with a certificate of enrolment by the Commission of Voluntary Organisations under the Voluntary Organisations Act;⁵⁶⁶

While this could be applied to museums managed by groups of volunteers (such as the RMMT, XRWM, and TMWB), it does not and should not apply to independent museums. which have similar structures and functions as the VOs and the NGOs. It is therefore discriminating to put all in one basket and subject all museums to observe the same laws if the laws do not recognise such museums and their administration. Private collections, even if set up and exhibited as museums, should not be treated as collections displayed at State or private museums. Independent museums, in most cases, rely only on the resources of an individual or a family which is different from museums whose collection does not belong to those administering the museum or its activities. Independent museums in most cases offer free admission and donations are optional. Even where admission is not free, museums could not cope or break even as the revenue required to maintain the museum, its venue, and its exhibits are huge. Despite such hardships the curators of independent museums keep doing their utmost to provide pedagogic, cultural and other activities for the public and their communities, and such efforts and activities call for recognition. Such differences are absent in the Maltese law and such independent museums, more than the private ones, would be forced to give up and close, and in turn deny their public and communities from enjoying 'personal' or 'family' built collections which will never find their way into State-owned or institutional museums. Certain provisions in the Law were drawn to allow the national agency to sustain its activity. Likewise, Maltese laws should introduce new laws to liberate private and especially independent micro museums from burdens imposed by those who perceived such museums as *for-profits*. As both Maltese Government and Heritage Malta became aware of the challenges and problems faced by the national agency in order to survive and sustain its operations and activities, a separate commercial arm was formed.

⁵⁶⁶ The VO Act Cap 492 was introduced on 11th December 2007.

“Heritage Malta’s subsidiary, Heritage Malta Services Limited, serves as its commercial arm for activities and events of a business nature. Its main activities include the hiring out of venues for corporate entertainment, promoting its corporate patrons programme and monitoring the museum shop activities besides other day-to-day revenue generating activities.”⁵⁶⁷

However, according to all curators interviewed, admission fees do not feature under the agency’s commercial arm and they are not considered by law as a *for-profit* activity. The other sources of revenue generation and therefore considered as *for-profit* which generate over €100,000 a year are thus explained.⁵⁶⁸

“Apart from the revenue generated through the sale of tickets from sites and museums, Heritage Malta’s basic revenue generation activities consists of sales of products from shops, the rental of assigned areas for private functions and the revenue generated from filming and photography.”⁵⁶⁹

This same measure, where admission fees do not qualify as a commercial or a *for-profit* activity shall be equally applied to all other museums, inclusive of private and independent micro museums as those studied. The current situation discriminates between the national agency’s museums and the other museums. While the national agency is permitted to do so with the excuse that it should pay salaries, maintain its venues and care for its collections, private and independent micro museums are not helped to maintain or take care of their venues and collections. Maltese laws define “museum” as a ‘permanent institution’ (Cultural Heritage Act, Cap. 445, Part I, 2)⁵⁷⁰ but, on the other hand, the same legislation mentions that support shall be given to all those involved in cultural heritage conservation and management: “government, local, private sector and voluntary sector” (Cap 445, 4(4a): 7). Private collections which in this study are termed as independent micro museums are not included in the law. This means that the State does not recognise the efforts, time and resources that such persons dedicate without incurring expenses or burdens on the State. In contrast they help and benefit the State in many ways: culturally, economically, socially and pedagogically among other.

⁵⁶⁷ National Audit Office, *Information Technology Audit – Heritage Malta*, National Audit Office, Malta: 7. <https://parlament.mt/media/71772/9510.pdf> .

⁵⁶⁸ Caruana, Jo. The Important Business of Heritage, MaltaChamber.org.mt, 25th March 2018. <https://www.maltachamber.org.mt/en/the-important-business-of-heritage> .

⁵⁶⁹ National Audit Office, *Information Technology Audit – Heritage Malta*, National Audit Office, Malta: 20. <https://parlament.mt/media/71772/9510.pdf> .

⁵⁷⁰ Cultural Heritage Act as amended on 25 June 2019 <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=29635&l=>

Heritage Malta is considered as a *non-profit* organisation and therefore not a commercial entity or a business. If the Laws recognises the national agency as a *non-profit* then even the sale of books and souvenirs may be deemed as a *non-profit* activity which intent is to maintain and sustain the objective of safeguarding cultural heritage and make it accessible to more people. The same principle is held by the other private and independent micro museums, but the latter do not benefit from the same opportunities or exceptions granted by the law mentioned.

The TKWM Curator also noted that although

“ir-raison d’etre ta’ Heritage Malta mhux il-profitt, imma biex tagħmel il-mużewijiet aċċessibli. Issa it-talbiet biex iżzomm l-aċċessibiltà, post miftuħ, dejjem jiżdiedu. Speċjalment fejn jidhol implementazzjoni ta’ ċertu faċilitajiet ta’ interpretazzjoni... u kollox bit-teknoloġija, kollox irid ħafna maintenance. Allura Heritage Malta riedet tkisser moħħha litteralment kif ħa żzomm ‘il-postijiet miftuħin. Jew tagħmel hekk jew il-Gvern jerga’ jeħodhom. Igifieri kellna naraw, u sibu modi u metodi kif ħa nżommu l-postijiet miftuħin. Il-ħwienet, il-merkanzija tagħhom, l-għan tagħhom kien li jsostnu lis-siti mhux biex tagħmel profitt.”⁵⁷¹

These comments raise several issues. To start from the technological, the national agency and museums which invested on technology should ask whether it is worth or not spending so much on technology as these require a great deal of maintenance and costs. Observations at the GCHH demonstrated that all the monitors there showed presentations and audio-visuals that kept repeating for all the time that the museum was open. Visitors did not care much about the content shown and besides the whole apparatus is a mismatch with the museum and its content. However since the necessity for information remains, it is recommended that: The concentration of the technological is placed in one room or a mini theatre would have been a wiser and a cheaper solution with better results. Observations show that the technology introduced does not reach the objectives it was meant for. Such technology may not be an option for private and independent micromuseums as in most cases they cannot afford it in the first place.

⁵⁷¹ Translation: [“the raison d’etre of Heritage Malta is not profit, but to make museums accessible. The demands to keep a museum accessible and open for visits are always increasing. Especially when it comes to implement certain interpretation facilities... and technology requires many maintenance. Therefore Heritage Malta had to exhaust its mind to keep its sites open. It was either that or Government would take it all back. That is we had to seek ways and means on how to keep places open. The shops, their merchandise, their scope was to sustain the sites not to make profit”]

Secondly the threat faced by Heritage Malta to keep its museums accessible and open is eye-opening and asks for deeper thoughts. If the national agency met difficulties to make its museums accessible and keep them open, then private and independent micromuseums who cannot turn on either government or public resources or other support are expected to face greater difficulties and challenges. Does all this therefore demand changes to the existing laws and regulatory frameworks concerning cultural heritage and museums?

Finally, if Heritage Malta is legally considered as a *non-profit* and permitted to carry out such revenue generating activities (such as the sale of merchandise, hire space and organise other activities which generate revenue) in order to sustain its museum functions and contributions to society, then all museums, whether State-owned, institutional, private or independent, large small or micro, should be allowed to carry out activities which generate revenue for the sustenance and maintenance of the same museum and its collections. Discriminating between museums is both negative and abusive. Laws and regulations which favour the State-owned micro museums over the private and independent micro museums shall be adjusted and corrected in order to practically acknowledge the contribution which private and independent micro museums give to the same State, the museum institution, the economy, society, and their communities. The difference is that State-owned museums are consuming public funds (to pay staff salaries, to pay for contracted services, to do maintenance and improvements, to carry out conservation and restoration of venues and exhibits, etc.) while private and independent micro museums depend totally on their own generated revenue and personal or family earnings. It is also discriminatory when one considers that the founders, curators and volunteers of private and independent micro museums are themselves taxpayers, who do not receive anything in return for their initiative, their services and contributions, their time and efforts to benefit society and the economy. Steps should therefore be taken by the national agency and the Minister to correct and completely eliminate these paradoxes/anomalies. The profit generated by certain popular sites and museums of Heritage Malta, compensates for the not so profitable museums, but the revenue generated is then spent according to the necessities of different museums and sites. Therefore, State-owned museums which do not generate much revenue could still rely on the support and revenue of the national agency. This reliance is impossible or

improbable with private micro museums and totally impossible with independent micro museums.

Another factor concerning curators, is that curators and staff at State-owned micro museums are salaried, while curators and volunteers at private and independent micro museums are not even remunerated. The only case met with curators being remunerated was at the XRWM, as the Local Council thought it would be the right decision to keep the museum open and cared for. Curators at the national agency are salaried employees, and in most cases, they could rely on the different sections and resources provided by the agency. They do not multitask: their dimension of tasks is narrow when compared to the wide range of tasks carried out by curators of private and independent micro museums. Curators and staff at State-owned micro museums earn a salary for their services, while curators at private and independent micro museums generally end up spending or contributing from their own pockets to run and maintain the museum and its collections, to organise activities, and to carry out maintenance and other daily tasks. We could say that while State curators make a profit by earning a salary, an while State museums generate revenue by taxing visitors through the application of admission fees and the selling of merchandise and services, private and independent curators and their micro museums operate at a loss or must strive hard to generate some revenue. All in all, it must be made clear that establishing a museum from scratch and running it is not a business and not for profit but a service to the community and to mankind. It's not a business but a service to society!

The researcher disagrees also about the fact that the national agency was obliged to set up the HMSL (Heritage Malta Services Limited) to carry out commercial activity, with a VAT number and the obligations brought about as a *for-profit* activity. The differences between what is commercial activity and revenue generating activities to sustain the museum seems very subtle and unclear in Maltese laws, and it does not apply equally to all. Such a concession is not applied to private and independent micro museums. They can be allowed to have a *not-for-profit* cultural arm and a *for-profit* commercial arm, as that of the national agency, but up to the time of writing these parameters were not specific. No one guided or guides the founders or curators and volunteers about the best way forward to survive and sustain the museum initiative. A revision of all laws concerning such private and independent micro museums, and

perhaps even the national ones, is demanded. As such museums do not make profits at the end of the year and cannot be self-sustainable. Even State curators argued that the revenue and profit generated is not sufficient to maintain and sustain the national museums and their needs. Although the national agency is registered as a *non-profit* it had to accept the formation of a commercial arm. Besides, it was known that the agency could not survive with the revenue generated from selling admission tickets alone. If this was contended by the State curators then it should be harder for private, and hardest for independent, micro museums to survive and sustain such museums, especially if they rely only on admission fees or if they hold a 'free-admission' policy, and donations are optional as at the NDMM.⁵⁷²

It is absurd that the State taxes cultural entities such as its own national agency, and worst of all, the private and independent micro museum, for doing some commercial activity to sustain their museums and their cultural and pedagogic activities. This shows clearly that the State does not acknowledge such cultural entities and grassroots initiatives. Also the Curators of State-owned micro museums agreed that such measures create several unnecessary burdens on museums. They said that such money could be reused on maintenance, restoration or conservation projects, and cultural and pedagogic programmes for the communities. They argued that such measures deprive museums from doing more, and especially for the poorer communities who would derive several benefits from museums and their activities. All in all, this may reflect the State's ulterior motives, which may be politically instigated. Among other measures taken by the State was the minimizing of importance attributed to the teaching of history at schools. A lowering of awareness, knowledge and education about cultural heritage was another attempt to decrease the importance of identities of the different communities, to boost the homogeneous national image and identity. Much worse was that the teaching of history disappeared from the curriculum of a number of middle schools. Therefore, one might question whether the State has the intention to suffocate grassroots initiatives and suppress knowledge in order to do whatever it wants. Is all this orchestrated with other permanent institutions such as the economy and religion? It is the national agency's responsibility to raise such issues, in collaboration with other government and non-

⁵⁷² See <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2019-06-07/blogs-opinions/Record-breaking-Heritage-Malta-6736209256> about Visitorship HM and Revenue.

government bodies to higher levels and bring along the necessary changes, as both family and education (i.e. two important institutions), are being set aside and relegated in importance. No government, economy or religion would exist or benefit society without the full participation of families and well-educated humans. The exclusion of the grassroots is a recipe for disaster and havoc. Curators of State-owned micro museums showed that they cannot exert pressure on higher levels to change laws and regulations. In contrast, the Curators of private and independent micro museums chose to become frontliners in order to voice the concerns of their museums, their communities, their locality's heritage and other debates concerning their environment.

The XRWM Curator informed us that the Local Council, as a public organisation, applied for guardianship or custodianship of the windmill and its adjacent catacombs. Most micro museums curators, except the MCIV Curator, confirmed that they operate under a law or a regulatory framework. The HMCC operates as a *non-profit* foundation within The Society of Cretan Historical Studies (SCHS). The FMAA operates as a museum and is also considered as a *non-profit* organization. Likewise, the AFCS and the MPBP operate as a *non-profit* cultural organisation.

The MMTC and MRDP Curator maintained that the south, and Sicily in particular, were for a long time abandoned by central authorities. Although Sicily has its own administrative autonomy, major decisions are taken at national level and in such the south starts at a disadvantage, as for example, in tourism and the provincial road networks. He brought the comparison that, from a tourism point of view, a tiny island like Malta has a very active harbour, while the harbour at Pozzallo is almost a dead harbour: no large ships and no cruise liners ever arrive there. Despite, he expressed optimism as the Ragusan Province shows signs of growth and improvement.

“Lo scenario Siciliano, cioe' la Sicilia noi sappiamo che gode dell'autonomia amministrativa avremo una regione con autonomia che dovrebbe rappresentare e lo e' in certe occasione un punto di forza, perche una regione autonoma che si governa attraverso un'atto costituzionale proprio quindi in un certo senso da questo punto di vista potremo entrare l'arbitre te ne dici. Dall'altra pero sappiamo che per la legislazione generale si dipende dal governo nazionale, il quale governo nazionale non sempre ha fatto delle scelte, come dire politiche e funzionali per il meridione, per il mezzogiorno. E quindi soprattutto nell'ambito delle attivita' sociali, culturali, il meridione parte svantaggiato. Diciamo che siamo in enorme sgarbo. Basterebbe pensare che solo ora da noi stanno decollando le attivita' turistiche, le attivita'

culturali, quindi si stanno facendo soggiornamenti nuovi nella valorizzazione e di ciò che è turistico e di ciò che è culturale. Però resta sempre, come dire, musicato che scontiamo in termini di presenze, in termini di realizzazioni di servizi. Basterebbe pensare che la rete autostradale ancora non è presente nel territorio, la rete ferroviaria è deficitaria, e quindi non hanno che la presenza di cui chiamiamo un porto qui importante. Il Porto di Pozzallo però a differenza di Malta non arrivano le grandi navi, le navi da crociera, e tutto questo è penalizzante. Se però consideriamo io mi permetto di dire questo che un'isola molto piccola come Malta riesce ad avere un volume di affari culturali e turistici molto di più dell'intera Sicilia, ecco questo deve fare riflettere molto. Per fare riflettere molto diciamo i rappresentanti del governo regionale, ma perché no, anche i rappresentanti del governo nazionale.

Devo dire che comunque c'è un progetto di crescita che sta assumendo un traguardo nuovo. La Sicilia non è ormai nella visione così di chi aveva il luogo di quelli che portavano il berretto della coppola e quindi del luogo della mafia, ma è il luogo delle bellezze naturali e architettoniche di grande significanza e significati, e questo è un passo in avanti. Devo dire comunque che storicamente la Provincia di Ragusa era stata sempre molto distante dai fenomeni della criminalità organizzata. Per cui ha goduto sempre di un palco scenico speciale che oggi sta non casualmente assumendo un significato più ampio.”⁵⁷³

The MLIA Curator points out that it is the local authority that is responsible for the running of the museum.

“Questa struttura è nata con una deliberazione di Giunta. La Giunta ha stabilito che veniva creato questo museo qui con le caratteristiche che ha. E quindi il Comune

⁵⁷³ Translation: The Sicilian scenario, that is Sicily we know that it enjoys administrative autonomy we will have a region with autonomy that should represent and is in some occasions a strong point, because an autonomous region that governs itself through a constitutional act proprio therefore in a sense from this point of view we will be able to enter the referee you say. On the other hand, we know that for general legislation it depends on the national government, which national government has not always made choices, such as saying political and functional for the south, for the south. And therefore especially in the context of social, cultural activities, the south is at a disadvantage. Let's say that we are in enormous rudeness. It would be enough to think that only now tourist activities, cultural activities are taking off from us, therefore new stays are being made in the enhancement of what is tourist and what is cultural. However, it is always, how to say, music that we discount in terms of attendance, in terms of realizations of services. It would suffice to think that the motorway network is not yet present in the territory, the railway network is in deficit, and therefore they only have the presence of which we call an important port here. The Port of Pozzallo, however, unlike Malta, large ships and cruise ships do not arrive, and all this is penalizing. However, if I consider myself, I allow myself to say this that a very small island like Malta manages to have much more cultural and tourist business than the whole of Sicily, so this must make us think a lot. To make you think a lot we say the representatives of the regional government, but why not, also the representatives of the national government.

However, I must say that there is a growth project that is taking on a new goal. Sicily is not now in the vision of those who had the place of those who wore the cap of the *coppola* and therefore of the place of the mafia, but it is the place of natural and architectural beauties of great significance and meanings, and this is one step closer. However, I must say that historically the Province of Ragusa had always been very distant from the phenomena of organized crime. So he has always enjoyed a special stage which today is not casually taking on a wider meaning.

sedette come il responsabile della vita di questo museo.”⁵⁷⁴

This implied that the *Comune* took responsibility of the whole administration of the museum even if the collection is a private collection. No similar examples were met on the Maltese Islands and the other islands in this study. A close example could be the XRWM (formerly a property and collection which belonged to an individual and his family), and whose property now belongs to the State, and is under a custodianship agreement with the local government.

The MLIA presents a scenario where the *Comune* could intervene but where the decisions about the content and the musealia were till the time of writing always left to the Curator himself with full autonomy, as he is considered the expert in the field.

“Il Comune in qualunque momento potrà intervenire e di anche nella vita del museo. Può intervenire, e quindi non so io sto a decidere. Ma decide anche l’Amministrazione, provvedo se dovessi presentarsi il caso. Ma normalmente non succede. Lasciano fare a me come responsabile. C’è autonomia.”⁵⁷⁵

The MUSB in Croatia operates as a ‘private ethnological collection’; a status held since its establishment. Its owner expressed satisfaction for the respect and freedom that the State and its legal framework allow to such museums to operate independently and without interventions.

Changes in the legal status

Curators were asked whether they ever changed the legal or regulatory status of their museums. The HMCC and the FMAA Curators declare that they did not change the legal status of their museum since its establishment. The AFCS had however changed it from a *cultural association*. The TMWB Curator informed us that the museum

⁵⁷⁴ Translation: This structure was born with a Council (Giunta) resolution. The Giunta has established that this museum was created here with the characteristics it has. And so, the Municipality sat as the entity in charge (10:16) of the life of this museum.

⁵⁷⁵ Translation: “The Municipality can intervene at any time and even in the life of the museum. You can intervene, and therefore I don't know I am deciding. But the Administration also decides, I will take care if the case should arise. But normally it does not happen. Leave it to me as manager. There is autonomy.”

started as an initiative of the Curator himself but then it had to seek the support of a non-government organisation (NGO) or a voluntary organisation (VO) in order to apply and access national and EU funding opportunities. However, the reward of funds from the EU forced the museum to change totally to an interpretation centre. The RMMT Curator stated that they started as a parish group of volunteers but like the TMWB they were advised to become a VO as it would have helped them to access funds. They were also advised to remove the old name but instead they joined the old and the proposed new titles as *Għaqda Filantropika Talent Mosti - Ċentru Nazzjonali ta' Kultura*. The second part of the title was dictated by government who owns the property. This did not happen at the ŻBSM and the NDMM since they decided to stay under the umbrella of their parish church, even if it deprives them from access to national and regional funds. Private micro museums reported difficulties to access funds even after they changed to a registered VO. Curators complained that the legal and regulatory burdens involved were not worth at the end. Independent micro museums which originally registered as a commercial entity would also find huge difficulties to try to remove their commercial identification as they should go through several expenses and challenges to change their status to an advantageous one (if that exists in that country). Authorities perceive no differences between large businesses and such museums. Most independent museums could be visited only by appointment, have minimum activities (indoors and outdoors), receive no admission fees, sell no merchandise and hire no spaces. Opening on a regular basis had in most cases become worthless. Independent museums which at their founding were registered as commercial entities are the worst affected by current laws as the State and its laws consider them as any other commercial enterprise. Cultural initiatives as independent micro museums could never generate the same revenue which other commercial entities generate. Apart from that they are at a huge disadvantage when they try to qualify for funding opportunities. They cannot access funds tailored for businesses because, as museums, they are considered as cultural entities, while on the other hand they cannot qualify for cultural funds because they are registered as businesses (for-profit). By the same reasoning, the Maltese national agency shall not qualify for cultural funding from either the State or the EU as it has a registered commercial arm. This reminds of Orwell's words that "all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others." Such words could be applied to the Maltese law as "all museums are equal but some museums are more equal than others."

When asked on the effects of current laws on their museum the TMWB Curator said that the change to an interpretation centre should involve more audio-visual aids. It would help the visitor to visualise the tuna-catching practices on film and get a glimpse of the heritage around but not the artifacts. The RMMT Curator said that the change was not that bad as transparency was always a must, but he complained that as a VO there was too much bureaucracy and expenses involved: which he explained as a headache and unnecessary for a museum which barely breaks even. The AFCS Curator said that the change in the legal status did not change the operations and circumstances of the museum. Such a comment might be due to various reasons concerning the drawing of laws and regulations in the different countries. Sometimes legal and regulatory changes are perceived to bring about radical changes, but most are cosmetic changes which do not ameliorate the situation where it concerns museums and their activities.

The research then asked the curators for an opinion on how Maltese laws effect their museums. The TMWB Curator said that Maltese laws are not seen as an obstacle since the legal responsibility of the museum (such as rents and services) fell on the Local Council, and there were minimal obligations to volunteers. The RMMT Curator complained that for a registered VO it is hard. He said that if a museum could not provide internally (i.e. volunteers with sufficient education to carry out administration work) matters would become difficult and expensive as they must engage an accountant, an auditor and other service providers during the year and on an annual basis. The RMMT Curator criticised whoever designed such regulations as they show that they have no idea of volunteers and volunteering. After a day's work, one cannot expect to provide for so much paperwork, financial reports, and other reports such as filling in Income Tax forms when such museums do not make a profit.

“Ifhimni din tal-volontarjat, illi jekk ma jkunux organizzati, jekk ma jkollokx forsi min jiehu hsieb ta' certu livell ta' skola, ... issibha daqsxejn diffiċli. Għax trid tqabblad accountant, irid iqabblad hekk, irid iqabblad hekk, jagħmel hekk... Voldieri jien għaliya personali il-għan tagħha huwa tajjeb, ma jkunux hemm tgerfix, imma min-naħa l-oħra qisek għandek sikkina taqta' miż-żewġ naħat, illi dak li jkun jgħidlek jien se noqgħod wara ġurnata xogħol se noqgħod nikteb u nagħmel u dan u hekk... too much! Hemm too much illi dak! Dħalna f' ta' l-Income tax qatt ma kellna

l-Income tax dawn... dan xi tridu... imma dhalna. ... La jitolbuhulek trid turi hux ... kull sena. ... hawn hekk m'ghandekx qliegħ.”⁵⁷⁶

The ŻBSM Curator spoke about Maltese laws concerning matters of restoration. He said that the museum is bound to adhere to correct restoration guidelines and practices. The ŻBSM Curator and volunteers complained about the annual expenses (such as an annual licence) which they must pay. The ŻBSM Curator maintained that they did all their best to add an eight-person elevator in order to increase accessibility, to restore the façade, and to comply with the health and safety standards; but, he added, that all these required a great deal of money which the museum could not afford from its revenue alone.

Without hesitation the Curator of the State museum, TKWM, said that Maltese laws have few effect on her micro museum, as

“Peress li hija aġenzija ta’ l-istat, diffiċli ħafna biex tfalli. Imma minkejja dan ir-realta’ hi li inti jekk għandek ċertu pressjoni min-nies, ... ma jistax ikun li nibqgħu bil-bejgħ imkisser, xi ħaġa jrid isir. (30:16) per eżempju, something has to be done. Minħabba li hi aġenzija ta’ l-istat, b’mod jew ieħor ħa jkollok l-appoġġ tal-Ministeru biex inti iġġib il-fondi. Allura dak hu vantaġġ kbir. L-iżvantaġġ hu li jekk inti għandek sena tajba, kellek ħafna qliegħ, m’intix ħa żżomm il-qliegħ, allura dak se jmur u jitlaq, allura dejjem għandek żewġ naħat tal-ġrajja.”⁵⁷⁷

These comments show that State museums, even if they perform badly, can still rely on funds and support from central government. This is not possible for private micro museums and even more impossible for independent micro museums who have no one to turn to. Even if they have a group of volunteers, funds are mostly collected internally or among the persons managing the museum. This is another factor that the State and the law must take into consideration and free such museums from further

⁵⁷⁶ Translation: “Understand me, this thing of voluntary organisation, if you do not have an organised team, if you do not have persons of a certain schooling who can take charge of certain tasks, ... you’ll find it quite hard. Because you must engage an accountant, you must engage this and that to do that... Personally, for me it means its purpose was right, so that there will not be a confusion, but from the other side it is like a knife that cuts from both sides, that makes someone say why should I after a day’s work go to write and do this and that... too much! There is too much of that! We went also into l-Income tax when we did not have Income tax here... why do we need this... but we were in... Since it was demanded you must show it... every year... here we do not have profit.”

⁵⁷⁷ Translation: “Since there is the national agency that provides the necessary, it is very difficult that the micromuseum would go bankrupt. Yet, the demands of the public cannot allow such low sales to persist ... something has to be done. Because it is a state agency, in some way or another you’re going to find the backing of the Ministry to acquire funds. So that is a big pro. The con is that if you have a good year, you had great profit, you’re not going to keep that profit, so it’s going to go away, so there are always two sides of the story.”

burdens which were earlier imposed by an outdated colonially legal system which strived to control everything and to suffocate grassroots initiatives as much as possible.

The Curator of the two Gozo Citadel State museums, the OPRM and the GCHH, argued that there is a necessity for change. He maintained that

“Il-liġi kif inhi fil-preżent u kif naraha jien għall-inqas, hemm fejn tgħin u hemm fejn ma tgħinx daqstant. Issa dan jiddependi, ha ngħidu hekk u għalhekk fil-fatt, bħal ma jiġri dejjem u kullimkien liġi jkun hemm bżonn li tiġi aġġornata minn żmien għal żmien. Għax jinholqu ċirkostanzi ġodda u fejn forsi qabel liġi kienet tgħin, fid-dawl ta’-ċirkostanzi ġodda ma tibqax tgħin. Jiġifieri jien naħseb li hemm, issa allavolja dan l-aħħar reġgħu saru emendi fil-liġi. Imma xorta naħseb fil-fehma tiegħi, hemm ċerti affarijiet illi setgħu ġew emendati wkoll u ma ġewx emendati biex kieku jindirizzaw aħjar ċerti sfidi li żviluppaw illum. Dana llum biss biss wieħed irid isemmi li isma’ jekk qegħdin nitkellmu mill-wirt kulturali, aħna wara kollox il-mużewijiet u s-siti tagħna huma jittrattaw, huma relatati, ma’ wirt kulturali. Jiġifieri anke il-wirt kulturali anki il-perċezzjoni tiegħu inbidlet minn żmien għal żmien. Jiġifieri il-liġi trid tkun anki tirrifletti dal-bidliet. Jiġifieri anki biex mużew, anki l-istess wirt kulturali kultant li l-mużew qiegħed jipprova jippromwovi, jibqa’ relevanti għal soċjeta’ kontemporanja ikun meħtieġ kultant li anke l-liġi tkun aġġornata anki f’das-sens ukoll. Għax jekk ma tkun aġġornata f’das-sens tispicċa ċertu sfidi flok jiġu indirizzati, jiġu injorati. Jien naħseb li iva hemm fejn ċerti sfidi mhux qegħdin jintlaħqu, u hemm fejn ċertu sfidi anke fejn jidhol il-wirt kulturali li suppost jiġi promoss anki mill-mużewijiet u s-siti, u hawnhekk issa mhux qiegħed nitkellem minn mużewijiet u s-siti ta’ Heritage Malta biss imma qiegħed nitkellem minn mużewijiet u siti b’mod ingenerali. Anki dawk li huma mmexxija minn organizzazzjonijiet oħrajn. Jekk inhuwa il-liġi ma tkunx tirrifletti interament dawn l-isfidi ġodda illi jkun sfidi li wara kollox ikunu anke qegħdin jaffettwaw lill-wirt kulturali, **jekk ma tkunx aġġornata fid-dawl ta’ dawn l-isfidi, wara kollox l-istess wirt kulturali se jkun anki t-tellief at the end of the day.** (27:00) u jien naħseb illi fil-liġi kif inhi attwali, anki minkejja li saru emendi dan l-aħħar, dina dejjem improvement veru imma jiena naħseb illi xorta ċerti *issues* għadhom mhumiex indirizzati għall-inqas b’mod adegwat.”⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁸ Translation: “The law as at present and at least as I see it, has instances where it helps and others where it does not help so much. Now this depends, to say so and for that reason, as happens always and everywhere a law must be updated from time to time. Because new circumstances are created and where perhaps earlier a law could help under the light of the new circumstances it would no longer help. I believe there is space for amendments even if lately there were some made to the law. However I still believe, that there are certain things which could have been amended to address better certain challenges which developed today. Today one must at least mention that if we are talking about cultural heritage, after all our museums and sites deal with and are related to cultural heritage. It means that even cultural heritage, even its perception has changed from time to time. Therefore the law must reflect these changes. That means even if a museum, the same cultural heritage which the museum is trying to promote, remains relevant to contemporary society it needs every now and then even the law is updated in that similar sense. Because if it is not updated in that

Even State-museum curators, therefore, agreed that Maltese laws do not help, or facilitate the existence of, museums. They acknowledged that Maltese laws unnecessarily burden and make it difficult to run and to sustain museums of whatever size and form. It is even more significant to the study that State-museum curators acknowledge the necessity, and call, for a change. The TBCM Curator, who shares responsibility for another State-owned micro museum, confirms that

“Aħna il-fatt li għandna Ministru li huwa iffukat fuq dan l-aspett diġa hi xi ħaġa importanti. Hi xi ħaġa tajba għax aħna nagħtu każu ‘il-wirt tagħna. Għax aħna sinjuri f’dan l-aspett fejn positijiet oħra m’għandhomx. Dan hu l-wirt storiku tagħna li dejjem għandna nippromwovuh u għandna biex niftaħru. (24:50) Din hija li nistgħu noffru aħna. Li hu xi ħaġa unika fid-dinja. Hi x’inh. Nemmen li qiegħed isir kull sforz biex aħna dan kemm jista’ jkun nippromwovuh u nisfruttaw b’mod tajjeb b’mod pożittiv infatti meta naraw il-persentaġġ tat-turisti li jiġu (f’mużewijiet ta’) fl-aġenzija tagħna, fl-istatistika jidher li dan qegħdin jiġu milqugħha b’mod tajjeb ħafna.”⁵⁷⁹

She added that all the museums of the national agency, even micro museums as the TBCM, were showing an increase in visitors. She mentioned that State museums face other challenges, and that

“Inzommu f’moħħna wkoll li llum it-turist għandu fejn imur. Il-Malti għandu fejn imur. Aħna qegħdin nikkompetu mhux biss ma’ mużewijiet oħra, imma ma’ postijiet oħra tad-divertiment ieħor, ma’ restaurants oħrajn,... din xi ħaġa li nżommuha f’moħħna. Il-kompetizzjoni hija kbira.”⁵⁸⁰

sense it ends up ignoring certain challenges rather than addressing them. I believe that yes certain challenges are not being addressed, not even challenges met by the cultural heritage which supposedly shall be promoted even by the museums and the sites. I am not speaking of the museums and sites of Heritage Malta alone but of museums and sites in a general sense. Even those that are run by other organisations. If the law does not reflect entirely these new challenges which would also be affecting cultural heritage, if it is not updated in the light of such challenges, after all it would be the same cultural heritage that becomes the loser ultimately/at the end of the day. And, I think that the law as it is actually, even despite the amendments lately made, which truly is always an improvement, but I think that likewise certain issues are not yet addressed at least adequately.”

