

MaLIA AGM 2010 23rd February 2010
Chairman's Report for the year March 2009 to February 2010
MaLIA's 40th Anniversary 1969-2009

Dear MaLIA members,

General note

This report is not intended to describe in detail or comprehensively all the year's activities of this outgoing council but rather to give an overview of activities and their relevance to MaLIA's development.

Introduction

Another year has passed and it has been one full of many activities and efforts with mixed levels of results

1. some have left the intended result in full,
2. others reached their targets only in part,
3. some efforts proved totally ineffective
4. There were also several targets that we would have liked to reach but they remained beyond our reach to even attempt

In a real sense the agenda and direction for this Council 2009-2010 was set by the previous Council. This Council finished off many of the projects started by the previous Council centering mainly on the following four areas of activities:

1. 40th Anniversary activities celebrations
2. our drive for a public library in Valletta as part of Government's plans for the redevelopment of the City Gate, Freedom Square and Opera House site
3. our drive to raise MaLIA's profile especially with the relevant authorities
4. routine administration of the Association

Our drive to raise MaLIA's profile especially with the relevant authorities

For many years MaLIA has never been known to even exist by the general public, not even by all librarians. In the case of the relevant authorities the situation was different. We were certainly known but plainly ignored. One target we set for ourselves during 2009 was to break this mould and I am happy to say that we have made great progress in this regard and there were several factors that helped which include

1. The dedication of present Council members which ultimately are the face that people see, hear and note
2. Registering officially as an NGO with the National Commission for Voluntary Organisations
3. Having a just and public cause – a public library in Valletta
4. Modern technology – our Web-site, Social interaction sites (Facebook), the press and e-mails

MaLIA, during the first half of 2009 continued with its series of meetings with all possible interested stakeholders that included:

1. The President of Malta (June)
2. Prime Minister of Malta (March)
3. Minister of Education (January)
4. Minister for Infrastructure and IT (January via e-mail)
5. Parliamentary Secretary for Public Dialogue and Consultation (May)
6. Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb
7. Malta Qualifications Council

8. Political parties (PL, PN, AD and AN – January, February)
9. Journalists, column writers and opinion makers (Dr. Claire Bonello, Dr. Ranier Fsadni, Fr. Peter Serracino Inglott, Daphne Caruana Galizia who at some point all made positive reference to our insistence for a public library in Valletta).
10. The general public through our contributions to the press and Facebook (Friends of Libraries in Malta and State of the Art Public Library/Cultural Centre in Valletta)

Through these face to face and on-line contacts MaLIA gained visibility in the public's eye as evidenced by reference to us and our cause in the press by journalists and individuals in blogs to our contributions in the press (generally favourably). But more important than that the relevant authorities especially Minister for Education started acknowledging us. The signs all indicate that this will lead to positive developments. Thus we note with pleasure that:

1. The Minister for Education has appointed person who is now following library matters with MaLIA and with whom we meet regularly. Initially it was with a Mr. Charles Caruana Carabez and since January we meet with Mr. Henry Cachia
2. When during the last quarter of 2009 the Ministry drafted a new Libraries Act MaLIA was officially asked to comment something which we did and the feedback we have is that our comments were appreciated. In this regard though not acknowledged we are proud to say that the text of this draft law matches almost to the word MaLIA's view for the restructuring of the National and Public library system, which we had submitted some three years ago and recently published in Robert Mizzi's paper in our 40th anniversary publication.
3. MaLIA was given a slot to put up an activity during book week held at St. James
4. For the first time ever MaLIA was officially invited for the opening ceremony of the Malta Book Fair held in November of each year
5. When towards June the DoI launched a book *Reading means borrowing: a directory of all public lending libraries in the Maltese islands* MaLIA was consulted about content asked to write its Foreword by way of endorsing it and was invited at its public launch in Bormla.
6. Following a meeting with Dr. Chris Said we have a request from him to organise a short course "Introduction to Library and Information work" for public libraries employees

These are all encouraging contacts that should be maintained. Admittedly it has taken a lot of effort to start off and maintain these contacts but without them MaLIA will be all that much poorer and less effective.

