

TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT: PLANNING FOR GREATER ACCESSIBILITY AND MOBILITY

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This short article evaluates the impact of capital investment in two major projects promoting Transit Oriented Development in the Harbour area Malta. These two projects were part-financed by the European Union through European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the 2007-2014 programme. The projects; ERDF 104: Stronger Cottonera Communities - The citizens right to accessibility and mobility and ERDF 183: Vertical Connection - Better accessibility through innovative and cleaner transport followed the objectives of Priority Axis 6 "Urban Regeneration and Improving the Quality of Life". Revisiting the projects 10 years after inception throws light on TOD as a planning and transit tool; have these projects truly reached the targets set?

Forward Planning: Cottonera Waterfront Project

In August 2015 the Planning Authority gave the go ahead for the American University of Malta project which would see the adaptive re-use of the British Buildings at the Dock No.1 and the complete regeneration of the waterfront project for Cottonera. The project included a planning gain contribution of €50,000 which has to be made by the developers to go towards the improvement of the locality.² This was one of the final projects which secured the completion of the "Stronger Cottonera Communities - The citizens right to accessibility and mobility" planning brief and project. An investment of €8,610,410. The purpose of this project was to launch an integrated urban regeneration project for Cottonera. The interventions include: enhanced transit areas, the development of the public realm through embellishment and the upgrading of social conditions through housing programmes. These projects were directed at strengthening neighbourhoods in the locality and instil sustainable regeneration through better accessibility and mobility.

The location of the American University of Malta in 2015 comes as wise political and planning decision in spurring further regeneration through adaptive re-use and diversified agents of change. It also falls within the project objectives and results;

1. "The full embellishment of the Dock Number 1 nodes extending from Triq ix-xatt to Triq San Pawl. This is an extension of the Dock No 1 project and is targeting the urban areas in the immediate surroundings of the project to increase the permeability of the project and to increase the economic and social spin off as a result of physical regeneration.
2. Bormla Local Council has earmarked the site which is located in St.John's Bastion just off St.Nicholas Street and in front of a residential areas for upgrading. The project includes the installation of new lighting systems, fixing of benches and new paving.
3. The proposed project by Agenzija Support is the embellishment of the surrounding area outside Dar Bormla which is one of the residences managed by the agency. The outside area is being redesigned in this new proposal to cater for persons with disabilities and will restructure current parking spaces."³

A Vertical Connection

¹ Dr Malcolm Borg was the Project Leader for ERDF 104 and 183 from 2008 to 2010 after developing Planning and Design Briefs together with the Projects Development Coordination Unit.

² <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20160825/local/american-university-of-malta-expected-to-get-go-ahead-for-dock-1-today.623003> (viewed 12 April 2017).

³ <https://investinyourfuture.gov.mt/project/public-infrastructure/stronger-cottonera-communities-the-citizens-right-to-accessibility-and-mobility-33947679> (viewed 12 April 2017).

Photo 1: The vertical Lift installed against the ditch walls in Valletta.

Photo 2: Dock No.1 regenerated as part of the waterfront rehabilitation.

(Photos:

<https://investinyourfuture.gov.vt/project/public-infrastructure/stronger->



The success of the project was catalysed by the Valletta Vertical Connection Project on the opposite side of the Grand Harbour. The scope of the project was to provide greater access between Valletta's waterfront and the heart of the City through a vertical link. With the redevelopment of the location of Valletta's main area will have a new lease of life. This new project would sustain the projects already underway and encourage further public and private investment in the area. It would also sustain ancillary operational transit systems and enhance the urban regeneration more sustainable. Moreover it would make Valletta a more attractive City for living and enhance the quality of life of the existing local and working community.⁴

Re-discovering the potential of the project

The project was unfortunately exported and reduced from the original Planning and Design Brief. Originally it was designed as a viable project as a park and ride with a diagonal lift with attenuated visual impact. The political and planning decision at the time was to remove the park and ride element and go for a vertical "off-the-shelf" system with greater visual impact and reducing significantly transit points. The other element which would have made the project more viable was the park and ride element which was designed with a landscaping scheme in the Valletta Landfront ditch. The current Government has reversed the decision of the park and ride and the Grand Harbour Regeneration Project has (2014-15) injected funds in the development of the park and ride as part of the regeneration masterplan for the Valletta Entrance to compliment the Renzo Piano project. The Vertical Connection project was designed to provide greater access between Valletta's waterfront and the heart of the City through a vertical link. It was directed to encourage a modal shift towards non-car modes when commuting to Valletta. The objectives and results of the project are:

1. "To provide a vertical link to enhance connectivity between the existing and proposed activities on the Valletta and Cottonera waterfronts;
2. Catalyse through this vertical connectivity a comprehensive transport strategy for Valletta integrating multi-modal systems
3. Bring eco-friendly traffic and promote new technology
4. Encourage travel behaviour change (modal-shift)
5. Provide direct and inviting links to public transport nodes and other different travel modes
6. Alleviate traffic congestion on Valletta Peninsula
7. Complement and support the development of other projects in the immediate context."⁵

Positive results for TOD indicators

The two projects with recent interventions following the original planning briefs has proved in the medium term that transit oriented development has truly driven change. The current statistics show a significant change in mobility and accessibility and also positive impact on the urban environment.

MAIN TO CATAGORIES	SPECIFIC INDICATORS	PROJECT RESULTS	ACHIEVED
Travel Behaviour	modal split	Lift use and ferry doubled between 2014-2015	Achieved

⁴ <https://investinyourfuture.gov.vt/project/public-infrastructure/vertical-connection-better-accessibility-through-innovative-and-cleaner-transport-33947695> (viewed 12 April 2017).

⁵Ibid.

MAIN TO CATAGORIES	SPECIFIC INDICATORS	PROJECT RESULTS	ACHIEVED
	parking	Valletta Landfront Ditch increased parking facilities	Achieved
	traffic flow	Redesigned waterfront and adjacent streets with shared space and increased walkability	Achieved
Economic	Private and public investment in regeneration	% redevelopment rose significantly between 2010 and 2016 with the highest being 2016 (+18) over the annual average (44).	Achieved
Environmental	Air Quality	Better air quality through reduced congestion	Achieved
	Use of solar Energy (PVP)	The project aimed for the application of a low carbon programme through implementation of RES and EE throughout the whole project and all its components and PVP use in social housing.	Achieved
	Use of Alternative transport modes	The application and support of alternative transport means through the lift, ferry and eco-bus and facilitating modal split.	Achieved
Built Environment	heritage assets (adaptive reuse)	The buildings around the areas were rehabilitated, regenerated and adaptively re-use; case example American University Malta.	Achieved
	design quality	The projects called for quality design both for the lift and the waterfront	Achieved

MAIN TO CATAGORIES	SPECIFIC INDICATORS	PROJECT RESULTS	ACHIEVED
	landscape architecture interventions	The projects included soft and hard landscaping interventions which embellished the areas and public realm	Achieved
	landuse and mixed use ratio	The project promoted mixed land-use and increased recreational space by 13%.	Achieved
Social	affordability	No data	No data
	migration	2010-2014 demographic change for the Three Cities is slight to the negative	Not Achieved
	social inclusion initiatives	Social Housing blocks and neighbourhoods completely regenerated	Achieved
	cultural heritage initiatives	The cultural and heritage assets around the areas of intervention conserved or restored	Achieved

Conclusion

As forecasted in 2007 “the implementation of TOD and gauging its success on micro-environments with micro-economies reflects the flexible nature of this planning tool. The effect of TOD on small communities and neighbourhoods measures its possibilities applied strategically at all levels of city fabric and texture. The Maltese cases point towards the possible adaptation of TOD in diverse cities and its encouraging results vis-à-vis sustainability, ‘smart growth’ and the promotion of green cities.” The ERDF programme and funds have made possible the capital investment to initiate this process and spur greater mobility and accessibility.⁶

⁶ M.Borg and R. Orsini; Transit oriented development – integrating land-use and transport in small island states Wessex University (Conference Paper · August 2008). Refer to WIT Transactions on The Built Environment, Vol 101, © 2008 WIT Press and https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271449766_Transit_oriented_development_-_integrating_land-use_and_transport_in_small_island_states. (Viewed 12 April 2017).