

# Maltese Theatre in 2020: Possible Scenarios

Theatre Studies Programme  
Mediterranean Institute  
University of Malta

A conference/workshop was held on Saturday 22nd February from 9.30 to 4.30 pm at the Sala Isouard at the Manoel Theatre. It was organised by the Theatre Studies Programme (Mediterranean Institute) of the University of Malta

## Aims of Conference

Dr. Vicki Ann Cremona, Academic Coordinator of the Programme, explained the aims of the conference. The establishment of the new Malta Council for Culture and the Arts marks a landmark in the history of Maltese culture. The previous landmark was that of publishing the policy for Culture. The time is now right to explore new strategies to continue to develop policy. Foresight methodologies and tools have been developed through the foresight programmes in Japan, US, UK. More recently, this methodological approach was first introduced to Malta within an EU context by the [Malta Council for Science and Technology](#) (MCST) in the [field of ICT](#). It has provided an opportunity to be on the cutting edge of 'hands-on' policy development, especially with regard to the cultural sector and theatre in particular.

She stated that the newly formed Malta Council for Culture and the Arts had no real representative from the theatre in its central committee, and had not yet formulated its plans for the theatre. This was a golden opportunity for people from different areas of theatre to get together and formulate their visions and views.

The stated aims of the conference were as follows:

- To encourage wider participation in the initial processes of policy making for culture. In this context, theatre will be used as a key tool to promote a new cultural strategy.
- Use scenario methods to explore possible futures for theatre in Malta - alternative pathways for theatre and its impact on and contribution to Maltese society
- Provide guidelines to an action-oriented vision involving all potential contributors (in terms of alternative visions, ideas, resources, support□.)
- Develop recommendations to be incorporated into possible policies where culture figures as a main feature.

## Opening Presentation

The opening presentation was given by guest speaker, Mr. Pier Massa. It was entitled: **The Strategy for the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts**. The points tackled were the following:

- Opportunities and Challenges for Culture and the Arts in Malta
- The Process of Managing Strategic Change
- The Strategy for the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts

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The working premise was that Culture and the Arts in Malta could benefit from a renewed level of investment by all social partners. In order to do this, Malta needs to better engage its people in areas of culture and the arts,

- as a means of enabling self expression and
- generating employment in the arts

The present moment offers an opportunity to leverage the concept of "Cultural Tourism".

The main key challenges that have to be faced are the following:

- Maltese cultural economy is under performing
  - Attendance at cultural events is low
  - Creative artists find it difficult to make a living
  - Cultural organisations are often starved of funds
  - Insufficient management and marketing expertise
- Malta's market size provides challenges in the promotion of the Arts
- A significant amount of funding is required to build capacity and develop the Arts
- The Scope of Culture is so broad that it is not easy to have a significant impact

Mr. Massa spoke of the vicious circle of mediocrity that characterized the field of the arts in Malta, and defined strategies to emerge from this. This involved creating and maintaining a change process through different means, which include developing a vision, empowering action and creating short-term wins. The council has agreed to provide the following vision:

A BOLD AND DARING expression  
of Malta's UNIQUE Cultural and Artistic IDENTITY  
that ENGAGES SOCIETY and  
IMPACTS FUTURE HISTORY

The mission it has set itself is to achieve new heights in creativity and accomplishment for Culture and the Arts in Malta in a manner that is enjoyable and accessible to all segments of society.

These aims will be achieved by endorsing quality, fuelling participation, developing markets and enabling commercial success, attracting investment.

The council aims to cater for the needs of artists and art organisations, the government, the public, and the cultural tourism and business sectors. Consequently, it has set itself the following objectives:

1. Raise standards in cultural programmes across all art forms
2. Create opportunities and generate exposure for young talented artists both locally and internationally
3. Develop educational structures that encourage active participation and enhance creativity for all students of all ages
4. Broaden and increase access to high quality arts and cultural events
5. Develop sustainable relationships with business channels and organisations in the field of art and culture
6. Build awareness and promote Maltese culture and arts

locally, around the Mediterranean basin and internationally

Various Art Form Sub-committees will Work with the Council to Establish Policy and Direction: Folklore and Crafts, Literature and Poetry, Architecture and Cultural Heritage, Music, Visual Arts and Media, Performing Arts and Theatre. These will create linkages with education, broadcasting and business.

Mr. Massa's introduction was very useful in highlighting the Council's general aims, and served as an excellent background to the work developed in the workshop.

## The Foresight Methodology

Dr. Cremona then gave a presentation where she gave a brief outline of foresight methodology and the way it would be applied in the conference.

Foresight provides a set of tools for more rational approaches to long-term, strategic decision making. However, it is certainly not about predicting the future. One of the more effective tools for visualising or anticipating possible futures is the use of scenarios. Scenarios are 'images of the future', they represent a collective effort for defining alternative futures, not simply by focusing on the elements that can exist in the future, but by putting them into a context. This means that through scenarios what is presented is not a wishlist of proposals, but sketches of alternative contexts. Scenario-building has various advantages. Since in foresight, we are using rational tools to imagine possible futures, it allows us to mix possibilities with facts. It can then create a systematic framework to lay all the different visions side by side and make connections between them. This work allows initial ideas to take up a new consistency and become possible directions. The creation of different scenarios allows for a comparative study which brings out the consistent and comprehensive qualities of the different scenarios, which are all based on the same structure of elements.

