

# THE RESTORATION OF THE HISTORIC COVERED MARKET OF VALLETTA, MALTA

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**Abstract.** Inspired by Les Halles Centrales, Paris, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Valletta Market served as a blueprint for similar structures in Europe and elsewhere. This remnant of British Colonial architecture, located in the capital of mainland Malta, underwent a number of alterations from 1945 until the early 1980s. The first was a reduction in the length of the structure due to damage sustained in the Blitz of the Second World War, followed by a series of transformations of the internal layout in the 1980s, which impacted on the spirit and feel of the building. Extensive restoration of the building was undertaken over the years 2016-17 and the building was re-opened as food court in the beginning of 2018, the year when Valletta was the European Capital for Culture. A critical assessment of the restoration works indicates that although new interventions did comply with the scientific rigour envisaged by contemporary conservation and practice, the cultural significance of this building was in some ways tampered with.

**Key words:** cultural heritage, adaptive re-use, Valletta, is-Suq tal-Belt, Les Halles Centrales

## 1. Introduction

A significant contribution to the corpus of theory on urban regeneration in Europe since 1980 is given by Couch *et al.* (2011). Indeed, urban regeneration is a catalyst to revitalise historic areas and reinforces urban identities through function and belonging (Carrion, 2005; Díaz Orueta, 2007; Del Pozo Paz and Gonzalez, 2012; Boussaa, 2018). Interesting research has been undertaken whereby heritage buildings of the same typology were

studied to propose models for their adaptive re-use which reinforce their cultural and symbolic values (Cercleux *et al.*, 2012; Merciu *et al.*, 2012; Merciu *et al.*, 2014), and to generate templates suitable for comprehensive conservation compatible with the spirit of the time and place. This study reinforces the importance of revitalisation through adaptive re-use as strategy for the conservation of built heritage, a theme reviewed by Plevoets and Van Cleempoel

(2011) and supported by Kip and Oevermann (2022).

Urban revitalization is crucial for maintaining sustainable urban conservation (Balsas, 2007; Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2015; Boussaa, 2018). In this regard, conservation and sustainability are mutually supportive in a given historic fabric if an integrated philosophical approach to its preservation is adopted (Rodwell, 2007). Sustainability is key to the economics of cultural heritage (Throsby, 2002). It is crucial that it does not “abuse the object so that future users are not deprived of its ability to function in a symbolic, meaningful way” (Muñoz Viñas, 2005).

Historical, urban, architectural, economic and social values are at the core of longstanding commercial areas in city centres (El-Haggag Mehanna and El-Haggag Mehanna, 2019). A traditional covered market is a significant cultural heritage element that is distinguished in the urban landscape by specific architectural features, as well as historical and social values. Markets play a significant role in healthy urban life. Market halls of southern European cities are not only places of routine trade in food and other everyday goods but also as functional and social foci (Fava *et al.*, 2016); they are the places where locals meet by chance on a regular basis. Together with shopping and food malls, they are key to daily living in the city, and liveability is dependent on the quality of urban places (Kravalik, 2010).

As Guàrdia and Oyón point out, food markets are “one of the most obvious expressions of municipal pride, architectural innovation, urban renovation and the new commercial structures of capitalist cities. However, in

the twentieth century many of them began to decline, some of them falling under the pickaxe and surviving only in people’s memory. Contrarily, many others are still standing, their old structures defying new commercial structures” (2015). The objective of this paper is to (i) review the development history of the historic covered market of Valletta, locally known as Is-Suq tal-Belt, a literal translation of ‘The Market of the City’ and (ii) critically assess its restoration with respect to contemporary thought on conservation. This iconic, principally cast iron, Victorian-era structure was restored, revitalised into an upmarket food hall and reopened for Valletta 2018, when the city was the European Capital for Culture (Fig. 1). Valletta, Malta’s capital city, has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1980 (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/131/>). A view of the Valletta Market as it appears at present is shown in Fig. 2.



Fig. 1. Site location – outlined in red - of Malta (top left), Valletta (top right) and the Valletta Market (bottom) (© Google Earth).



Fig. 2. The Valletta Market along Merchants Street as at present (© Alessandra Bianco).

## 2. Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research and adopts a methodology inspired from the doctoral thesis of Jenny Lee (<https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:278215/FULLTEXT01.pdf>English). The first part includes an exposition of the historical context of the Valletta Market, followed by a discussion of its significance in history and its conservation to date. The second part addresses conservation policy documents.

The method and materials for the first part included (i) retrieving historical sources and other relevant documentation and (ii) fieldwork. In terms of desk research, the following documents were consulted:

1. Archival material at the National Archives of Malta: *Dispatches to Secretary of State (1800-1900)* no. 143 (30 August 1858 and 9 October 1858), and no. 24 (29 April 1863); and Land Revenue File 1191: *Report of Hector Zimelli to Giuseppe Montanaro* (8 October 1858). Other archival material included the architectural drawings entitled *Design for proposed new market at Malta* and *Market Valletta*, accessible at Records and Archives Section, Public Works, Malta, folder 24.
2. Ordinance survey sheet (SS) for the years 1945, 1953, 1959 and 1968. The

number of the SS for 1968 is 5672; for the other years, it is 66.

3. Aerial photographs available at the Mapping Unit of the Planning Authority, Malta (<http://geoserver.pa.org.mt/publicgeoserver>)

The survey sheets, together with the official twentieth century aerial photographs, were deemed necessary given that the market was erected on a former urban site. They proved useful to understanding the market in its urban context. The fieldwork consisted of two site visits to inspect and undertake a photographic survey of the building and the surrounding environs.