⁵⁷⁹ Translation: “the museums of the State are at an advantage since they have a Minister focusing on the cultural aspect. This is positive as it shows that we care about our heritage. Because we are wealthy in this aspect when compared to other countries who do not own so much. This is our heritage which we shall always promote and be proud of. This is what we can offer. Something unique in the world. Whatever that is. I believe that all efforts are being made to promote this and use it in a good way, in a positive way and this positive reception is reflected from the volumes of tourists shown on statistics concerning the museums of our agency [Heritage Malta].”

⁵⁸⁰ Translate: “We have to keep in mind that tourists today have various options where to go. The Maltese has choice where to go. We are competing not only with other museums, but with other entertainment locations, with other restaurants, ... this is something we must deal with. The competition is great.”

The NDMM Curators maintained that despite whatever regulations and laws there are, all they could say is that “What I know is that we do not receive anything!” The NDMM Curators demonstrated that the situation of non-State micro museums is quite the opposite to that of the national agency (as for example the TBCM or the TKWM). The sense of exclusion is high among non-State micro museums and it gets worse with independent micro museums which are the most limited in resources.

Despite the fact that the windmill has lately become a government property, the XRWM Curator, showed dissatisfaction of the current situation.

“Jien naħseb li l-Liġijiet preżenti ma tantx qegħdin jagħtu pubbliċità’ lill-mużewijiet. Għalkemm bħalissa hemm daww l-inizjattivi tal-Heritage Cards (referring to the free admission Passport of HM for children and seniors) imma dawn ma jolqtux lil kulhadd. Allura għandek dawn li huma *small, based* museums bħal tagħna jew private museums, dawn mhumiex qegħdin jiġu *financed* jew bl-għajnuna ta’ dawn l-affarijiet. Allura sfortunatament bħal dan it-tip m’hemmx dak l-*advertisement* (promotion) mill-Gvern stess biex jiġbed lin-nies iktar hawnhekk. Lanqas mill-iskejjel jiġifieri bħal din tal-Cards marru Heritage Malta u dawn ma ntlax.”⁵⁸¹

Curators at museums, whose property belongs to government (such as the XRWM), complained that the national agency (paid from public money) is exclusionist. With the Passport Scheme, the agency excluded all museums which do not fall under its remit. Even the XRWM Curator was explicit about the exclusion which Heritage Malta practiced in the provision of free admission ‘passports’ (the HM Passport for Students and for Seniors). and promotion that the national agency did of its museums. It is absurd and discriminatory to exclude grassroots initiatives as private and independent micro museums. It is unexpected from a national agency, which is bound by law to promote cultural heritage, to discriminate and to exclude those who at their own expenses, time, and efforts do their best to promote cultural heritage without even burdening the agency or government with their expenses and worries.

⁵⁸¹ Translation: “I believe that the present Laws do not promote the museums well enough. Although at the moment there are the initiatives of the Heritage cards (a reference to the free admission Passports issued by Heritage Malta to attract school-children and accompanying persons and senior citizens over the age of sixty) these do not cover them (the museums) all. So, you have these small, based museums like ours or private museums, which are not being financed or supported by with the aid of these schemes. Unfortunately, there is no promotion not even from the side of government to attract visitors to this type of museums. Not even schools with the scheme cards they went to Heritage Malta but not to these museums.”

Although the national agency is aware that “*Cultural heritage can act as a catalyst for Malta’s tourism potential and consequently contribute significantly to the economy*”, its mission statement “*The mission of Heritage Malta is to ensure that those elements of cultural heritage entrusted to it are protected and made accessible to the public*” is binding and it (the agency) should not override it.⁵⁸² This however places the national agency, not as a promoter of cultural heritage on the Maltese Islands, but a carer or a curator, conservator and admissions controller of a number of State sites and museums. The Xarolla (XRWM) windmill is an example where a State-owned property, currently under the custodianship of the Local Council (local government), enjoys nothing from schemes and promotion made by the national agency.

In conclusion, curators and those involved in private and independent museums of whatever size, may contest and challenge the current practices of the national agency. The Principles and General Duties as explained on the Cultural Heritage Act (Cap. 445, Part II, Art. 4-6)⁵⁸³ clearly include all cultural heritage in possession of the State, non-State entities and private ownership. On the other hand, the national agency excludes museums which do not fall under its remit.

The RMMT Curators added that despite the various meetings they were called for, and the numerous promises made during such meetings, nothing realised. The curators of non-State micro museums showed disgust that no form of help ever arrived after they showed their disposition to help national events and make national objectives successful. They showed their indignation to the way that such micro museums are treated and abused by national authorities and bodies.

“... ta’ l-VOs laqqgħuna ma’ entitajiet oħra bħall-Valletta ’18 u hekk. Imma mbagħad bħala għajnuna jiena personali iddiżgustat. Kull meta fittixna naqra għajnuna finanzjarja, ħafna ħlewwa u dejjem... iddispjaċut. Tieġu l-Leave biex tmur tagħmel il-meetings magħhom u mbagħad bil-Malti jiġu jaqgħu jqumu minnek, ... miniex tajjeb. Dik li joqgħod jitnejjek bija... dika ddejqek... Dr Jeykyll and Mr Hyde... ħlejna l-ħin għal xejn.”⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸² Heritage Malta, Mission Statement, <http://heritagemalta.org/about-us/who-we-are/>. Accessed 30 July 2019.

⁵⁸³ See <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8911&l=1> .

⁵⁸⁴ Translation: “...the VOs were called to meet with other entities like the Valletta ’18 and others. But then when it comes to aid, I am personally disgusted. Every time we looked for a few financial help, they show a lot of sweetness and every time... I’m disappointed. You take Vacation Leave from work to attend meetings with them and then to say it in simple words they just do not care about you, ... this is not right for me. That someone is taking me for a ride ... that annoys me... playing Dr. Jeykyll and Mr. Hyde ... we lost so much time.”

The above could be added to other disappointments showed by all private and independent micro museum curators, who in spite of their efforts, dedication, costs, and contributions to society and the economy, receive no aid or support from the State, the national agency or national funds and schemes.

The Curators of the HMCC and the FMAA maintained that Greek laws, within which the islands of Crete and Corfu fall, do not affect much their museums. The AFCS Curators, who operate in Sicily maintained that Italian laws affect them *very good* as

“dei volontari che aprono un sito culturale al pubblico sono sempre ben visti dalla comunità”⁵⁸⁵

which contrasts highly with how Maltese laws considers private and independent micro museums.

Museums, and in particular curators, become burdened with the search for inclusive methods and practices to reconcile and explain past exclusions.⁵⁸⁶ The challenge in museums is still subjected to past perceptions and class struggles which promote the interests of the educated and better-off classes, more than the lower classes.⁵⁸⁷ An image of exclusivity lingers on and has an impact on the public perception of museums. A problem which persists is that museums are perceived as places for the middle socio-economic classes. Until such a perception remains, it would be difficult to convince and attract local communities to museums,⁵⁸⁸ irrespective of their belonging or classification to a social or a socio-economic class.

Contrasting perceptions about museums and classes were explicitly expressed by curators in particular. As the RMMT Curator complained of the low attendance of common people (mentioned to him by various artists exhibiting in Valletta), he observed that regrettably he must admit that “*l-kultura mhix tal-popolin*” [culture does not belong to the common people]. The Curators of the XRWM, the NDMM and the

⁵⁸⁵ Translation: “volunteers who open a cultural site to the public are always well regarded by the community.”

⁵⁸⁶ Karp, Ivan., Mullen Kreamer, Christine and Lavine, Steven D., 1992. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London. ISBN-10: 156098189X: 10.

⁵⁸⁷ Ross, Max. 2004. Interpreting the new museology, in *museum and society*, July 2004, 2 (2): 84-103 (ISSN 1479-8360): 95.

⁵⁸⁸ Ross, 2004: 94. Spencer, 2014:30.

MLIA, said that once people around heritage sites or museums get to know about such a presence they rarely show ‘eagerness’ to visit or revisit. Common among all three micro museums, is that their theme is a closed theme, and that might not generate sufficient interest among those who are not curious and interested to learn more.

Accessibility may be facilitated by offering free admission or open days to a museum, but that does not guarantee visits by members of the lower socio-economic classes. Perceptions cultivated by society for decades and centuries are not easy to change, and if people not only within a lower socio-economic class, but at any other stratum of society do not determine a value to a museum visit, they would not visit. Curators of grassroots museums therefore devise other channels and tools to attract such people. Culture, heritage awareness and other pedagogy could indirectly be transmitted through various channels and activities. Edutainment, tuition on life-skills and other activities, which might help a person find a decent job or improve a lifestyle, could be channels to make a person enter a museum and become curious about what the museum is all about.

The statement made by the RMMT Curator, that “culture does not belong to the common people,” contrasts strongly with the objective of grassroots micro museums. Although such a statement could be supported by statistics and literature (which show that more middle class people or with a certain level of education normally seek to visit museums), there could be other factors which limit visits by the grassroots or lower class persons at museums. Admission fees, the lack of education or the fear of not knowing that much to understand what is presented at a museum together with the importance given to a museum-visit in contrast to other necessities of everyday life are other factors which could prevent a person from visiting a museum. In most cases people from the lower classes tend to give more importance to everyday needs as they might perceive museum-visits as a waste of time and money, which in return renders nothing tangible to them or to their family. To many, and mostly to those close to the lower classes, *deficiency needs* take priority on *growth needs*.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁹ Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs – see McLeod, S. A. (2018, May 21). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Retrieved from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> .

A factor for disagreement with the statement of the RMMT Curator is that people in lower classes face limitations which restrict their achievement or delay it or even make it impossible. For example, if a household depends on a minimum wage or has burdens like debts to pay, is in need of medicines and medications, has persons with disabilities or elderly relatives to take care of, it is not expected that such a family should spend on what might be termed as luxuries, but on the basic necessities listed in Maslow's *Deficiency Needs*. Even if they as family and individually wish to access into the *Growth Needs*, the realities of life impede them from reaching higher steps of the hierarchy. Although there might be temporary solutions which hope to attract such persons to museums, (such as the Passports introduced by the Maltese national agency or free admissions as a policy embraced by some of the grassroots micro museums studied), it does not guarantee success as much as desired or hoped for, at least, among the lower classes. These are situations which curators of both State and non-State micro museums should explore deeper, and address in a way which would finally make such museums accessible to all: not necessarily at the museum, but by reaching out to their homes and neighbourhoods. Accessibility might not be dependent on the museum or the curatorial, but on the perceptions and the importance given to museum visits by the prospective visitor or the family. Curators are therefore demanded to think also from the point of view of such people, as such a not-so-easy objective would decrease the exclusive image and practices of museums. While State-micro museums could compensate for free admissions with tourist visits, services and facilities that they offer, and by support from the national agency or Government, private and independent micro museums have nothing to compensate for their free admission policies and enhance practices which tend to attract the lower classes. It is within this scenario that central authorities as the national agency, local and central authorities, should amend and change the present laws, regulatory frameworks and attitude. It is through such changes that grassroots micromuseums and their communities could benefit. Authorities should first and foremost place society, life, and communities in their focus if they wish to improve the lives of the most needy.

Admission Fees: Free admission policy

Free admission policies were so to say introduced by curators of private and independent micro museums in the last decade of the twentieth century. Although it

was quite a challenge (besides its intention to attract visitors), it was quickly adopted by the larger and State museums elsewhere (such as in Britain) where national museums saw it as an opportunity to open up for more people and perhaps attract more visitors from different socio-economic classes. On the Maltese Island, the free admission policy is not yet adopted by the national agency, except on specific occasions. Open days were introduced on special days such as national holidays and special events.

In 2019, the national agency introduced free admission schemes which allowed students to visit museums and sites accompanied by two other persons. Later in the same year the scheme was extended to senior citizens accompanying children. This could be considered as one of the major effects which private and independent micro museums had on national museums. All Curators of the State-owned micro museums maintained that the schemes helped to increase the number of visitors: although no statistics show which people and socio-economic classes visited. The schemes excluded private and independent museums. Heritage Malta, as acknowledged by the TBCM Curator, showed that it competes with the non-State micro museums. It does no longer regard them as insignificant or unprofessional museums or as the initiative of unprofessional curators. The Curators of the TBCM, the OPRM and the GCHH all maintained that non-State micro museums offer a distinct product and as such it stands to the interest and preference of the visitor to visit, not to the offering of free admissions or schemes alone. Moreover, the lack of interest shown by youngsters and the younger generations might be attributed to the measures taken through the Maltese education system: where the value of history as a compulsory subject and heritage appreciation activities had been relegated and in certain schools and years eliminated from the curriculum. The highest threat in Maltese society could be blamed on the political elite, who in most cases have no cultural background, are ignorant in history, and a disaster in the Maltese language. They dictate changes without the minimum awareness or responsibility of the damages that such measures could bring in society. Votes and money unfortunately precede the values of life to such persons and their circles.

Impact of grassroots museums on the represented community and other museums

Museums are not excused from the ways in which they narrated, interpreted and presented history in the past. Communities which were either excluded from museums or stigmatised by them are now claiming the rectification of such errors; which are still present in what are called ‘*out-of-date exhibit halls*.’⁵⁹⁰ Analogous claims motivate museums and their curators to revisit their interpretation and position on how to present the diverse segments of society.

The TMWB Curator believes that such museums have many positive impacts on the represented community. Primarily because it is heritage, and secondly, because it revives a community that is extinct through living relatives and descendants. The museum is considered as a memory of those people who suffered a lot to make a living for themselves and their families.

“Ihallu tajjeb ħafna mhux ftit. L-ewwel nett il-ġħaliex inti huwa patrimonju. It-tieni nett qiegħed terġa’ tqajjem komunita’ li lllum m’għadhiex teżisti u kemm il-partijiet ta’ dik il-komunita’. Dan ma tafx kif, dawn nies li kienu part-timers, kienu jithallsu miżerja, kienu jridu jkunu nies magħżulin għax riedu jkunu nies b’saħħithom. Dawna baġtew. It-tbatija tagħhom. Jiena nqis dana il-mużew bħala memorja ta’ kemm baġtew missirijietna biex għajjxuna.”⁵⁹¹

The RMMT Curator maintains that such museums leave a positive impact on the community they represent. Although the local community may not be so responsive as expected, the museum succeeds to attract people from outside the locality and even foreigners to appreciate the locality and its heritage. The ŽBSM Curator and his Assistant believe that such museums benefit the community where they are. The Assistant Curator notes that it is a pleasure to say so, but at the same time they acknowledge that there are matters which they wish to change or leave a higher impact but they cannot do it themselves as a museum. The curator was sceptic about the fact that an artefact or exhibit inside for example the national Museum of Archaeology can change the life of a person.

⁵⁹⁰ Karp, *et al.*, 1992: 12.

⁵⁹¹ Translation: They leave a lot of benefit. Primarily because it is heritage. Secondly because it is reviving a community which no longer exists and those who are connected to it. As you may know these were all part-timers, miserably paid, chosen persons because they had to be strong persons. These suffered. [This is] Their sufferings. I hold this museum as a memory of the sufferings faced by our ancestors to provide us with a living.

“Michael: Nahseb ġid iħallu.

Guzeppi: Tieħu pjaċir li tgħid hekk. Kemm jagħmlu differenza kbira lill-komunita’ ma nafx kemm jagħmlu differenza kbira. Aħna li involuti direttament ma’ dan il-mużew, nixtiequ li qegħdin nagħmlu impatt aħna. Li aħna qegħdin fil-fatt inbiddu ċertu affarijiet imma m’aħniex taf. Jiġifieri jien nahseb l-ebda mużew, ma nahsibx li hawn xi Malti li qatt inbidlet il-mentalita’ tiegħu b’xi esebit li hemm fil-Mużew ta’ l-Arkeologija per eżempju. Ftit tagħmel differenza għalih dana għall-maġġor parti tal-Maltin din ġebbla normali.”⁵⁹²

In contrast, the XRWM Curator maintained that he was proud to see an artefact from the locality (Ħal Safi) exhibited at the national museum. He felt connected to it, even if it was out of context and far from the locality. If the display of objects connected to a community at a museum could instil pride and self-esteem in members of that community, then museums which focus on displaying more objects connected to a particular community could certainly represent and connect to that particular community.

The NDMM Curators stated that the museum managed to attract foreigners more than the local community. In order to have a greater impact, the parish priest (who works hand in hand with the three volunteer curators) was of the idea that the museum should target school children as that might increase awareness, interest and visits from the community. The parish priest believed that

“I think personally it is more with foreigners and tourists than with the locals. I think that is something which has to be looked into, because as I was saying when I mentioned the children, schools children for example that would be a way of increasing a bit the interest of the locals.”

Museums give life to communities and places. They could bring the community together, enhance cooperation and social interactions. However, these factors would not ensure the community’s support and presence if the museum were to face hard times or go through problems common to museums which lack resources.

⁵⁹² Translation: Michael: “I believe they do good”.

Guzeppi: “I am happy to say so. I do not know what great difference do they make in the community. We as directly involved at this museum, desire to make great impacts. We wish we could change a lot of matters but we are not. Thus, I believe that no museum, I do not think that there is a Maltese who changed his mentality because of any exhibit at, for example, the Museum of Archaeology [a national museum]. It makes few difference to him, as for the majority of the Maltese it is just a normal stone.”

The MCDF Curator maintained that the museum leaves an impact on the community. He said that the *Castello* is not known in the Province of Ragusa, despite the fact that all talk about it, that it attracts tourists, many pass by, and many know it from television series, cinema, theatre or fiction. He states that

Quindi la parte comunita' anzi sempre succede che il Castello di Donnafugata e' insaputo, che tutta la provincia parla, e il monumento piu' grande d'attrattare i turisti dalla provincia. E del Comune senz'altro nella provincia. Ce qui passano tutti, perche e' un luogo che ha avuto un'incremento sia per il suo motivo che e' il Castello, e poi col passare del tempo anche per le puntate di Montalbano, che il nostro territorio a dato ricchezza. Il Castello per qualche scena, ma perche il Castello e' stato scelto sempre per il cinema e diventato set di Vicever, set di Montalbano, set di Chaos, di Fratelli Italiano. Poi ultimamente c'e' stato il racconto dei racconti di come si chiama Le Vie del Nonno un altro regista che sto premiato a Venezia. E' sempre stato il luogo di fantasia per il teatro, e ha avuto il fascino, praticamente il Castello d'hoc da tutto a livello turistico, e' un museo che si fa notare. E ci ha un grande introito per questo.⁵⁹³

The MLIA Curator believes that small museums with a specific theme will not be copied by State museums, as the latter shall own the same objects and material in order to compete with such small museums. He said that State museums are oriented differently and therefore they could not impact on the smaller museums. The MLIA Curator believes that State and non-State museums should coexist.

Certo che essere un museo particolare, non penso che quelli nazionali, quelli grandi ci copiano, anche perche dovrebbero ecco avere il materiale qui. Sono strutture di orientamento diverso. Quindi non penso che interferiscono. Conviviamo, insieme a loro.⁵⁹⁴

He also noted that the presence of museums like the MLIA benefit the businesses around them and it can, even if indirectly, benefit the community around it. He

⁵⁹³ Translation: As for the community, therefore, on the contrary it is always that the Castle of Donnafugata is unknown, even if the whole province speaks about it, and it is the largest monument that attracts tourists from the province. And from the Comune as much as from the province. It is that here all pass-by, because it is a place which has increased both because it is a place that is the Castle, and then over time also for its selection for episodes of Montalbano, which has given wealth to our territory. The Castle for a few scenes, but because the Castle was always chosen for cinema, and became the setting for Vicever, the set for Montalbano's, the set for Chaos, by Fratelli Italiano. Then lately there has been the story of all tales of, what's its name, Le Vie del Nonno, another director awarded in Venice. It has always been the place of fantasy for the theatre, and it has had the charm, practically the Castle d'hoc from a tourist point of view, and it is a museum that stands out. And it has a great income for this.

⁵⁹⁴ Translation: Of course, being a particular museum, I don't think the national ones, the big ones copy us, also because here they should have the material here. They are structures of different orientation. So I don't think they interfere. We live together with them.

maintained that mostly “e’ la komunita’ piu’ vicina che guadagna di piu’ [it is the closest community that can benefit most] from the presence of a museum like the MLIA.

Curators were also asked to identify what could help their museums bring about change in the community. The TMWB Curator believes that his museum has limitations and it could only be a means by which to increase knowledge.

L-unika haġa li jista’ jagħmel hu li jżid il-general knowledge, speċjalment fit-tradizzjonijiet, fis-snaġġa’, u fl-istorja. Imma l-bqija as such dan ma jista’ joffri xejn illum. Mhux xi haġa li se jipproduċi xi haġa.⁵⁹⁵

The RMMT Assistant Curator, Louis, believes that the RMMT museum had positive impacts on different members of the community. He argued that all depends on the interest which the audience shows to whatever the museum organises or holds at its venue. As a museum the wonder is that by its exhibitions it managed to attract persons who never visited museums. He mentioned how visitors show astonishment and surprise once they enter the venue. He said that visitors say that they did not expect such a place which mesmerises them and takes them back in time.

Ejja nieħdu l-post bħala mużew, din l-ideja tiegħi ta’ kif nara n-nies. Hafna minnhom ma jkunux ġew. Għalhekk sbieħ il-wirjiet, għax il-wirjiet ikunu b’nies li qatt ġew. Minn dak il-ħin li pparkja l-karozza w qasam nesa kollox warajh. Kif daħal hawn rifles dik l-għatba nesa kollox warajh. Qalilhom hawnhekk il-post saħħru. Ħadu fi żminijiet differenti.⁵⁹⁶

The RMMT Curator said that they could not see what manages to attract people once they visit. It might be the kind of feeling which old houses and farmhouses as the RMMT could offer to the visitor. Micro museums set up in old houses (such as the RMMT and the GCHH) have an own character, which is not found in places purpose-built as museums. Visitors at such museums commented that such places have

⁵⁹⁵ Translation: The only thing that the museum can do is increase general knowledge, especially on traditions, on crafts and history. But on the whole the museum can offer nothing else today. It can produce nothing.

⁵⁹⁶ Translation: So let’s take the place as a museum, this is my opinion of the people. Many of them never came here. That is the reason why exhibitions are great, because they attract people who never came to the museum. From the time they park their vehicle and crossed the street they forget the world outside. They would tell that the place mesmerised them. It takes them to different times.

something which they could not explain, but which attracts them and welcomes them. The RMMT Curator said that personalities who visited the venue with the premise to leave after a few minutes felt the need to stay longer and did so. He himself maintains that whenever he goes there, even if as a duty something attracts him to the place.

“Qisha hawn xi haġa *magnetic* [tiġbdek] hawn ġew. Tinsa’ il-problemi li jkun hawn barra. Jien nieħu minni jiena. ... x’hin niġi hawn hija terapija għalija. Ninsa daqsxejn il-problemi li għandi. Hawn xi haġa hawn ġew. ...ma jkollix aptit nitlaq.”⁵⁹⁷

The ŽBSM Curator believes that

“Kieku s-sistema’ taħdem kif tixtieq kieku għandu jgħin ħafna u jkompli jespandi anki l-mentalita’ ta’ l-individwi, pero ma taħdimx hekk. Qegħdin nitkellmu fuq affarijiet reali.”⁵⁹⁸

The ŽBSM Curator believes that at their museum it depends on how the parish priest, as the owner of the museum and its collection, relates with volunteers and how much value he gives to their role and the museum as a tool to help the community. Despite their roles the Curators had the perception that they do not contribute anything humanitarian to the parish, as they re-utilise the money received from visitors and activities for the same museum. They also see the museum as a contributor to community education, not on its own but as part of the educational system spread in society. The museum as a pedagogic tool is also recognised by curators of micro museums. Irrespective of their being State-owned, private or independent all micro museum curators acknowledged that museums could contribute to educate communities and people of any age. There is not much difference in the ways and means they use to achieve their didactic activities, although the difference of resources available do count and limit certain targets. As mentioned earlier the national agency has an arm totally dedicated to the organisation, planning and implementation of educational material and activities mainly with school children. This places State-owned micro museums at an advantage over private and independent micro museums,

⁵⁹⁷ Translation: “It’s as if there is something magnetic in here. You’ll forget the problems that there are outside. As from my part ... when I come here it is therapeutic for me. I forget the problems I have for a while. There is something in here ... I would not like to leave.”

⁵⁹⁸ Translation: “Museums could be very beneficial if things were to work as they should as they can expand the individuals capacities, but unfortunately it is not working that way. We’re speaking of real matters.”

which cannot afford such a luxury. However, it does not mean that private and independent micro museums are less innovative and take less initiatives. It was observed that some private and independent micro museums started pedagogic initiatives prior to State-owned museums. It was also noted that the national agency appears to scrutinize initiatives taken by private and independent micro museums, and if such initiatives succeed, the national agency would copy such initiatives. In such cases the resources available to the national agency are many more and easier to access for educational projects. The backing of by public funds and institutional structures makes it easier for the national agency to search for, qualify and win more funds for pedagogic projects. Private and independent micro museums are at a huge disadvantage on internal and external resources and consequently even their most innovative pedagogic initiatives could be hindered if such resources are not reachable or unthinkable.

The ŽBSM Curator argued that

Il-mużewoloġija trid tinbidel mar-realtajiet taż-żmien.⁵⁹⁹

and that many times

Pero personalment jiena naħseb illi l-valur ta' ċertu esebiti hawnhekk mhux apprezzati mill-pubbliku ngeneralment daqs kemm haqqu.⁶⁰⁰

The ŽBSM Curator believed that such important exhibits would gain in value once they could get a lot of promotion. He added that, however, private micro museums cannot afford the costs of such promotion as these are too high and the micro museum does not make sufficient revenue to afford promotion. The situation is worse with independent micro museums.

Curators of independent museums complained that government (the State) advertises its museums and sites, but it does not even mention independent micro museums whose founders and curators dedicated so much time, effort and money to run and maintain. They requested that such independent micro museums should at least be listed alongside any other State museum, even if it had to be at the end of the list. They claimed that in order to survive such micro museums should organise some

⁵⁹⁹ Translation: Museology must change with the realities of time.

⁶⁰⁰ Translation: However I personally believe that the general public does not appreciate the value of certain exhibits as they should.

activities to attract the public. However it is not easy when one considers that people (such as their curators) get older and have families to care for. Today, it is even more difficult as grandparents should take care of grandchildren while parents go to work; and the differences between one's enthusiasm and energy available are vast. Moreover, all such efforts are never shown appreciation by central authorities. The NDMM Curators expressed disgust for the complete exclusion that the State exercises with respect to private and independent micro museums. Nora, one of the volunteer Curators said:

“Give us some funding to do some paintings and repair works, ceiling works, may be pay the electricity and water bill, may be help us with the painting refurbishment. We need that sort of help. ... here no one is looking after it really they should actually send one or two staff so that we can open every day of the week and promote, create an awareness of how great this museum is, how you can build the popularity, how you can get support from locals and foreigners. It's a gem here in Gozo. There's not many nice museums like this. ... And we printed some big posters of this museum. When you get out of the ferry there they can have a big poster there. And we also informed the tourist office but we're not getting much help from there. May be the Local Council may be if they give funding to Local Council why don't they help this museum? They're always saying “it's a private museum, we can't help” but it's in Nadur, it's our locality, you should help, but that money should be coming from the government too. It's true because the Local Council they are looking at us as an outsider.”

The exclusion of private and independent micro museums by the State and its structures is strongly felt. The NDMM Curator specified that the support or aid given to such micro museums could not be money but what such museums require. Such museums require some promotion, restoration and conservation works on their premises or exhibits, subsidized bills, less bureaucracy and regulatory burdens, and above all, to stop considering them as profit makers, business entities, or the like. Curators of such museums therefore expect help in kind more than monetary support. As the NDMM Curator informed us Local Councils do not help, as they are bound by the law. The blame is therefore more on the law and the way the national agency applies for funding opportunities related to museums.

A recommendation that emerges from all this is that: The national agency as a public authority responsible for cultural heritage, its promotion, its conservation and restoration, raising awareness and pedagogic programmes, may include private and independent micromuseums in such applications or at least help them collectively, even if in tandem with the State-owned micromuseums, to safeguard cultural heritage and enhance the cultural tourism product of the country. It will be more practical to all if the national agency were to collectively administer the funds and see that the funds are then well managed by the beneficiary private and independent micromuseums. In cooperation and collaboration all micromuseums may reach better results and attract more visitors to their venues and collections, and consequently they will be more beneficial to the communities they serve.

The TBCM Curator argued that even simple things as the location or the positioning of a Bus Stop might impact positively on the performance of a micro museum. She explained that the lack of a Bus Stop contiguous to the micro museum hinders visitors as people hate walking to or from a more distant Bus Stop; and consequently, it reduces the flow of visitors. She argued that the national agency with all its power and contacts through government managed to place Bus Stops exactly adjacent to its museums and sites, but not next to the TBCM. Generally, the national agency obliged the national transport authority to place a Bus Stop next to its museums or sites. This is not possible for private and independent micro museums which do not have the clout that the State has on its own agencies and authorities. This positions private and independent micro museums at another disadvantage. Secondly, it is also discriminatory when one considers that the national transport authority acts in similar ways, as it does not treat non-State museums equally.