Our drive for a public library in Valletta as part of Government's plans for the redevelopment of the City Gate, Freedom Square and Opera House site

In brief the events unfolded in this manner

1. Early October 2008 MaLIA issued a press release outlining our proposals for a public library in place of the long derelict ruins of the Opera House in Valletta. Associated with this press release MaLIA wrote a long report describing in some detail our proposal. To promote this, we launched an on-line petition through our web-site which eventually gathered over 420 signatures and also launched a face book group (State of the Art Public Library/Cultural Centre in Valletta) which presently is supported by over 914 members.
2. Mid October 2008 the Prime Minister proposes the current projected project for the area which includes a parliament house in Freedom Square, an open air theatre (on the site of the Opera house ruins) and redesigning of the city gate entrance. Moreover Renzo Piano is mentioned as the architect in charge of drawing up plans.
3. At this point MaLIA steps up its publicity campaign and joins the fray amid the general controversy that erupted. But we also wrote to the key players including the Prime Minister Dr. Lawrence Gonzi whom we met personally in March 2009, the Minister for Infrastructure (Dr. Austin Gatt), the Minister for Education (Ms. Dolores Cristina) and Renzo Piano himself.

To each we presented our proposals. All (except Renzo Piano and Minister Cristina) expressed their general agreement with the idea of a public Library in Valletta but would not commit themselves explaining that they will wait to look at Piano's Proposals.

4. On the 22nd of June 2009 the Monday just 5 days before Saturday 27th June when Piano's plans were officially unveiled with great publicity the Times of Malta carried an interview with Piano himself. Piano clearly stated that beneath Parliament building on Freedom Square there will be a public library. MaLIA publicly welcomed this piece of good news on its web-site, in letters to the press and on its Facebook sites. It was with great dismay that through the Sunday 28th June papers we then read that beneath Parliament House Government now intends to house a Museum of Political Development.
5. MaLIA in all possible ways, publicly and privately, expressed its disapproval of these late hours changes in plans from Piano's expressed views. Minister Gatt's official version is that Piano in his interview was referring to much earlier plans for an electronic library which had to be dropped once the size of the chamber of deputies had to be enlarged. MaLIA is not convinced that these were the true reasons for the change of plans and has publicly stated so for the record moreover stating the country and the public has lost a golden opportunity to have a state of the art public library. MaLIA feels that in this instance there was never the political will for a library on this site. The main intention was and remains to build a new Parliament House at all costs.
6. Still MaLIA at any available opportunity will keep insisting that the public library service needs to be improved and that includes a 'High Street' location for the Central Public Library.

40th Anniversary activities celebrations

MaLIA over the past year marked its 40th year of existence, starting off in 1969 as the Malta Library Association (MLA), then the Ghaqda Bibljotekarji (GhB) and presently the Malta Library and Information Association (MaLIA). It was only fitting to mark the occasion. A publication was always our first choice and the ideal way how to do this would have been through a published update to Dr. Paul Xuereb's publication "Promoters of Information" which documented our first 20 years 1969-1989. But we did not find a suitable author and decided for a collection of papers on various aspects of library and archive practice in Malta. The resultant publication "A Mosaic of Library and Archive Practice in Malta" was launched on the 7th of December 2009 at the National Library in Valletta during a well attended event (over 60 people) which included also the handing out of certificates to participants of a MaLIA short course ending with a reception. The publication and its launch were the official event marking our 40th Anniversary

About this publication it is good to note that the Government Printing Press through our personal contacts with the DOI and NSO gave us a very favourable price for its printing. Through other personal contacts we managed to get two financial sponsorships from Emerald publishing and the Central Bank of Malta which sponsorships covered all printing costs, such that any sales we make will be profit for MaLIA.

Routine administration of the Association

Saying that this year's Council met in all 15 times belies the number of meetings that had to take place to get the work cited above and within this section done. The 15 formal minuted Council meetings held every 3 weeks ago at the UoM Library Boardroom or at the MCAST Library (MaLIA's 2nd home) do not reflect the many other meetings that were necessary to get our publication to launch stage, the short course in place, the library in Valletta report finalised, newsletters published, etc. etc. Below is a record in brief form of some of Councils activities which kicked off with a Saturday morning seminar in early March.