With respect to the second part, the following main, internationally endorsed conservation policy documents were consulted:

1. *The Venice Charter*, the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, International Council, hereafter referred to as ICOMOS (1964),
2. *The Burra Charter* (<https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf>), hereafter referred to as ICOMOS (2013), and
3. *The Nara Document on Authenticity* (<https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/events/documents/event-833-3.pdf>), hereafter referred to as ICOMOS (1994).

The inputs from the desk research, supplemented by the site visits, were used to interpret the historical context and significance of the market.

## 3. The Valletta Market

### 3.1. Historical backdrop

Is-Suq tal-Belt, hereafter referred to as Is-Suq, was erected between 1859 and 1861

on the site of a market dating from the period when the Knights of the Hospitaller Order of St John ruled over Malta (1530-1798). The Baroque building, which had a central courtyard, was demolished in 1858/9, as it was deemed unsuitable for meeting public health standards (Mifsud and Cassar, 2020). The main access to the market was from Merchants Street, a name which recalls the brief occupation (1798-1800) by the French, who changed its name from Strada San Giacomo (its name during the rule of the Knights) to Rue des Marchands.

Is-Suq was built to the design of Hector Zimelli (1816-?), the Superintendent of Public Works, and was completed under the direction of Emanuele Luigi Galizia (1830-1907) (Fig. 3). The metal framework was designed in 1859 by architect and engineer William Scamp (1801-1872) and the tender for the ironworks was awarded to Messrs Emmerson & Murgatroyd. In the words of Sir John Gaspard Le Marchant (1803-1874), the British Governor of Malta at the time, Is-Suq was “framed upon the market in Paris called Les Halles Centrales [and] adapted ... to the wants and climate of this island, with the assistance and opinion of Sir Charles Fox and the eminent architect Mons. V. Baltard of Paris” (National Archives of Malta, 9 October 1858). Sir Charles Fox (1810-1874) calculated and designed Joseph Paxton’s (1803-1865) structure for the Crystal Palace, which was intended to cater for the ‘Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations’ of 1851 (Rolt, 2010). Le Marchant’s predecessor as Governor was Sir William Reid (1791-1858), who chaired the executive committee responsible for the planning of this exhibition (Laferla, 1938). The design, manufacture and construction of Crystal

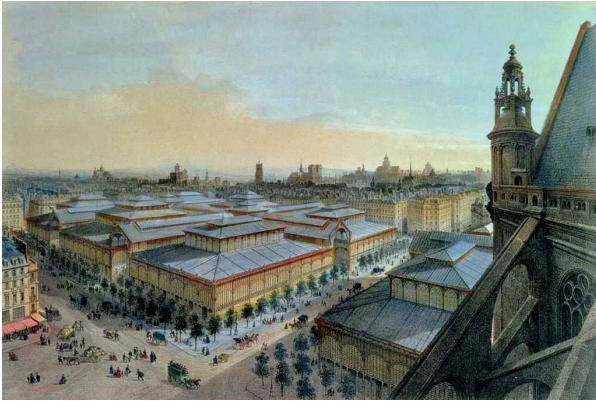
Palace provided a showcase of the revolutionary utilisation of iron and glass plate in prefabricated architectural structures that can be assembled on-site. It provided a blueprint for similar structures in other European countries.



Fig. 3. The Valletta Market along Merchants Street (dated late 19<sup>th</sup> century).

Zimelli was sent to France and England “for the purpose of inquiring into and acquainting himself with all the modern improvements recently introduced in the construction of such buildings in those Countries” (National Archives of Malta, 30 August 1858). He visited Les Halles, Paris’s central market, when its first phase was completed. He consulted its designer, Victor Baltard (1805-1874), the Chief Engineer of Paris, on the use of a similar iron structure for Malta. Baltard, who had visited Malta, advised against the use of iron. He further queried why Malta had to import materials for its construction and “discouraged the use of this material in warm climates ... when the local stone is ideal for keeping out the heat” (Caruana Dingli, 2018). His opinion, reported by the pro-British newspaper *The Malta Times, and United Service Gazette* further stated that local stone was “cheap, manageable, adaptable, envied and admired by surrounding countries, and constantly being transported from this [island] at great cost to other parts of the world” (24 August 1858).

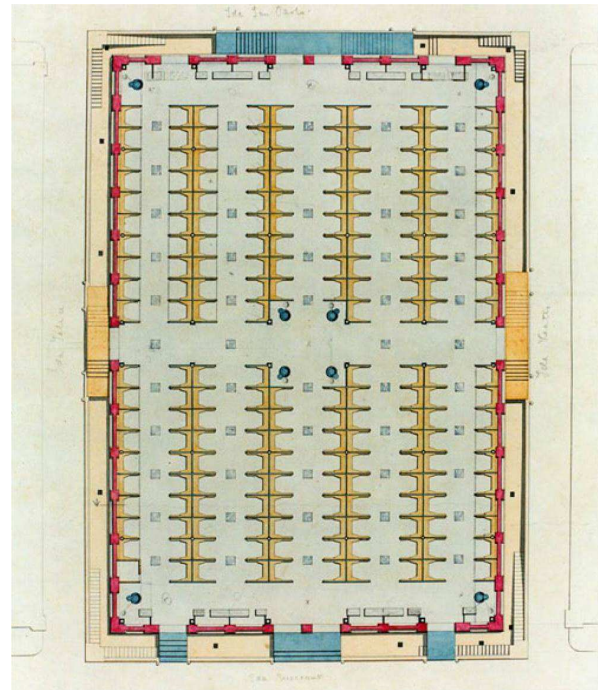
Despite Baltard's advice, Zimelli prepared a design proposal based on an iron structure. He "copied" one of the units at Les Halles both in form and structure (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4.** View of Les Halles Centrales from Saint-Eustache Church (dated circa 1870) (Felix Benoist; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les\\_Halles#/media/File:Vedere\\_a\\_Halelor\\_din\\_Paris\\_de\\_pe\\_Biserică\\_Saint\\_Eustache.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Halles#/media/File:Vedere_a_Halelor_din_Paris_de_pe_Biserică_Saint_Eustache.jpg)).

