*PhD Title: Defying Convention: Devising new approaches to heritage values in Valletta, Malta.*

Though this PhD was awarded by the Department of Archaeology at the University of York (UK), it is, at its heart, principally concerned with the values associated with heritage places, and thus can be broadly described as research within the field of Heritage Studies.

Specifically, this research examines heritage values and significance in the context of the World Heritage-listed city of Valletta, the capital of the Maltese Islands and my home. Though the city’s fortunes have ebbed and flowed over the years, it has experienced a period of accelerated regeneration in the last decade or so. Now a popular destination for cultural tourism, Valletta is a city in transition, where renewal has led to the conservation and restoration of its urban fabric. Yet change wrought by these processes has had a demonstrable, detrimental effect on its lesser recognized heritage. An intentional focus on these ‘unofficial’ heritage values was the principal subject of this research to produce an alternative reading of a heritage landscape most often associated with more traditional criteria.

To that end, this study was framed and informed by more contemporary approaches to heritage values, and the intellectual foundation for this approach was drawn from recent scholarship and related heritage conventions. This required the adoption of an innovative, in-situ data collection method, where the participants lead the researcher on walks around the city. Interviews were conducted with 19 participants in three phases between 2021 and 2022. The interviews themselves were participant-defined and captured on video as well as audio. The analysis of these data demonstrated the pivotal role of social value in understanding significance from a grassroots perspective, and approach that has never previously been applied in the context of Valletta. What emerged from this novel methodology was a new landscape of heritage value, where the ‘everyday’ aspects of city life are foundational to collective memory and emotional attachment to place. Though the landmark sites traditionally championed as intrinsic to Valletta’s heritage significance do feature in the data, it is the mundane and personal that is central to the social value attributed to the city by the participants. From small, locally run businesses to quirky architectural elements, it is the often-overlooked aspects of the material fabric of Valletta to which the participants give prominence. Furthermore, a subset of the data intersects with the notion of ‘liveability’ and how gentrification impacts the quality of life of residents and visitors to the city alike, be it positive or negative.

The TESS scholarship played a crucial role in this research, allowing me to build on earlier work on the heritage value of Fort Tigné. This work was conducted for the completion of an MA in Heritage Studies at the University of York. Though the subject matter differed, the underlying approach and outcomes further demonstrate that in the context of a rapidly changing island, how heritage is valued, conserved, protected, and shared requires a drastic rethink. By devising new strategies and participatory approaches to heritage valuation, it suggests that the heritage canon needs to be expanded to account for a broader, more inclusive range of heritage attributions. Though implemented and tested in the context of our capital, it is broadly applicable to the larger local heritage landscape.