



mahalla

Malta Festival

Mission

The general vision of the festival is to question a dystopian reality of excluding “the other” in the form of the migrant, the poor, the opposite sex, the unknown.

The Title, Mahalla, refers to the word mahalla used in many languages and countries meaning neighborhood or location originated in Arabic mähallä.

Mahalla as a title for the festival is a metaphor for a space of diversity and inclusion in the field of arts and culture.

Generating New Narratives

Final Report

Introduction

The Mahalla Festival in Malta took place between Nov 17 and Nov 25 with the participation of more than 60 artists, writers, filmmakers, cultural workers and initiatives from 20 countries. It was a Festival of film, literature, contemporary art, debates and several activities combining events that invite local and international participants to mobilize visitors to explore communities under new aspects. The Festival was located in venues around Valletta and Zabbar in Malta.

Maltese and international participants were presented in exhibitions, concerts, performances, screenings and talks displaying different topics: *language and migration, communities and diversity, new city cultures, mobile citizenship and future demands of communities.*

The displayed art works, performances, installations, screenings, readings and talks were reflecting aspects of borders, armed conflicts and migration, minorities, hospitality and hostility, urban structures, inclusion and intercultural communication.

Several initiatives and cultural workers from Europe with and without migration background who are working in the fields of diversity, inclusion and intercultural debates attended the festival in Malta and exchanged their experiences.

Organizer

The Mahalla Festival was organized by the Istanbul based association **DIYALOG** in cooperation with the Museum **MUZA** (Muzew Nazzjonali tal-Arti), **Heritage Malta**, the **African Media Association Malta**, **Contemporary Valletta**, **Studio 87** and **Sustainable Design Collective Malta**.

The Festival was realized in close cooperation with several Maltese initiatives of the civil society which are working in the fields of cultural inclusion and intercultural dialog. These were the **Sustainable Design Collective**, **Utopian Nights**, the **Sudanese Migrant Association** and **Rima**.

Other partners of the festival were the **St. Patricks Football Club Zabbar**, **Villa Romana Florence**, **Weiter Schreiben Berlin**, **Inizjamed Malta** and **Fann Magazine Frankfurt**.

Financial Support

The Mahalla festival was financial supported by the **German Embassy Valletta**, **Art Council Malta**, the **Austrian Chancellor**, **SAHA** Supporting Contemporary Art from Turkey, **Frank Salt Real Estate**, the **Austrian General Consulate Malta**, **Vodafone Malta Foundation**, **Allianz Kulturstiftung** for Europe, **Community of Örebro**, **Canon through Avantech Malta** and **WeVideo**.

Venues

The 6 Venues of the festival in Malta were the national Museum **MUZA**, **Museum Fortress Builders**, **Contemporary Valletta**, **Studio 87**, an unconverted **Palazzo in Zabbar** and the **St. Patrick's Football Club** in Zabbar.

The unconverted **Palazzo in Zabbar** was a venue for site specific interventions. It served as a police station during the British colonial times and was partly burned down during the anti-colonial uprisings in the 1958. The building is currently for sale heading towards an unknown destiny. The possibility to use it as an art space was provided by **Frank Salt Real Estate Malta**.

The Mahalla Festival was inventing the **Conceptual Mahalla Share House** in Valletta as a project to represent its continuous mission. It was located at the library of **Museum Fortress Builders**. Artistic works around the topics: Europe as a Fortress, armed conflicts, gentrification, fair trade were displaying a call for solidarity and utopian visions. Darrin Zammit-Lupi showed unknown visuals about his 20 years long practice as a photographer monitoring rescue mission in the Mediterranean Sea. In the Library different artists displayed positions around a globalized world-economy in the **Conceptual Mahalla Share-House**. Installations from objects out of recycled materials, Photo-documentations and interactive works were inviting for reflections on various topics central in Malta and Europe right now.

The **Museum MUZA** hosted several Talks, Readings and Film-screenings.

At **ST. Patrick's Football Club** in Zabbar the **Mahalla festival** in cooperation with the community museum **MUZA** was screening video works by nine participants. Subject of the Video-Artworks were the Maltese Diaspora in Tunisia, the Chinese minority in Indonesia, the Georgian shadow-play and its tricks to bypass censorship, German Veterans traumatized in Afghanistan, future migration to space, suitcase memories from Palestine and Syria, and **Sailor Pop-ais'** (alias Popeyes) solution for the refugee crisis. These works were showing a wide range of new narratives on various topics.

The galleries **Valletta Contemporary** and **Studio 87** hosted 2 exhibitions by Turkish artists at their venues. Both artists - **Fikret Atay** and **Raziye Kubat** - were reflecting the aspects of migration, hospitality and hostility based on their own experiences.

Participants

More than 60 international artists from 20 countries participate in the event in Malta. Some are themselves affected by displacement. All of them are working on new forms of narratives regarding global conflicts and their worldwide effects: a rising nationalism, progressing ecological destruction, dramatic gentrification in urban areas and rising inequalities in working life are some of the topics.

From Malta 12 artists, poets and cultural mediators participated into the festival:

Aaron Bezzina, Antoine Cassar, Darrin Zammit Lupi, Raphael Vella, Margerita Pule, Kristina Borg, Mario Sammut, Sara Pace, Victor Aguis, Elise Billiard, Charlie Cauchi, Jean Paul Borg and participants of the community video workshop.