The final option included masonry elevations in local limestone with a dual objective: visual integration with the existing urban fabric and thermal insulation (Fig. 5 to Fig. 8; these drawings were drawn to scale of 1 inch to 10 feet). In his report to Governor Le Marchant, Zimelli stated the following reasons for his design solution (Land Revenue File 1191, 8 October 1858): "Although the market may be called an iron building in as much as parts of it will be of iron, thus constituting an innovation in Malta, it is but right I should explain that iron has only been planned by me for the inner supports and divisions, thereby gaining a great deal of space, but the supporting walls and pavement of both cellars and the ground floor will be stone, and chiefly of hard quality, and three slanting roofs will be covered with terracing as used in hot climates. These explanations are in my opinion necessary in order to remove erroneous impressions that may arise from the circumstance that the

Market of Paris, from which the proposed one was copied, is I may say, altogether of iron".



**Fig. 5.** Layout plan of ground floor (© Records and Archives Section, Public Works, Malta).



**Fig. 6.** Elevation along Felix Street (© Records and Archives Section, Public Works, Malta).

At the time of its construction, Les Halles was a ground-breaking project. The decision to use an iron structure rather than a masonry one was undertaken on the basis of the cost-effectiveness of the building. It became one of the most visited sites in Paris; its popularity increased relentlessly from its opening until the early post-WWII

years (TenHoor, 2007). After 1950, the market began to lose popularity amongst food vendors, until it “was essentially stripped of its functions” by the beginning of 1969 (Wakeman, 2007). As stated in Parimage (July 2012), when reviewing Les Halles as the new heart of Paris, the building was torn down in the early 1970s, except for two pavilions whose metal structures were dismantled and relocated, one in the Paris suburb of Nogent-sur-Marne and the other in Yokohama, Japan. It was demolished to make way for the Réseau Express Régional, the new express underground rail network, and the Westfield Forum des Halles, a shopping mall with most of the shops and stalls located underground, designed by Claude Vasconi (1940-2009) and Georges Pencreac'h (1941). There are neither physical nor metaphysical traces referring to the memory of the old market in the current design. Following extensive building works, the Forum des Halles was inaugurated in 2018, essentially as a food market. Wainwright, in his contribution to *The Guardian* (6 April 2016), noted that the Forum des Halles development was not received well: “The resulting wrought-iron and glass pavilions of Les Halles, designed by the city architect Victor Baltard, were tragically bulldozed in the 1970s and replaced with a grim underground shopping centre topped with mirror-glassed lumps, in one of the worst acts of urban vandalism of the century. Nicknamed ‘the hole of Les Halles’, with a park that became a magnet for drug dealing, the place has been a national embarrassment ever since” (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/apr/06/les-halles-paris-architecture-custard-coloured-flop>).

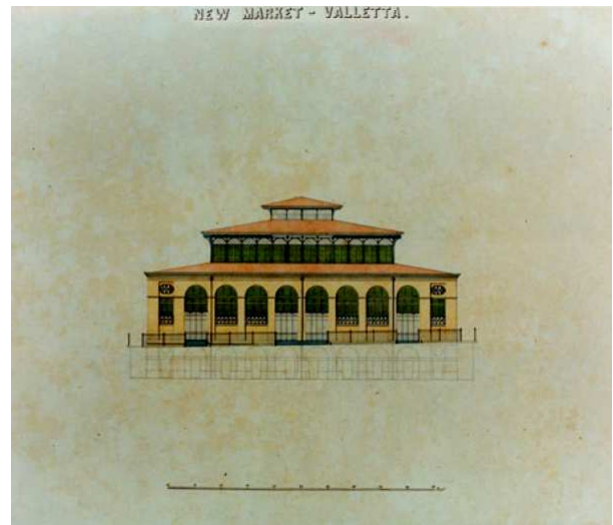


Fig. 7. Elevation along St Paul's Street (© Records and Archives Section, Public Works, Malta).

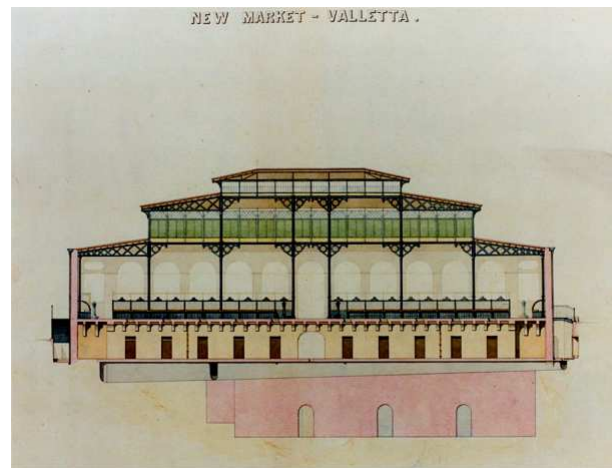


Fig. 8. Longitudinal section showing roofing structure, cellar and cistern (© Records and Archives Section, Public Works, Malta).