Primarily the practices of the national transport authority are inequitable, because as a national authority, it is paid from public taxes, inclusive of taxes and fees paid by the owners, curators, staff and activities of private and independent micro museums. Secondly the national transport authority follows no specified decision-making or policy with regards to placing Bus Stops in relation to museums. With the same rationale that State-owned museums and national authorities are funded by public revenue, private and independent micro museums (which were totally funded

and supported by the efforts and personal sacrifices of individuals who are also taxpayers), non-State micro museums shall also enjoy the benefit of having a Bus Stop next to their venue (where practical). With the same rationale, all museums, State-owned or not, shall enjoy the same rights, as they all contribute to the community and the economy.

Another factor which the TBCM Curator considered as helpful to her micro museum is that of promotion and the media: a factor requested also by the NDMM Curators. She maintained that it is only the creation of specific events that currently promote the TBCM. She was aware that the TBCM is at a disadvantage since it is perceived as a smaller replica of the St. Paul's Catacombs (Rabat). Since people hate repetition, as Curator she should look at the uniqueness that the museum and its main exhibit offer. Above all, she maintained that the TBCM has to excel in order to attract visitors. She argued that the TBCM does not belong to the Mosta community alone, but to the nation: an argument which might appear contradictory. While trying to attract the interest of the local community to raise awareness and increase the number of visitors, the Curator is in parallel aiming to promote the micro museum as a national heritage. Therefore, the struggle between focusing on the local community (Mosta) or the represented community (the national) is a matter of controversy at national micro museums. It is clear that the success or failure of a micro museum depends on the awareness, promotion and participation of its microcosm (that is, the local community), but there is also the intention to attract a wider community (that is, the national and tourists) too. Indeed, the matter of identity surfaces again and again, as the identity of the local community is different from the perceived national identity. Irrespective of how much effort was made to promote a homogeneous national identity and obliterate the heterogenous identities of smaller communities within the same nation, the two identities cannot be consolidated.

Ovjament, ukoll aħna li għandna bżonn f'dan il-każ ta' Ta' Bistra Catacombs, kif aħna ħa nispikkaw mal-katakombi ta' San Pawl irridu xi ħaġa oltre. Hemmhekk hemm ukoll l-element tal-media u f'dan il-każ aħna qegħdin niffukaw aktar fuq *events*. Hawnhekk f'dan il-każ li għandu uniku qegħdin niffukaw fuq dan l-aspett uniku, għax bħala arkitettura funebra huwa kważi identika bħal ta' San Pawl. M'għandniex għalfejn nirrepetu – in-nies jiddeju. Allura x'għandu uniku dan is-sit? Mela nifflu fuq dan. U aħna hekk

qegħdin nagħmlu, aħna l-event tagħna li jmiss qegħdin niffukaw fuq dan l-ambjent. Dan huwa tal-poplu mhux tal-Mostin biss imma tal-Maltin kollha. Dan il-fatt nixtiequ nifihuh għall-Maltin biex jindunaw li dan mhux mużew tiegħi, dan mhux mużew ta' l-aġenzija, dan huwa wirt tagħkom.⁶⁰¹

The discussion about the focus of the national agency on the national more than on local communities is self-explanatory. Since it was created by the State it is bound to promote and focus on State objectives which national government could not avoid. It also seems to create a conflict within the curatorial role as there are events which target the local community in order to get information from them, and at the same time, other events are telling the local community that the museum belongs to the national community not to them (the local community). Whatever belongs to everyone under the umbrella of the 'national' or 'state' nomenclature is many times considered as something which belongs to everyone not to any specific community. However, once it belongs to all, then many would argue that 'it does not belong to me or my community.' The personal or the communal from the perspective of a specific local or museum community is an individual or a specific community collective which carries with it a sense of pride and identity, and which the national does not. These contrasts of identities are a matter of pride even with the presence of localised private and independent micro museums where community members and visitors have a personal connection with the place, its exhibits and its narratives. Even in such a small country like Malta, different identities exist also within towns and villages of a few hundreds or thousands, as communities have had different experiences and memories of the past. The opinion and perception of visitors and the local community is an element highly regarded by the TBCM Curator, even though the national agency may not concur. As an enthusiastic Curator she requested feedback as it could help her curate and present the place better to visitors.

“Araw kif intom thossukhom fih in relazzjoni magħkom ma' dan is-sit u aħna rridu niehdu nota tiegħu għax għalina interessanti. Mhux sempliciment x'qalu l-istudjużi u l-istoriċi ta' qabel. Importanti. Pero in-nies komuni ukoll għandhom l-informazzjoni valida x'jagħtuna, u aħna rridu nisimgħuhom. B'dak il-mod aħna nistgħu nsiru aktar popolari.”⁶⁰²

⁶⁰¹ Translation: Obviously, even we are in need at the Ta' Bistra Catacombs, in order to shine with respect to the St. Paul's Catacombs we need something more. There is the media element there and in this case we are focusing more on events. Here we are focusing on the unique element that we have here, because as funerary architecture it is similar to that of the St. Paul's. We do not need to replicate as people will get fed up. So what do we have unique in this site? So we open on this. And that is what we are doing, our next event will focus on the environment. \this belongs to the people not to the Mosta people alone, but of all the Maltese. We wish to present this reality to all Maltese to realise that this is not my museum, not a museum of the agency, but this is your heritage.

⁶⁰² Translation: See how you feel in relation to this site and we shall take note of it as it is in our interest to do so. It is not simply what scholars and historians have said earlier. That is important. But even the common people (grassroots) have valid information to provide and we must listen to them. It is by doing so that we can become more popular.

The TBCM Curator implies that the possibility of success and their becoming popular with the people is by reaching the local community with activities addressed to them and by getting the information about the site and the catacombs from their personal experiences. This is an approach which private and independent micromuseums Curators said they apply to capture the history of the community that they represent and the local community where they are situated. Thus the approach of the TBCM Curator corresponds to that used by Curators of private and independent micromuseums. Giving value to the history of the community, their oral history and the history which is not found on formal text and publications is seen by the TBCM Curator as a tool which can bring the museum nearer to the community and in consequence the community may promote and in a certain way feel ownership of the museum. This means that the national agency has curators who acknowledge that private and independent micromuseums are nearer to communities as they target the communities they represent not the general public or the national. However this does not mean that they do not demand the attention and visits of the general public. As the RMMT Curator observed 'culture is for the cultured' and collections of private and independent micromuseums are targeted mostly to attract such audiences from the represented or local community, not the general public, the national or mass tourism. Their characteristic is that they target a distinct and specific community or audience which is selective and interested in more than just visiting a museum. Their audience is an audience that seeks connections, memories, and pride in their distinct identity or in getting to know about the diversity of the community represented by the museum and its exhibits.

Impediments to bring changes in the community.

Curators were asked to identify factors which could hinder their museum from contributing and benefiting the community. There are many factors which might hinder a micromuseum from contributing and benefiting its community. Among such hindrances the TMWB Curator recognised as a major problem the misuse of cultural heritage assets and sites (such as the same battery). He said that after it has been neglected for nearly forty years, there were several attempts to commercialise the property including that of turning the battery and its surroundings into a restaurant or a pizzeria. Converting or leasing heritage assets into commercial venues is not beneficial to the community, as only a few persons would make profit out of the

activity. The property would also lose its historic and cultural value, and it might suffer serious and irreversible damages (as for example to meet with catering demands or any other activity). Other factors which may hinder a micro museum from benefiting a community according to the RMMT Curator are persons who seek to satisfy personal interests at the expense of museums and their volunteers. The RMMT Curator said that he fears that kind of person who engages a museum or volunteering with the intention of benefiting themselves rather than the community. Some also try to buy the favour of micro museums to support their intention. He argued that such behaviour is unacceptable as curators and volunteers of micromuseums should always embrace a genuine community-oriented objective.

Curators were asked to mention impediments which prevent their museums from bringing about changes in the community. The HMCC Curator described it as “only a future arduousness of operating with it’s own resources,” as it is acknowledged that museums cannot survive or sustain themselves only with their own resources. In most cases curators and volunteers must be inventive and avantgarde to create their own ways and means to make some money for their micro museum or to keep it running. The FMAA Curator said that such impediments might even come from the museum and its human resources, inclusive of the curator. The FMAA Curator envisages the possibilities of impediments emerging from internal issues, as if the museum and those involved within would decide (a) “to stand still, (b) to not connect with visitors and locals, (c) to place uneducated staff in key positions (as the museum had in the previous years), adding “that I think is not going to make the museum thrive;” and (d) also the lack of a vision for the next year. The FMAA Curator added also that

“Nowadays we have to balance the lack of funding and the growth that we want. I believe that even small museums should invest in professionals and volunteers that can help the sustainable museum goals.”

Certainly, small and micro museums should invest but many times such museums do not have resources or funds with which to do so. As for the Maltese micro museums, the scenario becomes more difficult as private and independent micro museums are excluded from many opportunities. Some hold back because they have no time or resources to dedicate for such calls. Museums established in the 1990s or earlier,

however, would not qualify owing to their legal status or registration as companies or businesses (*for-profits*).

The AFCS Curator informed us that the worst impediment to the micro museum is how much and how long would the same persons continue to love the museum as ever before - “Niente, se continuiamo ad amarlo come sempre.” The AFCS and the FMAA Curators maintained that it is the passion and love of those involved that keeps such micro museums going. It is surprising how private and independent micro museums, small museums or maybe large museums, continue with their activity when one considers that they face so many challenges, setbacks, and disadvantages. The lack of external resources, of communication with the public, of education, of staff, of love and passion to the museum and its objectives, of a vision, of planning for the future, and other are all factors which could impede the museum from bringing about change in a community.

The comments of curators showed that the attachment which staff at private and independent micro museums have with the museum, its content, its activities and its public - visitors, community and others - are important. Curators at State-owned museums may not feel the same about their micro museum as the museum is not their ‘baby’. The State-museum curators interviewed in this study nonetheless showed a high degree of commitment and connection to the museum/s entrusted to them and that promises well. A similar attitude was also noticed among curators of municipal museums at the Province of Ragusa (Sicily). Although the degree of connection to the museum may not be compared to that met among private and independent museum curators, it was surprising to find such enthusiasm and dedication among State museum curators. The study showed that most of the success or failure of a museum does not depend only on its tangible resources, but also on the human element of those trusted with a museum-related role. Curatorial practices, therefore, do not limit themselves to the tangible objects and exhibits or the activities which a museum organises, but also the contacts which their curators establish with staff, with other curators, with visitors, with the community and the public, under various circumstances both inside and outside of the museum.

The TMWB Curator maintained that curatorial practices at private and independent micro museums affected national museums so much that they had to open much more their doors to the public. He attributed the introduction of schemes (for students, families and senior citizen) to the attempt of national museums to attract more visitors. The RMMT Assistant Curator observed that the practices of private and independent micro museums succeeded to draw cultural activity out of capital cities and their museums to bring them nearer to the grassroots.

Iva. Għax din qalhielna Mifsud Bonnici ġie fetaħ fost l-ewwel wirġiet t'hawnhekk. Kien għadhu Ministru ta' l-Edukazzjoni. Kien qalilna intom hawnhekk bl-ideja tagħkom ma hallejtux l-affarijiet isiru fil-kapitali biss fil-mużewijiet ta' l-Arti biss imma ġibtuhom qrib il-poplu.⁶⁰³

His comment demonstrates that private and independent micro museums are practically museums for the community and the grassroots. They offer the grassroots what institutional museums had earlier made exclusive and what the RMMT Curator defined as the 'cultured' population. The ŽBSM Curator in contrast eliminated the possible influence of grassroots museums on the national museums and their practices. He maintained that national museums have their own rules to observe and which were not affected by other museums. He objected to the handling of precious artifacts and archaeological objects by the public witnessed at City Gate (Valletta), as a promotional activity of the National Museum of Archaeology, as the handling of such unique exhibits and placing them at public spaces would place a high risk of damage or loss.

Impact of curatorial practices

Curators were also asked whether they think that the practices of micro museums forced State and institutional museums to open to small non-national communities. The RMMT Curator maintained that national museums were influenced by the practices of grassroots micro museums. He mentioned, as an example, that State museums are offering free admission on special occasions or by special schemes. In most cases, State and institutional museums tend to copy the successes of grassroots

⁶⁰³ Translation: Yes. We were told by Mifsud Bonnici who came to open one of the first exhibitions here. He was still Minister of Education. He told us that with your idea you moved things out of the capital alone at the Arts' museum and brought them near to the people.

micro museums, but the offer of free admissions could not have been simply to copy the practices of grassroots micro museums. Other motives could have been behind it.

The Curators of the TMWB, the ŽBSM, and the XRWM reported a decrease on the number of visitors in the last five years. In contrast the Curators of the RMMT, the NDMM and the four Maltese State museums declared an increase. The Curators of the TMWB, the RMMT, the ŽBSM, the XRWM, and the NDMM reported a decrease of visitors from the locality or that visits from the local community are low. Nevertheless, low visiting from the local community is not necessarily a show of disinterest or of an uncultured local society. The decrease of visiting occurs also at national level, and perhaps in small island states like Malta this led to the free admission initiative of national museums and sites on special occasions and events. It was, therefore, a measure to counter the decrease and an attempt to rekindle interest to visit or revisit.

Although such measures attracted more visitors to national museums, figures do not imply that visitors going to museums on such occasions are ‘cultured’ visitors, in contrast to the ‘uncultured’ referred to earlier by the RMMT Curator. A distinction must be made between the visitor who visits a museum to increase knowledge and learn, and the visitor who visits a museum just because it is free and to see what other people go to see: thus, a ‘herd-behaviour.’⁶⁰⁴

The TKWM Curator maintained that grassroots micro museums did not influence the practices of curators at State museums or practices within the national agency. She states that micro museums in Gozo struggle to survive. As an example she mentions her museum prior to becoming State-owned and others such as *Il-Ħaġar* museum at Rabat, Gozo. She maintains that small and micro museums have no capacity to market their products and their sites. Another factor which lowers the number of visitors in Gozo is that most tourists visit the island only for a few hours and are always in a hurry to return to Malta. That limits the choice of places to visit and micro museums are the ones which suffer most. In that sense, the TKWM Curator perceived no competition from non-State micro museums in Gozo.

⁶⁰⁴ Raafat, R. M.; Chater, N.; Frith, C. (2009). ["Herding in humans"](#), *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. **13** (10): 420–428.

Certainly, micro museums in Gozo are at numerous disadvantages when compared to the advantages they might have. Although distances between places in Gozo are short and easily reached even on foot, double insularity is a problem. A second one is that tour operators, as the TKWM Curator observes, dedicate a one-day 'in a hurry' trip to the island which in reality takes no longer than six or eight hours inclusive of ferry crossings. They never include any private or independent micro museum in their itinerary.⁶⁰⁵ She argued that even her State-owned TKWM is excluded despite its proximity to the popular Ġgantija Temples. Other State micro museums excluded from the mentioned itineraries, reported the same Curator, are the museums at the Citadel (Rabat, Gozo). A look at most tours operated for day trips exclude visits to micro museums. Together with the grassroots micro museums, none of the Gozitan State-owned micro museums in the study featured on the tour-operated itineraries in Gozo. Likewise, the TBCM is excluded from tours operated in Malta. Tours in Gozo, however, include transport time and lunch time, which means that touring time is further shortened by at least another two or three hours. It is the tourists who travel on their own, who can spare time to visit the Maltese Islands, or who perhaps aim to satisfy their special interests that include grassroots micro museums and State micro museums in their itinerary.

Despite the disadvantages mentioned more reasons could inflict severe damages and losses to micro museums. The abusive practices of persons in authority, or within the tourism industry and support services, are a major element of concern which could determine who succeeds or fails. Those who adhere to such practices might enjoy the benefits for a while, but then suffer the consequences when another source of higher income is found by those operating such services. Abusive practices from whatever source local or national, public or private, could inflict severe damages, not only on the museum in question, but also on the community, the economy of the place where the museum is situated, and the country which consciously allows such practices.

⁶⁰⁵ For example this is an itinerary of a full-day in Gozo. <https://www.getyourguide.com/malta-190/full-day-excursion-to-gozo-t15673/>.

Changes in the mentality and practices of curators

When asked whether grassroots micro museums had engendered changes in the mentality and practices of curators at State museums, the TKWM Curator expressed a desire for simplification of current practices within the national agency. She acknowledged that curators at private and independent museums might enjoy more flexibility, in comparison to implementing something at a State-museum. She explained that at the TKWM any kind of implementation, as for example, something connected to interpretation, must

“go through the entire bureaucratic process, and tenders, and suppliers, and quotations, and all the rest I know of.”

Although this may appear pedantic and bureaucratic to curators of State micro museums, the size of the organisation should be taken into consideration. While the national agency is composed of different departments and offices bound by laws and regulations connected to cultural heritage and its role, there is also the matter of hierarchies created by the public sector. All this makes the process longer and more complex. In contrast, those involved at grassroots micro museums, private and independent, are smaller in number, could be reached easier and take decisions in shorter time. While the whole process of decision-making in private micro museums could require the decision of a formal or an informal committee (representative of the volunteers and staff), the process is easier and faster in independent micro museums where decisions are taken by an individual or a few family members. It is the implementation process which might take longer in grassroots micro museums, because resources (human, financial or other) might either be absent or difficult to acquire. In all cases, decisions and implementation rely on the expertise and capabilities of the persons involved in such processes. The TKWM Curator said that while grassroots micro museums might appear at an advantage, as for example, in purchasing services or products, their lack of funds would place them at a disadvantage to State-owned micro museums. She argued that

“Xi ħadd li għandu mużew privat jista’ jaqbad u jqabba lil min irid. Iġifieri if it had to be on a level playing ground, huma kieku jistgħu ikunu ħafna iktar effettivi għax m’għandhomx dawn l-affarijiet jankrawhom ‘l

isfel. Imma fil-verita because they have such a lack of funds and resources: we are not playing on a level ground.”⁶⁰⁶

The comments of the TKWM Curator show that curators, from their different perspectives, perceive themselves at a number of disadvantages when compared to other micro museum curators. Likewise, they acknowledge that they have advantages over curators of grassroots micro museums. In a nutshell, curators of State-owned micro museums are disadvantaged at the decision-making stage, but very lucky to be backed by teams of experts and resources at the implementation stage. They could, at least and somehow, see their decisions materialize. Curators of grassroots micro museums might face a stale mate at the implementation stage and such a freeze could take as much as the retrieval of resources (which mostly is revenue). Curators of grassroots micro museums find it difficult and many times impossible to purchase services and products from third parties owing to the high prices requested. This might be a reason which forces curators at grassroots micro museums to multitask and involve the personal capacities of volunteers, family members or friends in the museum.

The TBCM Curator, another State-owned micro museum, maintained that grassroots micro museums had impacted national micro museums at least from the commercial side. She said that in such a scenario, the national agency should compete with other museums for attention. She also maintained that the national agency tries to maintain its popularity with travel agents and tour operating agencies.

“B’mod kummerċjali żgur. Illum it-turist, il-Malti u l-Maltin, għandu fejn imur. Jiġifieri aħna nikkompetu għall-attenzjoni. Fis-sens jekk aħna sempliċiment għall-wirt hemm ukoll dawn il-mużewijiet privati li huma kompetizzjoni tagħna. Pero aħna li għandna, ovvjament għandna ċertu siti li huma aktar ta’ impatt għall-mentalita’ Maltija, aktar importanti f’dak is-sens. Li naħseb li tagħmel differenza għall-Maltin u ovvjament għat-turisti ingenerali għat-touristic agencies qiegħda ngħid.”⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁶ Translation: “Someone who runs a private museum can decide and engage whoever they want to implement something. It means that if it had to be on a level playing ground, they can be better off and more effective as there is nothing that pins them down. In reality, yet, because they have such a lack of funds and resources: we are not playing on a level ground.”

⁶⁰⁷ Translation: Certainly in a commercial way. Today the tourist, the Maltese, have several options where to go. Therefore we compete for attention. In the sense that if we are here only for heritage, there are also these private museums who compete with us. But what we have, obviously we have certain sites which have more impact on the Maltese way of reasoning, more important in that sense. What I believe makes a difference for Maltese and obviously for tourists in general are the tourist agencies, that’s what I refer to.

Her argument confirmed the statements made by the NDMM Curators, that State-museums enjoy the flow of tourists brought over by tour operators and travel agents, in contrast to the private and independent museums. In contrast, the Curators of the State micro museums in Gozo, remarked that their museums are not included in such tours. However, the inclusion of State museums, not the State micro museums, by tour operators in their itineraries explains why the number of visitors at State museums and micromuseums enormously exceed those of private and independent grassroots micro museums. Although the number of visitors might not reach the number desired by curators at grassroots micro museums, the revenue gained from such visitors would certainly have impacts on factors as opening times, the revenue available for promotion and for the implementation of projects, on events and activities (inclusive of pedagogic ones), and other activities which would benefit the community.

The TBCM Curator believed that national micro museums continue to attract tour operators is because

“aħna nispiġkaw. B’dan il-mod pero ma jfissirx li mużewijiet privati jew mużewijiet żgħar m’għandhomx x’joffru eh? Aħna qegħdin ngħidu fuq livell popolari. Fuq dak is-sens naħseb, iva, li għadna quite strong.”⁶⁰⁸

The TBCM Curator remarked that national micro museums present a popular, and therefore a generic type of collection which appeals to the general public. Her statement confirmed that grassroots micro museums present specialised or special thematic collections which appeal to a different audience, and which is generally an audience interested in a specific area. Although sometimes the name of the collection might resemble that of a national museum, their collections are different in many ways. For example, the maritime collection at the NDMM and the WMC are personal collections which exhibit and present objects not found at the National Maritime Museum. The ethnographic and folklore collections at, for example, the RMMT, is different from that found at the GCHH: even if some objects could be common to both collections. Grassroots micromuseums present objects and collections from the viewpoint of the represented community or the community where they are situated. National micro museums however view objects and collections from a national

⁶⁰⁸ Translation: “we excel, but that does not mean that private museums or small museums do not offer anything. The argument is on a popular level. At that level we think we are still quite strong.”

perspective, where the personal and the local community disappear and become secondary. Therefore, the current interactions of the TBCM Curator with the local community of Mosta could be considered as a momentary necessity where the national agency seeks to build up the history of the site, and after which the museum-community relationship might decrease or vanish. The interactions and relations described by the GCHH Curator with the Rabat (Gozo) community, however, show that such relationships continue by time and take a two-way trend where the museum collects oral lore and at the same time tries to attract the local community to enjoy its heritage. Likewise, the relationship which the TBCM Curator seeks with the Mosta community could be more enduring than that probably envisaged by the national agency. Such approaches are closer to that of curators of grassroots micro museums, where relationships and communication with the represented community or the community around them, is ongoing and reciprocal.

This study found that private and independent grassroots micro museums are more concentrated on specialised or specific themes which do not appeal to the general public but to selected audiences. They therefore only attract visitors who have a specific interest in the collection or theme offered. Within such circumstances, the national agency has no reason to consider grassroots micro museums as competitors, but more as complementary to what the State museum offers. It is more likely and beneficial for country and communities to consider such specialised micro museums as an ancillary product. They could be easily promoted with the national product as they help the interested visitor to look deeper into the theme preferred. While national micro museums may act as a generic taster of Maltese and Gozitan heritage, independent and private grassroots micromuseums could act as a source for deeper, specific or thematic interests. More than competitors, grassroots micro museums, are ancillary attractions to national museums. Grassroots micro museums could serve as a support to all other museums as such cooperation would further enhance the tourism product of the Islands and contribute further to society, to communities and to the economy. Since grassroots micro museums do not have the necessary resources, it is the national agency who can help them improve their products and services, as it is its duty to help enhance the cultural product of the Maltese Islands and it could not exclude grassroots initiatives as the grassroots micro museums studied.

A NDMM Curator remarked that communication arrived when the national agency needed exhibits from the NDMM's collection to display at the national Gozo Museum project.

“The national museum got to know about these things from people who know the museum in Nadur. And that's how they reached us to loan them some exhibits. Probably they were discussing what were they to put on exhibit. At first it was going to be a museum of Fine Art. But I think it's going to be something so eclectic. It is going to have more than that... something more wide in scope I think.”

The idea of the Gozo Museum as described by the interviewees is incomprehensive as it will cost the State much more than doing some promotion or providing some support to the grassroots micro museums on the Maltese Islands. The Curators argued that a new national museum on Gozo will require a huge amount of resources for years to come, and which would ultimately burden the people with more taxes.

The HMCC Curator claimed that the practices of museums like theirs has forced national/institutional museums to open a great deal to small non-national communities, especially when it comes to ‘on loan practices for exhibitions.’ The request for loans by national museums in Crete is similar to what is reported by the Gozitan NDMM Curators where the Maltese national agency is seeking to loan objects from non-State museums to set up displays at its proposed Gozo museum. However the situation of private and independent micro museums vis-a-vis the national/institutional museum is that the State pretends help, support and loans from such micro museums, but it gives nothing in return to alleviate their burdens, to change laws and regulations, to support them or help them in any other way which they might require to sustain themselves and keep their musealia in good condition for posterity or to enhance their community-oriented activities. A one-way scenario is not a healthy practice, especially with micro museums which seek to benefit their community rather than to make profits or increase visitors. Although the national agency may feature as the entity to blame, it is also acknowledged that the agency is subjected to other laws, to central government, to political interests and other pressures.

The FMAA Curator believes that national and institutional museums had only opened a little to non-national communities, and argued

“I strongly believe that is a way to tell also stories that weren't noticed before, or shed light to other aspects of history (recent one).”

The FMAA Curator also maintained that national and institutional museums did not become pluralistic, as they used specific communities only to strengthen or achieve their nationalistic or institutional objectives. The AFCS Curator was explicit and said that national and institutional museums did not open at all to small non-national communities. The same feeling was expressed was expressed by curators of Maltese private and independent micro museums. They maintain that national and institutional museums exclude non-national communities to promote the homogeneous nation-state image. National museums, for example in Malta, refer to the people homogeneously as *the Maltese*, not as specific different communities which compose the different islands or areas of the same islands and from where the artifacts were recovered.

With regard to the Gozo museums, the OPRM and GCHH Curator maintained that, he could not perceive any impact from non-State micro museums on State museums and their practices. He attributes the low number of visitors at some State-museums to other factors, but not to the presence of non-State museums. He maintained that since many of the non-State museums display different exhibits and collections or offer a different product, they do not present a challenge to State-museums. He believes that visitors choose which museums to visit according to their preferences and interest, and mostly, owing to a specific deeper interests they have.

Ha nitkellem minn Ghawdex. Ghawdex l-ewwelnett lanqas hawn xi kwantita' ta' mużewijiet privati, iġifieri għandek il-mużew tal-folklor, għandek il-mużew tat-Toys ix-Xagħra, il-mużew marittimu n-Nadur u mbagħad għandek ukoll il-mużewijiet parrokkjali u l-Katidral għandek il-mużew tal-Katidral fiċ-Ċittadella, għandek dak parrokkjali ta' l-Għarb, għandek dak ta' San Ġorġ, illi nsomma għal Ghawdex kważi kważi mhux ftit lanqas. Imma ma narax illi kien hemm xi impatt illi jinħass. Jien anki jekk per eżempju fil-mużewijiet tagħna għandna forsi xi wħud minnhom illi l-attendenza tagħhom hija daqsxejn waħda batuta, jien ma nattribwixxieh għall-fatt li hemm mużewijiet, probabbli għax għandek issib li anki f'dawk il-mużewijiet taf tkun baxxa, jien pjuttost nattribwixxieh għal fatturi oħrajn, milli għall-preżenza ta' mużewijiet. U terġa' ha ngħiduha kif inhi, hafna minn dawn anka l-mużewijiet privati joffru anki prodott differenti wkoll. Iġifieri dak li jkun jekk inhuwa qiegħed ifittex mużew speċjalizzat fuq haġa, illum il-gurnata anka il-mużewijiet speċjalizzati huma invoga, barra minn Malta iżjed minn Malta, imma anke f'Malta wkoll qegħdin isiru. Il-mużewijiet speċjalizzati, jekk wiehed ha jmur għal mużew speċjalizzat partikolari, dak ha jmur għand dak. Mhix kwistjoni illi gie f'tiegħek u ma marx f'ta' l-ieħor. Jiena l-istess nagħmel

barra minn Malta, ġeneralment ma mmurx f'mużewijiet biex ngħid rajthom imma mmur f'moħħi jkolli mużewijiet speċifiċi li rrid nara. Inkun naf minn qabel x'mużewijiet irrid nara. Naf li sejjer f'dak il-mużew u mhux fl-ieħor, mhux għax tghidli dak ma jinteressanix imma jiena sejjer għal mużew partikolari għax hemm xi haġa partikolari li rrid nara, jew għax għandi raġuni partikolari w irrid naraha, u qiegħed nimmagina jiena, forsi mhux il-viżitaturi kollha, imma jaf numru mdaqqas minnhom ikollhom l-istess approach. Ġifieri jekk dan sejjer allura jara mużew partikolari dak se jara mużew partikolari, mhux kwestjoni se jaffetwawh għax hemm mużewijiet oħrajn.⁶⁰⁹

The XRWM Curator said that the uniqueness of a museum has the ability to impact even on national museums. He maintained that the national agency decided to restore and list among its museums the Ta' Kola windmill (TKWM) at Xagħra, Gozo; even if it did not replicate the old original mechanism found at the XRWM (Żurrieq). He lamented that at independent museums resources and revenue are limited and insufficient to improve the product.

Meta oġġett ikun uniku, jagħmel impatt. Infatti x'gara? Din il-miżna influwenzat lil dik Ta' Kola, tax-Xagħra, Ghawdex. Sfortunatament imma illi l-Kunsill Lokali hawnhekk kien aktar kawt u żamm ma' l-originali fejn jidhol makkinarju. Heritage Malta ippruvat tkun aktar avventuruża u fejn marret għall-makkinarju użat sistema differenti u iktar moderna minn dik li nafu llum. Fl-istess ħin dawn il-mużewijiet li huma indipendenti bħala dħul finanzjarju peress li huwa batut ma jistgħux jimirfu kemm iridu u kif iridu. Għax normalment anka bħal permessi w kollox dejjem ikaxkru (*drag*) biex iġibu u ma jkunux jafu minn fejn iġibu ċertu fondi għax dawn

⁶⁰⁹ Translation: To speak about Gozo. Gozo first of all does not have a large quantity of private museums, that is, it has the folklore museums, the Toys museum at Xagħra, the maritime museum at Nadur (NDMM) and then there are also the parish museums and the Cathedral's museum at the Citadel, there is the Għarb parish one, that of St. George (Rabat), that for Gozo over all is not a few after all. But I can see no felt impact left by such museums. For example even if I can see that some of our museums struggle to get visits, I do not attribute that to the presence of museums, because you may find that even at those museums attendance is low, so I attribute that to other factors, not to the presence of other museums. Also to say that many of these private museums also offer a different product. That is, if someone seeks a specialised museum, nowadays even specialised museums have become trendy, abroad more than in Malta, but also in Malta it is becoming so. The specialised museums, if one seeks to visit a specific specialised museum, the visitor will choose that museum. It is not a matter that the visitor came to your museum and not the other's. I do the same thing when I am abroad: generally I do not go to a museum for the sake of visiting but I go with my mind set on specific museums that I must see. I know I am going to that museum and not the other, not because you tell me that it does not interest you, but I am going to a particular museum because there is something particular that I must see, or because I have a particular reason and I must see it, and I believe that not all visitors may share this, but a considerable amount of them take the same approach. That is if one is going then to see a particular museum that one will go to that particular museum, and the presence of other museums would not have any effect on that person.

japplikaw through il-Kunsill. Meta jridu xi fondi ikunu gruppi ta' nies per se u ffukati fuq dawn il-financial aids.⁶¹⁰

The XRWM Curator also pointed out that the national agency has an office entirely dedicated for researching, identifying, accessing and managing EU funds and other opportunities. This is an advantage which the national agency has on private and independent grassroots micro museums. In order to decrease the gap, a recommendation which emerges from these facts is that: The national agency since it is paid from the people's taxes shall support the non-State-owned museums who are more engaged with the local communities as their initiators and volunteers are also and equally tax-payers. It shall therefore be either HM's responsibility to find such support for these micromuseums or else a policy of central government to help them as much as possible external to HM's roles and responsibilities. This can be a way of acknowledging their efforts and initiative since these are contributing where the national agency and central authorities are not.

