Port Regional Council

Concept Note
Regional Cultural Cooperation Programme

ARTS COUNCIL MALTA

Kunsill Reġjonali Port
Port Regional Council

Research

With people living longer than ever before and social isolation on the rise many in Europe and beyond are asking how can the quality of life for older people be improved?

At the level of the Port Region's localities, this question is extremely pertinent considering the findings of the social impact assessment. The assessment, covering the 2023-2024 period revealed several significant social trends that include a declining population, an ageing demographic and a higher proportion of elderly residents compared to the rest of Malta. Overall, the Region has a larger share of older adults relative to the working age population when compared to the National average.

These challenges are further intensified by rising housing costs and ongoing gentrification, which have displaced long-time residents—most notably in areas such as Floriana and Birgu. Compounding this are issues like heavy traffic and limited transport options, which have contributed to a growing sense of dissatisfaction among the region's older population while hindering their participation in the cultural and artistic life of the Islands. At a more granular level, insights shared by stakeholders and community leaders during various Valletta Community Network meetings have brought to light additional concerns not fully captured by the formal assessment. These include restricted mobility caused by infrastructure that fails to meet the needs of older adults, and

a deepened sense of social isolation that has lingered in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many older community members who were once active participants in local networks now find themselves largely confined to their homes, held back by lingering fears, disillusionment, and a profound sense of disconnection from a world that has evolved beyond their recognition. Ongoing ethnographic research conducted in the lead-up to the Birgu 2031 European Capital of Culture bid underscores this divide. It reveals the stark contrast between contemporary digital life—with its distinct skills, languages, and norms—and the industrial, socially grounded realities in which many of these individuals were raised and to which they adapted over decades. This disconnect is particularly pronounced among those whose personal histories and identities remain deeply rooted in the Dockyard and its surrounding communities.

In addition to the Region's long-standing elderly population, it is also important to acknowledge that, given current national trends and demands, many residents in care homes located in areas such as Isla, Floriana, Paola, Ħaż-Żabbar, Tarxien, and Fgura are likely to have come from outside the region. As a result, they may lack a sense of connection to their new environment. This highlights the continued importance of placemaking—even in later life—as fostering a sense of residential belonging has been shown to positively impact health and overall well-being.

Project Concept

Considering the overview provided above, our Region aims to support a pilot project that reaches elderly populations through innovative and creative approaches in line with the general principles put forward in the charter for the status of the artist.

We intend to collaborate with community artists, local networks, active ageing centres, schools, and residential homes to establish an intergenerational platform for meaningful dialogue around memory and belonging. Rather than relying on nostalgia, we are interested in fostering dynamic, shared spaces where different generations can exchange stories, imagery, and knowledge. Engaging those who may not have grown up in the region, as well as younger generations (ages 8-16) who are experiencing it for the first time will bring fresh energy and a sense of potential to the initiative, while also supporting the preservation and transmission of local and oral histories. For our Region, this project will contribute to the cultural program devised for the Port Region's 2026 Region of Culture program while helping us identify, deepen our knowledge of and address gaps in the findings of the social impact assessment.

We likewise believe that this project will not only be highly relevant within the local and regional context, but that it will also align with wider European and international conversations around ageing, care, and social connection. A recent example, published by The New York Times on 20 June 2025, for instance highlighted the work of Papy Booom - a Belgian organisation actively addressing the isolation faced by older adults. Their focus on joyful, participatory activities such as dancing and clubbing, go beyond what individuals or typical retirement settings offer, serving as an inspiring model and a source of international solidarity to already extant small-scale initiatives practiced by local community centres in Malta. In this same spirit, we aim to develop an equally hopeful and future-oriented initiative that affirms the right to cultural participation for both long-established and newly arrived residents, while paying tribute to the region's rich historical heritage. Beyond its immediate goals, the project will also serve as a valuable opportunity to deepen our understanding of these communities—insights that may inform and enhance other ongoing regional efforts, including the Birgu 2031 European Capital of Culture bid.

Suggested initiatives include:

1. Creative Workshops

- A multimedia initiative capturing the perspectives of both children and older adults on the port area.
- Joint creative sessions that support the development of interactive tools, such as video games, specifically designed with older adults in mind.