### 3.2. Historical significance

The covered market in Valletta introduced innovative design and engineering techniques to local architecture and construction (Borg, 2001). Erected in cast-iron columns and girders, the ironwork recalls Les Halles (Fig. 9). Scamp's girders are similar but marginally less elaborate (Drago and Dreyfuss, 2014). An innovative aspect of the design was the use of red deal planks instead of 'xorok', the traditional Maltese limestone slabs. The planks were covered by a layer of 'torba' (well-compacted stone chippings) with an overlying 6 mm

layer of 'deffun' (an impervious layer composed of small chippings of earthenware mixed with lime and water, beaten to a paste and left to set), thus providing a lighter roof and more effective thermal insulation than the zinc cladding of Les Halles (Mahoney, 1996).

The market was "built with a different ethos in mind and in the process eradicating the community networks defined by the previous courtyard space. The communal value of the site was changed forever and with it, a chapter of Valletta's social history was closed" (Mifsud, 2018). When completed, the Valletta Market was appreciated both on the Continent and in India (National Archives of Malta, 29 April 1863).

### 3.3. Conservation history

Although the Merchants Street side of the market was heavily damaged during aerial bombardment in the Second World

War, a significant part of the iron structure survived. The reconstruction included re-erection of the elevation where the roof structure was still undamaged, thus recessing the building's perimeter to the present line along Merchants Street (Fig. 10). This led to a reduction in the size of the market's inner space, but generated an open space in front of the re-built elevation – effectively a square – which was used for car parking (Fig. 11).

An article in the magazine *Country Life* (18 February 1982) notes that despite upgrades to meet hygiene standards, Is-Suq started to decline in the mid-1970s and stood empty by early 1982. In 1983, following a remodelling of the internal layout plans to showcase Maltese products, it was rebranded 'Ixtri Malti', literally translated as 'Buy Maltese', a phrase with a pleasing double meaning which could be read as either 'Maltese [People] Buy' or 'Purchase Maltese [Products]'.

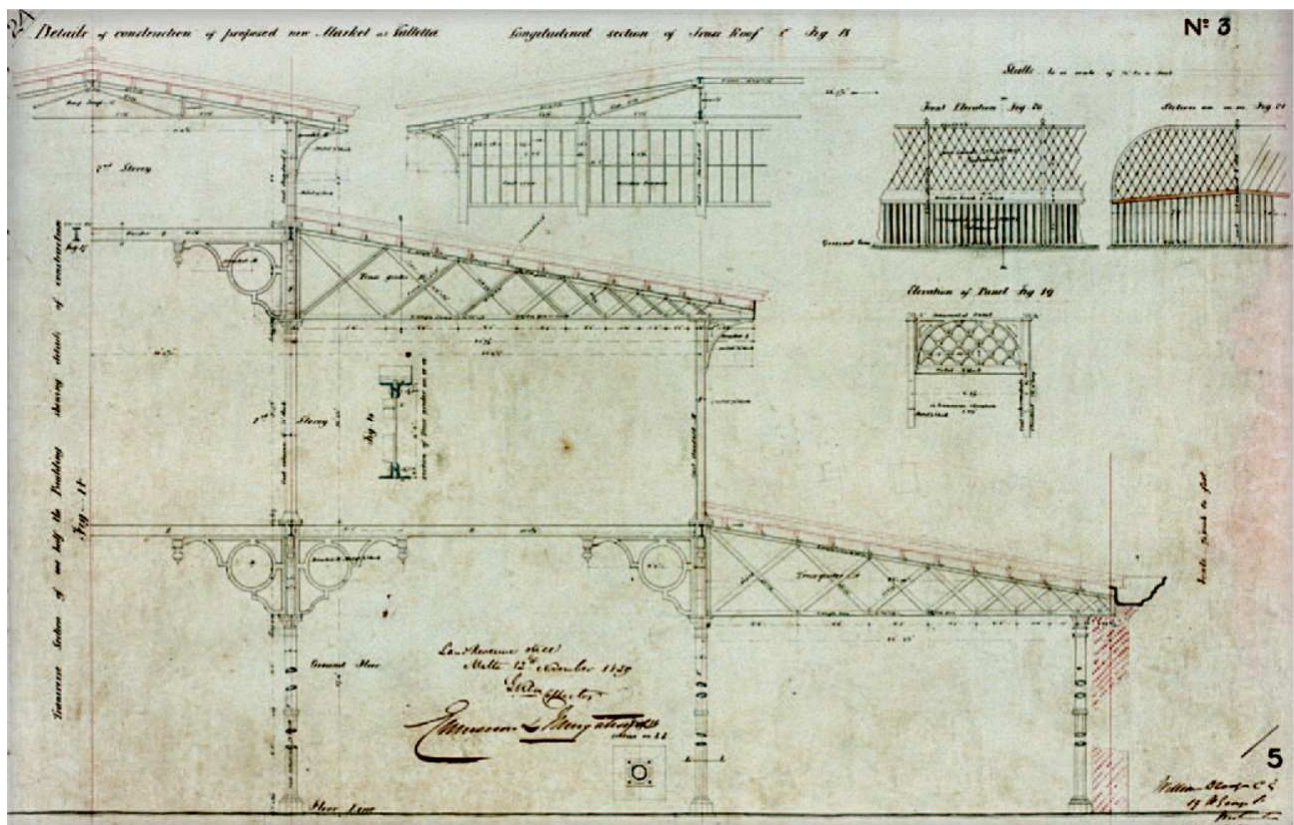
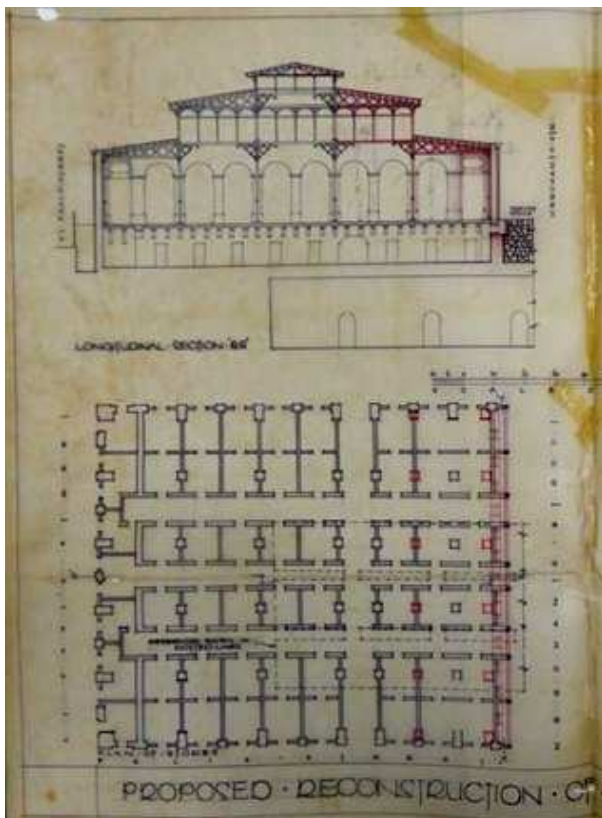


