



Rabat, Città Victoria Cultural Strategy

▲ 2026 - 2035



Foreword by the Mayor of Rabat, Città Victoria

Victoria has long stood at the centre of Gozo's cultural life. Its streets, squares, theatres, and churches continue to reflect a vibrant cultural landscape shaped by creativity, tradition, and a strong sense of community. Here, culture is not confined to institutions or events. It is embedded in everyday life, sustained by the commitment of volunteers, the work of artists and practitioners, and the shared experiences that bring people together.

This richness is the result of a sustained collective effort over generations. It is a testament to the dedication of individuals, organisations, and communities who continue to nurture and evolve Victoria's cultural and creative sector. Today, the city remains a place where heritage and contemporary expression coexist, contributing to a dynamic and living cultural environment. As Mayor, I recognise the essential role that culture plays in shaping the identity, wellbeing, and cohesion of our community. It strengthens social connections, supports creative expression, and reinforces a shared sense of belonging. At the same time, Victoria's cultural life extends beyond Gozo, engaging with national and international networks and audiences.

The ongoing Victoria2031Ghawdex European Capital of Culture candidacy has further brought into focus both the strengths of Victoria's cultural ecosystem and the opportunities that lie ahead. It has highlighted the importance of long-term vision, structured collaboration, and sustained investment in culture as a public good, reinforcing the need for a coherent and forward-looking Cultural Strategy. In this context, this Cultural Strategy represents a timely and necessary step. It provides a shared framework to guide the sustainable development of the cultural and creative sectors, ensuring that they remain resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking. The role of the Victoria Local Council is to support and enable this process by fostering dialogue, strengthening partnerships, and creating the conditions in which culture can continue to thrive.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all those who contributed to the development of this strategy, and to the many individuals and organisations whose ongoing work sustains Victoria's cultural life throughout the year. Their commitment ensures that Victoria continues to serve as a vital cultural centre for Gozo and for Malta.



Brian Azzopardi

Mayor of Rabat, Città Victoria

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Victoria: Where Gozo's Cultural Life Converges

Rabat, Città Victoria (the City of Victoria) forms the cultural, social, and economic heart of Gozo. It functions as a central point of convergence: for public life, for social interaction, and for artistic production. As the island's capital, Victoria holds within its storied streets and squares a remarkable concentration of civic institutions, commerce, cultural and religious heritage, and creativity. Here, the city stages a continuous rhythm of encounter, exchange, and shared experience. This is the ground on which Victoria's cultural life has always been built.

Victoria's cultural vitality is woven into daily routines, informal meetings between neighbours, and communal traditions passed down through generations. At its backbone are the city's voluntary organisations. These institutions were built not by decree but by collective effort, and sustained across lifetimes by people who believed in them. The festivals, operatic productions, concerts, exhibitions, and festivals they curate shape a longstanding cultural calendar that gives shape and rhythm to the life of the city. Opera, in particular, represents a defining feature of Victoria's cultural identity, sustained through the work of its historic theatres and musical societies. These events attract audiences from across Malta and beyond, reinforcing Victoria's position as a centre of artistic excellence while remaining deeply rooted in traditions of voluntary cultural production. These organisations are more than producers of art; they are schools, meeting places, and engines of civic life, offering real pathways for people to develop as musicians, dancers, artists and creatives, while fostering and nurturing a sense of shared identity and belonging. From within their ranks have emerged artists and cultural practitioners who have carried Victoria's name far beyond the island.

Over recent decades, Victoria's cultural and creative sectors have grown significantly in scale, scope, and ambition. This growth has been driven by sustained grassroots commitment, voluntary initiative, and long-term public and organisational investment. Engagement with international artists and networks has expanded the city's cultural horizons, facilitating exchange, innovation, and increased visibility. However, the conditions surrounding this cultural life are also changing: demographics are shifting, the urban fabric is evolving, and the pace of change is quickening. Sustaining Victoria's distinctive cultural character therefore requires strategic foresight, ensuring that growth is guided, that heritage remains a living resource, and that culture continues to occupy a central place in the everyday life of this city.



A Cultural Strategy for a City in Motion

The cultural life described above is the result of sustained and collective effort, intergenerational commitment, and a deep sense of shared responsibility. As Victoria evolves, the conditions on which this ecosystem has long depended cannot be taken for granted. Growth, demographic change, shifting work patterns, and increasing pressures on urban space all place strain on the community networks and voluntary structures that underpin cultural life.