Mahalla Video-Workshop

Part of the Mahalla festival was a **community video workshop** for third country nationals and local communities realized since March 2018 by **DIYALOG** in cooperation with the **Sustainable Design Collective Malta**. This workshop took place in 4 sessions at the **Sudanese Migrant Association** in Hamrun, at the **Gzira Local Council** and at the **Volunteer Center** in Valletta. The participants of the video workshop learned to use the narration-style of video-filmmaking with smart phones and simple video devices to express personal experiences, visions and their aspirations regarding community life in short movies of approximately one to five Minutes and published the results on the online video magazine **Streetwalking**, edited by DIYALOG. A selection of short movies created within the workshop were shown at the **RIMA Film Festival** in October and at the museum **MUZA** as part of the Mahalla Festival in November.

These video workshop series were a *Connecting for Good Project* by **Vodafone Malta Foundation** supported also by **Allianz Kulturstiftung** for Europe.

The results of the workshop can be found on our video magazine:
<http://streetwalking.inenart.eu/archives/category/video-workshop-malta>

The multicultural video-workshop was conducted by the curators of the Festival, **Sabine Küper-Büsch** and **Thomas Büsch**. The workshop was supported by the video online editing software **WeVideo** in the frame of an educational program. The postproduction is partly done by this online postproduction software. The support of the video workshop by **WeVideo** is still ongoing.

Resonance

More than 1.000 participants and visitors were attending all 10 events between November 17 and 25, and we reached in one month on our Facebook Site more than 45.000 people with over 2.000 responses mostly in Malta. The Mahalla Web Site had more than 32.000 visits in November. -

The Mahalla Festival was covered with a live interview of 10 minutes at **TVM** and a report at **Maltarti. Times of Malta** published a two-pages interview about the Mahalla Festival.

(Maltaarti: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QShpsW4x_20;
Times of Malta:
<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20181116/community/generating-new-narratives-in-the-arts.694376#>)

The video workshop had 20 active participants who created and published in 8 months more then 30 movies. During this period the online video magazine had 23.000 unique visitors. The 30 films were viewed 7.700 times at the video magazine. On our Facebook Site we reached 78.000 people with boosted movie ads with over 2.000 responses.

Together with the Mahalla events and the movie ads we reached 123.000 people on Facebook with over 4.000 responses in a period of 8 month.

Conclusion

The Mahalla festival was a success and fulfilled all our expectations. The invited participants formed new synergies and a European network dedicated to mobility, inclusion and cultural identity has been expanded. The festival strengthened local and international artistic practices and intercultural development.

The festival boosted new artistic narratives and innovations and contributed to a better understanding between communities.

The Local community in Zabbar for example first mainly came to the unconverted Palazzo to see the former police station that had been closed for decades. They soon started sharing the local history with the artists and visitors. The **FC St. Patrick's Club** just across the Palazzo hosted several international Video-Art-works. The reception of the opening of the exhibition in Zabbar was done in this club with moving interactions of artists, visitors and locals. During the entire week people would come by to have a drink, watch the Videos and to have a chat. We are very convinced that there is a high potential for such art-events in several undiscovered communities in Malta inviting local and international artists to discover spaces and history.

The festival has also shown that more needs to be done in the future to contribute to a better understanding of cultures in Europe, to understand cultures of newcomers and the others as enrichment and to accept and promote the challenges in nowadays intercultural dialogue.

The museum **MUZA** wasn't fully operative during the Mahalla Festival yet. Still the screening of films produced by migrants and locals in the frame of the Mahalla Video-workshop pulled people there, who had never entered a museum before. After the screening Bosnian-Swiss artist **Milenko Lazić** did

a performance with 20 kg of clothes, he had carried with him from Zürich in front of the Museum. People passing by and the guests of a reception in the Foreign ministry watched the performance with curiosity and interest. Lasiç formed a body from clothing. He put on several layers of dresses and played with aspects of home and homelessness, dress-code and behavior roles in public space. The performance lasted twenty minutes, no one was provoked or annoyed. The migrants, who attended the film-screening, were startled by the first art performance they were part of in their lives and by a different form of affiliation they experienced in the middle of Valletta, a part of Malta they are usually avoiding. The screening at **MUZA** with **Kamen Stoyanov**, **Katharina Svoboda** and **Alaa Hamameh** and the following discussion was as well an enrichment for all participants. The introduction of the **Weiterschreiben** project and the **Fann** magazine from Germany at **MUZA** was as well a very good example from Germany how poets and writers can support each other and contribute to a better intercultural dialogue between the culture of the host communities and the newcomers.

The festival was carried out as clearly laid down in its concept. The organizer acted with utmost good faith towards the supporting institutions and its partners.

The money received was be used solely and exclusively for the proposed Mahalla Festival and in conformity with the approved application.

We are very thankful for and inspired by our experience in Malta. While in other parts of Europe xenophobia is spreading due to the total segregation of communities we were able to experience different dynamics in Malta. We operated on the level of a State-Museum, we worked with local Galleries - **Valletta Contemporary** and **Studio 87** - representing the Valletta art-scene and hosted two exhibitions in a local community with a high working-class-spirit and two band clubs very powerful in the social life. Our main conclusion is that the mixture of different artistic practices by local and international artists is a boost for inclusion oriented cultural work when it is able to interact with the local structures.

After a more theoretical oriented Festival in Istanbul in 2017 the Mahalla Festival was able to experiment with different formats of exhibitions, literature-events, film-screenings and performance-events in Malta. Our next aim is to continue to grow Mahalla to operate and develop the concept internationally. The network is central in the concept. As we invited many Turkish artist to Malta this year, we will reconnect to the Maltese artists for the next Festival and are also planning to have Satellite-events in Malta and Turkey. The location of the next Festival isn't decided yet. Gotland in Sweden was offered to us, the East of Germany is a challenge as well as Sarajevo in Bosnia/Herzegovina.

Istanbul, December 7, 2018