Fig. 9. Construction details of the 1859 proposal (© Records and Archives Section, Public Works, Malta).

Another piece, in the monthly magazine *Modern Elegance* (March 2007), notes that the stalls which had originally traded at the site were moved to a new building outside the capital. Local masonry and reinforced concrete were introduced to build shops on two levels, thus concealing the original structure. A significant intervention was the introduction of a shopping arcade around a stepped central atrium. This intervention ran counter to the original concept of having a light structure and it impacted significantly on the original layout. Although the building reverted to its earlier function in the early 1990s, its popularity had diminished. In 2008, Is-Suq was scheduled as a national monument of Grade 1 importance (<https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Government%20Gazette/PA%20GN/Documents/2008/GG%2028.3.pdf>).



**Fig. 10.** Proposed ground plan and longitudinal section of post-war reconstruction (© Records and Archives Section, Public Works, Malta).



**Fig. 11.** Open space in front of the Valletta Market was used for car parking (© Continentaleurope at English Wikipedia / CC BY-SA 4.0).

After the successful bid for Valletta to be the European Capital of Culture for the year 2018, the restoration and rehabilitation of Is-Suq was at the forefront of the Central Government's agenda. In 2016, the market was leased to a private investor, Arkadia Group, for 65 years, with unanimous approval by Parliament. A complete overhaul was undertaken in 2016-17 and the market hall was once again accessible to the public as a food court from 3 January 2018, the onset of Valletta 2018. According to the design of the conservation works, the original elements of the structure were preserved and subsequently restored (<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/as-vallettas-is-suq-nears-completion-residents-fear-a-commercial.655388>). Rock-hewn cisterns and dividing walls discovered during the restoration works were integrated into the design. The conservation project included the removal of additions, most notably those introduced in the early 1980s, thus exposing the original historic fabric. The restoration and rehabilitation project was inspired by the adaptive re-use of Mercado de San Miguel, Madrid.

Market squares are “among the most interesting urban objects of unique architectural and urban features”



(Kaplinska, 2015). Once regenerated, they offer a better quality of life to locals and provide a tourist attraction (Bursiewicz, 2018). The informal square in front of Is-Suq was converted for outdoor dining and serves as a catalyst for locals and tourists who want to enjoy a drink, snack or lunch.

#### 4. Conservation policy documents

##### 4.1. *The Venice Charter*

*The Venice Charter* was the first in a series of resolutions adopted by the Second International Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings held in 1964 (ICOMOS, 1964). Historic monuments and sites were identified as common heritage, and thus safeguarding them and their authenticity for future generations was stated as a common responsibility.

Article 7 of the Charter states: “A monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs. The moving of all or part of a monument cannot be allowed except where the safeguarding of that monument demands it or where it is justified by national or international interest of paramount importance”. It also makes provisions for the replacement of missing sections which, whilst they should be integrated with the whole, must be distinct from the original to ensure the authenticity of the artistic and/or historic evidence (Article 12). Additions which impinge on the monuments and their context are not allowed (Article 13).

With respect to the excavation of ruins, the Charter specifically states: “All reconstruction work should however be ruled out ‘a priori’. Only anastylosis, that is to say, the reassembling of existing but

dismembered parts can be permitted. The material used for integration should always be recognizable and its use should be the least that will ensure the conservation of a monument and the reinstatement of its form” (Article 15).