The XRWM Curator added that authorities do not seem to care much. The community is aware that, for example, local government does not promote the windmill, its exhibits and the surrounding heritage abroad in order to attract foreign visitors. In addition, he complained that the local community, who knows about the windmill, its exhibits and the surrounding heritage sites, do not take a further step to promote the museum or suggest it to others. All this showed that grassroots micro museums on the Maltese Islands bear hardships owing to their limited resources and the lack of support they find from local and national authorities.

Among the positive impacts which grassroots micro museums leave on the represented community, the HMCC Curator commented that

⁶¹⁰ Translation: When something is unique it leaves an impact. As a matter of fact, what happened? This windmill influenced that at Ta' Kola, at Xaghra, Gozo. Unfortunately, while the local council of this village was more cautious and kept to the original mechanism. Heritage Malta tried to be more adventurous and used a different type of mechanism which is more modern than what we know today. At the same time independent museums since they have a low income they struggle to survive and cannot achieve much what they wish for. Because normally even to obtain a permit they have to drag for a long time, they will not know from where to get the money because they apply through the Council. For such funds there are people on their own who are focused on such financial aids.

“according to the museum’s reviews our visitors are very satisfied with the way the collections, and consequently the communities as presented.”

The FMAA Curators maintained that grassroots micro museums

“educate, promote and protect culture, connect locals and visitors, contribute to the economy and acknowledgement of the area, in sort.”

The AFCS Curator said that the positive impacts left by such museums are

“un esempio di abnegazione e amore per la cultura”
[“an example of self-denial and love for culture.”]

The Curator of the three municipal museums, MCDF, MUDECO and MDTC, argued that

“Ma per quello statale l’abbiamo. Il fatto che il statale abbiamo il Museo di Camarina, che e’ statale ma sta malissimo perche e’ sempre, sempre piu’ chiuso. Tutto cio che e’ statale il Museo di Ragusa archeologico e un bellissimo museo. Perche a livello di investimento per quegl’anni era all’avanguardia pero non e’ pubblicizzato. Non ha nessun tipo d’impatto il museo statale. Zero totale. E in piu’ ha una spesa enorme perche ci sono. Non so quanti sono, ci sono forse piu’ personale che reperti archeologici. Sto esagerando. Sono quattro, cinque, sei, migliaia arrivo qui e vedo piu’ persone che reperti. (1:06:00) E questi costano una spesa. [...] E i musei statali non hanno nessun tipo di concorrenza. (1:07:08) Io sto cercando di prender li contatti con il palazzo con cioe’ Di Stefano che un po’ uncomisciuto/inconosciuto da, mongolfiera, insomma proprio mi senti vorrei fare tipo la catena dei musei. Nel senso dove il Castello di Donnafugata e’ quello che prende di piu’, e quello che ha molto: non ha bisogno del museo statale. Certo perche vedo tutti quanti. Pero posso usarlo il museo statale, arricchendo anche il museo statale, arricchendo me stesso. E qui siamo nel concetto di *marketing* ma soprattutto anche di impresa. Chi vanta quasi. Come? Io compro un biglietto di seriero, qua al Castello. Con questo biglietto io se vado al museo di Camarina ho l’ingresso a meta’ – cinquanta per cento – mettiamo, e loro sono li ce ma il cuore. Comunque io questo biglietto posso aver la visita anche con lo stesso biglietto il l’aperitivo di benvenuto al primo bar, che e’ d’accordo, posso avere due euro di sconto sulla pizza nel secondo nella trattoria, e tre euro nella pasta e pur cosa succede. Io spendo sei euro per visitare Donnafugata, e guadagno dodici euro di beneficii, perche cio’ due euro al pizza, due euro di que, due euro... e quindi questo crea un vortice. Questo piu che altro con gli altri musei non e’ chiara anche questa possa reggere, ma i musei statali purtroppo non l’hanno

impatto nonostante che Camarina sia una citta' importantissima nella Magna Grecia. E' un piccolo museo E' bellissimo.”⁶¹¹

He maintained that small/micro museums could have a positive and beneficial effect on the State museum: which is currently in a very bad state of affairs. However, such opportunities could only be enjoyed by the State museums, if they were to support initiatives proposed by the smaller museums: which are more entrepreneurial than State museums.

The MMTC and MRDP Curator maintained that such grassroots museums had certainly left an impact on State museums. He said that the discrimination and neglect suffered by the south is similar to the suffering of the small museum. He maintained that it is through dialogue, and by creating conditions for collaboration between the large museums and the small museums that the beauty of the place and the community can be fully enjoyed and narrated.

“Certo, inevitabilmente. Pero io qui farei riferimento a un'opera importante dello scrittore Bufalino⁶¹² e che scrisse un'opera *Museo d'ombre* [1982]. Quando lui scrisse questa opera diceva e si lagnava, un'opera che e' stata scritta intorno agli anni settanta, ottanta, del secolo scorso e diceva “Come mai i musei del nord, le grandi chiese del nord, e le architetture del nord hanno una visibilita' enorme, e nella storia dell'arte nell'insegnamento nelle scuole e tutto questo invece non accade per tutto cio' che riguarda il bene popolare? Quello comunemente il bene minore perche nella classificazione,

⁶¹¹ Translation: But for the State one, we have it. The fact that as for the State we have the Museum of Camarina, which belongs to the State but is very bad because it is always more and more closed. All that is the State's is the Archaeological Museum of Ragusa and a beautiful museum. Because in terms of investment for those years it was at the forefront but it is not advertised. The State museum has no impact. Total zero. And in addition it has a huge expense because there are. I don't know how many there are, there are perhaps more staff than archaeological finds. I'm exaggerating. Four, five, six, thousands come here and I see more people than finds. And these cost an expense. [...] And State museums have no competition whatsoever. I am trying to get them in touch with the building, that is Di Stefano, who is a little unknown by, a hot air balloon, in short, you really feel like I would like to do the museum chain. In the sense where the Castle of Donnafugata is the one that takes the most, and the one that has a lot: it does not need the State museum. Of course because I see everyone. But I can use the State museum, also enriching the State museum, enriching myself. And here we are in the concept of marketing but above all also in business. Who almost boast. Like? I'm buying a serious ticket, here at the Castle. With this ticket, if I go to the Museum of Camarina, I pay half the entrance - fifty percent - we put it, and they are there but the heart. Anyway I can have this ticket also visit with the same ticket the welcome drink at the first bar, which agrees, I can have two euros discount on the pizza in the second in the restaurant, and three euros in pasta and what happens. I spend six euros to visit Donnafugata, and I earn twelve euros in benefits, because that is two euros for pizza, two euros for that, two euros ... and therefore this creates a vortex. This more than anything else with the other museums is not clear, even this can hold up, but unfortunately the State museums have not impacted it despite the fact that Camarina is a very important city in Magna Grecia. It is a small museum. It is beautiful.

⁶¹² Gesualdo Bufalino was an Italian writer poet and aphorist (1920-1996).

quindi piccolo museo, e la piccola chiesa, il piccolo palazzo.” E si lagnava perche questi fasci di luce non arrivavano a questi luoghi. E momentaneamente diceva “Cosa c’ha di differenza lo scalpellino del sudest che ha costruito questi palazzi di grande spessore, grande significato dall’architetto rinascimentale che ha realizzato i piu’ grandi e belli edifici di Firenze?” E soffriva enormemente la sua sofferenza seppure in ritardo e’ stata sanata dalla storia. Oggi questi fasci di luce fanno in modo che questi musei non sono ormai ‘musei d’ombra’, ma sono musei con la luce notevole, probabilmente direi prevalente rispetto alla architettura rinascimentale o al grande museo diciamo che la storia ci ha consegnato ‘le ner chena’ puo essere il dialogo. Ma io direi una grande svolta sarebbe quella di creare condizioni di collaborazione intensa fra i grandi musei e i piccoli musei. Cioe’ creare strumenti perche il senatore⁶¹³ accanto al grande museo del luogo possa essere consapevole territorio ci sono delle piccole realta’ che pero’ sono un’esplosione di bellezza, un’esplosione di racconti.”⁶¹⁴

The MSDL Curator maintained that museums like his can leave both a positive or a negative impact on the represented community. Among the positive impacts he mentioned that the museum

“permite salvaguardar, a través de la conservación de colecciones y objetos, unos valores comunes de Mallorca que están desapareciendo de forma acelerada, debido a los cambios acelerados causados por el turismo de masas y la globalización.”⁶¹⁵

Among the negative impacts the MSDL Curator visualises a

⁶¹³ Treccani, Dizionario, Senatore is referred to figuratively as the representative of the people.

⁶¹⁴ Translation: Of course, inevitably. But here I would refer to an important work by the writer Bufalino and who wrote a work *Museo d’ombra* [1982]. When he wrote this work he said and complained, a work that was written around the seventies, eighties, of the last century and said "How come the museums of the north, the great churches of the north, and the architecture of the north have an enormous visibility, and in the history of art in teaching in schools and does this not happen for all that concerns the popular good? That is commonly the lesser good because in the classification, therefore small museum, and the small church, the small palace. " And he complained that these beams of light did not reach these places. And momentarily he said "What is the difference between the Southeast stonemason who built these very thick buildings, of great significance for the Renaissance architect who built the largest and most beautiful buildings in Florence?" And she suffered enormously from her suffering even if it was delayed and was healed by history. Today these beams of light make sure that these museums are not now 'shadow museums', but they are museums with remarkable light, I would probably say prevailing compared to Renaissance architecture or the great museum let's say that history has given us' the dark scenario of what can be dialogue. But I would say a major turning point would be to create conditions of intense collaboration between large museums and small museums. That is, to create tools so that the senator next to the large local museum can be aware of the territory, there are small realities which, however, are an explosion of beauty, an explosion of stories.

⁶¹⁵ Translation: allows to safeguard, through the conservation of collections and objects, common values of Mallorca that are disappearing rapidly, due to the accelerated changes caused by mass tourism and globalisation.

“visión congelada o estática en tiempos pasados de nuestra identidad como mallorquines.” [frozen or static vision in past times of our identity as Mallorcans].

The MUSB Curator maintained that the practices of similar museums did not force national or institutional museums to open to small non-national communities. The major difference envisaged between museums similar to the MUSB and national/institutional museums is that such the smaller museums ‘need to make profit’ in order to survive and to sustain their activity.

The BMWS Curator maintained that

“The museum benefits the community in many different ways. Locally and regionally, there are social and economic benefits that can be measured by the raised awareness of the importance of preserving the cultural heritage, and the number of newly built/reconstructed/repared wooden boats is raising constantly bringing more work for local artisans, craftsmen, souvenir makers, local restaurants and coffee shops. The tourist board reports the increased number of arrivals on the island every year. One of our own goals was to motivate group visits to the museum and the village as a whole, so now we have some completely new initiatives on touristic offer. Cultural heritage is being revalued, recognition of the island has been upgraded which leads to the entire region becoming viewed as new attraction and tourist destination.”

The BMWS said that the presence of such museums could bring social, economic and cultural benefits to the community and the place where the museum is located. They could also increase tourism and the value of the place, culturally and economically.

Impact on community and other museums

When asked about the impact that such grassroots micromuseums have on their community and other museums, the TMWB Curator said that they (the museums)

Iħallu tajjeb ħafna mhux ftit. L-ewwel nett il-ġħaliex inti huwa patrimonju. It-tieni nett qieġħed terġħa’ tqajjem komunita’ li lllum m’ġħadhiex teħisti u kemm il-partijiet ta’ dik il-komunita’. ... Jiena nqis dana il-muħzew bħħala memorja ta’ kemm baġħtew missirijietna biex ġħajjxuna.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁶ Translation: They have a reasonable positive impact on the community. Primarily because it is heritage. Secondly because they can revive a community which is nowadays extinct and the descendants of that community. ... I consider this as a memory of our forefathers who suffered a lot to earn us a living.

The RMMT Curator maintained that grassroots micro museums have a positive effect on the community. He said that although he and the volunteers complain about the poor response of the villagers, the same poor response is met by other groups and clubs at the village. However the ŻBSM Curators showed doubt on whether such positive effects were acknowledged by the community. The Curators said that although they wished to benefit the community with the museum's presence, such benefits do not depend totally on the museum or its volunteers. The ŻBSM Curators argued that artifacts on exhibit, such as the megaliths displayed at the National Museum of Archaeology, cannot change the mentality of the people.

Speaking about Gozo, the OPRM and GCHH Curator, said that private micro museums are few in Gozo and they mainly focus on folklore, crafts or ethnography, such as the Toy Museum at Xaghra, the Maritime Museum at Nadur, two parish museums at St. George's Basilica, Rabat, and the Għarb parish church and the Cathedral Museum at the Citadel. According to the Curator these micro museums had minimal impact on State-museums. The Curator argued that the low number of visitors felt by the State micro museums is not an effect of the private and independent micro museums as the latter also have a low number of visits. He maintained that there is no place for competition between the non-State micro museums and State museums as the former offer different collections and specialised thematic collections. The OPRM and GCHH Curator maintained that people visit a museum because they want to see and experience something particular which they know they can only find in particular museum: not for any other reason. Visits are therefore a matter of choice mainly based on personal interest and selection. In agreement, the XRWM Curator maintained that "Whenever something is unique it leaves an impact."

As an example, he mentioned how the XRWM set the way for the TKWM project in Gozo. The XRWM Curator maintained that

"... dawn il-mużewijiet li huma indipendenti bħala dħul finanzjarju peress li huwa batut ma jistgħux jimirfu kemm iridu u kif iridu. Għax normalment anka bħal permessi w kollox dejjem ikaxkru (*drag*) biex iġibu u ma jkunux jafu minn fejn iġibu ċertu fondi għax dawn japplikaw through il-Kunsill. Meta jridu xi fondi ikunu gruppi ta' nies per se u ffukati fuq dawn il-financial aids."⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁷ Translation: "...these museums which are independent and have a low financial income, cannot venture as much as they want. Normally even for permits and anything else they drag and might not

The XRWM Curator added that the national agency has a specific section dedicated solely to identify, apply and access EU funds opportunities. This is an advantage which the national agency has on private and independent micro museums. A recommendation which emerges from this scenario is again that: The national agency since it is paid from the people's taxes shall support the non-State-owned micromuseums who are more engaged with the local communities as their founders and volunteers are also and equally tax-payers. It shall therefore be either the national agency's responsibility to find such support for these micromuseums or else a policy of central government to help them as much as possible external to the national agency's roles and responsibilities since these are contributing where the national agency and central authorities are not.

The XRWM Curator was more selective when asked whether he believed that their museum has impacted on the community. He said that it depends on which group of people as he perceived no strong interest from either the Local Council or the residents of the surrounding villages. According to the Curator people tend to be proud of heritage at their locality but they scarcely take a further step to, for example, promote it with their relatives, friends or foreign tourists who they come across. He said that the curators engaged by the Local Council take initiatives to organise events. The community however does not believe that the Local Council has interest to promote the windmill. The Local Council trusts the engaged curators to take initiatives, but the Local Council indirectly does not organise activities, initiatives, or promote the windmill and its museum on an international scale.

“Sinċerament ngħidlek skond fuq liema grupp ta' nies. Meta qegħdin ngħidu aħna nteress min-naħa tal-Kunsill Lokali, in-naħa tal-komunita' ma tgħidx illi l-Kunsill Lokali jinteressah *to promote the windmill*. Li jħalli f'idejn il-Kuratur u l-Kuratur forsi joħloq ċertu inizjattivi w idejat biex imexxi. Imma indirettament min-naħa ta' Kunsill Lokali m'hemmx ċertu attivitajiet, inizjattivi, promotions, on international scales biex jippromwovi kemm jista' jkun dal-prodott barra minn Malta. U anka l-lokal stess jgħidu iva aħna għandna x-Xarolla, ix-Xarolla hija tagħna, imma s'hemmhekk biss. Imma per eżempju ma ntefgħux iġibu qraba, kuġini, zijiet biex jaraw dil-Miṭħna.”⁶¹⁸

know from where to bring certain funds as they – in the case of the XRWM – apply through the local council. When they (the national agency) require funds they have groups of people who focus on acquiring such financial aids.”

⁶¹⁸ Translation: Sincerely it depends on which group of people. When mentioning interest by the Local Council, the community does not believe that the Local Council is interested to promote the windmill.

The NDMM Curators maintained that the impact of the museum was more on foreigners, on tourists and a few Maltese who visit Gozo, than with the Nadur community. They said that the museum should reach out to the younger generations in order to increase awareness and participation from the local community. The Curators were glad that the Maltese who visited other maritime museums on the Maltese Islands commented positively about the NDMM. In Malta there are two other maritime museums: the national Maritime Museum at Vittoriosa and the independent micromuseum called the Wickman Maritime Collection at Xgħajra. The latter is very similar to the Kelinu Grima collection (now the NDMM), as it is a lifetime collection. It is curated by the same person who started it and which is only open by appointment.

The MSDL Curator claimed that it is a “mayor difusión entre la población mallorquina” [major diffusion among the Mallorcan population] that can help the museum bring changes within the community.

The MCIV Curator maintained that the State should help such museums.

“Ma questi tipi di musei a me non interessa il posto. A me m’interessa proprio organizzarci meglio. Io parlo del mio museo, delle altre non lo so. Come vengono gestiti. Ma del mio che ancora e’ ne abusivo sulle mie spalle fin ad oggi, cinquant’anni ha, ancora e’ sulle spalle della mia famiglia quindi se la Regione [...], non dico che ce ha promesso, pero ha visto se dice si deve sapere organizzare questo museo e quindi ci vuole d’ogni sorta nsomma va...”⁶¹⁹

Like the NDMM Curators, the MCIV Curator made it clear that he does not expect any financial help, but other forms of support.

“Ga me che carico sorte. Che ca di bonu sorte. Ca io, cioe a me io non l’ho fatto per guadagnare, l’ho fatto per la mia, per amore della mia Sicilia, dell’arte che c’abbiamo in Sicilia, un’arte del carretto, del pittore, del ferro battuto arabisco. Abbiamo artigijan abbiamo tutto. Artigiani meravigliosi che ci hanno lasciato tante bei ricordi e tante testimonianze, perche ogni carretto dimostra e testimonia l’artigiano bravo di quei tempi. A questo proposito, io ho dedicato un libro duecento

It leaves all to the curators to organise certain initiatives and forward ideas. Indirectly the Local Council does not organise certain initiatives, promotions, on an international scale to promote as much as possible the product abroad. Even the locals say that “yes we have the Xarolla, the Xarolla is ours” but they stop there. They do not, for example, try to bring their relatives, cousins, aunts and uncles, to see the Windmill.

⁶¹⁹ Translation: But these types of museums, they don't interest me, as venue. I am interested in organizing ourselves better. I talk about my museum, I don't know about the others. How they are managed. But mine which is still abusive on my shoulders to date, fifty years old, is still on the shoulders of my family (8:22) so if the Region [...], I don't say that he promised us, but he has seen that if you know how to organize this museum and therefore if it takes all sorts of things, it goes ...

cinquanta foglie di ‘*Il Canto del Carretto.*’ Il carretto un tempo era la colonna di sostegno per il popolo Siciliano. L’armonia di ogni bottega, mastricarzone tutti ‘n coro con gl’atrezzi che [c]anto un’eco musicale: un vero concerto da maestri da lavoro. Svegliando il paese dopo vere cantato il gallo con il tintinnio del incudin’ e martello. A poche passe una bottega all’altra muri imprattati di vernice e un paladino disegnato di gesso e carbone testimoniava come insegna la bottega del decoratore. A poti u puter u carrettu. Entriamo nella bottega dell’artigiano del ferro battuto. L’artigiano con la forgia roventava il ferro co l’incudin’ e martello, modellava fiori, uccelli, personaggi storici, biblici, leggendare, mitologiche, segna zodiacale. L’uomo ricalcava la vita fatta di vite e di leggende dal sacro al profano e la riproponeva nei suo mestiere, facendo leggere a chi e’ analfabeta. Il carretto e’ testimone quanto l’uomo aveva la forze e le mani per forgiare tutti i suoi utensile. Anche le tenaglie si forgiava con le mani. Ci cannu su uecce che fai il le coca e sparava. Quindi quest’ e’ ‘l carretto. E’ l’anima che incorpora tutti i simboli che appartengono all’umanita’.’⁶²⁰

The MCIV Curator, who established his museum as a passion towards something he loved and admired, seeks support which can make his collection survive for future generations. It is not the personal income or profit that matters with such independent museum curators, but the assurance that such heritage is passed on to posterity. This is not yet acknowledged by the State or its representatives. The laws and regulatory frameworks drawn do not recognise the efforts done by curators of independent museums, their families and all those involved in keeping alive such museums. Treating such independent museums as any other VO, NGO, foundation, as a *for-profit*, or similar legal forms, is totally mistaken and illogical. As the MCIV Curator pointed out the situation of independent museums is a burden as they have no favourable options available. Staying out of the existing legal and regulatory frameworks of a country or joining under one of them is both burdensome and consequently suicidal. A solution to this could be if Mediterranean museums were to

⁶²⁰ Translation: "Yeah, I load fate. What a good luck. That I, that is, I did not do it to earn, I did it for my sake, for the sake of my Sicily, of the art we have in Sicily, an art of the cart, of the painter, of the *arabisco* wrought iron. We have artisanship, we have everything. Wonderful craftsmen who have left us many good memories and many testimonies, because each cart demonstrates and testifies to the good craftsman of those times. In this regard, I have dedicated a book two hundred and fifty pages of '*Il Canto del Carretto*' [The Song of the Cart]. The cart was once the backbone of the Sicilian people. The harmony of each workshop, *masters of folk song* all in chorus with the tools that sing a musical echo: a true concert by working masters. Waking up the village after the rooster had sung with the tinkling of the anvil and hammer. A few steps from one shop to the other walls stained with paint and a paladin drawn in chalk and coal testified how the decorator's shop teaches. How to build a cart. We enter the shop of the wrought iron craftsman. With the forge, the craftsman burned iron with an anvil and hammer, modeled flowers, birds, historical, biblical, legendary, mythological characters, signs of the zodiac. The man traced the life made of lives and legends from the sacred to the profane and re-proposed it in his profession, making those who are illiterate read. The cart is a testimony to how much man had the strength and the hands to forge all his tools. Even the pincers were forged with your hands. There the iron rod was beaten till you made it red hot and it sparked. So this is the cart. It is the soul that incorporates all the symbols that belong to humanity."

unite, discuss and propose a system which would help independent museums to survive and to sustain themselves without the burdens and obstacles faced at present. A helpful source of inspiration and guidance could be the practices of other countries around the globe, where independent museums, as cultural initiatives, could flourish and grow with more freedom and much less legal, regulatory and financial burdens. According to the MUSB Curator the most helpful thing which could help the museum bring changes within the community are donations.

While the study agrees with Livingstone that “Private museums do not operate as public ones do”, the findings contradict Livingstones’ conclusion that “their primary duty is to produce profit for shareholders and not the public good.”⁶²¹

Impacts and challenges of double insularity : Gozo

As the Gozo island museums were the unique museums situated on an island belonging to an island state, the research asked about the effects of double insularity on museums. The OPRM and GCHH Curator, Dr. George Azzopardi, said that double insularity presents both advantages and disadvantages. He explained that it stands to the curator to turn disadvantages into advantages. As a principal matter he mentions the personal attitude towards the posting of a curator at a museum. Since State-owned museums are assigned curators according to the exigencies of the service, a curator might end up at a museum which has few things to attract visitors or even interest. The Curator maintained that an important factor is not whether as a Curator you would like the place or not. He maintained that if as Curator one takes a positive stance and attitude, irrelevant of advantages or disadvantages, one could do and achieve a great deal with any museum, even if it is a micro museum as the OPRM or as the GCHH. He argued that if a Curator recedes and limits him/herself into the disadvantages of the museum walls, then he/she would certainly be at a disadvantage; no matter what the size of the museum or its location are. The Curator maintains that a curator should go out of the museum he/she curates and discover what is happening at other museums. Advantages on the other hand might be seen irrelevant of the size of the museum, or whether it is in a small or a large country, said the Curator. If a Curator opens up and keeps abreast with new ideas and trends in museology and museums around the world,

⁶²¹ Livingstone, 2011: 21.

the Curator could consequently perceive advantages even by participating at networks of curators. The Curator said that the balance between disadvantages and advantages is tilted by the Curator's own attitude to the work he/she is entrusted by the national agency (in the case of State-owned museums).

“Jekk inti tingħalaq biss f’dan il-mużew u qisu d-dinja tiegħek hi hawnhekk biss, allura hemmhekk ngħidlek iva ħa jkun żvantaġġ, imma dak wara kolloxx seta’ ma kienx mużew kbir, seta’ kien mużew kbir u seta’ kien mużew kbir ġo l-ikbar belt. Jekk inti dak ikun id-dinja ristretta tiegħek, allura ħa jkun ta’ żvantaġġ. Mill-banda l-oħra, indipendentement minn jekk hux kbir jew żgħir, indipendentement minn jekk hux f’pajjiż żgħir jew f’pajjiż kbir, jekk inti ma tingħalaqx ġo fih imma tinfetaħ anki għal ċerti kurrenti li qegħdin isiru anke barra min pajjiżna, fejn tidhol dik li hija mużeoloġija, għalhekk per eżempju l-importanza li wieħed iżomm ruħu aġġornat. Jekk wieħed imbagħad ma jingħlaqx imma jinfetaħ, w iżomm lilu nnifsu integrat ġo network ta’ *curatorship* anki ta’ mużewijiet oħra u dan, hemmhekk umbagħad ħa ngħiduha kif inhi il-post jagħlqek jekk thallieh jagħlqek. U jekk inti trid tinfetaħ mhux se jzommok mili tinfetaħ. Jien il-vantaġġ jew l-iżvantaġġ ma naraħx fil-post innifsu, jiddependi mill-approach li tiegħu l-persuna [il-kuratur].”⁶²²

With such an argument, the OPRM and GCHH Curator said that the success or failure of a curator depends on his/her own approach and attitude to the role at any museum they are entrusted with. Other factors identified as significant to one's success or failure as curator is the aptitude and openness of a curator to learn more from the practices and experiences of other museums around the world. Networking and participating with other curators, particularly on curatorship matters is important. By communicating with other curators and museums, curators could present and share experiences, knowledge, innovations and are developments and scholarly studies of museology and curatorial practices from around the world.

Inclusivity and Disability

The HMCC, FMAA, MSDL and ŽBSM Curators informed us that their

⁶²² Translation: If you were to restrict yourself to this museum as if this were your only existence, then yes, I could say that it will be a disadvantage, but that could happen in any other large museum, or a museum in the largest city. If that is going to be your restricted world, then it will be a disadvantage. On the other hand, independently from whether it is large or small, independently from its being a small country or a large country, if you do not lock yourself in it, but open to certain trends occurring also abroad, where it applies to museology, then, for example, it is important that one should keep himself updated. If one opens rather than closes and keeps himself within a network of let's say curatorship, even with other museums, then one will lock himself as much as he would choose to do so or afford such a museum to shut him in that alone. And, if one wishes to open up none will keep him away from doing so. I do not see that the advantage or the disadvantage is in the place itself, but in the approach that a person [the curator] takes.

museums offer facilities for disabled persons such as *ramps, lifts, etc.* The HMCC Curator said that they were soon introducing information in Braille for blind persons next to exhibits. The absence of such means for blind persons was common among the Maltese micro museums. It was only the RMMT Curator who showed a desire to introduce something to help visitors with impaired vision. The RMMT Curator said that although their micro museum does not offer Braille facilities, the museum helped in fund raising for such persons and who happened to visit the museum. The XRWM Curator informed us that the windmill presents problems of accessibility. Disabled persons cannot ascend the tower of the windmill as the spiral staircase is very narrow and already difficult to climb for visitors without disabilities. Currently, the XRWM does not even provide for deaf and blind persons. A group of visually impaired persons have visited the TMWB some days before the interview, and in addition to the narrative the Curator gave them the opportunity to touch and handle objects on exhibit. The OPRM and GCHH Curator informed us that the two State micro museums under his responsibility do not offer information in Braille, and accessibility through the two museums was not possible as the venues are centuries-old houses and protected as scheduled properties. These limitations are common to museums housed in old buildings: however it does not prevent curators from being innovative and creative to reach persons with different disabilities.

Inclusion: Languages for foreign visitors and facilities for senior citizens.

The TMWB Curator informed us that in his own capacity he can only offer three languages to the visitor: Maltese, English and Italian. The TMWB Curator said that the museum is also visited by many senior citizens who come in groups on outings organised by their respective Local Council. The ŽBSM Curator explained that the museum does not provide interactive tools, but they have a returnable printed guide if the visitor is interested to follow it. However, the ŽBSM Curator or his Assistant said that whenever visitors show interest, they will tour-guide themselves. They maintained that a tour of the museum would always take more than one and a half hours. They said that at present they provided tour-guiding in Maltese and English, but there are also efforts to complete a tour in German by September 2019, followed by a Bulgarian and a Romanian narrative prepared by volunteers (who were once visitors and who

are) now resident at Żabbar. This shows that Curators at private and independent micro museums do not rely on a central service provider or a parent sponsor, but on the abilities and knowhow of volunteers, family members and sometimes visitors who are eager to help. This shows that curators build resources by establishing contacts and network with people who could support the museum when required. Although these might not be financial aids, these are contributions which would have costed much more to the museum and which would have never been realised. Such contributions as the translations or narratives mentioned by the ŻBSM Curators are a form of visitor and community participation in the interpretive process of a museum, its exhibits and its community.