Commissioned by the Victoria Local Council, this strategy positions the Council as an enabling actor within the locality's cultural ecosystem. Rather than assuming a centralised role, the Council seeks to support cultural coordination and stewardship by facilitating dialogue, encouraging collaboration, and strengthening connections between cultural practitioners, organisations, institutions and community groups. In doing so, the Council aims to create the conditions for culture to function as shared public infrastructure: a resource that supports participation, creativity and social connection. This work is aligned with the wider ambitions of Victoria2031Ghawdex and the city's candidature for the European Capital of Culture in 2031, which will serve as an important testing ground for the strategy's objectives.

Cultural governance in Victoria extends beyond the remit of a single entity. The Ministry for Gozo, other public entities and cultural agencies all contribute to shaping its cultural landscape. This strategy is conceived as a framework that situates the Council within a wider ecosystem of governance, collaboration and partnership. The actions set out in this document are accordingly directed toward this broader ecosystem, rather than the Local Council alone. Within this context, the Council operates in three complementary capacities: as a direct delivery body where actions fall within its own mandate and resources; as a facilitator where progress depends on the alignment and cooperation of multiple stakeholders; and as an advocate where change requires engagement with regional, national or European decision-making structures.

The strategy is elaborated through four interlinked themes. The first three address the conditions and governance frameworks that enable Victoria's cultural sector to function effectively, while the fourth theme defines a more specific strategic vision for the sector itself, guiding its development, sustainability, and international engagement.



How the Strategy was Developed

The strategy is grounded in a structured research and consultation process which sought to ensure that future planning for Victoria's cultural life would be informed not only by aspiration, but by evidence, experience, participation and institutional context.

The work began with a detailed review of existing policy and governance frameworks at local, regional, national, and European levels. This analysis mapped the legislative environment, funding structures, strategic priorities, and development plans that shape cultural activity in Victoria. Building on this foundation, the process engaged directly with Victoria's residents and its cultural and creative communities. Public consultation sessions, questionnaire-based research, and targeted interviews were conducted with voluntary organisations, professional practitioners, educators, venue operators, funding bodies, local authorities, and other key stakeholders. These include:

Arts Council Malta; the Culture Directorate; the Gozo Business Chamber; the Gozo Regional Development Authority; the Gozo Tourism Association; Heritage Malta; The Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association; The Ministry for Gozo, including the Cultural Heritage Directorate, the Maintenance and Public Cleansing Directorate, and the Tourism and Economic Development Directorate; the Ministry for Local Government.

The findings were analysed and consolidated into a series of thematic priorities that structure this strategy. The result is a framework that responds directly to the realities of cultural life in Victoria as it is lived today, while also pointing towards the opportunities and possibilities that lie ahead.



Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation

This strategy sets out a vision for cultural development in Victoria which extends to 2035, reflecting a deliberate commitment to long-term and adaptive cultural governance. Recognising that Victoria's cultural landscape will continue to evolve, the strategy will undergo a formal review every three years. These reviews will assess progress, recalibrate priorities, and ensure responsiveness to emerging social, economic, and cultural dynamics. Regular reporting will also ensure transparency and create structured opportunities for reflection, learning, and dialogue.

The strategy's objectives are supported by a series of key actions, the implementation of which will be monitored through a collaborative framework involving public authorities, cultural organisations, and relevant stakeholders. This shared approach reflects a commitment to collective responsibility and coordinated delivery.

The Victoria2031Ghawdex European Capital of Culture (ECoC) candidature provides an important framework for the monitoring and evaluation of this strategy. It has already contributed to a more structured understanding of the city's cultural landscape and, subject to a successful bid, will establish a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system. This will support the systematic tracking of cultural participation, audience development, social impact, and sectoral growth, while ensuring that evidence generated through the ECoC process informs long-term policy development. Its processes and outcomes are therefore expected to contribute significantly to the implementation and review of this Cultural Strategy. Through this approach, the strategy is positioned as a living framework, continuously informed by data and practice, and aligned with European standards of impact, participation, and accountability, ensuring that Victoria's cultural governance remains connected to its wider European dimension.

Theme 1:

Coordination, Capacity & Cultural Governance

Victoria's cultural ecosystem is sustained by a strong foundation of public investment. Consultation processes highlighted the central role of regional funding bodies, alongside European funding programmes, in enabling cultural production, infrastructure development, and public access to culture. This sustained investment has enabled a diverse cultural landscape and reflects strong institutional commitment to cultural life.