2. Exhibitions in Elderly Care Homes

- Showcasing children's creative outputs within residential homes for older adults.
- Incorporating multimedia installations and interactive features to engage residents and encourage participation

3. Initiatives with an intergenerational scope, highlighting lesser-known histories and using an oral history approach.

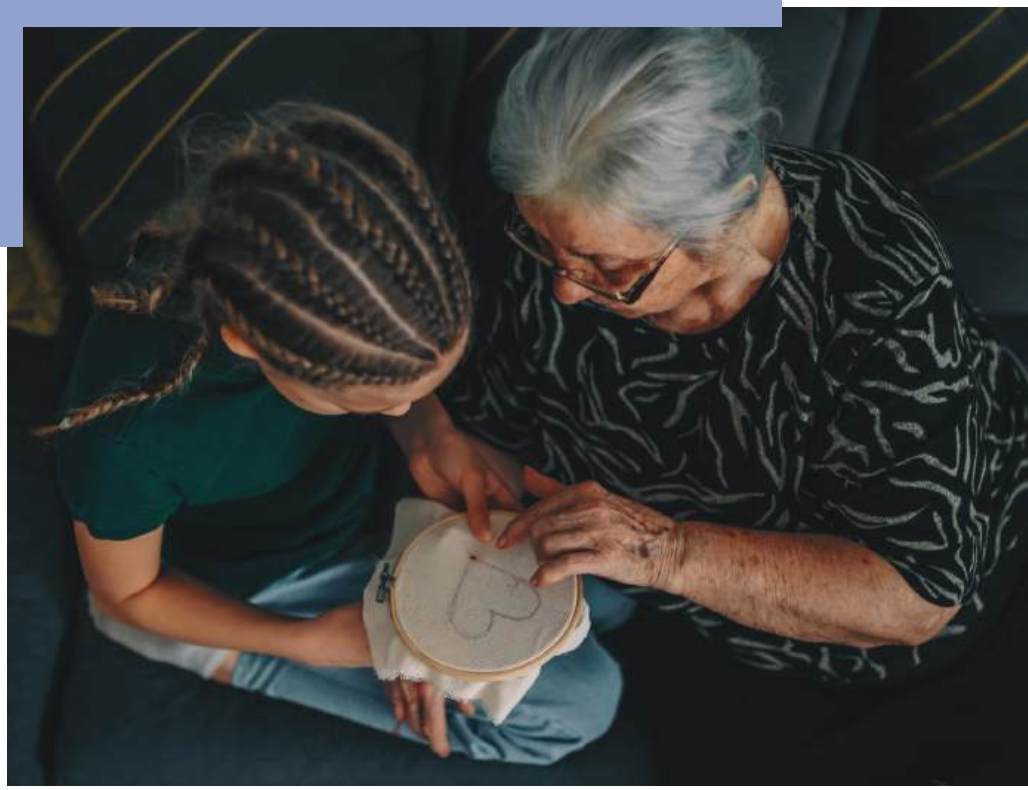
4. Any initiative brought to our attention from creative practitioners and artists seeking to tackle specific sensory realities (dementia, Alzheimer's, blindness, hearing difficulties, mobility difficulties and more)

Goals:

- To foster mutual understanding, pride in place, and emotional connection.
- Stimulate Youth Engagement: Foster creativity and civic awareness among children through local exploration and expression.
- Transform aged care institutions into intergenerational hubs of interaction and learning.
- Use digital tools to create new experiences, enhance skills and share them and to generate new experiences, especially for those with mobility issues.
- Ensure accessibility for ongoing intergenerational projects.
- Collect reflections from both children and elderly participants and use findings to propose policy recommendations on integrating intergenerational activities into school, artistic and community initiatives.
- Promote vitality and reduce isolation
- Reinforce Identity and agency and boost confidence and sense of purpose
- Enhance understanding of Social Impact Assessment findings and use data to support policy and future measures in this area.

Possible Partners & Stakeholders

- Regional Local Schools
- Regional Residential Homes for the Elderly
- Active Ageing Centres
- Local Councils and Cultural Offices
- Community Artists
- Multimedia Designers



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