Culture and Tourism

Mini Case Study MALTA:
The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039)

Work Package 9

Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF)

October 2015
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Malta
Mini Case Study – The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039)

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Mini Case Study

The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039) mini case study is part of the WP 9 Culture and Tourism - Malta case study.

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Forward

The European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) is undertaking an ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF) during the period 2007-2013 in regions covered by the Convergence, Regional Competitiveness & Employment and European Territorial Cooperation objectives in the 28 member states.

The Consortium IRS-CSIL-CISET-BOP has been selected to undertake the ex post evaluation on ‘Culture and Tourism’ (Work Package 9). An important element within the exercise is a series of case study analyses of NUTS2 regions covering interventions co-financed by ERDF during the 2007-13 programming period.

In addition to the full case studies (at a region’s programme level), the evaluation also includes two mini case studies (focused on individual projects) for each programme case study. As with the programme case studies, mini case studies are based on desk research and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the main participants involved in the chosen projects.

This report presents the results of the mini case study The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039). This is the first of two mini case studies selected from among the many projects funded by the Malta’s Operational Programme I (OPI) – Investing in Competitiveness for a Better Quality of Life.

The report begins with a brief synthesis of the The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039) project before moving on to a fuller description and the presentation of the results of the analysis undertaken. The report ends with a review of the main conclusions of the study, together with a series of lessons learnt for future policymaking.

The mini case study was based on desk research and on a programme of 3 semi-structured interviews. The interviews were with the key actors in the design and delivery of the project. Those interviewed were:

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1 Synthesis

The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039) dominates the spend within the Operational Programme on the restoration and revalorisation of cultural sites in Malta and Gozo, and is the largest project within Axis 2 accounting for EUR 25.295 million, approximately a quarter of the overall committed spend.

The project was chosen as a mini case study because it is by far largest project within Priority Axis 2.

The project is yet to reach physical completion. By December 2014, the project had implemented 129,000 sq m of fortification surface area. By the end of 2015, it is anticipated that the project will have achieved considerably more outputs that originally anticipated – in particular, in addition to the original target of 135,000 sq m, an additional 18,000 sq m of fortification surface area will have been restored, resulting in a total of 153,000 sq m of restored fortification surface area.

This mini case study demonstrates the contributory or indirect nature of major infrastructure and public realm improvements. Significant changes have already occurred within the contexts where the investments by the restoration and revalorisation of cultural sites (ERDF 039) took place, including increasing levels of private sector investment in dwelling restorations, hotels and restaurants. This process of gentrification has been achieved as the result of a complex set of factors that have created the conditions for private sector investment and cannot be wholly attributed to this project.

The availability of ERDF funding over the 2007-2013 period was essential for the achievement of these results.
2 Background information

Country: **Malta**
Region: **Malta**

**Full project title:** The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039)

**Duration of project:** 2010 to December 2015*

**Key words:** tourism, international tourism, cultural heritage

**Funding:**
- **Total budget** € 34,435,455
- **ERDF contribution** € 25,295,230
- **National budget** € 9,140,225
- **Regional budget** € 0
- **Private contribution** € 0

**ERDF Objective:**
- ✓ Convergence
- ☐ Competitiveness
- ☐ Territorial cooperation

*Some ancillary works are due for completion in 2016

**Motivation for selection**

- **The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039)** is by far the largest investment within Axis 2, accounting for a quarter of the overall committed expenditure. One of the key areas of intervention identified in the OP was the restoration and revalorisation of cultural sites. Together, projects focused on the ‘Protection and preservation of cultural heritage’ type 58 accounted for just under 45% of the total committed spend.

- The project demonstrates the contributory or indirect nature of major infrastructure and public realm improvements. The achieved results are significant.

- The project will exceed the original target result of 135,000 sq m of surface area of fortifications restored.