Consultations identified a clear opportunity to strengthen the ecosystem through greater coordination across the governing entities that shape Victoria's creative and cultural sectors, recognising that closer alignment between local, regional, and national bodies could unlock new possibilities for coordinated planning, shared expertise, and stronger collective impact. Central to this is the continued development of Gozo's cultural funding systems, ensuring they reflect the diversity, scale, and evolving nature of cultural practice on the island. Consultations also revealed that many cultural organisations, particularly those operating through voluntary models, face increasing administrative demands relating to funding applications, compliance, and regulatory obligations. These pressures place significant strain on limited human resources, highlighting the strategic importance of administrative and managerial support, as well as shared capacity mechanisms to ensure continued access to funding and organisational sustainability.

Meaningful gaps in specialised expertise across the sector were also identified through the consultation process. Cultural planning, funding systems, project development, production, and communication all require skills and knowledge that the sector often draws from external sources, indicating that internal capacity remains in need of development. Strengthening human capital within cultural organisations and building expertise at governance level are therefore essential conditions to ensure the sector's long-term sustainability.



Strategic Objective 1.1: Strengthen Cultural Governance and Funding Structures

Key Actions:

- 1. Facilitate Strategic Alignment:** Enable strategic coordination, joint planning, and alignment of cultural priorities and investments between the Victoria Local Council, Ministry for Gozo, regional and national authorities, and cultural organisations.
- 2. Establish City-Level Data Systems:** Support the development and implementation of accessible data collection and analysis tools for cultural events and practices across the city to track cultural activity and participation, assess impact, and inform strategic planning and decision-making.
- 3. Strengthen Strategic Advocacy:** Strengthen the Local Council's advocacy role with regional and national bodies on behalf of Victoria's cultural sector, with particular focus on advocating for investment in cultural infrastructure, establishing Gozo-specific funding criteria that reflect the scale and voluntary character of local cultural practice, and developing more responsive compliance frameworks for small and voluntary organisations.
- 4. Advance Transparent and Responsive Funding Structures:** Support research and consultation to inform the design of transparent, criteria-based funding allocation, selection, and evaluation procedures that respond to the changing needs of Gozo's cultural and creative sectors.
- 5. Support Participatory Governance Mechanisms:** Introduce structured consultation, advisory groups, or rotating representation models, such as a Cultural Advisory Committee including youth, emerging practitioners, and underrepresented communities, to ensure that diverse perspectives inform cultural decision-making.

Strategic Objective 1.2: Strengthen Sector Capacity and Reduce Administrative Burden

Key Actions:

- 1. Engage Cultural Funding Expertise:** Engage a dedicated funding expert to support strategic resource allocation, strengthen funding frameworks, and enhance the Local Council's capacity to access, manage, and facilitate cultural funding opportunities.
- 2. Establish Shared Administrative Support Structures:** Support the development of shared administrative services to facilitate access to local and European funding programmes, and assist cultural organisations and practitioners in meeting funding and compliance requirements.

Theme 2:

Audiences, Participation & Cultural Development

Victoria's cultural life is supported by a rich and active programme of cultural production, spanning festivals, religious feasts, operatic productions, concerts, exhibitions, and a wide range of community-led initiatives. However, consultation processes highlighted that the scale and ambition of cultural production, relative to the size of Victoria's resident population, has significant implications for the capacity and patterns of local attendance. Many large-scale productions rely heavily on audiences from Malta, as well as international visitors. While reflecting Victoria's strong cultural standing beyond Gozo, this underlines the importance of strengthening connections between the city's cultural offer and its local residents. Expanding participation beyond traditional formats and seasonal peaks, while cultivating a more continuous engagement between cultural life and the everyday community, emerged as key strategic priorities.

Consultations also indicated that visibility and accessibility are key factors shaping participation. Many cultural experiences remain insufficiently visible or accessible due to limitations in communication systems, wayfinding, and interpretive infrastructure. Improving how cultural opportunities are communicated, encountered, and experienced is essential to broadening engagement among residents and visitors alike.

While Victoria's cultural ecosystem remains open and sustained by strong voluntary participation, various consultation participants noted that informal social dynamics can unintentionally limit access for newcomers, younger generations, migrant communities, and emerging practitioners. As cultural organisations continue to diversify programming, experiment with new formats and genres, and develop youth- and family-oriented initiatives, there is a growing need for coordinated policy, funding, and organisational frameworks that strengthen access points and create inclusive pathways for participation.