As for other equipment and tools which the museums offer to visitors, the Curators of the HMCC, the FMAA, and the AFCS said that they have multilingual guides in addition to the printed narratives and informative panels at the museum. The MSDL and the BMWS Curators informed us that the museum offers its visitors the facilities of a multilingual guide in addition to the printed information at the museum. The BMWS Curator informed us that in addition to the printed material the museum offers visitors “an interactive guide/WIX/Digital guide in different languages” which could be followed on the visitor’s own mobile devices.

Appendix VI: Recommendations applicable individually and /or collectively to observed participant micromuseums.

Introduction

The following are a few recommendations which emerge from the study. *Generic recommendations* call for attention and further research. Despite being common to more than one micromuseum, these call for specific actions to be considered and achieved. These may require further research and actions regarding practices, policies, theories and other spheres which impact museums especially micromuseums. The impacts of Maltese laws and regulatory frameworks on such private and independent grassroots micromuseums is an issue which must be prioritized as the current burdens carried by such museums can force such initiatives to close permanently, reduce their opening hours and wipe off all the opportunities of pedagogy, self-esteem, awareness, care, volunteering, employment and benefits which such museums can bring to society, to individual communities, to the lower classes and to the economy of the place and island/country where they are situated. *Individualized recommendations* are addressed to specific micromuseums in the study. Although these may appear museum specific, they may be applicable to other or similar museums elsewhere. However, the author acknowledges that in any case the recommendation/s may demand more in depth analysis or studies on the specific museum so that the necessary steps for improvement can be designed, planned and successfully implemented. These research implications propose a way forward and how such actions may serve for improving practices, policies, theory and further research in the relative area or museum. These implications were drawn from an analysis of the findings and are basically considered as possible and practical solutions to the museum in question. However, it is also acknowledged that there may be unforeseen limitations which may hinder the recommendations from being implemented or be implemented in the suggested manner. Overall, the objective of these recommendations is to instigate further discussion and action to enhance the appeal of the micromuseums under study and to help such museums improve their contribution to the communities they represent or where they are situated.

Generic Recommendations

1. **Statement:** Although some collections displayed at grassroots micromuseums may also be found in museums outside the Maltese territory, no similar State museum on the whole archipelago can be matched or contended.

Issue: All the heritage and efforts behind grassroots micromuseum collections may no longer be appreciated or may even be lost forever if such collections end up in the wrong hands or are not in the right ambience.

Recommendation (01): The current issues faced by grassroots micromuseums of any size and type demand changes which shall view such museums through a new perspective and a more favourable context, not necessarily legal and regulatory alone, but also in other factors which can help grassroots micromuseums on the Maltese Islands and elsewhere to benefit communities and the economy of the place where they are situated.⁶²³

2. **Statement:** By starting at the bottom irrespective of one's own qualifications, even in a museum environment, curators and museum staff at grassroots micromuseums maintain that they learnt a lot however they complain that they rarely or never have access or opportunities for further learning on museum related themes and practices.

Issue: The grassroots museum curator is at a disadvantage as resources or those responsible or owners of the museum, collection or venue rarely offer them the opportunity to enhance their knowledge about matters related to museums, care of collections and other relevant training. These deficiencies keep them and their communities backward as they cannot offer what they wish to.

Recommendation (02): It is suggested that grassroots micromuseum curators and their supportive staff, whether volunteers or not, shall be supported to engage in further education, continuing professional development, knowledge-sharing activities and events concerning museums and museum practices to enhance their knowledge, to share experiences and help them perform better for the welfare of their communities and society.

⁶²³ Hagedorn-Saupe and Ermert, 2007: 13, 42, 61, 64, 69, 73-75, 79, 104 and 108.

Recommendation (03): Curators of whatever type of museum shall never restrict themselves to the museums which they curate. Although resources and time may be a hindrance, curators shall also be visitors at other museums and participants at other museum related activities around the world.

3. **Statement:** It was stated that State museums are in competition with non-State museums such as grassroots micromuseums. As a consequence grassroots micromuseum curators also complained that their museums are not promote alongside the State museums or at least at the end of the list.

Issue: The lack of collaboration, cooperation and mutual support leads to situations which may put certain museums, such as grassroots museums, at a disadvantage even if their museums and collections are unique. They risk becoming unsustainable and could close permanently or reduce drastically their opening schedules, and consequently impact negatively on the represented community, the community where they are located and the economy of the place.

Recommendation (04): State and grassroots micromuseums State and non-State museums must collaborate not compete.

Recommendation (05): Since grassroots micromuseums, their owners, curators and staff, paid or volunteers, contribute to the State in various ways, such as financially through taxes and regulatory measures, philanthropically by helping communities to improve and develop, socially as they foster good relationships among communities and community members, pedagogy as they educate and provide educational material to all visitors and economically as they attract visitors and tourists to the locality, local and central authorities shall give something back in return by at least promoting the museums alongside and equally with other museums and attractions.

Recommendation (06): It is therefore recommended that local authorities shall keep close contact with curators, museum staff, historians and experts in their locality, as these are irreplaceable sources of knowledge about the environs and have strong contacts with the community not just locally but also on a wider scale. They can suggest ways and means to improve displays at other museums, to safeguard local cultural heritage for the welfare of the community and to boost the local economy.

Recommendation (07): Such curators and/or knowledgeable museum staff can be consulted by central and local government authorities such as those in charge of projects, heritage, culture, tourism, the environment and education. The input of such persons can save local and central government authorities revenue and taking undesired risks, avoid taking wrong decisions which cause negative effects on communities and on their unique cultural heritage.

Recommendation (08): Authorities shall take heed of curators of both State and grassroots micromuseums who speak out their concerns or become vociferous about threats to cultural heritage of communities. and concerns.

Recommendation (09): Since the destruction of cultural heritage is disrespectful to both community, country and humanity, central authorities shall enforce the laws when local and/or central authorities consent to destroy local or community heritage with the excuse of progress, development, the economy or other justifications.

Recommendation (10): Curators of State and grassroots micromuseums shall become vociferous in debates and issues concerning the benefit of the community which they represent and/or where the museum is located. They shall side with the community in such circumstances, and not seek to satisfy the interests of those in power.

4. **Statement:** The MCIV Curator stated that it is only now that he started documenting what he earlier held in his mind due to the lack of resources and as he did not find time and resources to do so. As the MCDF Curator remarks ‘culture belongs to everyone without distinction’ and it is the responsibility of all to ensure that heritage, tangible or intangible, is not lost and recorded for posterity.

Issue: This dearth calls upon all cultural heritage authorities (local, national or for example EU) to consider the risks attached to such a scenario where most of such museum collections and cultural heritage are not even on an inventory. Curators of grassroots micromuseums call for help not only in Sicily but wherever they exist. Many of such collections and cultural heritage may deteriorate and be lost completely since most grassroots micromuseums do not own or find resources to conserve or restore their collections.

Recommendation (11): Authorities responsible for cultural heritage shall help grassroots micromuseums to document their possessions and hold an updated and detailed inventory of such heritage. This can be achieved through for example EU funds which grassroots micromuseum may access through the national agency.

5. **Statement:** Most collections displayed at grassroots micromuseums are objects which do not qualify for display at State-owned museums.⁶²⁴

Issue: The major issue is what will happen of such museum collections once their curators cannot take care of them any longer or die. It is not guaranteed that descendant will be interested to curate and continue with the museum.

Recommendation (12): It is not recommended that collections of grassroots micromuseums end up in the ownership of the State. Instead, grassroots micromuseums shall be helped to survive and to find ways to sustain themselves. The introduction of favourable conditions which support the interested descendants to continue to curate the museum and maintain the collection in good condition and to open it to the public is the best way for a way forward.

Recommendation (13): This can be facilitated if all micromuseums, State, institutional, private and independent grassroots micromuseums come together and in collaboration with the national agency and other cultural heritage authorities draw and propose amendments to existing laws and regulations.

6. **Statement:** The collections at independent grassroots micromuseums, require urgent attention, maintenance and conservation interventions.

Issue: Such collections may suffer irreversible damages and consequences since curators do not have the necessary resources to maintain and sustain their collections on their own. It is also acknowledged that cultural heritage belongs to all and once these collections or their objects are lost it is the whole

⁶²⁴ O'Hare, Michael. Museums can change – Will They?, Democracy, A Journal of Ideas, Spring 2015, No. 36. <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/36/museums-can-changewill-they/> .

of humanity that loses them not the curator or the independent museum that curates and exhibits them.

Recommendation (14): Local, national, and regional authorities responsible for cultural heritage shall seek ways and means to get funding from national or for example EU funds to help such independent micromuseums to maintain, restore and conserve their collections. This can be one of the best ways to compensate such grassroots initiatives and the efforts and sacrifices made by those who established and curate them all year long.

7. **Statement:** It is known that when artefacts find their way to national museums, they either end up in dark-storage or else are exhibited out of context with few or no acknowledgement of the community/communities which owned such artefacts.

Issue: Such objects, as for example shards and other small archaeological artefacts, are forgotten in storage places as they are considered not of importance or not displayable at the national or institutional large museums. They are kept away from public display and communities are not aware of such heritage recovered from their locality or its surroundings.

Recommendation (15): It is recommended that State or institutional museums displaying objects out of context shall acknowledge the community/ies from where such artefacts were recovered.

Recommendation (16): State and institutional museums which opt not to exhibit such objects in their own museums, shall negotiate and possibly allow the display of such artefacts at grassroots micromuseums within the same community/communities who were formerly deprived of such exhibits and own cultural heritage.

Recommendation (17): In the case of art, State and institutional museums, displaying art objects such as paintings, recovered from communities and displayed out of context, shall discuss and provide a digital copy of the art work to be displayed at the grassroots micromuseums situated within the community from where it was recovered or taken away.

8. **Statement:** Curators at times distinguish between the cultured and the *uncultured*, while other curators give importance to the knowledge and

information which comes along with the assumed uncultured. Being uncultured on the other hand, does not make people void of resources for the museum. Findings and experience show that people and visitors who declare themselves as persons with no or few schooling can be very knowledgeable about many things which curators, museum staff and academics are not even aware or knowledgeable of despite the education received and accumulated through time. Since museums are held as keepers of knowledge accumulated from its represented community, visitors, staff and the non-visiting community, their curators shall become visitors, listeners, learners and recorders of histories and knowledge. Such knowledge makes them indispensable as they and their museums become means of knowledge transfer from the community to the public.

Issue: Oral lore, personal experiences and personal capabilities and skills as those connected to crafts, may be soon lost forever if no one takes the initiative to record them.

Recommendation (18): Such grassroots micromuseums shall be helped to organise themselves and collect as much as possible oral history and knowledge from different community/ies for posterity. These can be audio recorded, audio-visually recorded, transcribed and archived so that they can be shared with other museums and archives, and made accessible to universities or other educational institutions, to researchers and those interested in enhancing their knowledge about the community in the past.

9. **Statement:** The ŻBSM Curator, for example, informs that they adopted English as the printed informative and narrative language at their museum. This presents a problem with those Maltese who are illiterate or lack a good understanding of English. The use of the Maltese language or the native language and vernacular vocabulary of the place where a micromuseum is situated, facilitates the pedagogic aspect of a museum with the community and simultaneously helps to keep the local vernacular alive.

Issue: Communication between museum and visitor or the community is fundamental for the success of the museum and its objectives, especially pedagogic objectives.

Recommendation (19): Curators shall seek ways and means and/or be helped to at least provide basic information and narratives in their own vernacular using also community specific vernacular, even if at times considered as dialect. Presented together with another preferred foreign or official language such a practice can help maintain the local vernacular alive.

10. **Statement:** The matter of signage was raised by many Maltese micromuseums, State-owned, private and independent.

Issue: The lack of signage is a matter which can have negative impacts on museums such as a lesser flow of visitors and consequently lack of revenue to maintain and sustain the museum and its activities. However, the posting of such signage on the Maltese Islands is today dependent on different stakeholders. It does not depend solely from the museum's staff and the national agency (Heritage Malta), but also on external entities such as transport authorities, local government, the Planning Authority which demands various permits, and which all in all will take ages to achieve and a lot of effort and money. While the national agency has potential to lobby and get what it wants, it is by far more difficult to get if the request is made by a private or an independent grassroots micromuseums who rarely have anyone to lobby for them: and thus leaves them in a discriminatory situation which could have further negative effect on the sustainability and survival of the museum, and other impacts on the surrounding community and economic activity of the place.

Recommendation (20): The national agency shall in collaboration with all interested non-State micromuseums design and propose regulations which demand that local authorities shall provide standardised signs indicating museums and cultural heritage found in the territory. These shall together enable the visitor to follow a kind of heritage trail through the locality. However, laws or regulation shall include measures to enable redress from museums which are discriminated due to political sidings or voicing community concerns.

11. **Statement:** Grassroots micromuseums are limited in their resources and their curators shall frequently shelve or forget about their planned projects.

Issue: The limitations cause micromuseums to restrict their museum related necessities, pedagogic or socio-cultural activities and much more with which to help the community.

Recommendation (21): A recommendation that emerges from the participant micromuseums is that curators shall look beyond the structure of their museum. The context of a museum can many times compensate to the displays and the venue and enhance the visitor's experience of the place. Such factors may be identified by the observation of visitor reactions through those places and spaces indoors and outdoors of a museum which for the curator or staff are considered as insignificant and ordinary. For example, it is not commonplace for all to be on a balcony, a terrace or a roof and see the street, the square below, or the sea in the distance, countryside or hills, the natural or the urban surrounding landscape. These are features and assets of a museum which can be overlooked by the curator and staff who work at the museum day after day. These are features which many times are not utilized or considered worthy of producing positive emotions or which could enhance the visitor's experience of place. Consequently, such factors may attract more visitors as people narrate their experiences to others.

12. **Statement:** All curators said "We are Mediterraneans" in some way and that the Mediterranean was an important factor for the community in history.

Issue: The curators admitted that the Mediterranean element and perspective is missing at their museums.

Recommendation (22): Depending on the theme and community/ies presented and interpreted, it is recommended that curators shall include the roles, significance and connections which the Mediterranean and its context had for their community/ies and theme in history: as this will help visitors recall the historical imaginary today..

13. **Statement:** Some micromuseums have no spaces which the public can use.

Issue: Micromuseums, especially private and independent, inclusive of some State micromuseums, find it hard to offer space for public or community uses

or to organize activities which may connect them to the community or render them some revenue.

Recommendation (23): Micromuseums and other museums shall collaborate and support each other by offering space and facilities for activities of micromuseums which do not have space or facilities at their own museums. Such collaboration shall be practiced mostly with activities intended to help and benefit the community. Meanwhile activities intended to raise funds or revenue may be negotiated between the two museums.

14. **Statement:** Some micromuseums due to their size and lack of space provide no route which visitors may follow in the museum and the lack of information makes it even more difficult to connect and understand.

Issue: The messages behind a micromuseum, its exhibits and displays may not be easily followed and understood and visitors may become distracted and critical of the museum if not aided by the Curator or someone knowledgeable of the museum, its content and context (ex. architectural features and spaces, exhibits, objects on display, narratives and more). This may ward off prospective or return visitors as they become aware of other visitors' experiences at the museum.

Recommendation (24): Museums are encouraged to provide a route and staff (if available) or basic information to assist visitors in their museum experience. This may help increase return and new visitors to the museum.

15. **Statement:** Exhibits are haphazard and the museum may be more assimilated to an antiques shop than a museum.

Issue: It is not presented in an organised way and most of the exhibits are haphazard and nothing explains their former use. Interpretation panels and information labels are mostly missing or in a very bad state. There is nothing to explain the displayed. It is only when the curator or staff, when possible, that leads the visitor or tours through the museum that understanding is possible.

Recommendation (25): The exhibits and displays can be better presented and better organised through the existing museum spaces. They can be grouped according to theme and leave spaces enough for visitor use and

reflection. However there is no need to exhibit all the items at once at a museum. Displays may be changed from time to time and organised by themes or other factors. However some basic information about the displayed is always recommended.

Recommendation (26): The provision of basic signage which a visitor can follow through the museum and its exhibits facilitates the visit and may allow the visitor to gain an experience even in the absence of the Curator or a guiding knowledgeable person.

16. **Statement:** The fear of most curator is what will happen of the collection once they cannot carry out the maintenance and curatorial duties which they currently do. Some things may be sold, kept in storage or suffer some sort of deterioration due to lack of resources and continuous care.

Issue: Collections at some micromuseums may be lost forever if no intervention is made from the owners. Owners' limited resources may cripple the initiative and the enthusiasm of the curating persons. The Maltese Islands can rapidly lose much of these unique collections if such independent museums and they are not offered the support and aid required to keep their venues and collections open to the public. These independent and private initiatives have personally paid for the safeguard of cultural heritage which the State and the establishment had for long abandoned or relegated to invaluable objects.

Recommendation (27): National and regional authorities for cultural heritage shall the soonest possible take into consideration the current situation of the independent grassroots micromuseum. They must take action and propose changes to laws and regulatory frameworks, supportive and funding opportunities to ensure that such collections are neither deteriorated or worse lost.

Maltese laws and regulations concerning museums

17. **Statement:** Most curators argued that Maltese laws and the current regulatory frameworks burden most museums and cultural initiatives from the grassroots.

Issue: These burdens make matters difficult for the sustenance of such micromuseums. Besides their limited resources such burdens contribute to further limitations and burdens which handicap grassroots micromuseums from giving more to society. Micromuseums caught in the web of bureaucratic Maltese laws and regulatory burdens face problems which many times lead to a permanent closure or serious difficulties.

Recommendation (28): Small and micromuseums shall together with the micromuseums of the national agency demand a revisit of all Maltese laws and regulations concerning the identification of such micromuseums. They shall force changes which identify all museums as *non-profit cultural entities* irrespective of their past or current registration and classification.

Maltese laws shall at least distinguish between

- a. (a) independent non-profit museums (those created and sustained by individuals and families in their own property), and
- b. (b) private non-profit museums (such as NGOs and VOs) housed within, for example, government property or establishment venues.

As the national agency museums, they shall be acknowledged as non-profits and allowed to generate revenue for their sustenance, maintenance and administration costs. Small and micro museums which had earlier been registered under any type of *for-profit* activity shall no longer be allowed as commercial enterprises or public liability companies as their role in society is mainly cultural, pedagogic, social and beneficial for the economy around it. Consequently they shall be given the option to register under category (a) if independent or (b) if a private non-profit organisation or as a private non-profit entity (that is a museum, archive, library or art gallery) without compromising or undermining their financial activity for the sustenance of the same museum, archive, library or art gallery.

18. **Statement:** Several curators mentioned the lack of an associative formal or informal entity which represents such grassroots micromuseums.

Issue: Currently non-State micromuseums have no voice and that cannot bring about changes much desired by the museum world or which have already taken place elsewhere.

Recommendation (29): Small and micro museums created by individuals, family members or volunteer groups, including philanthropic groups shall

unite and create a common front to voice their concerns to local and national authorities.

MALTESE MUSEUMS

TMWB

1. **Statement:** The TMWB Curator complained about the difficulties met by the micromuseum to find funds for restoration and people who were interested to do the sanctioned restoration works.⁶²⁵ The museum had to join a VO and then succumb to a local authority to access funds, which consequently due to conditions imposed by EU funds had to surrender its museum function to an interpretation centre away from the original objective of the museum.

Issue: The longstanding expectancy of the museum for restoration and the way the museum had to surrender to the requisites and conditions of eligibility, application and accession for funds forced the micromuseum to change and lose its museum status, lose its independence and change its founding objectives.

Recommendation (30): National authorities shall seek ways to protect and support the existence of grassroots micromuseums and their founding objectives. This can be achieved if they recognise museums as grassroots initiatives, not as VOs or NGOs. Grassroots micromuseums shall enjoy the same benefits and status enjoyed by micromuseums of the national agency. They shall be helped to access funds, national or regional, without compromising their initiative and founding objectives as micromuseums.

2. **Statement:** The architectural development and view from the roof of the battery are two magnificent and unique features which were not well promoted or utilized by the Curator and those involved at the TMWB museum. It was observed that visitors who were guided through the architectural development of the construction and who visited the roof, stayed longer, showed more interest and showed more satisfaction on exiting the

⁶²⁵ Restoration started when this study was being concluded.

museum. This was observed even with occasional visitors whose interest did not include military or architectural interest.

Issue: Frequently, the Curator is alone and cannot assist or tour guide every visitor personally through the exhibits and the battery. Apart from the lack of signage which indicates a way through the displays and which briefly explains the battery's interior and exterior structures and development. Without the Curator's assistance or without personal initiative visitors may easily miss all the knowledge and experiences.

Recommendation (31): A basic route through the battery's architectural features may well contributed to the visitor's experience once the museum/site even if it will be converted into an interpretation centre. Although the present exhibits will no longer be present, the presentation of the site's architectural features and the view from the roof could boost attractiveness and provide a better experience of place.

3. **Statement:** The objects exhibited at the TMWB, which took years to collect from various families, will no longer be exhibited at the battery once it is changed into an interpretation centre. The Curator has no idea where the objects and displayed will end up once this takes place.

Issue: The fear of the Curator is that the objects and material displayed may end up somewhere which is unguarded and which cannot ensure the right environment for the unique objects. The collection may endure serious irreversible damages and losses. Another fear is that they may end somewhere out of the village.

Recommendation (32): The Curator, the VO and the Local Council shall discuss with central authorities to provide a safe and secure venue within the locality, preferably close to the battery, where the objects exhibited at the TMWB can once again be displayed for the public. The unbuilt land between the battery and the main road could also be a right spot for the development of such a project.

4. **Statement:** The Tunnara Museum is also known as and subtitled in the signage as the Westreme Battery.

Issue: Although the museum is mostly known as the Tunnara Museum, its military aspect is not exploited and many times it is forgotten.

Recommendation (33): The promotion of both the Tunnara practices and the military aspect of the museum, which will shortly function as an interpretation centre shall be an aspect which must be given promotion as it has the capacity to attract more interest. The museum and future interpretation centre shall have a generic name which includes both the tuna-catching practices and fishermen practices from the Mellieħa area and the military aspect of the battery during the different centuries. It shall be a focus point which combines the heritage of the area around the village: all of which are in walking distance. The TMWB, although destined to become as an interpretation centre, may serve as a reference or a point of departure for a heritage trail or a cultural tour of the different sites and historical heritage of the area. It can even become a minor tourist information point which will help the tourist and the adventurer walk around and enjoy heritage and natural landscapes. Certainly in the wake of all this, the threat of uncontrolled and undesired development can damage all the efforts of the TMWB to promote such cultural, historical and natural heritage.

XRWM

1. **Statement:** The Curator informed that the Local Councils showed interest, intervened, and took the initiative to discuss with the national agency and bring some artefacts to be displayed at the locality and for the local community to enjoy. Similarly, the Żurrieq Local Council managed to get pieces of pottery found at the Xarolla site from the stores of the national collection and display them at the windmill museum.

Issue: Small pieces of pottery and other items which may seem insignificant or not displayable to State museums are kept at stores and away from the public and the communities to which they belonged.

Recommendation (34): National agencies and national museums shall discuss with Curators of micromuseums situated at specific towns and villages to see whether it is possible to exhibit such finds at the located micromuseums. Curators of grassroots micromuseums and national museums may cooperate with the national agency to make them available for viewing

at the locality. The display of such artefacts at a local museum can raise more awareness and interest about the cultural heritage of a community.

Recommendation (35): Secondly, by making such artefacts visible and accessible, scholars can indulge into further studies without the complex and bureaucratic necessities required to retrieve artefacts from a national storage place. The display of artefacts facilitates further research and knowledge. The availability of artefacts may be a reason why some grassroots micromuseum curators and volunteers as those interviewed engage into scholarly research.

2. **Statement:** The XRWM Curator maintains that their museum cannot afford or offer spaces for group or community activities.

Issue: The lack of space at the windmill may cause the XRWM to lose opportunities which can help generate revenue, raise awareness and attract more participation from the local community.

Recommendation (36): Despite the lack of space indoors the XRWM can utilise its adjacent open-air spaces, especially during the summer season and weather permitting. It can also collaborate with the local parish church to utilise the adjacent chapel for other indoor activities not possible within the windmill spaces.

3. **Statement:** The Curator informed that annually the windmill is set with the canvas sails and let function for some time depending on the wind-force, so that the mechanism stays in good working condition. The Curator observes that the event is not made public and it can only be enjoyed by those who happen to be near or who happen to know about it.

Issue: The event can be a good source of revenue and for raising awareness and knowledge about the windmill and its museum.

Recommendation (37): Although this is not an event which can be planned much ahead, it can be an event that attracts public attention and an occasion to increase visitors a few times a year. Weather forecasts today are more accurate than in the past and such an event can be easily targeted for a few days during the year when the presence of the right wind is predictable on the Islands. Such an event can help promote the windmill museum and its

surrounding heritage with locals and tourists and can be a suitable event for fundraising and pedagogy.

4. **Statement:** The XRWM Curator informed that, since the present flow of tourists is mainly French, they have plans to introduce an audio-visual in the French language.

Issue: The concentration of an investment on one language because present or recent past activities showed a certain trend may not be the case for such an investment as it will be like putting all the eggs in one basket. The concentration of investment on one language may be too a high risk to the XRWM.

Recommendation (38): Since the windmill's mechanism and displays are fixed, a kind of webpage available in different languages might, apart from being environment friendly, be a better tool to reach and attract more visitors from different nationalities than just one. The Curators and the Local Council shall seek expert advice before reaching a final decision with those who are more in touch with the realities of the XRWM and those visitors who seek such museums and experiences.

RMMT

1. **Statement:** The venue and the exhibits relate much more to the locality, its local traditions, trades and crafts, and personalities more than to a national or a wider regional or Mediterranean audience.

Issue: Though some exhibits are equally known among other communities around the Islands, the Mediterranean and foreign visitors, it is not easy to understand the function of such exhibits if no explanation is provided.

Recommendation (39): The RMMT must invest in a simple printed, audio or visual tool which could help the visitor understand the objective of the museum, its exhibits and the venue in simple terms.

2. **Statement:** The support of museum staff is crucial for visitors as the former are the only medium which can provide an understanding of the place, its exhibits and its historic imaginary.

Issue: Visitors arriving at the RMMT may find it difficult to understand the place and the exhibits displayed at the museum and its other spaces. Although temporary exhibitions may be better understood, folklore museum and the permanent art exhibition may convey no meanings or imaginaries to the visitor who is not familiar with the objects and the personalities presented, not excluding the architecture and spaces of the venue.

Recommendation (40): The presence and availability of the Curator or a knowledgeable person is highly recommended in the absence of information labels or interpretive panels especially when visitors are alien to the place and the exhibits. Both audio and visual tools may help understand the objective of the museum, its exhibits and the place better, in the absence of knowledgeable museum staff.

NDMM

3. **Statement:** The NDMM is presented on the web under different names as the Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum, the Nadur Maritime Museum and the Maritime Museum.

Issue: The inconsistent presentation of the museum may be confusing and misleading to the prospective visitor. in its web-based.

Recommendation (41): The Curators must ensure that consistency is kept on all websites referring to the museum. As Nadur Maritime Museum it is easier to associate directly with the village, however a mention to the old name, as for example 'formerly known as The Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum' shall then be included in the accompanying informative text and the keywords with which to search the museum. This can facilitate identification by anyone not familiar with the village, Gozo and the Maltese Islands.

4. **Statement:** The Curators informed that the museum has a strict opening schedule to which the visitor must adapt, not viceversa.

Issue: The opening schedule is another factor which is not constant on all webpages presenting the museum. Visitors might turn up to find the museum closed or that the Curators cannot open at the visitor's call.

Recommendation (42): The Curators must ensure that an updated opening schedule is available at all media presenting the museum to prospective visitors.

5. **Statement:** The NDMM remarked that they could not be supported or even promoted by the Local Council of the village as the laws prohibit local government from supporting or promoting what according to the law is private. As most curators observed it is not the monetary support that such museums seek, but equal promotion of their activities and existence for the benefit of the community.

Issue: Due to the current laws local government cannot promote such grassroots museums and similar cultural or pedagogic initiatives which the law terms as ‘private’.

Recommendation (43): The author recommends that legislation concerning local government shall be reviewed to allow and urge local governments to promote local grassroots initiatives involved in raising awareness, pedagogy and the community.

STATE MICROMUSEUMS

TBCM/GENERIC STATE-MUSEUMS

1. **Statement:** The TBCM is one of a very few examples where a national museum provides information concerning the context from the social aspect of the village community.

Issue: National museums rarely or never present the local community as they focus on the national.

Recommendation (44): The approach adopted at the TBCM may serve as an example and the micromuseum can act as a laboratory where the national-local community experiment is closely observed and analysed, thus providing results for future projects which may bring in the local community, to own jointly the heritage promoted by the national micromuseum or site; and thus raising awareness and education among the community who can in turn promote the museum.

TBCM

1. **Statement:** The white modern walls, white apertures and overhead metal structure in white contrast with the weathered yellowish limestone rock of the catacombs. The railing along the path was an unavoidable necessity to prevent visitors and especially children from falling into the rocky part. Apart from that the new structure built over the catacombs is also painted white.

Issue: The white painted structure built over the limestone catacombs are not harmonious with the site and its context, a dissonance which could have been avoided or made otherwise, is the presence of the moulded or concrete used over the catacombs.

Recommendation (45): It is recommended that the national agency shall seek a better way of presenting the site as the most important artefact of the museum. A better presentation, for example, would have been a replica of the rubble walls which existed prior to the project as shown on some of the monochrome photographs.

Statement: The modern structure and design of the last part of the museum which presents the *triclinum* and the quarried area was a major fright to the observer and to some visitors.

Issue: The elements of the modern structure are superior and wane the remains as the main focus of the museum. The huge structure at this part of the museum is odd and shocking when compared to the tranquillity inspired by the catacombs context back in time.

Recommendation (46): The section and its structure must be simplified or redesigned to give more the feeling of an open space in a rural context.

Statement: The visit at the TBCM ends at the far end of the site and visitors must return to the exit via the same route they came through.

Issue: The flow of visitors on site may be problematic if the national agency aims to increase visitor numbers at the museum, as incoming, visiting and exiting visitors will flow through the same paths of the museum.

Recommendation (47): The walk around the museum can be modified to become a total go around. The concrete walking-path at the last section of the site can be narrowed, and with a transparent floor so that visitors may enjoy more of the site beneath them than be distracted by the new white modern structure. Also the path can be divided into the route and flows desired at the museum.

GCHH

1. **Statement:** The GCHH Curator argues that the authentic can be experienced only when the authentic is kept.

Issue: The installation of electronic audio-visual units within the GCHH creates a dissonance with the venue. Observation showed that the audio-visual presentation equipment present at the GCHH is a completely wrong choice which ridicules the GCHH setting as a Historic House and its supposed folklore experience. It is a distraction more than an interpretative aid.