- There are already signs that private sector investment is being attracted with neighbouring buildings being restored and private sector tourism operators attracted.
3 Project description

3.1 Overall Objectives

The project aims to restore Malta and Gozo’s fortifications in the areas of greatest tourism demand and potential. Overall, Malta and Gozo have some 60 kilometres of historic fortifications, much of which were in a state of disrepair. For a period of some forty years post independence there had been no ongoing maintenance of the fortifications due to extreme budgetary constraints as the national economy restructured. In 1996, work began to identify priority works and respond to actual and imminent collapse. Due to insufficient national funding, it however was not possible to carry out important holistic improvements of the scale required.

Significant sections of the historic ramparts were in a very poor state of preservation, owing largely to the lack of funds to address the scale and magnitude of restoring such massive structures. The decayed condition of these highly visible fortifications was felt to be:

- visually unattractive and potentially damaging to Malta's brand image and to efforts to further promote the islands as a cultural destination;
- in some sections, owing to the high degree of erosion, vegetation, structural instability and misuse, there was a threat to public safety;
- increasingly a symbol of decay and underinvestment rather than a source of national pride and identity.

The project for the restoration of the fortifications of the four historic cities of Valletta, Birgu, Mdina and the Gozo Citadel is designed to bring these cultural and touristic sites back to an acceptable standard of presentation, attractiveness, architectural legibility and visual power. The investment provided by this project has upgraded the quality of the fortifications and associated public realm in potentially prime tourism areas.

At a strategic level, the Maltese Government was committed to deliver the Operational Programme 2007-2013 as planned and absorb all available funds. This was a major project that required a significant amount of funding.

3.2 Beneficiaries

The direct beneficiary was the Restoration Directorate within the Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government.

In addition, this project has a range of potential impacts at different spatial scales. Potential indirect beneficiaries include:

- tourists, through an enhanced visitor experience;
- tourism operators, retailers and other services benefiting from an increased volume of foreign tourists and higher spend tourists; due to increased footfall on and adjacent to the fortifications, and the enhanced marketability of sites and facilities in the area of restored fortifications, and of Malta as a whole.

Unintended beneficiaries were property owners and investors gaining from an uplift in
land values resulting from the investment.

3.3 Description of the activities implemented

The project was originally programmed to start in 2007 and be substantially completed by the end of 2010. However, the main period of restoration did not begin until 2010 and is now in its fifth year of activity. The project is now nearing completion and the main elements of the project will be completed by the end of 2015. It is understood that some ancillary works will spill over into 2016. The total ERDF financial resources committed to the project are EUR 25 million.

The expenditure of over EUR 0.5 million prior to 2010 reflects the detailed nature of surveying, testing, planning and specification that was required prior to the effective delivery of the restoration and repairs.

Table 3.1. Financial resources (Euros), 2010-2014

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned ERDF Expenditure</td>
<td>1,106,452.36</td>
<td>13,087,619.07</td>
<td>13,863,117</td>
<td>1,194,409</td>
<td>94,092</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actual ERDF Expenditure</td>
<td>221,290.47</td>
<td>110,645.23</td>
<td>232,245.23</td>
<td>3,563,394.05</td>
<td>6,933,916.52</td>
<td>6,514,624.49</td>
<td>6,708,855.62</td>
<td>5,988,591.39</td>
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</table>

Source: Restoration Directorate

The restoration focused on the 6km of fortifications identified to be the highest priority for restoration. The works included: stabilisation of foundations where required; replacement of lost sections of fortifications; replacement of decayed or lost stones; new lighting; associated public realm improvements.
4 Political and strategic context

Numerous strategies leading up to the Operational Programme 2007-2013 and the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 (most notably the 2013 National Reform Programme 2005-2008 and the Tourism Policy for the Maltese Islands, 2006-2010) indicated the importance of Malta’s cultural and historic assets to the expansion and diversification of its tourism industry away from a sun-and-sea summer destination, to a more broadly based year-round destination. Hand in hand with this aim came the need to upgrade key heritage sites to improve their interpretation, accessibility, conservation and promotion.