Strategic Objective 2.1: Broaden Cultural Participation and Enhance Visibility

Key Actions:

- 1. Develop an Audience Development and Communications Strategy:** Establish a coordinated, data-informed strategy to guide audience growth, segmentation, and targeted communication, strengthening engagement with residents, visitors, and underrepresented groups across Victoria's cultural offer.
- 2. Develop Structured Cultural Participation Models:** Support the development of curated and appropriately priced cultural packages, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to bring together Victoria's year-round cultural offer into accessible and clearly defined propositions for residents and visitors.
- 3. Strengthen Public Communication and Engagement:** Establish clear and consistent channels, including digital platforms, centralised noticeboards, and cultural ambassador networks, to enhance the visibility of cultural initiatives, decisions, and opportunities to residents and visitors.
- 4. Incentivise Innovation:** Establish a dedicated funding strand focused on experimentation, creative engagement, and innovative cultural practices that reach diverse audiences, supporting the integration of informal and accessible cultural experiences into the rhythms of everyday city life.

Theme 3:

Cultural Capacity, Infrastructure, and Sector Sustainability

Victoria's cultural ecosystem is sustained by a vibrant network of NGOs, voluntary organisations, and community groups that provide continuity, diversity, and resilience across year-round cultural activity. While central to the vitality of the city's cultural life and its wider network of living traditions, consultations indicated that the voluntary sector is facing mounting pressures. Time constraints, professional commitments, youth outmigration, and the increasing scale and complexity of cultural production are placing significant strain on limited human resources. At the same time, voluntary practice increasingly intersects with paid professional roles, creating a need for transparent policies, equitable recognition, and clear frameworks that enable voluntary and professional sectors to coexist productively. Sustaining long-term engagement requires meaningful opportunities for leadership, contribution, and intergenerational continuity, alongside pathways that enable newcomers, migrant communities, and emerging practitioners to participate and contribute.

This cultural ecology is supported by a diverse range of spaces, from formal performance venues to public squares and historic sites, each serving as an important cultural anchor. However, consultations also identified persistent gaps in this infrastructure, including a lack of appropriately scaled performance venues, limited access to technical, rehearsal, and storage facilities, and a shortage of flexible, neutral spaces for contemporary visual arts. These constraints, compounded by a reliance on multipurpose or educational spaces, limit the sector's capacity for production, experimentation, and the development of professional practice.

Culture in Victoria extends beyond theatres and galleries, thriving throughout the city's streets and public spaces. Urban conditions, traffic, and the management of public space are therefore central to vibrant cultural participation. Consultation findings highlighted the importance of pedestrian-friendly streets, accessible public spaces, clear wayfinding, and well-maintained heritage sites as key conditions enabling cultural life to flourish. Aligning urban management with cultural development is essential to ensuring that Victoria's public realm continues to function as a shared space for encounter and cultural expression.



Strategic Objective 3.1: Support Sustainable Cultural Work and Professional Development

Key Actions:

- 1. Clarify and Support Diverse Roles Within the Sector:** Support the development of clear frameworks defining voluntary, semi-professional, and professional roles and expectations, enabling hybrid production models while ensuring fair recognition, transparency, and sustainable collaboration.
- 2. Support Fair Pay and Working Conditions:** Advance fair pay principles aligned with national standards, ensuring equitable and context-sensitive remuneration across Victoria's cultural and creative sectors.
- 3. Invest in Human Capital Development:** Support structured training, mentorship, and professional development opportunities for practitioners within artistic, technical, and administrative/managerial roles to strengthen sectoral capacity and long-term sustainability.

Strategic Objective 3.2: Strengthen Infrastructure and Spatial Capacity

Key Actions:

- 1. Support the Strategic Enhancement of Existing Cultural Venues:** Advocate for and facilitate the modernisation, maintenance, and technical upgrading of existing cultural facilities to ensure their long-term sustainability, accessibility and functionality.
- 2. Utilise and Program Temporary and Adaptive Cultural Spaces:** Facilitate the flexible use of underutilised spaces such as public buildings, outdoor areas, and heritage sites, while supporting cultural programming that animates these spaces to enable experimentation, expand capacity, and inform long-term urban planning and place-making.
- 3. Advocate for Strategic Investment in Cultural Infrastructure:** Advocate for sustained, long-term investment in dedicated, flexible, and fit-for-purpose cultural spaces that address evolving needs across production, rehearsal, exhibition, and storage.

Strategic Objective 3.3: Embed Culture in Urban and Public Space Planning

Key Actions:

- 1. Advocate for Mobility and Accessibility as Cultural Priorities:** Advocate for traffic management, pedestrian accessibility, and safe, walkable streets as fundamental conditions for cultural participation and vibrant public life, promoting supportive policy and infrastructure investment.
- 2. Enhance Accessibility Across Public and Cultural Spaces:** Support improvements to pedestrian infrastructure, wayfinding, and safe access routes, to ensure that cultural venues, civic spaces, and events are accessible to everyone.