##### 4.2. *The Burra Charter*

Since its adoption in 1979, *The Burra Charter* had been periodically revised and updated: in 1981, 1988 and 1999 (ICOMOS, 2013). This charter emphasises places rather than monuments and puts forward a typology of heritage value in four categories: aesthetic, historic, scientific and social. The last of these, social value, recognises the importance of spiritual, political, national and other cultural values for past, present and future generations. Although it encourages the restoration and rehabilitation of heritage buildings, this charter calls for prudence when it comes to interventions with the historic fabric, in order to minimise the impact on its cultural significance.

This charter incorporates a number of definitions (Article 1), conservation principles (Articles 2–13), conservation processes (Articles 14–25) and conservation practices (Articles 26–34). It concludes with a flow chart illustrating the Burra Charter Process through the various stages that must be handled in the planning and management phases of any project affecting a site of cultural heritage significance. It defines ‘conservation’ as “all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance”; ‘cultural significance’ is understood as “aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations”.

In a systematic procedure for assessing the cultural significance of a historical

monument, preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation are vital actions for the conservation of a heritage site. The introductory article to Conservation Processes (Article 14) states that “conservation may, according to circumstance, include the processes of: retention or reintroduction of a use; retention of associations and meanings; maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and interpretation; and will commonly include a combination of more than one of these. Conservation may also include retention of the contribution that related places and related objects make to the cultural significance of a place” (ICOMOS, 2013).

#### 4.3. *The Nara Document*

*The Nara Document on Authenticity* is rooted in the spirit of *The Venice Charter*, formulated three decades earlier (ICOMOS, 1994) (Article 3). It acknowledges authenticity as central to heritage values (Article 10). Judgements about values vary from culture to culture, and also within a given culture (Article 11).

The last article, Article 13, of *The Nara Document* states that: “Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time, authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. The use of these sources permits elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined”. A template was developed by the Raymond Lemaire International Centre

for Conservation as a tool to define the multidisciplinary values in terms of Article 13 ([https://www.icomos.org/quebec2008/cd/toindex/77\\_pdf/77-j1F6-282.pdf](https://www.icomos.org/quebec2008/cd/toindex/77_pdf/77-j1F6-282.pdf)). As noted by Jaenen, proceeding from this definition, the “essential spirit” of a given heritage building “can be specified and be used as a guide to future treatment and monitoring for safeguarding the spirit” (<http://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/71/1/77-j1F6-282.pdf>).

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1 *Character-defining elements*

Restoration may uncover issues – material, technical, economic, social and/or spiritual – relating to the history, archaeology, anthropology and sociology of a given place (Benguedda *et al.*, 2020). The restoration works at Is-Suq did uncover building elements. There is scope for interpreting the rock-hewn cisterns and dividing walls discovered during these works in the micro- and macro-context of the site. Furthermore, conservation issues may arise when an architectural monument and its authentic appearance require preservation (Orlenko *et al.*, 2020). Character-defining elements of Is-Suq are listed hereunder:

1. The masonry elevations serve as an aesthetic and environmental skin to the building; the support to the iron structure is independent from them.
2. The stripped-down elegance of these elevations recalls Neoclassicism, an architectural language associated with the British Empire and which contrasts sharply with the Baroque of the ‘ancien régime’.
3. The large-spanning, Neogothic-like, iron structure marked a leap in building engineering and technology in Malta, whose built heritage, until recent decades, constituted

predominantly of load-bearing masonry structures.

4. The original roof decking, which makes use of torba and deffun overlying timber planks, merged traditional construction techniques with modern ones in a novel composite construction for Malta.

### *5.2 Value identification*

A recurrent theme in conservation is the value of heritage property. Various authors addressed this topic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first being Alois Reigl (1902). Interest in conservation values has gathered momentum since the 1980s, most notably through the works of William Lipe (1984), Bruno Frey (1997) and Bernard Feilden (1982). A recent study attempts to quantify heritage values for a given cultural heritage site (Zammit and Bianco, 2022).

When originally erected, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Valletta Market was the first structure in Malta which made extensive use of cast iron, a material no longer produced commercially. It applied innovative technology and building engineering techniques with its quasi-stripped, Neoclassical masonry elevations. The structure – a glass and iron frame typical of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – was designed and prefabricated overseas, then imported and assembled on site, with the elevations realised in local limestone. These elevations ensured visual continuity with the existing urban context. The composite design of the roof is grounded in local building materials and traditions.

This unique remnant of the built industrial British colonial heritage in Malta is still the principal covered shopping arcade of the capital city. Typologically, it is similar to other iron-

framed historical closed markets on the Continent. It was designed, taking into account the climatic conditions, local habits and type of merchandise which the market catered for.

The Nara Grid was completed for the Valletta Market as it stood in the 1950s – that is, after its length was reduced from the original footprint and prior the additions of the 1980s which transformed the spirit of the space (Table 1). The open space/square which had been turned into a carparking space was not considered when completing the grid, as it would have skewed the analysis.

### *5.3 Critical assessment of the interventions*

The destiny of the Valletta Market differed from that of Les Halles. Once demolished, with only two relocated pavilions remaining, Les Halles represents a failure in terms of the notions of authenticity and relocation of built heritage advocated by conservation charters. Themes relevant to the critical assessment of conservation interventions are:

1. legibility,
2. reversibility,
3. overshadowing of values,
4. alterations,
5. restoration, and
6. anastylosis.