4.1 Governance

The Restoration Department has been responsible for the design and specification of the works, as well as for supervising the construction, repairs and monitoring progress. The Intermediate Body has been the Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government.

For other governance arrangement see the Malta case study report.

5 Implementation

5.1 Project Design and Implementation

The Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo (ERDF 039) is a Maltese Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government project. It was designed and managed by the Ministry’s Restoration Directorate.

The restoration was broken down into significant sections of ramparts. This allowed the Restoration Directorate to carefully plan each section in turn. Planning was meticulous and literally at the level of individual stone blocks.

For some sections, additional studies were required from external contractors. These had to be put out to tender, which added to the time taken to plan the works required. The construction tenders were broken down into sections that required different sets of expertise. A total of 55 tenders were issued. Each restoration tender was in the range of between EUR 0.5 million and EUR 3 million. Relative to the initial planning, the profile of expenditure was distributed much more evenly and over a longer period than originally envisaged. This was the result of carefully planning each phase sequentially, and then issuing the next contract.

5.2 Management, monitoring and evaluation

The Restoration Directorate employed the services of specialists such as geotechnical engineers with experience of deep consolidation techniques, to address problems of subsidence affecting some sections of the fortifications.

Although the works were highly specialised and complex, the specialist technical skills within the Restoration Directorate, together with those of overseas specialists brought in where required, were able to cope with these demands. The Restoration Directorate
was able to closely specify the scope of the work and contractors were able to deliver within budget and in accordance with agreed timescales. Due to the scale of the project, it required EU approval, which delayed the project start by several months.

The Restoration Directorate did not have the authority to issue contracts and as a result there was a delay of several months between the tenders being agreed and contract approval. This resulted in a delay in the start of each phase of restoration; however, as this was an anticipated delay, it had little impact on cost or quality.

The Restoration Directorate through its day-to-day monitoring of the progress and quality of the works has been recording the results using sq m of rampart surface restored as an indicator. The Directorate has also been keeping a precise record of the number of visitors to the ‘Fortress Builders’.

An independent ex-post evaluation of the project is planned for later in 2015.

5.3 Innovative elements and novel approaches

There are several elements that in the context of Malta were innovative and provide learning opportunities for other regions.

Previously, the Restoration Directorate had designed and then implemented the works required. The scale and complexity of the work required skills and resources from specialist private sector contractors with international experience.

Some of the work was of a highly specialist nature that had not been previously undertaken in Malta and was at the very forefront of the use of building technologies in relation to rock (cliff) stabilisation and ground (under-pinning) stabilisation techniques employed within historic sites.

The sheer scale of the fortifications meant that in sections that required only isolated replacement or repair of stone blocks, the traditional use of scaffolding would have been prohibitively expensive. Instead, construction abseiling was used to access some of the highest sections of the ramparts.

In summary, the break-up of the project into 55 medium-sized contracts:

- reduced the risk for both public and private sectors;
- achieved efficiency savings, as both the Restoration Department and private contractors became better skilled and equipped to design and implement the required works;
- led to local businesses being able to successfully tender;
- developed an indigenous design and construction stone restoration capacity, which will continue to benefit the current and planned work by both public and private sectors to sensitively refurbish Malta’s rich but decaying historic built environment.

5.4 Constraints on the implementation

Underspend achieved through efficiency gains on the ERDF 039 resulted in additional resource allocated to “The Fortress Builders - Fortification Interpretation Centre”. The Centre provides a visitor experience explaining the history and function of the
fortifications, how they were built, and the nature of the repair works. This is a high quality new visitor attraction close to the centre of Valletta, which has received very positive reviews on Facebook and Trip Advisor. However, in 2014 it attracted just 11,250 visitors in its first year of operation as a free attraction.

There appears to be an absence of any signposting for the site and marketing could be described as low key. In addition, the opening times are inconsistent and are not designed around visitor convenience. Regular opening hours are between mid-June and end-September, between 9.00am – 1.00pm, except on Tuesdays and Thursdays when the Centre is open till 4.00pm; and then different opening hours between 1st October – 15th June. Available resources to staff the centre are the key constraint on opening hours.