Recommendation (48): A recommendation emerging from the visual observation is that the modern audio-visual monitors and the apparatus shall be removed from the rooms. The audio-visual facility shall be concentrated in one space, either at the start of the museum tour to introduce the visitor to the house and the collections, or reduced to two or three spots around the museum to introduce the visitor to the next sections or collections. It shall present only one audio-visual presentation about the whole or offer the visitor an interactive facility through which the visitor can search and find the information they require about the folklore display, the three houses, the Citadel and the community (of the Citadel, of Rabat or Gozo as an island).

2. **Statement:** It was observed that, for example, a panel describing *Maltese weights* has the title in both languages but no conversion or equivalent to Maltese weights. There is no conformity in either interpretation or information panels around the museum. Each room has its style, design and presentation of information and visuals. The choice, design and other matters concerning interpretation panels and information labels at State

micromuseums does not rely totally on the Curator. At micromuseums like the GHCC, Curators are the persons who spend most time at the site and who have contact with staff and visitors. Curators can be more experienced about their museums and they can suggest what works at their museum much more than any other expert which has no experience of the day-to-day occurrences at the museum.

Issue: Variation and conformity can have different impacts on visitors and the image of the museum. Interpretation and information panels at the GCHH vary between almost naive rudimentary black and white text and pictorial simple prints, to what can be considered as professional, sophisticated, colourful designs and explanatory text and pictorial printed matter.

Recommendation (49): Although expert feedback may be sought, the national agency shall first and foremost discuss with the curators at its museums rather than apply a top-down approach or imposition. Certainly consulting the experts can help provide new perspectives, but the most knowledgeable and the best observant of a museum are the all-year round curatorial and museum staff and the visitors respectively. Therefore better results may be achieved if the museum staff and a number of visitors are interviewed or called for a workshop to discuss a way forward. The presence of experts can be accepted once they commit to listen and observe carefully before going to the table.

3. **Statement:** There are no indicators or a route to follow through the three houses which form the museum.

Issue: The absence of a route through the museum can give the impression of a museum which tells no story at all, gives no experience to the visitor and which is simply a repository of antiques.

Recommendation (50): The presence of indicators or a route to follow at the GHCC can enhance the visit through the micromuseum. A simple arrow to follow may help the agency, through its curatorial, interpretational, exhibition experts and a representation of visitors, to provide the visitor with a walk through the museum and its exhibits which transform the visit into an experience. It can include for example information about the original use of the rooms and spaces, the architecture and other features met at the three

houses composing the micromuseum. Since these are among the few houses still intact and accessible at the Citadel they can accommodate and present various aspects of life and residence at the Citadel through the ages.

OPRM

4. **Statement:** The OPRM has no objects exhibited and it may seem surprisingly void and inattractive to the visitor who does not read the interpretation panels or is not assisted by someone who could guide through the museum.

Issue: The OPRM may have negative repercussions as there are no authentic objects found on site on exhibit. Visitors may react negatively as the concept of the museum resembles more to that of a site as the TBCM, than a display of objects.

Recommendation (51): The OPRM visitor experience may be enhanced if to the prison and confinement theme is added information and perhaps some artefacts which as those at the reception area can tell something about the prisoners, the prison wardens and others employed there when it served as a prison: thus the human element with which to connect.

Recommendation (52): The artefacts at the reception inclusive of some reproductions of the graffiti found at the prison cells can be better exhibited at the yard together with the interpretation panels, or close to the prison cell, so that crowding shall be avoided.

Recommendation (53): The maritime graffiti coming from other sites around the Islands shall not be kept at the OPRM's reception area but at a museum which has a maritime theme.

SICILIAN MUSEUMS

GENERIC

AFCS

1. **Statement:** Along the way there is nothing which directs the visitor to the museum. Touristic signs indicate churches but not museums.

Issue: As with the case of the NDMM, it seems that local governments do not promote the heritage attractions of private or independent initiatives as grassroots micromuseums. This reduces the attraction and appeal of the locality

with tourists, decreases awareness and ownership of local heritage by the community and deteriorates the economy of the place. It also damages the sustainability of the same initiatives.

Recommendation (54): A UNESCO World Heritage Site like Scicli has no signs which indicate museums and other cultural attractions, apart from those indicating churches. Certainly, churches present a treasure of art and architecture, but the religious must be complemented with the social and the cultural to acquire more cultural value. It is recommended that local authorities promote cultural attractions as micromuseums at their locality, as it will in turn help the community to increase self-esteem, the locality to attract visits and raise civic pride, and the local economy to improve.

AFCS

1. **Statement:** Museums as for example the AFCS may have messages which go deeper than all the others as it selects a 'social space', the pharmacy, to reach its community and raise their awareness and knowledge about "the artistic, scientific and social importance of the pharmacy at the beginning of the last century." The role of the pharmacy may be traced back in the various ways and methods used by humans to cure their ailments from the beginning of time. The expectation from outside the museum and the surprise once inside contrast well with the greatness of the baroque city and its streets. The cosy and welcoming sense inside the small pharmacy space presents the visitor with an experience which is not common today.

Issue: Museums cannot be judged by their size or by the restricted theme which they present.

Recommendation (55): A short history about the coming around of pharmacies, pharmaceutical practices and the role of the pharmacy for communities can help the visitor understand better the place. Natural and artificial cures were not something of the present century alone but a whole long story, and the containers at the pharmacy are an example of the knowledge. The element of surprise must be left. It can also be a good idea if the pharmacy visit had to follow the tour of the MPBP as visitors would have already experienced the baroque city, its churches and its great noble house,

but in the time of illness the pharmacy would have served as a solution and a social space where different people meet and come to an equal point: that of seeking ailment from sickness.

2. **Statement:** As it is not the shop owner who promotes the shop as a community space, a cultural space or a social space, but the fact that people meet at the specific space for some time which makes it a place for dialogue, exchange of experiences, salutations and more. The AFCS seems to present the pharmacy as an object more than as a community or a cultural and social space.

Issue: A restricted perspective of the pharmacy museum may restrict the appeal of the museum and compromise sustainability.

Recommendation (56): A broadening of the perspective and idea of the pharmacy and the addition of the community's perspective of the pharmacy may boost the image of the museum with both community and non-community visitors. While the pharmacy objects and furniture are detached from the visitor and the community, the addition of the role of the pharmacy space and place in view of communities may attract more interest and reflection about ways the AFCS can be promoted. It may also extend the content for pedagogy outside the 'pharmacy' related sciences into social sciences and the humanities. The author believes that if the AFCS curator were to widen their pharmacy theme by providing the visitor with the history of pharmacies at least around the Mediterranean region, the curators could identify and provide an interpretation of the Mediterranean in historic times, at least from the themed perspective.

3. **Statement:** The AFCS Curator states that the only media available momentarily are a book and a flyer in different languages which tells its history, as its limited space restricts the introduction of more media.

Issue: The restrictions imposed by the museum seem to restrict the thinking about the museum and its channels for reaching out.

Recommendation (57): Nevertheless, even within such a limited theme the museum can do much more to reach its prospective audiences and visitors. The theme of the pharmacy, its practices along time and its development

through time around the Mediterranean can be an innovative way and area through which the AFCS can venture. This is in addition to the focus on the social space which the pharmacy presented to the community and its role in society, especially among small and closely connected communities.

4. **Statement:** The pharmacy is presented as museum where things and life came at a standstill.

Issue: The AFCS may suffer consequences of appeal and sustainability if no innovative ways are found to attract visitors and repeat visitors.

Recommendation (58): Another aspect upon which the AFCS can expand interest, pedagogy and edutainment activities, is by seeking connections between the medications and remedies offered by the pharmacy back in time and those offered by mother nature mainly identified in the practices of the rural communities.

5. **Statement:** Although the information provided suffices the curiosity of the average visitor, it was noted that the presence of a well-informed guide, such as the Curator, enhances the visitor's experience through most of the participant micromuseums, as human interaction is irreplaceable.

Issue: The lack of human contact may reduce the museum's appeal and experience to the visitor.

Recommendation (59): Micromuseums shall ensure that there is always someone who could assist or tour guide visitors around their museums, in order to provide a better experience of place.

Statement: It was observed that there are no directional signs in the city which lead to the MPBP. Also, it has no indicative sign on the façade yet.

Issue: Like some other museums in the study, the lack of directional signage may lead to the loss of revenue and compromises the sustainability of the museum.

Recommendation (60): The Associazione Culturale 'Tanit Scicli' and similar associations and curators, must cooperate with members and similar associations of the city to design and install directional signs which can help the visitor easily find such cultural attractions around the city.

MMTC

1. **Statement:** No signs indicate the presence of the museum not even at the same square in front of the venue.

Issue: The lack of promotion of the museum by local authorities is a setback to both the museum and the community of Modica. The association which takes care of the museum can achieve more from the museum, its spaces inside the museum and the space in front of the museum. However, these are not used.

Recommendation (61): It is therefore recommended that local authorities shall discuss with the association *IngegneriaCultura* to invest in signage and promote the museum as it deserves. The position of the museum at the old centre of the city is an ideal place to enhance the cultural heritage of the city. The museum and its collection may attract more visitors and serve to boost the economic activity at that section of the city.

Statement: There is no route to follow indicated inside the museum. It is the curator or assistants that guide the visitor through the exhibits and the different rooms. The low visitor volumes do not provide for self-sufficiency and sustainability of the museum.

Issue: A route through the museum is lacking and in the absence of the Curator or his substitutes, the visitor will not get enough of the narrative told by the Curator as few information and interpretation media are present.

Recommendation (62): It will also be helpful if in collaboration with the local government the museum develops at least bilingual interpretation panels and information labels. Although most of the medical professionals or students on visit may be familiar with the museum exhibits, it can be very helpful if the museum aims also to attract visitors who have no medical experience, background or knowledge. As curing and healing were always a concern for humanity irrespective of time, class or other background, the further development of the museum as a regional medical museum may boost the volume of visitors and help bring the museum to self-sufficiency.

MRDP

2. **Statement:** The MRDP is most of the time used as a *museo diffuso* which allows the visitor to reside in and experience the lifestyle of the rural community of Modica Alta in history. It is the Curator that guides the visitor through the museum and explains all that one can see.

Issue: The museum is not accessible for visits when the museum is resided in. It can hinder the visitor flow which the same museum can attract all year long. However in the absence of the Curator, few information is provided about the exhibits and spaces of the same museum.

Recommendation (63): The MRDP may still be used as a residential experience, but the provision of interpretational or informative-pedagogic panels or labels may help the museum-visitor and the visitor-resident to get more of the experience. This is indispensable particularly if the Curator is not available as the visitor-resident is not accompanied by the Curator on a twenty-four-hour basis. Even for the museum-visitor who is just visiting the museum the availability of such information is important as not all visitors may be familiar with the stone-works, the architecture, the objects or the rural house aspects presented at the museum. These may be familiar to the Mediterranean communities and cultures who live on islands having a limestone geology (like, Malta, Pantelleria, Linosa, Lampedusa, but not others.

Recommendation (64): The MRDP can be divided into a restricted residential experience area and an area which could allow a flow of visitors all year long without disturbing the residential experience.

MLIA

1. **Statement:** The MLIA presents only the positive and Italian side of the colonial experience presented.

Issue: Presenting just one perspective of colonial history can be damaging to the museum. The voice of the colonised is absent even if they gained from the colonial experience.

Recommendation (65): The Curator in collaboration with experts in the field shall seek a way to present both sides of the story: the coloniser's and the colonized. Besides the positive experiences there is nothing wrong in presenting also the dark side of the story once the true and authentic is told and presented objectively. This can help the museum increase visitor volumes and attract visitors even from the ex-colonies to come and tell their stories.

2. **Statement:** It was observed that through social media and other mass media some people condemned the existence of the museum, tried to label it with a political opinion and urged for its closure.

Issue: If the MLIA maintains a one-sided viewpoint of the Italian colonial era, it might damage the image of the museum and force it to closure.

Recommendation (66): The collection exhibited at the MLIA and the story which can be objectively told at the museum is unparalleled in all of Italy and perhaps the Mediterranean. The museum must be supported to tell the whole story and helped to grow its potential pedagogic, informative and experiential aspects. It must also be promoted among schools and educational institutions providing tuition on history especially Italian colonial history.

3. **Statement:** The allowance and dedication of space at the Comune allowed the birth of this unique museum at the centre of Ragusa. The arrangement of the uniforms can certainly be considered as the work of a professional. The other exhibits displayed at the museum however require a better place and more space which up to now were not available at the Comune.

Issue: Currently the museum lacks space and the collection has become crowded. If the museum is expected to be more inclusive, objective and more appealing to visitors it cannot stay for long at the current venue.

Recommendation (67): Primarily, the example of the Comune di Ragusa must be lauded and imitated by other local governments elsewhere. The Comune is supportive of the grassroots initiative even if this was a personal collection of one of its citizens. Secondly the Comune must look ahead and think how to further improve the museum and provide more space for its exhibits. This is a unique museum and collection of which all Italians and Mediterraneans must be proud. Its Curator managed to save the tangible part

of Italian colonial history which is not found elsewhere around the globe. An ideal place for such a collection could be one of the Fascist architectural monuments which survive in Ragusa, where space is larger than the one at the basement of the Comune's offices.

4. **Statement:** The information labels at the MLIA although in Italian, are classy and legible and very well positioned next to the uniform described. Flyers in different language provide a basic explanation of the collection.

Issue: A disadvantage to the visitor is that all the information provided with the collection is in Italian.

Recommendation (68): If the museum wishes to keep its information labels in Italian as presented by the Curator, it shall provide a reference number, a mixed code or a QR code by which visitors can access information on their mobile phone or other means of instant communication.. This can help the visitor who is illiterate in the Italian language to understand the exhibits and the history narrated at the museum.

5. **Statement:** The Curator and his assistants are all very helpful and they try their best objectively to help the visitor understand such a historic age and what happened in the colonies and in Italy at the same age. They also follow a sort of walk through the museum which helps one go through the various stages of Italian colonisation history.

Issue: The restricted space does not allow much for a route through the museum, however it is very well presented to walk through. It is the unaccompanied visitor who will find it difficult to experience the same museum visit as when the Curator or his assistants accompany visitors and provide information.

Recommendation (69): Since the collection is unique in all of Italy, it is recommended that national government must help the Comune and the Curator to improve and secure the conservation of such a collection for posterity. Even if some may look at it as a dark event in history, as a visitor, a historian and a Mediterranean I feel that this is a special museum which gave me an experience I had never expected or imagined. What is thought to be dark and negative in history has always been a channel for learning and

mnemonic not to repeat past mistakes. However, what the museum celebrates is not the dark aspect but how the different European and African cultures came together through the Mediterranean and what they managed to achieve together even if at times they might have clashed. There's nothing wrong in being true and presenting history as it happened: after all its history today. However, a well-designed route through the museum exhibits as it is today or as it could grow will be very helpful to the visitor.

6. **Statement:** The museum presents history from the coloniser's side and it stops at the age when colonisation came to an end. However, colonisation did not depart with the coloniser and the connections established between Italy and the colonised kept growing and developing even after that date.

Issue: The aftermath and what resulted from the relationships and experiences, positive and negative of the countries, people and cultures involved is missing.

Recommendation (70): The museum can be much more interesting if different perspectives and histories are included. Colonisers and colonised can cooperate sixty years after the end of Italian colonisation as there shall be a lot of oral history still remembered but undocumented among those who lived the experiences themselves or heard their ancestors narrate them. It is therefore recommended that now, sixty years after the end of Italian colonisation, the Curator, the Comune with the aid of the national and regional EU funds, and academia shall invest to record as much oral history as possible from those who experienced the Italian colonisation period themselves in Italy and in Africa. There is a treasure of information which shall not be lost.

MCIV

1. **Statement:** Besides the *carretti* collection, the MCIV displays a great collection of tools and utensils used by the rural and farming community of which the same curator forms part. Implicitly it is very much representative of the rural and farming community as the *carretti* served mostly to carry produce and objects from the countryside to the cities. Such observations

were made by most of the visitors of the same museum and those who knew about it or recommended it.

Issue: The name of the *Museo del Carretto Virgadavola* does not reflect the vast collection which such a museum displays: the Sicilian or better the Iblean *carretto*, the tools and utensils used in agriculture and farming, the crafts and skills of the rural communities, the connection of the *carretto* through art, film and other communication media as poster, newspapers, and other, besides art which the Curator produces himself.

Recommendation (71): The Curator, the Fiera Emaia organisers and a selection of experts from the community may discuss and foresee how the expansion of the museum thematically could be better presented to the visitor as an expression and a display of the rural community of Vittoria and the rural communities around it. Without minimizing the importance and central focus from the *carretto*, all the other themes can be used as a channel which shows the importance and meaning of the *carretto* to all those sub-themes in the life of rural, agricultural, farming and urban communities. This could be a booster for more visitors from special interest groups. (Certainly, this would call for a larger and more organised space – see next Recommendation)

2. **Statement:** This collection is not simply Giovanni's collection but a heritage which symbolizes and represents the *carretteri*, the artists, the craftspersons and the rural communities of Sicily who gave birth to the present villages, towns and cities of the island. The Virgadavola collection moved from greenhouses to the space provided by the Fiera Emaia (Vittoria): a large shed which at least gives protection and better access to the collection, whilst serving also as an attraction for those visiting the events at the grounds.

Issue: The collection has potential to grow and attract more visitors all year round, but the venue is not yet one which fits and provides the right conditions to safeguard the collection and present it to the visitor as it merits.

Recommendation (72): The Fiera Emaia stakeholders, the local administration of Vittoria, the Comune di Ragusa and the Regional government must come together with the Curator and the Virgadavola family, and experts from the field, and the community, to decide about a better and

larger venue for the collection or a redesign of the existing venue at the Fiera Emaia grounds.

3. **Statement:** Through the museum tour the Curator revealed knowledge from his first-hand experiences from the agricultural community. He also mentioned that much of the knowledge about the carretto, the other exhibits and the rural community are only in his mind and that they will gradually start recording it.

Issue: Most of the oral lore and knowledge, skills and crafts, traditions, experiences, and other inherited by the rural communities may be lost in a short time and once the owners die. The Curator shows concerns that such knowledge is not shared anywhere else or with anyone who can guarantee their written conservation for posterity.

Recommendation (73): It is important that the knowledge and oral lore of such Curators are recorded and transcribed in their own Sicilian vernacular and in Italian. Some tend to disregard the knowledge and oral lore of persons who do not own academic qualifications, a profession or a high educational background. Research shows that most of the knowledge and history of communities is not written or published but transmitted from one generation to another through oral tradition.

4. **Statement:** Independent grassroots micromuseums have voluntarily and from their own limited resources created and curate museums and collections which help communities to improve their self-esteem, to provide pedagogic material and activities, and help to attract tourism and generate economic activity in their surrounding environment.

Issue: Independent grassroots micromuseums have limited resources and most of the time they cannot achieve as much as they wish and can for the community/communities which they represent and/or where they are located.

Recommendation (74): Independent grassroots micromuseums as contributors to the community and the economy of a place must be supported and helped to take care and keep in good condition their museums and collections; to enhance their pedagogic activities and to help in the well-being of their communities. Laws and regulations concerning such grassroots

micromuseums must be amended and updated to permit national authorities to help them qualify, access and manage funding opportunities, if not on their own at least in collaboration with national/regional/municipal agencies/authorities responsible for cultural heritage, conservation, restoration, tourism, education and last but not least, to access further education opportunities for their curator/s and museum staff.

MDTC – Municipal

5. **Statement:** It was observed that along the way there are no signs indicating the presence of the MDTC and other museums in the vicinity.

Issue: The lack of signage indicating museums around Ragusa can be a deterrent. Tourists and prospective visitors may not call at museums or even the city if its streets indicate nothing of interest and lower visitor volumes may impact on the sustainability of the museums and their surrounding socio-cultural, pedagogic and economic activities.

Recommendation (75): The Comune or the regional government shall invest in signage to promote the museums at Ragusa Ibla. However, the facilitation of tracing museums around the city may also be supported by the internal requirement for communication.

Recommendation (76): Another factor which the Comune or the regional government must invest in is the provision of at least bilingual interpretation and information at the *musei civici*.

MCDF - Municipal

6. **Statement:** Observation shows that the visitor's museum experience can be further enhanced by more information via an audio-guide, the Curator's tour or a tour by a knowledgeable museum guide who can, more than the information already supplied in the panels, provide visitors with true stories which happened to real people at the same Castello, its park and labyrinth.

Issue: Frequently museum curators tend to provide visitors with lots of history and narratives concerning people in authority, but they rarely mention the common people or people who were not in authority or in a power

position, and visitors do not find ways to connect and build an experience of the place.

Recommendation (77): Recommendations about this museum are numerous as the site presents various opportunities for improvement and enhancement of the visitor experience. The availability of the train station, ample parking space and other facilities are already an advantage of the museum. The major challenges are how to use and exploit such opportunities in the long term and make them self-sustainable. Experiences at the museum may vary from residence for short periods, to leisure, to food and beverage experiences, to retreats, meetings and conferences, country-walks or touring the Ragusan Province or Sicilian heritage. It is appealing to various interests from history to architecture, art, home decoration and interior design, garden design and much more. It cannot be taken at one goal, but it is worth planning carefully and achieving such projects in the long run as the product and the services of the Castello can attract more visitors of any interest. However, an overarching requisite is that these places and the narratives about them must be connected through the people who lived, worked and visited before the visitor. It is through their true stories that the visitor may connect and gain a personal experience of the place and its environs.

MDTC – Municipal

7. **Statement:** The MDTC is placed at the lower level of the Palazzo Zacco which hosts an art exhibition as its main attraction and collection. There is no sign indicating the MDTC or the different collections displayed at the Palazzo Zacco.

Issue: Although the pedagogic aspect of the MDTC is valid and desired in an urban context as Ragusa; it may not be the best place for such an exhibition. However, the lack of signage and the lack of visibility may put the whole museum at risk of self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Recommendation (78): Apart from the urgent need for signage showing the way to the MDTC and the Palazzo Zacco art collection, signage around the Province of Ragusa shall be more visitor friendly. Although various tools may be available online, the physical signage leading to different museums and cultural heritage around the city and its environs could boost tourism.

Recommendation (79): The present display of the MDTC at Palazzo Zacco could serve as an introduction and a promotion to a larger MDTC type of museum which would be better placed within the MCDF context. Something on the same line but on a larger scale may also be in context to help the visitor at the MCDF have an idea also of what the peasantry and agricultural communities did on the lands surrounding the Castello: thus the communities and lands which contributed to the birth and development of the Ragusan city and other urban places of the Province.

Appendix VII: Establishment, founding objectives and other information on the participant micro museums.

Participant Museums: establishment and objectives

1. Museo Santuario de Lluc, at Palma, Mallorca 1952

The MSDL, established in 1952, was an initiative of the Missioners dels Sagrats Cors ('Congregación de los Misioneros de los Sagrados Corazones') [Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts – Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts] and is bound to the Bisbat de Mallorca [Bishopric of Mallorca] as a private entity. The founding objective of the Museu was to “conservar donaciones de fieles y coleccionistas al santuario de Lluc.”⁶²⁶ It represents the community of Mallorca. The property of the MSDL belongs to the Bishopric of Mallorca. The museum and its activities are managed by Lucus, espais i natura, SL (sociedad limitada) – una empresa de gestion cultural y turistica.⁶²⁷

2. The Historical Museum of Crete, Heraklion, Crete (Greece) 1953

The museum was founded in 1953 and is run by the Society of Cretan Historical Studies (SCHS), with the aim of preserving and showcasing the cultural heritage of Crete from early Byzantine times to the modern era. The Historical Museum of Crete (HMCC) collection is the property of the SCHS, a Society (1951) established with the aim of “supporting and promoting Cretan studies in the fields of archaeology, history, ethnography, language and literature from early Christian times onwards”, and governed by a Board of seven persons elected by members at the general assembly. The HMCC is in the house of Andreas and Maria Kalokerinos, a 1903 listed neoclassical building granted by the A. & M. Kalokerinos Foundation in accordance with the donor’s wishes and after the issue of a permit by the Ministry of Culture to establish a museum collection. The objective of the HMCC is mainly pedagogic as it aims to support and promote Cretan studies in different fields, to hold temporary exhibitions, conferences and events to run another museum, to publish academic works related to Cretan studies and organise educational programmes and activities. The SCHS is also responsible for (a) the running of the Menelaos Parlamas Museum

⁶²⁶ Translation: to conserve donations made by the faithful and collectors to the Sanctuary of Lluc.

⁶²⁷ Translation: Lucus, spaces and nature, a limited liability company - a cultural and tourism management company.

of Rural Life and Theano Metaxa-Kanakaki Weaving Collection, a 1988 branch museum in Piskopiano, Hersonsisos, (b) holding temporary exhibitions, conferences and events, (c) publishing works related to Cretan studies, and (d) organizing educational programmes and activities.

3. *The Żabbar Sanctuary Museum 1954*

The ŻBSM at Haż Żabbar is considered as a parish museum and most of its exhibits are related to the religious theme and devotion. It was the initiative of local priest, Giuseppe Zarb, who later became parish priest and monsignor. After compiling an inventory (1943), he aimed to exhibit the listed items and those found around the sacristy in a secure and better place where people can enjoy them. The museum, started in 1952, was inaugurated in September 1954. It is a structure purposefully built as a museum. At that time, the collection consisted of weapons, ship models, religious paraphernalia, and other religious items. Most of the collection consists of votive paintings – seventy-two percent of which is presently not accounted for.⁶²⁸ After his death, the museum continued to be cared for by a committee formed during his days. It is now still led by an autonomous parish group of volunteers which works closely with the local parish priest who presides over the committee. Other exhibits at the museum are donated items, artefacts and paintings originally found in the parish church and other chapels of the village, bought artefacts, and artefacts recovered from excavations around the village ranging from prehistoric to modern times. The exhibits are spread on three levels. It is run by a committee of six volunteers headed by the local archpriest. It opens for three hours every day. Admission is against a fee of two euros per person.⁶²⁹

4. *Museo del Carretto Virgadavola, Vittoria, (RG), Sicily 1965*

The Museo del Carretto Virgadavola (MCIV) initiative⁶³⁰ is narrated by the founder-curator himself as a passion and a hobby born in him when he participated for the first time in 1965 at the fair *Sacra dell’Uva* as he realised that the *carretto* was disappearing: he had to do something as a museum to collect and exhibit the Iblean

⁶²⁸ Vella, Fiona, 4 March 2014, Żabbar Sanctuary Museum, [Times of Malta](#), Malta.

⁶²⁹ Żabbar Sanctuary Museum, Facebook page, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/muzew.zabbar> .

⁶³⁰ *Ragusanews.com*, Collezione Virgadavola, ovvero l'arte del carretto siciliano, 26 July, 2016, <https://www.ragusanews.com/2016/07/26/attualita/collezione-virgadavola-ovvero-l-arte-del-carretto-siciliano/69374> .

cart. The MCIV is therefore a museum born from the need to salvage a heritage which was quickly disappearing. The need to save heritage is one of the reasons which force a community or persons within the community to take initiative and do something. The MCIV Curator can be held as a pioneer of such grassroots museums in the southwest Sicilian province of Ragusa. In total there are now six museums dedicated to the *carretto* on the island of Sicily. Virgadavola started collecting heritage connected to the *carretto* and rural life, and his collection continued to grow, even if for a long time it lacked a proper exhibition space and the right climatic conditions for conservation. Till the end of this research, the MCIV was displayed under a 54-metre long shed provided at the grounds of the *Fiera Emaia Campionaria Nazionale*, an exhibition and trade centre in Vittoria (RG), made up “of a team of professional journalists and enthusiast tourists from different backgrounds.”⁶³¹

5. *Ta' Kola Windmill Museum, Xagħra, Gozo (Malta) 1992*

The *Ta' Kola Windmill Museum* (TKWM) Curator informed that back in time the windmill belonged to a certain Ġużeppi Grech known as Żeppu Kola. He used to maintain it but as in the 1990s windmills were no longer necessary, his passion for windmills kept him running it even if it was for the sake of maintaining it as his residence. Once Żeppu Kola got older he went to a senior citizens' home. Although he left the windmill, he wished that the windmill will not follow the fate of other windmills on Malta and Gozo. At that time, the Museums Department on behalf of the Maltese Government took responsibility for the restoration of the Ta' Kola windmill, but it was not yet presented as a museum as it was still the residence of the individual owner. It was opened as a museum in 1992 and from a residence-mill, it ended up as a showcase of the miller's residential quarters and a means to inform about the role and activities of the mill in society, such as cultivation and harvesting, threshing, grinding and baking, the importance of bread in the Maltese diet, the role of the *Universita'*, historic events which impacted on the mill's function, the last miller, and the names of different parts of the mechanism and architecture.⁶³² The windmill museum is an example of how private property and an independent collection ends becoming a government property and a State museum.

⁶³¹ For further details about the Fiera Emaia go to <https://www.fieraemaia.com/about-us/>.

⁶³² Heritage Malta, Ta' Kola Windmill. <https://heritagemalta.org/ta-kola-windmill/>.

6. Nadur Maritime Museum (as Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum) Nadur, Gozo (Malta) 1999

The Curators of the NDMM, Kerry and Nora Evison (Gary Costello absent for the interview) together with the Parish Priest Reverend Fr. Jimmy Xerri narrated how the museums started. Kerry explains that the founder Kelinu Grima set out as a young boy visiting ships and collecting bits and pieces and collecting souvenirs. All throughout his life, he still went down to the ships, met various people from the ships and wrote to everybody and anybody and asked for things, and they sent him stuff. So, everything here almost, ninety-nine percent of the stuff is what he collected in his house until the church donated him the building in 1999 and all the stuff came was transferred to the parish house. The priest used to live upstairs. When Grima passed away, he donated everything to the church. For two years some government employees opened the museum, till three volunteers were found. The NDMM is curated by the three volunteers trusted and supported by the parish priest and sporadically by a few other volunteers ex-merchant ships or ex-Royal Navy themselves. Nora explains that “it’s quite a personal museum and it’s all mixed up. It is jumbled up, there’s no ‘this is hundred years old...’ a mix up which makes life interesting.” Fr. Jimmy adds that the NDMM collection was given the space at the parish priest’s house because the house was in disuse for many years since most of the Nadur parish priests were from the same locality and preferred to live at their family home. The rest of the house was used to teach religious doctrine to children.

7. Xarolla Windmill Museum Żurrieq, Malta 2000

In 1976 the Xarolla windmill was provided with the original mechanism from a windmill at Bormla. However, it was abandoned between 1979 and 1996 as the sails suffered extensive damages during a storm. The last miller George Sammut and his family together with the Żurrieq Local Council took the initiative and synergized with central government to restore the windmill and organise a museum inside it, which opened in the year 2000. Its founder and curator, George Sammut died during this study, a few days prior to the interview. Although George was a volunteer, the Local Council appointed three young curators on payment, to assist the founder, to take care of the windmill and its museum. The windmill museum is an example of an

individual's initiative which ended up becoming government property and added to the number of State-owned museums, even though currently under the responsibility of a Local Council.