Theme 4:

Heritage & Cultural Connectivity

Victoria's cultural and creative sectors are deeply rooted in the city's rich heritage, which continues to shape identity, artistic production, and everyday life. Spaces such as local squares, historic theatres, and the Cittadella provide both a physical and symbolic framework for cultural expression, while the performances, festivals, and day-to-day practices that unfold within them play a vital role in fostering and sustaining localised expression. Heritage is experienced as a living presence, shaping Victoria's cultural life in dynamic ways.

Shifts in demographics and patterns of cultural participation raise concerns about the long-term strength and accessibility of Victoria's cultural heritage and identity. This strategy seeks to address these challenges by balancing the safeguarding of established local expressions with innovative and experimental forms of engagement and reinterpretation, ensuring that historic and cultural assets continue to inform, inspire, and engage residents and visitors alike.

The success of this approach depends not only on local engagement but also on strengthening international relationships. Victoria's cultural sector already benefits from a robust network of international exchange. There is significant opportunity to further invest in these connections to raise Victoria's cultural profile, facilitate knowledge exchange, and encourage the flow of ideas and practices.

By fostering a vibrant ecosystem that connects heritage, innovation, and community, Victoria can enhance the sustainability, relevance, and inclusivity of its cultural life, ensuring its traditions and creative sectors remain resilient, dynamic, and capable of evolving alongside the communities they serve.



Strategic Objective 4.1 : Strengthen Creative Engagement with Victoria's Cultural Heritage

Key Actions:

- 1. Facilitate Capacity-Building for Heritage Practice:** Facilitate training, mentorship, and knowledge transfer for traditional artisans, musicians, and practitioners to sustain local craftsmanship, skills, and cultural practices.
- 2. Support Heritage-linked Funding Initiatives:** Establish dedicated funding streams to support projects that engage with local heritage through experimental, contemporary, and community-based cultural practices and programmes.

Strategic Objective 4.2: Strengthen International Cultural Relationships

Key Actions:

- 1. Enable International Residencies and Exchanges:** Position Victoria as a hub for international artistic residencies, enabling local practitioners to engage with global peers while hosting international artists locally, fostering knowledge exchange, collaboration, and creative cross-pollination.
- 2. Formalise Strategic International Partnerships:** Develop and consolidate collaborations with international ensembles, networks, artists, and cultural institutions to support sustained exchange and co-production opportunities.

Strategy Overview

Themes	Strategic Objective (SO)	Key Actions
Coordination, Capacity & Cultural Governance	SO 1.1: Strengthen Cultural Governance and Funding Structures	Facilitate Strategic Alignment
		Establish City-Level Data Systems
		Strengthen Strategic Advocacy
		Advance Transparent and Responsive Funding Structures
		Support Participatory Governance Mechanisms
	SO 1.2: Strengthen Sector Capacity and Reduce Administrative Burden	Appoint Cultural Funding Expertise
		Establish Shared Administrative Support Structures
Audiences, Participation & Cultural Development	SO 2.1: Broaden Cultural Participation and Enhance Visibility	Develop an Audience Development and Communications Strategy
		Develop Structured Cultural Participation Models
		Strengthen Public Communication and Engagement:
		Incentivise Innovation
Cultural Capacity, Infrastructure, and Sector Sustainability	SO 3.1: Support Sustainable Cultural Work and Professional Development	Clarify and Support Diverse Roles within the Sector
		Support Fair Pay and Working Conditions
		Invest in Human Capital Development
	SO 3.2: Strengthen Infrastructure and Spatial Capacity	Support the Enhancement of Existing Cultural Venues
		Utilise and Program Temporary and Adaptive Cultural Spaces
		Advocate for Strategic Investment in Cultural Infrastructure
	SO 3.3: Embed Culture in Urban and Public Space Planning	Advocate for Mobility and Accessibility as Cultural Priorities
		Enhance Accessibility Across Public and Cultural Spaces
Heritage & Cultural Connectivity	SO 4.1: Strengthen Creative Engagement with Victoria's Cultural Heritage	Facilitate Capacity-Building for Heritage Practice
		Support Heritage-linked Funding Initiatives
	SO 4.2: Strengthen International Cultural Relationships	Enable International Residencies and Exchanges
		Formalise Strategic International Partnerships



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