With visitor-friendly opening hours, a realistic charging structure for foreign visitors, effective signposting, integration within a Valletta heritage trail, joint ticketing with leading attractions and so on, this "Interpretation Centre" has the potential to be both an important part of the visitor experience for tourists with an interest in history and culture, and to become an economically viable attraction.
6 Key results

Table 6.1. Results, 2010-2015

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Source: Restoration Department

Overall, the project will achieve the restoration of 153,000 sq meters of Malta’s historic fortifications before the end of 2015. In addition, the project will improve the lighting of the ramparts and, by introducing LED lighting, will dramatically reduce the revenue cost for lighting. It will also create new areas of high quality public open space in historic areas lacking such provision as well as areas of significant public realm improvement in the streets, paths and corridors adjacent to the ramparts.

ERDF has intervened to provide a massive boost to efforts to restore and protect Malta’s most prominent historical fortifications. The scale of funding for ERDF 039 has enabled the holistic restoration of the ramparts in the parts of the four historic cities of Mdina, Valletta, Birgu (Vittoriosa) and Cittadella (Gozo Citadel), which are considered to have most tourism and cultural potential.

The sheer scale of the holistic of restoration of the most prominent sections of decaying fortifications is a major achievement in itself.

Crumbling walls in Mdina prior to project start. Source: Restoration Department

Decaying walls in Birgu prior to project start. Source: Restoration Directorate
Decaying walls in Valletta prior to project start. Source: Restoration Directorate.

Ground consolidation design and implementation in Mdina. Source: Restoration Directorate.

Rock consolidation implementation Cittadella. Source: Restoration Directorate.
New areas of public open space. Source: Restoration Directorate

Although not yet complete, there are already indications of the significance of the ramparts to Malta’s overall tourism offer. A recent article in The Telegraph (UK newspaper) referred to the fortifications (in the areas restored with ERDF funds) as one of five of the nine best free attractions in Malta\(^1\).

The restored fortifications are expected to contribute to the already strong development of the tourism industry in Malta, and an initial evaluation of the project is planned for the end of 2015.

The case study has revealed a number of successes:

- The development of specialist in-house skills - including laser surveying, and various specialist forms of fortification repair and reconstruction, including underpinning techniques and abseiling, which will enable the Restoration Directorate to achieve more restoration and repairs within the resources it has available, increasing the likelihood of the investment being sustainable in the long term.
- The scale of investment and co-ordination of the tourism strategy at ministerial level led to significant change to the appearance and potential of several of the most targeted areas. In the case of Valletta and Birgu in particular, this may have been an important factor in pump priming significant private sector investment already occurring in building refurbishment and in new tourism and culture business formation.

Ultimately, the scale of the impact resulting from the Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo will not only be based on ERDF funding for this project. This project has undoubtedly created potential:

- for MTA, Heritage Malta, and the Restoration Directorate to more effectively market Malta’s heritage assets, including its most prominent fortifications;
- for MTA, Heritage Malta and key ministries to ensure, for example:
  - more efficient and reliable multi-modal connections to allow for ease of access to, between and within the areas benefitting from ERDF 039;

\(^1\) [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destination/malta/139451/Malta-free-things-to-do.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destination/malta/139451/Malta-free-things-to-do.html)
effective signposting of fortification walkways and heritage trails within and around the restored fortifications;

- joint ticketing arrangements including those sites not managed by Heritage Malta;

- for the private sector to invest in redundant sites and buildings for tourism and other economic uses within and close to the restored fortifications;

- for the Maltese Government to introduce measures, which ensure the sustainable re-use of sites, and in particular the re-use of the large portfolio of redundant or under-utilised sites it part-owns (most notably in Valletta).