8. Tunnara Museum - Westreme Battery, Mellieħa, Malta

The TMWB was an initiative of the Curator, Tony Valletta. It focuses on the past tuna-catching practices prevalent in its season among the local community where the museum is situated. It includes the input of families and relatives involved in tuna-catching mostly located in the north of Malta. It tells their history and experiences. This museum is in an 18th century military battery. It displays various items and photographs connected to the practice. The founder-curator later joined *Art Club 2000*, a VO and found support from the Mellieħa Local Council to access funds for the restoration of the battery which was in dire straits. Restoration started at the end of 2019 and the museum will be converted into an Interpretation Centre for the environs.⁶³³

9. Folklore Museum Acharavi, Acharavi. Corfu (Greece) 2008

The folklore museum was started in October 2008 by Spyros Vlachos, the owner and visionary who searched, found, and displayed local folk items of northern Corfu for twenty-five years. It is bound to a private company named Historic & Folklore Company of Northern Corfu. It is located just opposite the Roman baths of Acharavi in a private building of 1,000 square metres. The permanent collection of the museum is displayed in two rooms and organised according to the local activity. It includes old photos, books and manuscripts which date from 1862, coins from the period of the Ionian State, wooden folk furniture, a loom, a traditional olive press, kitchen utensils, agricultural tools, a watermill, ecclesiastical items and other exhibits that present the historical course of Corfu from the 18th century till present. The museum has a conference room where lectures and seminars take place, a traditional coffee shop as well as a permanent exhibition of traditional products and woven handicrafts.⁶³⁴

⁶³³ Art Club 2000 official website, 2018, <http://www.artclub2000.org/tunnara.html> .

Reporter, Times of Malta 2016b.

⁶³⁴ Folklore Museum of Acharavi – TripAdvisor website.

The FMAA depends on the objective set by its founder Spiros Vlachos, whom the curator calls “a man with a mission.” The FMAA Curator explains that when Spiros created his private museum his motivation was to “present to the world, in the best way that [he] could: the way of life many years ago, to recall great memories of the past, and to show young people items used at that time. So that we understand how people lived some 50-100 years ago. The memory of our ancestors and our history is something that should be kept intact, no matter how modern our lifestyle.”

10. Antica Farmacia Cartia, Scicli (RG), Sicily (Italy) 2008

The AFCS was a family-owned pharmacy which ended its business activity. It was the cultural association, Associazione Culturale Tanit Scicli, formed by local people and the owners, the Cartia family, that jointly took the initiative to preserve and run the 1902 pharmacy as a museum. Situated in a UNESCO World Heritage site at Scicli, the AFCS Curator states that the objective of turning the old pharmacy into a museum was “to make known the history of the pharmacy of the early nineteenth century at a town like Scicli and of the family which opened it for the practice.”⁶³⁵ The same *Associazione* takes care of other museums and sites at Scicli amongst which the MPBP.

11. Museo Civico l'Italia in Africa, Ragusa, (RG), Sicily 2009

The MLIA Curator, Mario Nobile, tells that the initiative happened due to the support he found from the Mayor, the *Comune* and the *Giunta*. From a personal collection kept at home, a unique museum telling a unique history in the whole of the Italian territory was born at the heart of Ragusa in 2009. The Curator explains that “da sempre ero collezionista di cose coloniale, di cose militari in genere e poi si e' specializzata nelle colonie: materiale, uniformi particolari provenienti dalle colonie che aveva l'Italia in Africa. Avevo raggiunto un numero di pezzi quando ho incontrato un Sindaco disponibile. Li ho proposto di fare un museo ed e' stato immediatamente spontaneamente concorde. E cosi' abbiamo fatto questo museo dell'Italia in Africa. L'abbiamo intitolato *Museo l'Italia in Africa* perche riguarda solo il periodo mille

⁶³⁵ “Far conoscere la storia della farmacia di primo novecento in una città come Scicli e della famiglia che l'ha aperta all'esercizio.”

ottocento ottanta cinque e mille novecento sessanta [1885-1960],”⁶³⁶ as in 1942, Italy lost the war and lost most of its colonies. The museum is housed at the lower ground floor of the *Comune* offices in Ragusa Superiore [Upper Town]. The Curator is now helped by two employees of the *Comune*.

12. Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla, Modica (RG), Sicily 2010

The MMTC is in an old hospital at Modica Bassa [Lower Modica]. The Curator Mario Giovanni Incatasciato narrates that as President of the Associazione Culturale *IngeniCultura Modica*, born in 2008, the association aimed to the “valorizzazione dei beni culturali del territorio non solo di Modica ma del sudest.”⁶³⁷ They aimed at the “valorizzazione dell’insolito. Quello che e’ piu’ piccolo, quello che e’ meno noto. Quello pero’ proprio per essere meno pubblicizzato e meno noto, e’ piu’ significativo dal punto di vista della ricerca che della sperimentazione. Questo lavoro ci ha portato anche a fare nel territorio di organizzare anche un numero infinito di incontri, di tavole rotonde, di iniziative. E tutte queste iniziative avvenivano in quei siti culturali che avevano proprio la caratteristica di essere luoghi insoliti.”⁶³⁸ Such activities helped Modica to become recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site and led to the birth of many other social and cultural initiatives. The MMTC was born in 2010 on the ashes of a 16th century hospital, the *Ospedale della Pieta’*, built with the participation of the Knights of Malta. It was known for the treatment of syphilis and the famous mercurial barrels created in 1693. The property is included in the Local Intangible Heritage Register (Reil). The Association looked at providing a way of experiencing the museum through cultural initiatives and different events. The museum is included in the Association’s dramatization initiatives and trails which follow through socio-cultural itineraries. The museum preserves most of the objects used by the hospital from the anatomy tables to laboratory equipment, medical tools and medical stuff.

⁶³⁶ Translation: “I have practically always been a collector of colonial things, of military things in general and then specialized in colonies: material, particular uniforms from the colonies that Italy had in Africa. I had reached several pieces when I met a willing Mayor. I proposed them to make a museum and it was immediately spontaneously concordant. And so, we did this museum of Italy in Africa. We named it the *Museum of Italy in Africa* because it only concerns the period of [one thousand] eight hundred eighty-five and one thousand nine hundred sixty [1885-1960].”

⁶³⁷ Translation: “to enhance the cultural heritage of the area not only in Modica but in the south-east.”

⁶³⁸ Translation: “valorisation of the unusual. What is smaller, what is less known. However, in order to be less publicized and less known, it is more significant in terms of research than experimentation. This work also led us to organize in the territory also an infinite number of meetings, round tables, initiatives. And all these initiatives took place in those cultural sites that had the characteristic of being unusual places.”

13. *Razzett tal Markiż Mallia Tabone - Folklore Museum, Mosta, Malta 2011*

The *Għaqda Filantropika Talent Mosti*, which started as a parish group in 1983, were in 1998 trusted the custodianship of the RMMT farmhouse for cultural purposes and added the status of *Ċentru ta' Kultura Nazzjonali (National Culture Centre)*. After 2007 the group registered as a Voluntary Organisation. They restored the venue and collected a wide range of items which derive from Mosta, its surrounding villages and donors. For such objects, the group decided to transform part of the venue into a folklore micromuseum, inaugurated in 2011, and adjacent rooms as a permanent art exhibition. The museum displays a collection of artefacts, tools and utensils used by the agricultural community, traditional crafts persons and a collection of works of art by local artists. Other spaces in the farmhouse are used for temporary exhibitions. In 2012 the group converted the garden into an open-air theatre and activity space.⁶³⁹

14. *Museo del Tempo Contadino, Ragusa, (RG), Sicily 2012*

The *Museo del Tempo Contadino* (MDTC) is situated at the eighteenth-century Palazzo Zacco, a UNESCO monument of the late baroque period in Ragusa.⁶⁴⁰ The museum was set up in synergy with the Centro Studi Feliciano Rossitto and the Centro Servizi Culturali. It is curated by a scientific committee of six persons amongst whom was the interviewee architect Giuseppe Iacono.⁶⁴¹ Inaugurated on the 28 August 2012, the museum has the objective to “rappresentare un filo conduttore tra la città barocca e la campagna ragusana e si inserisce all'interno della rete museale come una sorta di museo di introduzione legato al Museo di Arti e Mestieri: l'esposizione Contadina, concepita come un percorso espositivo temporale dove gli oggetti evocano il ritmo dell'anno agrario.”⁶⁴²

The museum exhibits different tools and utensils of traditional peasantry as ploughing, sowing, the preparation for bread-making, for making *ricotta* and cheeses and a

⁶³⁹ Għaqda Filantropika Talent Mosti official website, 2018,

<http://www.talentmosti.com/home/index.php/dawra-mar-razzett> .

⁶⁴⁰ I monumenti del tardo barocco di Ragusa: Palazzo Zacco. www.comune.ragusa.gov.it . Accessed 28 Nov 2019.

⁶⁴¹ RagusaOggi.it, Inaugurato a Ragusa il Museo del Tempo Contadino, 29 August 2012, <https://www.ragusaoggi.it/inaugurato-a-ragusa-il-museo-del-tempo-contadino/> .

⁶⁴² LiveSicilia, Ragusa, inaugurato il Museo del Tempo Contadino, 29 August 2012 m.livesicilia.it. Translate: "represent a common thread between the Baroque city and the Ragusan countryside and is part of the museum network as a sort of museum of introduction linked to the Museum of Arts and Crafts: the Peasantry exhibition, conceived as a temporal exhibition path where the objects evoke the rhythm of the agricultural year."

section on crafts from the most able hands of women who used to adorn attire and houses of the rural environs.⁶⁴³ In the words of the Curator, the MDTC has much more to add to its objective especially due to its location in a city. The museum represents the rural community who contributed with their wealth in produce to the building of the city after the 1693 earthquake. Although the museum occupies a small space in the Palazzo, the Curator states that “Quindi con il Palazzo tardo barocco io ho voluto far capire che dalla pancia della madre terra, dalla pancia del territorio, dove il palazzo non si vergogna di avere la giu’ nei terrazze alimentari, le farine, e il fieno, il carretto, la mula, la scecche e queste cose che forman parte di deposito, una parte di ricchezza. Dal ventre e’ cresciuto il palazzo che vediamo. Non tutto una recita verticale anche simbolica di questo. Quindi e’ un segno.”⁶⁴⁴ He wishes to show that the wealth and the economy of the late baroque in the Ragusan Province is the fruit of such labour of the peasants and the rural and agricultural communities at its outskirts, and that there is nothing to be ashamed of. The collection, information and narratives all relate to the agricultural sector and to what the farmers used to do in each month of the year: thus from the field to the product.

15. *Muzej Uja – Museum of Olive Oil, Škrip, Brač, Croatia 2013*

The owner and founder of the *Muzej Uja – Museum of Olive Oil* (MUSB), Krunoslav Cukrov states that the family mill (oilery) was established in 1864 by his grand-father Josip Krstulović. “By the early twentieth century Krunoslav and Mandica Krstulović have upgraded the oilery by buying the new *Thomas Holt* olive press from Trieste, Italy. The family continued to process the olive oil until 1963 when the oilery stopped working due to the introduction of new technologies such as the hydraulic press. In 2013 Krunoslav Cukrov, grandson of Krno Krstulović, and his family took the challenge of restoring the old oilery and by July 2013 the oilery became the *Museum of Olive Oil* in Škrip. It is open for the public as a historical and cultural monument of the history of olive oil making on the island Brač.”⁶⁴⁵ The owner explains that the intent of the museum is “to present the old way of olive oil production” and to honour

⁶⁴³ MUSEOItalia, Museo del Tempo Contadino, www.museionline.it .

⁶⁴⁴ Translation: “So with the late Baroque palace I wanted to make it understood that from the belly of the mother earth, from the belly of the territory, where the palace is not ashamed to have the downs on the food terraces, the flour, and the hay, the cart, the mule , the *scecche* [cheques] and these things that form part of the deposit, a part of wealth. From the belly the building we see has grown. Not all a vertical recitation, even symbolic of this. So it's a sign.”

⁶⁴⁵ Olive Oil Museum website, <https://www.muzejuja.com/> .

the founder of the mill. The MUSB attributes the preservation of the tradition as the most important aspect of the exhibition.

16. Muzeja betinske drvene brodogradnje (Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding), Betina, Murter Island, Croatia (BMWS) 2014

The respondent, Mirela Bilić, marketing manager and guide at the museum in conjunction with the Curator-Director Kate Šikić Čubrić, informed that the museum, established in 2014, was an initiative of the local community who formed a ‘civil association’ named Betina Gajeta 1740“. The respondent explains that “the main objective for the founding of the museum was to preserve traditional knowledges of wooden shipbuilding in Betina. Contributing to the preservation of historical and cultural knowledge, people in Betina formed a council with the intent to collect and recover knowledge and practices consistent to the town’s 300-year culture. It began in 2011 with the forming of a civil association named Betina Gajeta 1740, and plans were immediately put in place to create the present-day museum. The association was founded in order to preserve traditional and unique building knowledge of the Gajeta, or Betina Gajeta. The Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding is a direct result, creating a cultural hub and promoting tradition while raising awareness for cultural heritage and local identity. From the beginning the museum’s collaboration with community raises awareness and cultural significance of wooden shipbuilding Croatia and Europe-wide.” She continues that the museum “is an ideal platform for sharing knowledge between the older generations of shipbuilders, today’s visitors, locals, and possibly, future shipbuilders.” For this reason, the museum interviewed shipbuilders with “the goal of documenting their skills and knowledge in traditional shipbuilding.” It also used “quotes from shipbuilders’ stories as a guide through the Museum collection.” The BMWS intends to grow by setting up an “*Open-air museum* with two main components being *boats in harbour* with boats on display utilised in everyday traditional activity and a *walk of fame* styled names of *Betina shipbuilders* being installed in the path from the main square to the museum doors. The museum’s part of the harbour will be a vivid insight into Betina shipbuilding tradition.” The museum believes that the musealia “and knowledge kept inside its walls have an irreplaceable role in the history of Croatian maritime and shipbuilding heritage, which makes it a

significant part of the European culture.”⁶⁴⁶ The BMWS has projects to grow and develop its extramural activities.

17. *Museo Diffuso ‘Murika’ – Racconti di Pietra e Casa degli Avi Modica Alta, (RG), Sicily.*

The Curator of the *Museo Diffuso ‘Murika’ – Racconti di Pietra (MRDP)* and the *Casa degli Avi* at Modica, tells that, in 2014-2015 the Associazione *IngegniCultura Modica* created another association within it called *Simoutique: Sistema Identitario Modica*,⁶⁴⁷ and with the principle of valorising the Modican heritage took a cave-house which was fortified in the medieval era round the year 1000 and named it the *Casa degli Avi* [Forefathers’ House].⁶⁴⁸ As a residence of the Curator’s own residence since the year 1400 the residence developed inside it a cultural centre and a museum called *Museo Diffuso ‘Murika’ – Racconti di Pietra*: a type of historical museum where visitors can choose to reside for a short period, thus a *ospitalita’ diffusa* (diffused hospitality). It is an environment that is the interpretation of the history of Modica. A story that goes through three stages: medieval history, ancient archaeological history, and Baroque history, which here are represented plastically in this structure. They are the paradigm of the city’s history. It is the tripod on which the cultural axis, the museum axis and the axis of hospitality rest which together represent the most advanced form of what is to be understood today as the cultural good.

18. *Museo del Costume - MUDECO Donnafugata, (RG), Sicily2018*

The Museo del Costume – MUDECO is currently set up in the lower levels of the Castle of Donnafugata.⁶⁴⁹ The MUDECO displays part of a large collection of clothes acquired by the Comune of Ragusa from a private collector: Gabriele Arezzo di Trifiletti.⁶⁵⁰ The idea is to display the collection as it represents the Sicilian identity

⁶⁴⁶ Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding website - <http://mbdb.hr/en/betina-museum-of-wooden-shipbuilding/> .

⁶⁴⁷ See website SiMoutique - The project, <https://www.simoutique.com/il-progetto/>

⁶⁴⁸ See website SiMoutique - Murika: Racconti di Pietra <https://www.simoutique.com/murika-racconti-di-pietra/?lang=en> .

⁶⁴⁹ *Ragusanews.com*, Ragusa: Museo del costume, fra qualche mese sarà realtà’, 29 May 2018, <https://www.ragusanews.com/2018/05/29/attualita/ragusa-museo-costume-qualche-mese-sara-realta/89035> .

⁶⁵⁰ *Ragusanews.com*, Ragusa: Museo del costume, fra qualche mese sarà realtà, 29 May 2018, <https://www.ragusanews.com/2018/05/29/attualita/ragusa-museo-costume-qualche-mese-sara-realta/89035> .

and culture. Currently not all the clothes are on display but a number of glass showcases have been set up in some rooms to complement the Castle of Donnafugata. The *Museo del Costume* also incorporates clothes used by famous Sicilian personalities, and “rappresenta soprattutto la storia del costume e della moda Siciliana.”⁶⁵¹ The Curator explains that the museum is the result of an intervention by the Regione Sicilia and the Comune di Ragusa to rescue a collection which represents the Sicilian identity and culture from going outside Sicily. The collection consists of attire used by the Sicilian communities from nobility to peasantry on various occasions. There are also some small collections such as buttons, thimbles, bobbin lace, and other. It is also expected to boost the appeal of the Castle as a residence, as a place of relaxation and contact with nature and culture.

19. Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane’ – Museo Diffuso Scicli, (RG), Sicily2018

The MPBP Curator who also curates the AFCS, describes the MPBP as a museum which can augment the value of the pharmacy museum just across the street. Its history, furniture, architecture, artistry and craftsmanship and magnificence as a whole can help the visitor of the AFCS to understand and visualise older society and everyday life in that part of Scicli. This explains the Curator can be experienced better as the MPBP, with its role as an Albergo Diffuso, will offer visitors the possibility of short accommodation. Palazzo Bonelli Patane’ is a late nineteenth century and early twentieth century palace, built and inhabited by the Bonelli family up until two decades ago. It is now owned by the Patane’ family and managed by the Albergo Diffuso in Scicli, as a museum. Its noble floor is completely original. Everything was conceived by Raffaele Scalia, who was one of the greatest artists, painters, sculptors, Italian engravers of the early twentieth century, he was also an interior decorator. So, he not only painted all the times and the frescoes, but also designed the furniture and their composition, and everything is completely as it once was. Even the floor made of linoleum seems to be modern, however, it is old, and an expression of full futurism which was a rage at the time used instead of majolica, and instead of the Ragusan asphaltic stone.

20. Museo Castello Donnafugata, Donnafugata, (RG), Sicily2018 refurbished

⁶⁵¹ Translation: it represents above all the history of the Sicilian costume and fashion.

The Museo Castello di Donnafugata (MCDF) is mainly a collection of furniture and other items left by the earlier residents of the Castle. The Curator explains that MCDF is mainly the furniture, the architecture, the park and the context, but its significance takes life once the visitor is told about the history of the place, the role it had in society, and the personalities attached to it both as residents or as guests. However, there are various stories and personalities tied to the Castle, its spaces inside and outside. Each room has its own character, purpose, stories, art, and furniture. The Museum also as a film location serves as a promoter of the cultural heritage of the Province.

The Castle is expected to provide its spaces for more collections or smaller museums as the MUDECO to increase its appeal.

21. Old Prison Museum, Rabat (Victoria) Citadel, Gozo 1990s

The Old Prison is inside the Gozo Citadel at Rabat (Victoria), next to the law Courts. It consists of an entrance room, which leads to a free-standing block of individual cells and a small courtyard. It was used for the purpose between the late 1530s and 1962. In the 1990s it was restored by the Citadel Restoration Group under the remit of the Ministry for Gozo. The mind and the enthusiasm behind the initiative was mainly the late George Vella. As a state property it was naturally a project for the Ministry for Gozo. The place was restored but there were not enough personnel to open the place for the public on a regular basis. Once the Old Prison project came to life, and once the restoration was completed and the furniture at the reception hall brought, there was an arrangement to hand it over to the museums section, under the direction of the mentioned George Vella for the Ministry for Gozo, so that it could be opened on a regular basis. The building is well-preserved and now managed by the national agency *Heritage Malta*. There is a large amount of graffiti of maritime vessels, handprints, religious symbols and figures, dates, games, and anthropomorphic figures etched into the limestone walls. A small collection at the reception space shows a few items related to imprisonment and copies of maritime graffiti found elsewhere on the Maltese Islands.

22. Gran Castello Historic House – Folklore Museum, Rabat (Victoria) Citadel, Gozo 1983

The GCHH is also under the remit of the OPRM Curator and situated at a narrow street inside the Gozo Citadel. It was originally opened as a Folklore Museum in 1983. Before it opened as a Folklore Museum it consisted of a complex of three houses which were used to rear livestock and poultry. Naturally as one expects from such a use the place was not well-kept, and after government took the property and restored it, the complex opened as a Folklore Museum of Gozo. Changes took place by time, as for the display it was not a display that remained static and unchanged since its inception. We cannot say that there were radical changes made to it, but by time there were additions and some reorganisation of a small scale. For this reason a part of the complex was changed to resemble a historic house as a domestic space where the family of a 'high' social status resided: a social status particularly associated to the eighteenth century. That was the last reorganisation that took place in the complex or better within part of the display at the complex, with small scale changes that still happen from time to time.

The collection witnesses to the local domestic, rural, and traditional lifestyles, agriculture, rural trades and skills, a mill-room, grains and liquid measures, weights and weighing scales, bobbin lace-making and weaving, local traditional crafts, the cotton industry, gin and spinning wheel, and items connected to the traditional fishing industry. The architecture of the houses reflects some Sicilian and Catalan influences and the Late Gothic style, witness to their wealthy owners. There are also sections which were used by the servitude.⁶⁵²

23. *Ta' Bistra Catacombs Museum, Mosta, Malta 2016*

Officially inaugurated in 2016, it is the largest catacombs complex found outside the Rabat area. It is a State museum managed by the national agency, *Heritage Malta*. The project was part-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.⁶⁵³ The TBCM Curator informs that Ta' Bistra Catacombs were discovered in the 1930s, but never taken care of. As the responsibility for it passed to Heritage Malta, its 'Phoenician, Roman, Medieval' unit under the direction of its Senior Curator David Cardona started to protect and transform the site into a museum.

⁶⁵² Heritage Malta, Gran Castello Historic House, <https://heritagemalta.org/gran-castello-historic-house/>.

⁶⁵³ The Malta Independent, Second phase of Ta' Bistra Catacombs project inaugurated, 26 June 2016, <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2016-06-26/local-news/Second-phase-of-Ta-Bistra-Catacombs-project-inaugurated-6736160008>.

The collection on display consists only of three clay oil-lamps and a cranium found on site or donated by persons who claim that they found them earlier on site. The main exhibit is the catacombs complex, showing features added by the owner farm family, including a war shelter, and quarrying.

Tables

Table 1: Participant museums: year established, name, location and initiative

Year	Name	Location	Initiative of	Participant (P) / Mentioned (M)
1952	Museu Santuario de Lluc	Palma, Mallorca (Spain)	Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts	P
1953	Historical Museum of Crete	Heraklion, Crete (Greece)	Society of Cretan Historical Studies	P
1954	Żabbar Sanctuary Museum	Żabbar, Malta	Priest Giuseppe Zarb	P
1965	Museo del Carretto Virgadavola	Vittoria, (RG), Sicily	Giovanni Virgadavola	P
1983	Gran Castello Historic House – Folklore Museum	Rabat, Citadel, Gozo	Ministry for Gozo (State)	P
1990s	Old Prison	Rabat, Citadel, Gozo	George Vella obo Ministry for Gozo (State)	P
1992	Ta' Kola Windmill Museum	Xagħra, Gozo (Malta)	Żeppi Kola (now State)	P
1999	Nadur Maritime Museum (formerly Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum)	Nadur, Gozo (Malta)	Kelinu Grima	P
2000	Xarolla Windmill Museum	Żurrieq, Malta	George Sammut and Żurrieq Local Council.	P
2007	Tunnara Museum Westreme Battery	Mellieħa, Malta	Tony Valletta	P
2008	Folklore Museum Acharavi	Acharavi. Corfu (Greece)	Spyros Vlachos	P
2008	Antica Farmacia Cartia	Scicli, Sicily (Italy)	Associazione Culturale Tanit Scicli and Family Cartia	P
2009	Museo dell'Italia in Africa	Ragusa, (RG), Sicily	Mario Nobile	P
2010	Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla	Modica, (RG), Sicily	Ingegnicultura Modica and Family Incatasciato + Comune	P
2011	Razzett tal Markiż Mallia Tabone – Folklore Museum	Mosta, Malta	Għaqda Filantropika Talent Mosti	P
2012	Museo del Tempo Contadino	Ragusa, (RG), Sicily	Centro Studi Feliciano Rossitto and the Centro Servizi Culturali	P
2013	Muzej Uja – Museum of Olive Oil	Škrip, Brač, Croatia	Krunoslav Cukrov	P

2014	Muzeja betinske drvene brodogradnje (Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding)	Betina, Croatia	Betina Grajeta 1740 - local community, civil association	P
2014-15	Museo Diffuso 'Murika' – Racconti di Pietra e Casa degli Avi	Modica Alta, (RG), Sicily	Si-Moutique and Family Incatasciato	P
2016	Ta' Bistra Catacombs Museum	Mosta, Malta	David Cardona, obo Heritage Malta (State)	P
2018	Museo del Costume – MUDECO	Donnafugata, (RG), Sicily	Amministrazione comunale Ragusa	P
2018	Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane' – Museo Diffuso	Scicli, (RG), Sicily	Associazione Culturale Tanit Scicli	P
2018 refurbished	Museo Castello Donnafugata	Donnafugata, (RG), Sicily	Amministrazione Comunale, Ragusa	P
Other museums mentioned				
1960s	Wickman Maritime Collection	Xghajra (Malta)	Victor Wickman	M
1988	The Menelaos Parlamas Museum of Rural Life & Theano Metaxa-Kanakaki Weaving Collection	Hersonissos, Crete (Greece)	Society of Cretan Historical Studies	M
1996	Gharb Folklore Museum	Gharb, Gozo (Malta)	Family Felice	M
1996-97	Bir Mula Heritage	Bormla (Malta)	Family Vella	M
2010	The Agricultural Heritage	St. Paul's Bay (Malta)	Family Galea	M

Table 2: Population, islands and their percentage of total Mediterranean islands

Population range	Number of Islands within that range	Percentage of Total islands
Nil	32	16.8%
1-100	20	10.5%
101-500	29	15.3%
501-1,000	12	6.3%
1,001-5,000	41	21.6%
5,001-10,000	15	7.9%
10,001-20,000	16	8.4%
20,001-50,000	9	4.7%
50,001-100,000	4	2.1%
100,001-500,000	7	3.7%
500,001-5,010,000	5	2.6%

Total:

190

Table 3: Classification of the communities reached at the time of the museum's establishment and at the time of research (based on Watson's typologies, 2005: 206-207).

Type of Interpretive Community > Museum	(i) by shared historical / cultural experiences	(ii) by their specialist knowledge	(iii) by demography/ socio-economic factors	(iv) by identities (national, regional, local or relating to sexuality, disability, age and gender),	(v) by their visiting practices	(vi) by their exclusion from other communities	(vii) by location
Museums on the Maltese Islands							
RMMT	X		Y				X
TMWB	XY	XY					X
ŽBSM	Y	Y					XY
XRWM	XY	Y					X
NDMM		XY					Y
Other Maltese mentioned museums							
AGHM	X	X				X	
BMH*	XY	Y		Y		X	XY
WMC	XY	XY					
Maltese State museums							
TBCM		XY					X
OPRM		X					
GCHH		XY					
TKWM		XY					X
Sicilian museums							
AFCS		XY					Y

MPBP	Y		X				Y
MCDF	XY		X				Y
MUDECO		XY					
MDTC	X	Y					
MCIV	X	Y					
MLIA		XY					
MRDP	XY	XY	X				Y
MBTC		XY					Y
Other museums							
MSDL		XY					Y
HMCC	XY	XY					XY
FMAA	XY	XY					XY
MUSB	XY	XY		XY			XY
BMWS	XY	XY		XY			XY

** Among the non-participant but mentioned museums we may classify the BMH as a museum whose community was characterised by (i), (vi) and (vii) but which has by time also attracted the (ii) type of communities.*

Table 4: How the participant museums place within the four generations of education or knowledge construction (DDF, 2018)

The four generations of education or knowledge construction >	<i>contemplative</i> where object information is totally provided by the museums (<i>verbal or printed</i>) with no allowance to visitor interpretation.	<i>science and technology</i> which educates through controlled interaction with objects.	<i>interactive</i> where objects are contextualised and intended to communicate an idea or concept to the visitor even through interactivity.	an educational project, called also <i>museum staging</i> where visitors are expected to interpret themselves the objects and allowed to construct different interpretations and knowledge. ⁶⁵⁴	Other
<i>Museums on the Maltese Islands</i>					
RMMT	✓			✓	
TMWB		✓	✓		
ŽBSM	✓				
XRWM	✓	✓			
NDMM				✓	
<i>Other Maltese museums mentioned</i>					
AGHM					Not available
BMH	✓	✓	✓		
WMC	✓				
<i>Maltese State museums</i>					
TBCM	✓				
OPRM	✓			✓	
GCHH		✓			
TKWM		✓		✓	
<i>Sicilian museums</i>					
AFCS				✓	
MPBP				✓	
MCDF				✓	
MUDECO	✓				
MDTC	✓				
MCIV		✓		✓	
MLIA	✓				
MRDP		✓	✓	✓	
MMTC	✓	✓			
<i>Other museums</i>					
MSDL	✓				
HMCC	✓				
FMAA	✓				
MUSB		✓			
BMWS		✓			

⁶⁵⁴ DDF, 2018, *ibid.*

Table 5: Museums and the volume of objects on public display.

Participant Museum Name / Island	Number of objects on display Q 01.3			Objects not on display: Y= Yes, N=None, and Blank = Not Available
<i>Museums on the Maltese Islands (Green = Independent; Yellow = Private)</i>	Less than 1,000	1,001 to 5,000	5,001 or more	Q 15.1
ŽBSM		1,001+		Y
XRWM	-1,000			Y
NDMM		1,001+		N
RMMT	250 < 300			N
TMWB	-1,000			N
<i>Mentioned - Not under research (Malta)</i>				
AGHM	-1,000			
BMH	600			Y
WMC	-1,000			
<i>Maltese State-museums</i>				
TBCM	4			N
OPRM	-1,000			N
GCHH	-1,000			Y
TKWM	-1,000			N
<i>Sicilian Museums</i>				
MCIV		1,001+		N
MLIA	-1,000			N
MRDP	-1,000			N
AFCS			5,001 +	N
MPBP	-1,000			N
MBTC	-1,000			N
<i>Municipal Museums (Sicily)</i>				
MCDF	-1,000			N

MUDECO	-1,000			Y
MDTC	-1,000			N
<i>Other Mediterranean Museums</i>				
MSDL (Mallorca, Spain)			5,001 +	N
HMCC (Crete, Greece)		1,001 < 5,000		Y
FMAA (Corfu, Greece)			5,001 +	Y
MUSB (Brač, Croatia)	-1,000			Y
BMWS (Murter, Croatia)	-1,000			Y
Totals	20	4	3	Y=10, N=15, Not available=2.