1. Newsletter. Initially edited by Claudio Laferla but now in the capable hands of our newcomer on Council Charlene Bajada. 4 issues were published. Besides the web-site
2. Register of Professional Librarians which is maintained by Dr. Liliana Sciberras. A useful tool that however is not being exploited in full. Not all MaLIA members know about it and those that know about are not convinced of its importance. This is reflected in the small number of new members in the register since it was re-launched some two years ago. Dr. Sciberras on any annual basis in January send a list of members to the Minister of Education. MaLIA uses this register as a starting point for the eventual recognition of the
3. MaLIA Web-site. Never has this we-site been so regularly kept up to date by Mr. Robert Mizzi as in the past year. Many individuals and organisations know who we are and gauge how serious we are solely through our web-site so an investment in it is more than worth it
4. Short Course Introduction to Library skills. More or less this popular course (8 sessions x 2 hours each) open to the general public is held every other year. This year it was planned for mid October to mid November but because it was oversubscribed (20 participants) another course (nearly full 18 participants) was repeated immediately after (November December). This course which is mainly attended by either persons already working in libraries or else simply interested in the subject serves many purposes. More than anything else it is a point of contact between MaLIA and the general public through which we can explain the work that librarians and archivists do and increase appreciation towards our profession. Secondly it stimulates interest in the academic side of the profession with some participants opting to start the UoM Diploma or Degree course. It also of course serves as one of the few ways how the association can generate funds. At this point it is good to thanks MCAST for providing its premises and facilities for free and the lecturers who contribute (against a fee) to make this course a successful one. There are yet to be finalised plans for offering this course to public library employees through the Local Councils platform through the office of Dr. Chris Said Parliamentary Secretary for Dialogue and Public Consultation with whom MaLIA has established more than cordial relations.
5. This year saw the successful conclusion of an agreement between MaLIA and the University of Malta library through which MaLIA members can make free use of the Z (library science) collection. This agreement was reached in return for the continued commitment by MaLIA to deposit library science publications that are the property of MaLIA. MaLIA acquires these publications through its IFLA, COMLA and EBLIDA membership and donations it receives. This agreement does not preclude that at any stage MaLIA withdraws its property for depositing somewhere else.

Events happening on the local library scene

It is good to point out some of the events that have been happening to put into context our activities

1. Retirement of Mr. Philip Borg as Director of Libraries and Mr. Joe Debattista Officer in Charge of the Central Public Library.
2. Restoration of the façade of the National Library but at the same time we are informed of serious structural faults inside the building (the roof) and further deterioration of the old books
3. The new look at the University of Malta Library 1st floor
4. On-line Services at the MCAST Library and initial plans for a new library building
5. More funds for public libraries through the local councils and support from HSBC. MaLIA welcomed this news without however making it seem that all problems with the public library collection development problems had disappeared
6. The transfer of ISBN agency from PEG to Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb. MaLIA had suggested to the Ministry that the agency be transferred to the National Library, but eventually KNK got it.

7. CITRA Conference held in November was definitely a success for the National Archives, The Friends of the National Archives and for Mr Charles Farrugia personally

The International dimension

MaLIA does not exist isolated from the world's library scene. Through our membership in IFLA, COMLA and EBLIDA and other personal contacts we keep in touch with the library world abroad. This year was an exceptional year because we managed to host a number of foreign librarians in Malta and at the same time managed to travel to foreign lands on workshops and conferences