In terms of legibility – that is, the ability to ‘read’ the history of the building – the interventions between the old and the new in the Valletta Market are clearly defined, except for the roofing, which is discussed later on in this section. The later interventions, most notably the masonry works dating from the early 1980s, were removed, exposing both the original open layout and those parts of the iron structure that survived the war. The apertures in the original fabric were

restored to their original state, whilst new interventions were kept to a minimum so as not to overshadow the old fabric (Fig. 12). A further illustration of clarity in distinguishing between the original design and newer interventions can be seen in the balcony and railing that were introduced to the elevation overlooking St Paul's Street. These additions make use of different materials and are rendered in different colour (Fig. 13). In case of Les Halles, legibility was irreversibly obliterated once the structure was demolished. The relocated structure in Nogent-sur-Marne was repainted, thus making it impossible to distinguish the original fabric. The structure located in Yokohama consists solely of the main members of the cast-iron structure, which are also completely painted.

Good practice in architectural conservation calls for the reversibility of

any interventions undertaken. Such interventions should not be carried out in a manner which impairs the original fabric. Due to the redevelopment of the site, the original Les Halles was irreversibly destroyed by demolition, as were its environs, in particular through the excavation of the site, an action which in itself is not reversible. In the case of the Valletta Market, the new stalls were designed to work unaided by the original structure. Another load-bearing structure introduced supports so as not to overload the original iron columns. In concordance with the terms of Article 7 of *The Venice Charter* (ICOMOS, 1964), the old and new columns remained distinguishable (Fig. 14). If the alterations were removed in the future, the original form and integrity of the structure would be regained. The technologies and services introduced during the interventions did not impinge significantly on the historic fabric.

**Table 1.** The Nara Grid for the Valletta Market.

Aspects of the sources	Dimensions of heritage			
	Artistic	Historic	Social	Scientific
<b>Form and design</b>	Designed in Neoclassical form with Neogothic structure.	Extensive industrial iron structure dating to 19 <sup>th</sup> -century British Colonial era.	Main food market in the capital. It can be used in all weather, as interior is covered.	Technological and engineering feat to span a large space.
<b>Materials and substance</b>	Original materials are in good state of repair.	Use of imported 19 <sup>th</sup> -century iron from Britain.	X	Illustration of 19 <sup>th</sup> -century use of iron in buildings.
<b>Use and function</b>	The form and design follow the original function.	Exemplar of iron-framed covered market in Europe.	Popular market for all the inhabitants of the island.	X
<b>Tradition, techniques and workmanship</b>	Craftsmanship in masonry and iron construction.	State-of-the-art of building science and construction.	Various tradesmen worked on the construction.	Innovative composite roofing construction in local tradition.
<b>Location and setting</b>	X	Located on the site of a former Baroque market.	Central to the community and thus a focus for social interaction.	X
<b>Spirit and feeling</b>	Ornamented iron columns and beams overwhelm the space generated.	Feel of the original 19 <sup>th</sup> -century structure can still be appreciated by users.	Key building for Malta, especially for the residents of Valletta.	X



Fig. 12. Old (left) and new (right) apertures.



Fig. 13. Balcony overlooking St Paul's Street.

Although contemporary materials were used for ease of legibility, the new addition to the first floor overshadows the elevation overlooking Merchants Street (Fig. 15). Such overshadowing ignores the stipulation for caution with respect to change advised by *The Nara Document* (ICOMOS, 1994) and *The Burra Charter* (ICOMOS, 2013). Large retractable canopies were installed over the outdoor dining area after the market's

re-opening. These 'temporary' structures dominate the protected building and the square in front of the market. In the case of Les Halles, the intervention completely disregarded such caution by irrevocably obliterating the original fabric, thus annihilating an object of cultural significance.

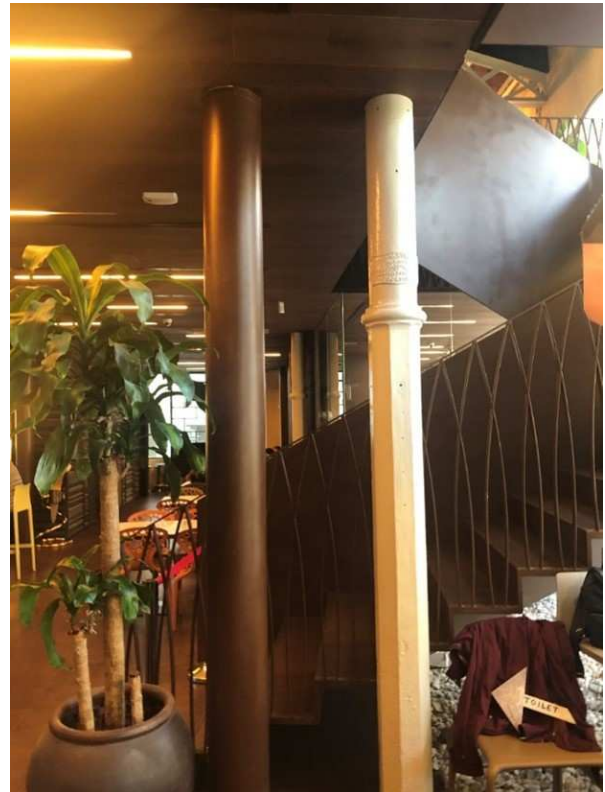


Fig. 14. Independent structure introduced to carry the load of the new building elements.