Table 6: Museum types, initiative, venue, sustenance, revenue generation, eligibility and qualification for funding.

Museum type (Maltese Islands)	Initiative	Property/Venue	Sustenance	Revenue generation	Recognition (Law/regulatory)	Eligibility to benefits	Qualification for funding
Independent	Individual	Own	Own resources	Donations, few or no fundraising activities	Nil or For Profit	None	None
	Family	Own	Own resources	Donations, some or no fundraising activities	Nil or For Profit	None	None
	Informal group	Own/Institution	Own resources and some from institution	Donations, some or no fundraising activities	Nil or For Profit	None	None
Private	Group (registered/statutory)	Private, Government or Institution	Group resources	National/Regional funds, Donations, Admissions, Membership, Activities	Non-profit or/and For Profit	Yes	Yes
	Organisation (registered/statutory)	Private, Government or Institution	Group resources	National/Regional funds, Donations, Admissions, Membership, Activities	Non-profit or/and For Profit	Yes	Yes
State/National	Agency	Public	Public Taxes	Regional (EU funds), Donations, Admissions, Membership, Activities, Rental of spaces, merchandise, souvenirs, books and publications,	Non-profit or/and For Profit	Yes	Yes

Note: Definition of *non-profit* organisations: Non-profits are formed for a multitude of reasons such as cultural, religious, charitable, educational, economic, and political among others. These are bestowed with tax-exempt status, tax deductible contributions, opportunities for funding schemes and other benefits, if they are accordingly registered. (Based on source: <https://www.myaccountingcourse.com/accounting-dictionary/nonprofit-organizations>).

Table 7: Museum initiatives, objectives and represented community.

Year	Name	Location	Initiative of	Represented community (if any)	Type of Community
1952	Museu Santuario de Lluc	Palma, Mallorca (Spain)	Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts	Community of Mallorca	Place
1953	Historical Museum of Crete	Heraklion, Crete (Greece)	Society of Cretan Historical Studies	Cretans	Place
1954	Żabbar Sanctuary Museum	Żabbar, Malta	Priest Giuseppe Zarb	Żabbar village community	Place
1960s	<i>Wickman Maritime Collection</i>	<i>Xgħajra, Malta</i>	<i>Victor Wickman</i>	<i>Maritime and Naval</i>	<i>Interest</i>
1965	Museo del Carretto Ibleo/ Museo del Carretto Virgadavola	Vittoria, (RG), Sicily	Giovanni Virgadavola	Sicilian Iblean carretto craftsmanship, and rural life	Interest / Practice
1983	Gran Castello Historic House – Folklore Museum	Rabat, Citadel, Gozo	Ministry for Gozo (State)	Gozitan families of high social status	Interest
1988	<i>The Menelaos Parlamas Museum of Rural Life & Theano Metaxa-Kanakaki Weaving Collection</i>	<i>Hersonissos, Crete (Greece)</i>	<i>Society of Cretan Historical Studies</i>	<i>Rural and weaving communities</i>	<i>Practice</i>
1990s	Old Prison	Rabat, Citadel, Gozo	George Vella obo Ministry for Gozo (State)	N/A	N/A
1992	Ta' Kola Windmill Museum	Xagħra, Gozo (Malta)	Żeppi Kola (now State)	National, Xagħra village community, millers	Place/ Practice
1997	<i>Bir Mula Heritage</i>	<i>Bormla, Malta</i>	<i>Vella Family</i>	<i>Bormla community</i>	<i>Place</i>
1999	Nadur Maritime Museum (as Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum)	Nadur, Gozo (Malta)	Kelinu Grima	Maritime, Nadur village community	Interest
2000	Xarolla Windmill Museum	Żurrieq, Malta	George Sammut and Żurrieq Local Council.	Żurrieq-Safi villages and surrounding rural communities, millers	Place/ Practice

2007	Tunnara Museum Westreme Battery	Mellieħa, Malta	Tony Valletta	Tuna-catching/fishing community, Mellieħa and northern region communities, Military and maritime	Place/ Practice
2008	Folklore Museum Acharavi	Acharavi. Corfu (Greece)	Spyros Vlachos	Corfiots	Place
2008	Antica Farmacia Cartia	Scicli, Sicily (Italy)	Associazione Culturale Tanit Scicli and Family Cartia	Scicli community, pharmacists	Place/ Practice
2009	Museo dell'Italia in Africa	Ragusa, (RG), Sicily	Mario Nobile	International, varied; mostly military, history and colonial interest	Interest
2010	Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla	Modica, (RG), Sicily	Ingegnicultura Modica and Family Incatasciato + Comune	South-east Sicily and medical communities	Practice/ Interest
2011	Razzett tal Markiż Mallia Tabone - Folklore Museum	Mosta, Malta	Għaqda Filantropika Talent Mosti	Mostly artistic, international and Mosta rural community	Place/ Interest
2011	<i>The Agricultural Heritage</i>	<i>St. Paul's Bay, Malta</i>	<i>Family Cooperative</i>	<i>Agricultural and rural community</i>	<i>Practice</i>
2012	Museo del Tempo Contadino	Ragusa, (RG), Sicily	Centro Studi Feliciano Rossitto and the Centro Servizi Culturali	Agricultural and rural community	Practice
2013	Muzej Uja – Museum of Olive Oil	Škrip, Brač, Croatia	Krunoslav Cukrov	Dalmatian, olive oil milling communities	Practice / Place
2014	Muzeja betinske drvene brodogradnje (Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding)	Betina, Croatia	Betina Grajeta 1740 - local community, civil association	Betina community, shipbuilders and maritime	Practice / Place
2014-15	Museo Diffuso 'Murika' – Racconti di Pietra e Casa degli Avi	Modica Alta, (RG), Sicily	Si-Moutique and Family Incatasciato	Modica Alta community	Place

2016	Ta' Bistra Catacombs Museum	Mosta, Malta	David Cardona, obo Heritage Malta (State)	National, Mosta village community	Interest / Place
2018	Museo del Costume - MUDECO	Donnafugata , (RG), Sicily	Amministrazione Comunale Ragusa	Sicilian fashion identity and culture	Interest
2018	Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane' - Museo Diffuso	Scicli, (RG), Sicily	Associazione Culturale Tanit Scicli	Nobility of Scicli	Place
2018 refurbished	Museo Castello Donnafugata	Donnafugata , (RG), Sicily	Amministrazione Comunale Ragusa	Noble, feudal and peasant community of Donnafugata	Place

Table 8: Curator demographics (gender, age group, education level, museum related qualifications, family connections to community represented, residence at museum locality, years as curator, previous museum experience, voluntary or paid, and involvement with other museums.)

Curator/s details >	(i) Female	(ii) Male	(iii) Age Group	(iv) Education level	(v) Museum related qualifications	(vi) family connection to represented community	(vii) lives at museum' s locality	(viii) Years as curator	(ix) previous museum experience	(x) Voluntary / Paid	(xi) involvement with another museum
<i>Museums on the Maltese Islands</i>			Adult (A) / Retired (R)	No schooling (N), Primary (P), Secondary (S), Tertiary (T)	Yes (Y) / No (N)	Yes (Y) / No (N)	Yes (Y) / No (N)	Number of years (till 31.12.2019)	Yes (Y) / No (N)	Voluntary (V) / Paid (RP)	Yes (Y) / No (N)
RMMT		1	R	P	N	Y	Y	8	N	V	N
TMWB		1	R	S	N	N	Y	12	N	V	N
ŽBSM		1	R	S	N	N	N	15+	N	V	N
XRWM		3	A	T	N	N	Y	1	N	P	N
NDMM	1	2	A/R	S	N	Y	Y	3	N	V	N
<i>Others mentioned</i>											
AGHM		1	A	S	N	Y	Y	-	N	V	N
BMH	1	1	R/A	T	Y	Y	Y	23	Y	V	N
WMC		1	R	S	N	Y	Y	50+	N	V	N
<i>Malta State museums</i>											
TBCM	1		A	T	Y			1			N
OPRM		1	A	T	Y						Y
GCHH		1	A	T	Y						Y
TKWM	1		A	T	Y						N
<i>Sicilian museums</i>											
AFCS		1	A	T	Y		Y				Y
MPBP		1	A	T	Y		Y				Y
MCDF		1	R	T	Y						Y
MUDECO		1	R	T	Y						Y
MDTC		1	R	T	Y						Y
MCIV		1	R	P	N		Y				N
MLIA		1	R		N		Y				N
MRDP		1	R	T	N		Y				Y
MMTC		1	R	T	N		Y				Y
<i>Others</i>											
MSDL		1	R				Y				N
HMCC	1		A	T	Y	N	Y	14	Y	P	Y
FMAA	1		A	T	Y	Y	Y	*	Y	P	Y
MUSB	1	1	A	S	N	Y	Y	6	N	P	N
BMWS	1		A	T	Y	Y	Y	5	Y	P	N

* New/Less than one year.

Table 9: Sense of place of the participant micromuseums. Primary (marked X) and secondary (marked Y).

<i>Sense of Place: Type associated to location and museum</i>	Culture	Norms	Architecture	Public space	Commerce	History	Heritage	Storytelling	Symbols	Tradition	Community	Adversity	Lifestyle	Identity	Celebration	Visitors	Nature	Landscape	Infrastructure	Placelessness
<i>Museum</i>																				
TMWB			X		X	X		X		X	X			X		X	X	X		
RMMT	X		X				X			X			X			X				
ŽBSM	X			X			X	X				X								
XRWM			X				X	X	X		X		X				X			
NDMM						X		X	X			X	X							
AFCS				X	X		X		X		X	X								
MPBP	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X		X	X						
MMTC						X		X	X	X	X	X								
MRDP			X				X				X		X	X						
MCIV					X		X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X			
MLIA						X			X			X		X						
<i>State-museum</i>																				
OPRM												X								
GCHH													X							
TKWM							X													
TBCM						X	X													
MCDF			X					X		X	X		X				X	X		
MUDECO	X					X			X	X	X		X	X	X					
MDTC	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X			X			

Diagrams

Diagram A: Micro, small or large? The two elements which determine the number of objects of public display at a museum.

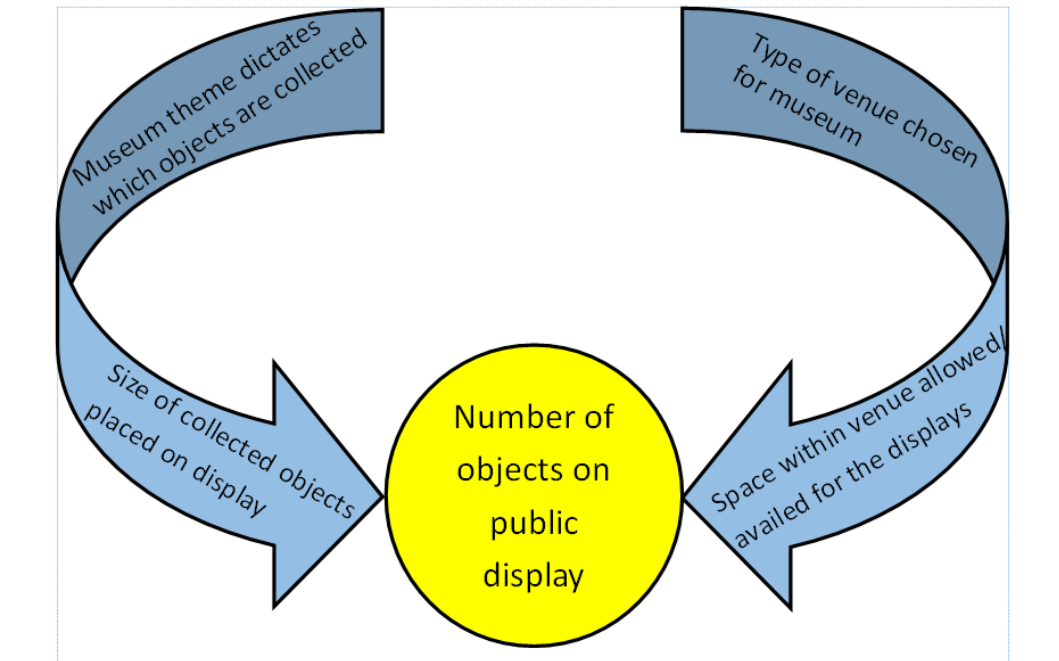
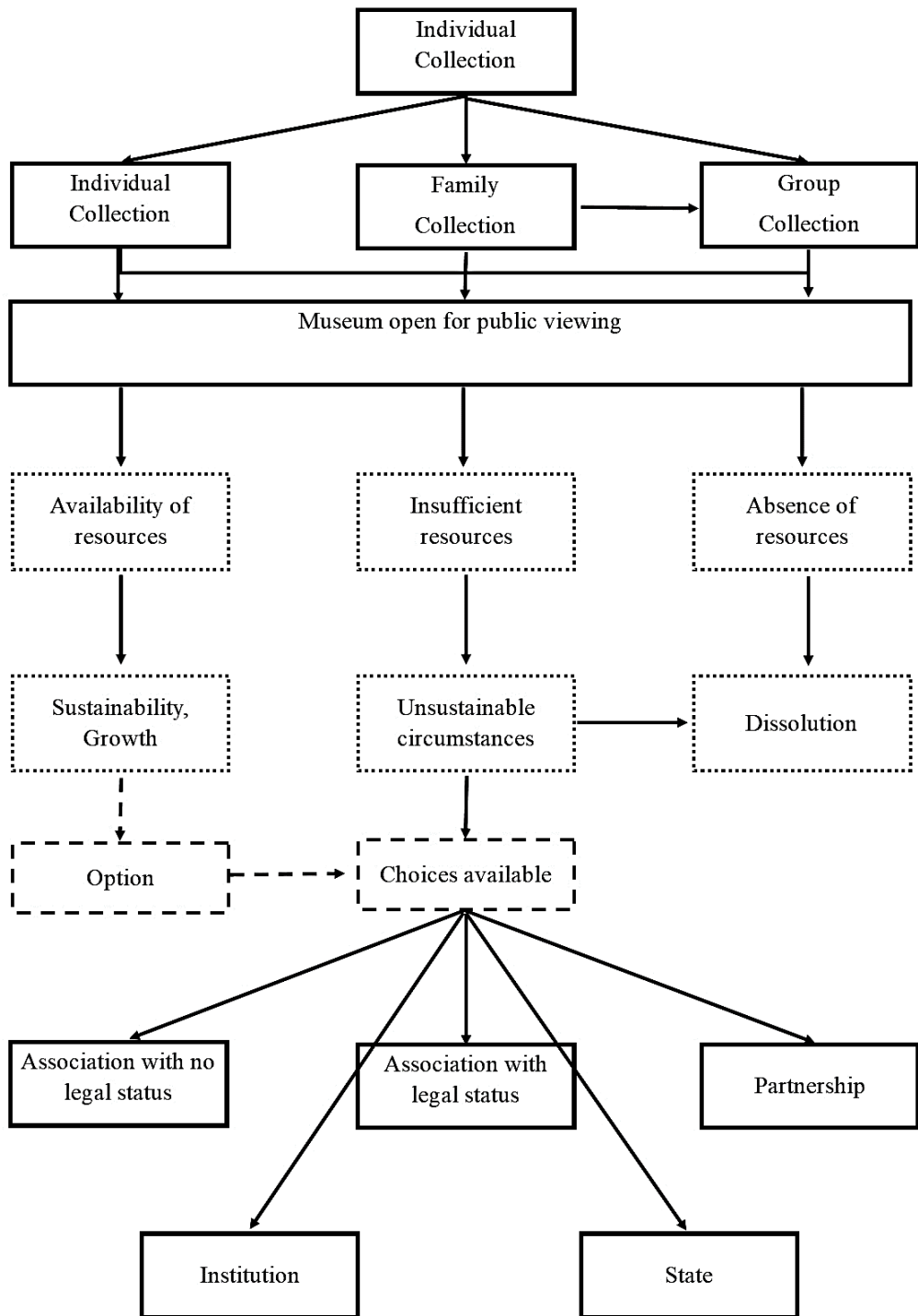


Diagram B: Micromuseum development



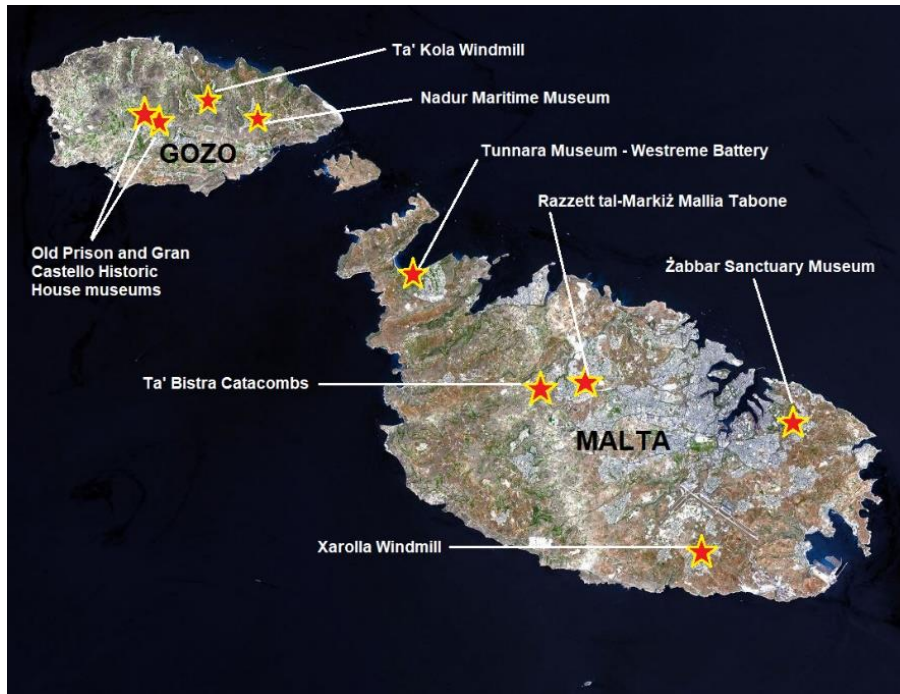
Images and Photographs

This is a selection of images showing the location of the participant museums and photographs taken by the author during the study or available on websites of the participant museums. These are intended only to help the reader visualise the museums and their collections.

Image 1: Map showing where the participant museums are located in the Mediterranean (★starred).⁶⁵⁵



Image 2: Map showing the location of participant museums (★starred) on the Maltese Islands.⁶⁵⁶



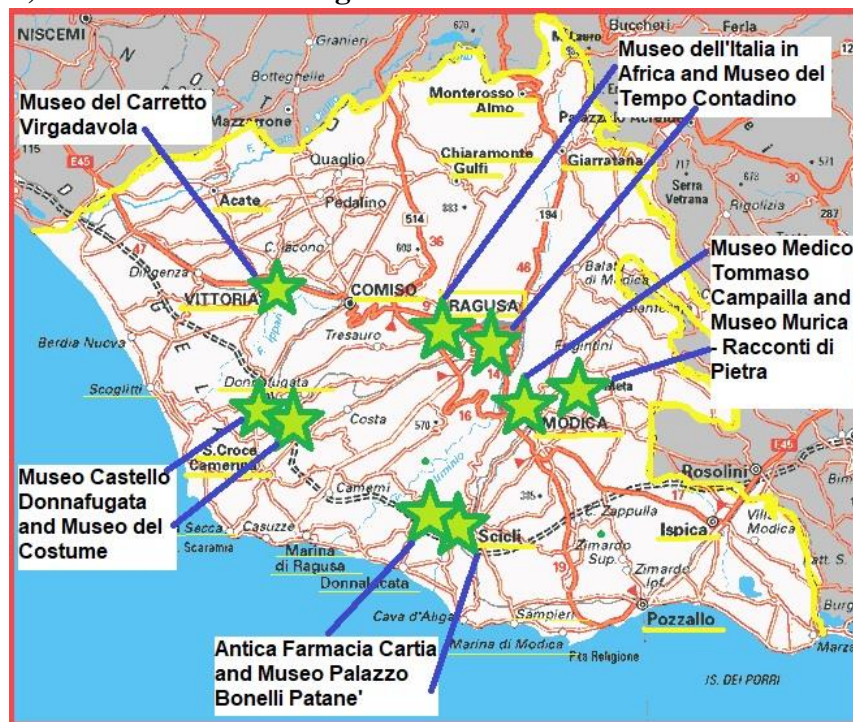
⁶⁵⁵ Base map courtesy of Peace Alliance Winnipeg retrieved on 16 July 2020 at <https://www.peacealliancewinnipeg.ca/2011/03/war-on-libya-and-control-of-the-mediterranean/map-mediterranean-countries/>.

⁶⁵⁶ Base map courtesy of Mapsland.com retrieved on 16 July 2020 at <https://www.mapsland.com/europe/malta/large-detailed-satellite-map-of-malta-and-gozo>

Image 3: Map showing the position of the Ragusan Province and its proximity to the Maltese Islands⁶⁵⁷



Image 4: Map showing the location of the Sicilian participant museums (★starred) in the Province of Ragusa⁶⁵⁸



⁶⁵⁷ Map courtesy of ViaMichelin

⁶⁵⁸ Base map courtesy of SicilyPlaces.com retrieved on 16 July 2020 at <http://nuke.sicilyplaces.com/theProvinceofRagusa/tabid/96/Default.aspx>

Image 5: Map showing location of the Greek participant museums (★starred)
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Image 6: Map showing the location of the Croatian participant museums (★starred)
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⁶⁵⁹ Base map courtesy of Mapping Europe retrieved 16 July 2020 at <https://www.mappingeurope.com/greece/greece-island-groups-map.htm> .

⁶⁶⁰ Base map courtesy of find-croatia retrieved on 20 July 2020 at <https://www.find-croatia.com/islands-croatia/> .

Image 7: Map showing location of the Mallorcan participant museum (★starred)⁶⁶¹



⁶⁶¹ Base map courtesy of Alamy retrieved on 20 August 2020 at <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/map-majorca.html> .

Photographs

Photographs 1 - 4: Antica Farmacia Cartia, Scicli, (RG), Sicily⁶⁶²



The author in front of the museum's main door. The author and the Curator of the Antica Farmacia Cartia, Vincenzo Burragato (Scicli), and two views of the interior of the museum (showcases packed with jars and other containers, the counter and the art nouveau painting behind the counter).

⁶⁶² Author's photographs.

Photographs 5 - 8: Muzej betinske drvene brodogradnje (Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding), Betina, Croatia⁶⁶³



Pedagogic displays at the museum.

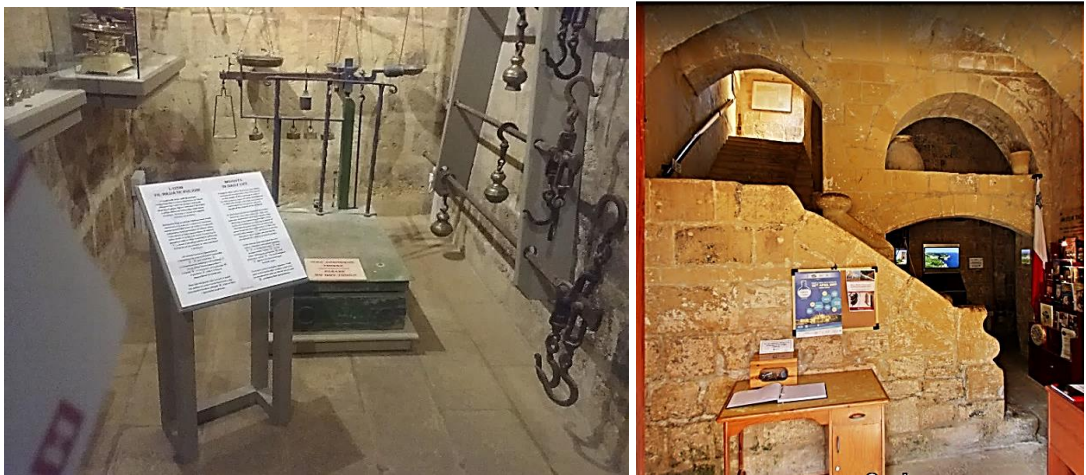
⁶⁶³ Website gallery of the Betina Museum of Wooden Shipbuilding retrieved on 12 August 2020 at <http://mbdb.hr/en/museum-of-betina-wooden-shipbuilding/> .

Photographs 9 - 12: Folklore Museum of Acharavi, Corfu, Greece⁶⁶⁴



⁶⁶⁴ Photographs from the museum's website retrieved on 31 July 2020 at <http://www.museum-acharavi.com/>.

Photographs 13 - 16: Gran Castello Historic House, Citadel, Victoria, Gozo⁶⁶⁵



Displays at the museum, showing also one of the modern display monitor, descriptive panels and the entrance of the museum.

⁶⁶⁵ Author's photographs

Photographs 17 - 20: Historical Museum of Crete, Heraklion, Crete, Greece⁶⁶⁶



Displays at the museum.

⁶⁶⁶ Photographs from the museum's website retrieved on 31 July 2020 at <https://www.historical-museum.gr/eng/collections> .

Photographs 21 - 24: Museo Castello Donnafugata, (RG), Sicily⁶⁶⁷



Informative panel at the entrance of the museum. The author interviewing Dott. Ing. Iacono, Curator of the three municipal museums in the Province of Ragusa: the Museo Castello Donnafugata, the Museo del Costume and the Museo del Tempo Contadino. Private portable bath-tub with cover, wash-hand basin, pitcher and soap holder on display. Descriptive panels at the Museo Castello Donnafugata.

⁶⁶⁷ Author's photographs.

Photographs 25 - 30: Museo del Costume, Donnafugata, (RG) Sicily⁶⁶⁸



The glass display cases of the Museo del Costume which at the time of study were placed inside the rooms of the Museo Castello Donnafugata. Showcased costumes and descriptive panels of the Museo del Costume. Bobbin lace, buttons, and thimbles among the collections displayed.

⁶⁶⁸ Author's photographs.

Photographs 31 - 34: Museo del Carretto Virgadavola, Vittoria, Sicily⁶⁶⁹



The museum's shed entrance at the Fiera Emaia, Vittoria, (RG) Sicily). Some of the *carretti* on exhibit. Interviewing the Curator of the Museo del Carretto Virgadavola, assisted by his daughter Silvana. Part of the agricultural objects displayed at the same museum space.

⁶⁶⁹ Author's photographs.

Photographs 35 - 38: Museo del Tempo Contadino, Ragusa, Sicily⁶⁷⁰



Displays at the museum showing the panels describing the agricultural activities in each month and the Palazzo Zacco where the museum occupies the cellar level.

⁶⁷⁰ Author's photographs.

Photographs 39 - 42: Museo dell'Italia in Africa, Ragusa, Sicily⁶⁷¹



The Curator and Collector Mario Nobile describing the collection. Displays at the museum, showcased items, descriptive panels, and informative labels accompanying the exhibits.

⁶⁷¹ Author's photographs.

Photographs 43 - 48: Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla, Modica (RG), Sicily⁶⁷²



The author and the Curator Dott. Incatasciato of the Museo Medico Tommaso Campailla (Modica) at the entrance of the museum which shows also the marble slab of the hospital's establishment year as A.D. 1600. The anatomy laboratory table, asking the Curator about the objects on display at the syphilis chambers, and the medical chair.

⁶⁷² Author's photographs.

Photographs 49 - 52: Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane' - Museo Albergo Diffuso, Scicli, (RG) Sicily⁶⁷³



Entrance and Descriptive panels at the entrance of the Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane'. Views of the interior of the Museo Palazzo Bonelli Patane'.

⁶⁷³ Author's photographs.

Photographs 53 - 56: Museo Diffuso 'Murika' - Racconti di Pietra, Le Case degli Avi, Modica, (RG) Sicily⁶⁷⁴



The reception vault of the Murika - Racconti di Pietra museum and the author being welcomed and shown around by the Curator Dott. Incatasciato. Displays at the Murika and the activity space inside the museum.

⁶⁷⁴ Author's photographs.

**Photographs 57 - 60: Museo Santuari de Lluc, Escorca, Palma, Mallorca
(Spain)⁶⁷⁵**



Displayed collections at the museum are grouped according to theme.

⁶⁷⁵ Photographs from museum's website retrieved on 20 July 2020 at <https://www.lluc.net/en/museum/> .

Photographs 61 - 64: Muzej Uja – Museum of Olive Oil, Škrip, Brač, Croatia⁶⁷⁶



The olive mills, rooms and the façade of the museum.

⁶⁷⁶ Photographs courtesy of Otok Brač retrieved on 20 July 2020 at <https://www.otok-brac.hr/tours/muzej-uja-skrip/BR-TR-147> .

Photographs 65 - 68: Nadur Maritime Museum (ex-Kelinu Grima Maritime Museum), Nadur, Gozo⁶⁷⁷



⁶⁷⁷ Author's photographs.

Photographs 69 - 72: Old Prisons, Citadel, Rabat, Victoria, Gozo⁶⁷⁸



The view of the courtyard, a prison cell, graffiti and an informative panel at the museum.

⁶⁷⁸ Author;s photographs.

Photographs 73 - 76: Razzett tal-Markiz Mallia Tabone, Mosta, Malta⁶⁷⁹



View of the façade of the museum's venue, displayed objects of folklore and the permanent art exhibition.

⁶⁷⁹ Photographs from museum's websites retrieved on 31 July 2020 at *Ghaqda Filantropika Talent Mosti* Facebook page

Photographs 77 - 80: Ta' Bistra Catacombs, Mosta, Malta⁶⁸⁰



The façade and main door of the museum, the showcased artifacts and wall-sized photographs, informative panels at the catacombs level, and a view of the path along the catacombs site from underneath the road to the open space.

⁶⁸⁰ Author's photographs.

Photographs 81 - 84: Ta' Kola Windmill Museum, Xaghra, Gozo⁶⁸¹



View of the windmill museum, the mechanism, displays and a view of the living quarters.

⁶⁸¹ Author's photographs.

Photographs 85 - 88: Tunnara Museum - Westreme Battery, Melieha, Malta⁶⁸²



The Curator and founder Anthony Valletta explaining the exhibits, the collection of artifacts found at the well and at the battery, a model of the tuna-trapping net and other items on exhibit at the museum.

⁶⁸² Author's photographs.

Photographs 89 - 92: Xarolla Windmill Museum, Żurrieq, Malta⁶⁸³



Descriptive panel, the living quarters collection, the mechanism and artifacts from the old mechanism at the museum.

⁶⁸³ Author's photographs.

Photographs 93 - 96: Żabbar Sanctuary Museum, Żabbar, Malta⁶⁸⁴



External view of the museum, the Vulcan fuselage display, the showcase along the wall and paintings above it, and section of the display where religious and non-religious objects come together.

⁶⁸⁴ Author's photographs.