This process allows for the sharing of ideas and knowledge. It places more emphasis on wide participation, and the direct involvement of the end users in the vision-building process. Foresight does not try to project utopic visions, but rather to orient present-day decisions and actions within a long-term collective framework. However, it has to go beyond today's culture to try and develop feasible and practical tools to advance towards a new vision attained through wide consensus. The purpose of scenario building is not to pinpoint future events but to highlight large-scale forces that push the future in different directions. Foresight is about making these forces visible.

There are many technical methods for creating scenarios, but Dr. Cremona chose to trace two main different approaches:

- Vertical dimension: top-down scenarios
  - a. start from the present and pose 'what if' questions : e.g. what if the public subsidies decrease considerably?
  - b. start from the future and ask 'how' questions: e.g. What would it have taken to have reached a future where theatre participation is very intense and highly specialised?
- Horizontal dimension: bottom-up scenarios

This was the approach adopted in the workshop.

Scenarios are created by specialist forecasters, where experts in the field are the source of knowledge and their contribution is the basis of the framework used. The reasons for this choice were the following:

- a. it allows the examination of alternative futures that provide alternative possibilities. This will lead to the identification of key points in the decision making process for policy.
- b. these scenarios can lead to identify priorities, to determine objectives and targets, to establish useful indicators of progress, and to define what can be taken as warning signs that will tell us that a scenario is beginning to unfold.
- c. It is important to stress that there is no 'right' scenario. No one is better than the other. The mapping of several possible scenarios allows us to examine approaches or situations that are not frequently thought of or envisaged.

One essential factor to keep in mind is that the future will not be any of the scenarios, but it will contain elements of all the scenarios. The implications of creating different scenarios are that some of the decisions taken in one scenario make sense across all of the futures envisaged. Therefore better, more solid plans can be created. It also helps to detect early warning signs that show clearly that a scenario, in a positive or negative sense, is beginning to unfold.

Dr. Cremona outlined the day's proceedings as follows: define 4 possible types of scenarios, each of which would be discussed in a specific working group. The four scenarios ran as follows:

1. **Business as Usual**: the group was to create a scenario where current trends are pursued with no change in policy
2. **Hard times**: things get worse, but not catastrophic collapse
3. **Onwards and Upwards**: current trends are put into a better environment
4. **Visionary/Paradigm shift**: successful public participation in policy allows pursuit of visionary/alternative directions

Dr. Cremona also pointed out that when creating scenarios, attention has to be paid to 'drivers'. These are factors that could be critical to influencing the course of events, promote one or other sort of developments, and lead to distinctive futures. However, each workshop could suggest other shaping factors.

Participants were asked to identify and describe the drivers, and see which are pertinent to the scenario being described and how they play a role in this scenario. They were also asked to define what would be considered as 'success' in each particular area, and how the drivers can contribute to this. It was pointed out that some drivers are outside our control. After we have determined what we have no control over, we should be left with a number of uncertain and critical areas, which are key to the development of the performing arts in our scenario e.g. the population growth of a country is beyond our control, therefore it is a predetermined factor. However, attracting new types of population to our theatres is a critical and important factor in our scenarios. Tax deductions for private sponsors is another critical and uncertain factor which we can incorporate into a scenario.

The participants were then split up into four groups. Each group worked together for two workshops. A rapporteur was appointed

from each group to report back to the plenary session.

In Workshop No. 1 the participants were asked to name and describe their scenario, and to think about the conditions that might bring this into being (drivers and shapers)

In Workshop Session No. 2 the first task was to provide more detail on the factors that would tend to lead to the group's scenario, by choosing from a range of driving factors which help shape the scenario:

- SOCIAL
- TECHNOLOGICAL
- ECONOMIC
- ENVIRONMENTAL
- POLITICAL
- VALUES

In the last session every group was asked to present their scenarios, to identify the major drivers, and to prioritise the key elements for policy.

### Points Defined as Necessary for Policy Consideration

Various points were brought out from the different scenarios and then placed in an order of importance through the participants' vote. The list given is in descending order of importance, according to the number of votes obtained per entry:

1. Theatre in schools: focus on creativity
2. Concept of national theatre
3. Political and policy change
4. Human aspect - interculturalism and inclusivity
5. Sharing space, finance and training
6. New ways of support e.g. guilds
7. Cultural management course
8. Transparency in statistical data
9. Subsidies for expertise
10. Censorship
11. Bringing science technology and the arts closer through experimentation
12. Collaboration, networking, working together
13. Private funding should not substitute government funding
14. Well-defined roles and flexible administration
15. New approaches to theatre skills when technology-integrated
16. Rebellion vs status quo
17. Benchmarking of standards
18. Transparency of aids and grants
19. Clear policy-making identity



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