1. Career Development Group (CDG) of CILIP UK were in Malta in March 2009 for a week for their bi annual study visit. MaLIA helped out with the local organisation and from their feedback it was a successful visit. We managed to meet several of them during a welcoming dinner; a fund raising walk and a workshop open to the public.
2. CILIP Biannual conference. In June Laurence Zerafa on behalf of the MCAST Library attended this two day conference in Hatfield UK during which just recently made in Malta contacts with UK librarians were revived. This visit also included meeting Mike Freeman
3. LIBER-EBLIDA Workshop on Digitisation of Library Material in Europe was held in October 2009. Mr. Claudio Laferla attended on behalf of MaLIA and Ms. Maroma Camilleri attended on behalf of the National Library. The conference was attended by 125 delegates from all the World and covered a wide aspect of topics such as: Europeana, Digitization of orphan books, Copyright, Interoperability, the Google Digitization Book Project and Metada amongst others. What is noteworthy is that Pat Manson from the European Commission, who was one of the keynote speakers said that, the European Commission had designated Digital Libraries as one of its i2010 flagship projects, but that the vision of integrated access required cross-domain collaboration. LIBER Digitization Roadmap <<http://www.libereurope.eu/files/LIBER-Digitisation-Roadmap-2009.pdf>

The MaLIA International Relations Officer, Robert Mizzi, attended the IFLA World Library Congress in Milan during August 2009. This was a unique opportunity to experience a library congress with nearly 4000 registered participants, talks and presentations on all aspects of library studies and practices and the possibility to make the necessary contacts for future cooperation with other library associations and international associations such as IFLA and EBLIDA. MaLIA supported Robert Mizzi by sponsoring part of the registration fee. A detailed account of this experience is available on a blog maintained by Robert Mizzi at <http://malia-ifla2009.blogspot.com/> The IFLA conference served as a magnificent opportunity to make contact with colleagues from other library associations. Contacts have been made with the ALA, CILIP and other associations and MaLIA is now a member of the library associations group of IFLA.

4. A number of foreign librarians on holiday in Malta have made contact with MaLIA members during their stay on the Island. These included a certain Yvonne Schurer from Leipzig who's studying librarianship and focusing on the Maltese library scene for her thesis.

Support MaLIA appreciates and depends on

In no particular order of importance and not always listing in full how these individuals and entities supported us here is a list of names we depend on for progress in our work

1. University of Malta Library which houses our collections, archive and provides us with meeting space for Council meetings and AGM
2. MCAST Library for the meeting space for council meetings and lecturing spaces for holding courses

3. American Embassy who through their initiative keep contact with us and provide foreign lecturers at every possible opportunity
4. Emerald Publishing for sponsoring our latest publication
5. Central Bank of Malta for sponsoring our latest publication
6. Council members individually and collectively who keep MaLIA going
7. Individual MaLIA members and friends of MaLIA (mailing lists, papers for publication, editing the publication, lecturing , Registrar,)
8. Mike Freeman who is our main and valuable link with the UK library scene besides being a personal friend

What we did not do?

This report would not be complete without listing the projects we started and have not completed. The hope is that they will serve as the impetus to keep things going by the new Council assuming that these unfinished points will still remain relevant

- a. Course for library staff in Public libraries jointly with Dr. Chris Said
- b. Establish a standards for school and public libraries
- c. Establish a Job Description for School Librarians
- d. Organise a talk about private records management facilities in Malta in conjunction with Rentastore an Irish company that recently set up shop in Malta in partnership with a local company
- e. Issue a position statement about who can work as a librarian in school
- f. Issue a position statement about internet filtering used by library staff
- g. Issue a position Statement about censorship
- h. Intensify campaign for establishing the professional status of librarians
- i. Assist the President of Malta with his Library
- j. Assist Mater Dei Hospital with its library for child longer term patients
- k. Establish formal or even informal contact with Malta Schools Library Association
- l. Organise a trip to the UK for Maltese librarians to visit UK libraries and CILIP. This is projected for September 2010. Discussions are currently in progress with CILIP on the possible assistance in the organization of this trip.
- m. Work closely with the American Embassy who possibly may involve MaLIA in their declared intention to rope in Maltese expertise in rebuilding Afghanistan

I end by thanking you all especially Council members for your support and advice in brining so many of the above projects to fruition. I can only wish we had more expertise energy at our disposal to do more of what must be done to keep the momentum of these past two years going. Personally at present I no longer have the necessary stamina to maintain the past year's pace. Though presenting my self for a Council post I will not seek re-election to the post of Chairman. Present personal work commitments do not leave much time or energy for such a commitment. There may be others who can do a better job than me at the present moment.

Laurence Zerafa
 Chairman MaLIA
 21st January 2010