A significant part of the original roof was, essentially, destroyed during the Blitz in the Second World War. Metal sheeting that had been used to cover the remainder in the post-war reconstruction was removed and a new sandwich panel roof system was installed (Terracore, 2016). Aesthetic details were adopted in the reconstruction so that the trimmings complemented the original (Fig. 16). Any timber planks that had deteriorated were replaced. The new timber elements resemble the original fabric; a transparent render was applied to the timber roofing. Although this intervention complied with the *Method Statement* exhortation "to

ensure that aesthetically the structure will appear as it [was] originally intended” (Terracore, 2016), it is now challenging to distinguish the old from the new. The adopted method for ‘restoration’ of the roofing elements was more focused on visually simulating the original design than integrating harmoniously with the nature of the original fabric (Fig. 17).



**Fig. 15.** Addition to first floor; ‘temporary’ awnings were placed over the dining areas.

Indeed, the reconstruction approach used a different roofing construction technique made to look as if it was the original, thus it does not comply with Article 14 of *The Burra Charter* (ICOMOS, 2013). Furthermore, four timber beams in the area where air extraction was envisaged, were modified for ease of installing ventilation equipment (Terracore, 2016), a non-reversible alteration to accommodate services. The remains of the original market that were uncovered during the restoration works were safeguarded and incorporated in the new design in line with the stipulations on anastylosis put forth in Article 15 of *The Venice Charter* (ICOMOS, 1964) (Fig. 18).

An overview of the restoration works and the subsequent revitalisation of the Valletta Market can be appreciated through images taken over a span of four decades (Fig. 19 to Fig. 21).



**Fig. 16.** Trimming of new sandwich panel system to complement the original.



**Fig. 17.** Reconstructed timber roof.

## 6. Conclusions

Architectural design has a bearing on the social, cultural and economic aspects affecting the revitalization of an urban marketplace (Ali, 2016). The restoration works and subsequent adaptive re-use of the Valletta Market has transformed the surviving part of the Grade 1 listed Victorian covered market from a failed fruit, vegetable, meat and fish marketplace into a thriving food court with a food market at basement level. The

upper level is expected to host private functions and cultural events.



**Fig. 18.** Glass panel placed in the floor to provide a view of an original staircase uncovered during the restoration works.

The restoration of the original fabric was accomplished using compatible materials to minimise future problems. The new intervention is physically separated from the old and thus reversible. The concept is valid, but was applied insensitively. Whilst the Valletta Market underwent a transformation regarding its use, the executed design tampered with its cultural significance. The addition to the first floor overshadows the elevation overlooking Merchants Street and thus runs counter to the recommendations of *The Nara Document* (ICOMOS, 1994) and *The Burra Charter* (ICOMOS, 2013). Rather than integrating the new intervention with the original fabric, the reconstruction of the new roof aimed at a visual simulation of the original design, thereby rendering it difficult to

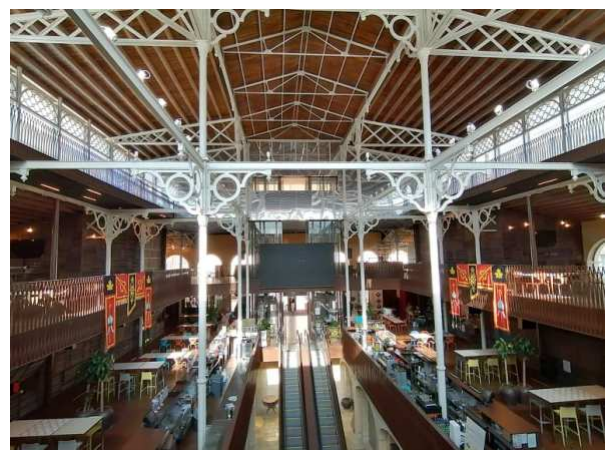
distinguish the old from the new. Furthermore, modified timber beams added to accommodate services caused irreversible damage to these elements.



**Fig. 19.** The Valletta Market prior to the restoration and adaptation undertaken in 2016-17 (© Daniel Cilia).



**Fig. 20.** The interior stripped from additions introduced in the 1980s (© Times of Malta).



**Fig. 21.** The Valletta Market as at present (© Alessandra Bianco).

Although the project has been successful in bringing a new character to the building and has proven to be a

sustainable reuse of the space, compromises in heritage values were made in the new interventions. Sustainability is critical for the economics of cultural patrimony, but in an integrated approach to the preservation of built heritage, conservation values must also be included. These findings validate the view that new is not necessarily better with regards to the values concerning that particular culture.

Cultural events have an impact on the image of a city, especially when it becomes a Cultural Capital of Europe (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Food markets shape communities and also serve as tourist resources. The economic benefits for developers of such establishments are the prime driver to invest in the development of the neighbourhood, but these investments bring socio-cultural benefits as well as tourists (Crespi-Vallbona and Domínguez Pérez, 2016; Crespi-Vallbona and Dimitrovski, 2017). Based on observations of the first author of this article, who has frequented the site regularly over the past twenty-five years, the project to revitalise Is-Suq meant that the premises were re-invented from their original role, which catered for all citizens – including those on low incomes – to one targeted at more affluent customers. This trend had been noted elsewhere, where the “narrative of decline and revival” has pushed the traditional retail markets to the verge of a gentrification frontier (Gonzalez and Waley, 2012). Equitable development is a way forward to reduce the chances of gentrification (Rose, 2002), a reality which may generate socio-economic issues and related concerns.

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