7 Sustainability and transferability

Each of the interviewees noted the continuing development of human capital in the Restoration Directorate and in Malta’s restoration and construction chain. This major project achieved a steady build-up of skills and expertise over the lifetime of the project, as a result of breaking the overall project up into several phased projects:

- management, design and tendering skills both within government and among Maltese contractors;

- the capacity of the indigenous construction sector to prepare effective and timely bids for major refurbishment and specialist construction projects;

- specialist skills gained by the Restoration Directorate for example in the use of laser surveying techniques, which helped to reduce costs and achieve efficiency gains;

- construction skills at all levels from entry level through to more specialist skills, including abseiling construction.

The decision to break the overall project up into several smaller-sized contracts had a number of other unintended benefits, which can be expected to reduce future repair costs and improve sustainability as a result:

- it increased the potential of local contractors to successfully bid for contracts;

- it allowed local contractors to build their expertise through working with foreign contractors;

- it progressively raised the efficiency of contractors, enabling more to be achieved with the available resources in the later phases of implementation.

Two other large investment projects funded by the 2007-2013 programme have contributed to the task of repairing Malta’s network of ramparts:

- ERDF 244 - Fort St Elmo Heritage Experience: Museum and Rampart Walk, Valletta

- ERDF 245 Fort St Angelo Heritage Experience, Birgu

The task of what to do with the remaining 50 km of decaying fortifications not included as part of this project, and at the same time maintaining the sections restored with ERDF support, will remain heavily dependent on constrained national public funding. There is understood to be a commitment to restoring the remaining sq km of walls and
ramparts with national funds “in phases”.

The use of other financial resources not coming from ERDF was considered by one interviewee to be “an important issue for the development of the construction/restoration sector to be further explored during the next programming period 2014-2020”.

Although work to restore the fortifications and associated public realm improvements is virtually complete, an integrated system of signage to link key cultural assets including the restored fortifications and new museum sites is yet to be put in place.

There are no plans to charge for access to the Fortifications or to the Fortress Builders Interpretation Centre as a means of generating revenue to pay for ongoing repair and maintenance.

8 Conclusions and Lessons learnt

Planning and governance

- Careful sequential planning of the work achieved a steady build-up of skills and expertise over the lifetime of the project, and can be expected to reduce future repair costs and improve sustainability.
- Not allowing the Restoration Directorate the responsibility to issue contracts may have delayed the delivery of each component of the project by approximately 6 months.

Implementation

- Resting responsibility for the design and management of the works with the Restoration Directorate has helped to build the skills and expertise that will be required to cost-effectively continue the ongoing need to restore and repair Malta’s network of historic fortifications.
- Phased letting of smaller contracts had the benefit of maximising skills development within the Restoration Directorate and Maltese contractors, and the submission of increasingly professional and competitive tenders.
- By including associated public realm improvements as an integral part of the restoration works this has helped to create an attractive environment for tourists, tourism businesses and property developers.

Management and monitoring

- The Restoration Directorate appears to have managed the project very effectively. Through its close monitoring of the progress and quality of the work, it has been able to continuously update the progress made towards achieving (and exceeding) the target of 135,000 sq m of surface area of ramparts restored.
- There are a number of measures that could have been used to more closely gauge future success at the micro level such as:
- Area of land (hectares) previously redundant brought back into productive use.
- EUR millions invested (public / private) in sites accessed by walkways, roads created / improved as part of the project.

Results

- Given the scale of private sector investment which has already been attracted to sites close to the fortifications, it is a credit to the Maltese Government and the EU to have made this bold investment in a major project.

Sustainability

The fortifications that have been restored will require ongoing repair and maintenance. This major task will remain heavily dependent on a long term programme of public funding to ensure sustainability without further ERDF funding.

Ultimately, the scale of the impact resulting from the Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Fortifications of Malta and Gozo will depend on the ability of the Maltese Government and its agencies and partners to make the most of the opportunity that this significant investment affords.
References

- Malta’s National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF).
- National Reform Programme 2005-2008 was published October 2005.
- Tourism Policy for the Maltese Islands, 2006-2010.

Web sites

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