



Rotary Conference on UNESCO-listed Historic Cities and Sustainability, University Campus, Valletta Friday 4 to Sunday 6 April 2025

Introduction

The 6th International Rotary Conference on Unesco-listed historic cities was held in Malta from the 4th to the 6th April 2025 at the Aula Magna, Valletta Campus, University of Malta, with the theme: **UNESCO HISTORIC CITIES, Sustainability and Historic Cities; challenges and opportunities.** It was organised by Rotary Club Malta in conjunction with Rotary Club La Valette and Rotary Club Gozo and with the support of the permanent secretariat of this initiative within Rotary Club Urbino

These conferences are an initiative of the Rotary Club Urbino who in 2013 organized the first Conference of Rotary clubs of European cities whose historic centre has been declared a UNESCO heritage site. This in order to provide answers to the various problems that pertaining to UNESCO sites entail. After that first meeting attended by about 20 clubs representing as many Unesco cities, other meetings took place every two years and on different topics: in 2015 in Istanbul (Turkey), in 2017 in Florence (Italy), in 2019 in Zamosc (Poland) and in 2023 in the three locations of Siena-Pienza-San Gimignano (Italy). A permanent secretariat within RC Urbino helps to organise these conferences.

Attendance

The conference was held over three days, starting on Friday afternoon and finishing on Sunday lunchtime. The table below shows attendance over the three days. The Special Guests for the opening of the Conference were the Mayor of Valletta and Malta's Ambassador to UNESCO.

	Friday afternoon	Saturday all day	Sunday morning
Special Guests	2	0	0
Registered and paid	52	47	40
Speakers	5	9	1
Interpreters	2	2	0
Rotaract Helpers	3	3	0

Note that not all participants who registered and paid to be present on Sunday attended. In fact, on Sunday, there were only some 20 participants present.

The following Clubs were represented at the conference by one or more delegates.

Ancona Conero, Casalmaggiore Viadana Sabbioneta, Chianciano Chiusi Montepulciano, Firenze, Gozo, Istanbul, Krakow, La Valette, Malta, Lviv (Leopoli), Rhodes, Stuttgart, Suzzara Gonzaga, Urbino, Venezia, Zamosch (16 clubs).

Members from Banska Bystrica, Napoli, Sofia and Siena registered to attend but had to pull out at the last minute for serious personal problems of the members coming. .

Friday afternoon

The opening of the Conference and the Friday session went very much according to the final programme circulated. The pre-Conference lunch gave participants the opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones.

Saturday

On Saturday, we started half an hour late due to the late arrival of most participants. To make up for the late start, the last speaker before the coffee break (Regina Economides from Rhodes) was moved to after the coffee break. We thought that we would still be able to follow the programme, since Regina could take the place of a speaker who had dropped out at the last minute. However, when it became obvious that we would be late breaking up for lunch, I offered to make my presentation after lunch, since it seemed that after lunch, we had plenty of time available.

So, the afternoon session started with my presentation which was followed by the proper business of the session, namely presentations by various clubs of the projects they had undertaken in their respective cities. Since this was expected to last only about an hour, we planned to also start a discussion about formalising the management of these Conferences with the discussion expected to spill over to Sunday. In the end, the presentations by the clubs took longer than expected and there was only half an hour left for the discussion. However, one of the participants stood up and proposed the setting up of a working group to study this issue. The proposal was accepted by acclamation from the floor. So ended the discussion and the meeting finished on time. Clubs making presentations were La Valetta, Istanbul, Sabbioneta, Venice, Florence and Zamosch.

Sunday

The Sunday meeting also started late. Present were some 20 participants mostly Italian speaking, so the meeting was held in Italian. The meeting started as planned with Bignami's speech, after which the only item on the agenda was deciding the venue for the 2027 Conference. Venice was the only candidate. After the presentation of the candidature of Venice, it was put to the vote and was unanimously approved. Lviv also made a presentation as they hope to hold the Conference in 2026. They were supposed to hold it in 2025 but could not do so because of the war, so they were told they would be able to do it in 2026. The member from Krakow made a presentation about Poland.

The meeting ended in time. We then proceeded to an excellent light lunch at La Giara organised by Pat Salomone.

Dinners

The two conference dinners were a great success, and were thoroughly enjoyed by the participants. We had just over 60 participants for each dinner.

The Saturday dinner at the Corinthia San Gorg was originally booked to be held in an exclusive hall, but because numbers were rather low, we were obliged to move from an exclusive hall to Fra Martino. But we actually gained in the process as the buffet at the Fra Martino was fantastic and by far superior to what we would have got in the exclusive hall.

Presentations

The following are the authors and titles of the presentations.

Friday

1. Jelle Houtsma-Grech – *Welcome address*
President Rotary club Malta
2. Mgr. Joseph Vella Gauci
Malta's Ambassador to UNESCO

3. Mauro Bignami – *Brief History of the Initiative*
PDG District 2090
4. Yosanne Vella – *A short history of Valletta, a remarkable city, the hub of events that shaped the history of a nation.*
Professor, Department of Languages and Humanities, Faculty of Education, University of Malta.
5. Conrad Thake – *Valletta - City of the Order, from Francesco Laparelli to Renzo Piano.*
Professor Conrad Thake, Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta
6. Keynote Speech: Antoine Zammit: *Can World Heritage Cities also be truly liveable? Understanding key challenges and opportunities in the context of wider environmental sustainability and socio-spatial challenges within UNESCO Historic Cities.*
Architect and Urban Designer, Senior Lecturer and Design Tutor, Department of Spatial Planning and Infrastructure, Faculty for the Built Environment, University of Malta
7. Keynote Speech: Werner Sobek: *Urban Design in the Context of Population Growth and Global Warming*
Professor Emeritus of Architecture and Structural Engineering, University of Stuttgart.

Saturday

8. JoAnn Cassar: *Climate change and the Mediterranean: Historic Cities and other sites, with a focus on UNESCO listed heritage.*
Professor, Head of the Department of Conservation and Built Heritage and Deputy Dean, Faculty for the Built Environment, University of Malta
9. Patrick Calleja: *Safeguarding Valletta: A matter of civic pride*
Executive President, Din l-Art Ħelwa (National Trust for Malta).
10. Jonathan Borg: *Current Approaches Towards Heritage Planning in the World Heritage City of Valletta – The role of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage.*
Chief Officer – Heritage Planning Consultations and Built Heritage Restoration Monitoring
11. Joe Magro Conti: *Malta's efforts in safeguarding the Outstanding Universal Value of The City of Valletta, Malta's Capital, and a World Heritage Site".*
Advisor, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry For The National Heritage, The Arts & Local Government
12. Regina Economides: *Medieval city of Rhodes , over-tourism & sustainability?*
Head of Building Projects and Public Spaces, Department of Structure and Infrastructure of the Municipality of Rhodes
13. Robert C. Vella: *Energy Performance and Indoor Comfort in Historic Buildings*
Col. Dr. (Perit) Robert C. Vella; Principal Architect holding a Doctorate in Industrial Engineering from the University of Valladolid, Spain.

14. Robert Ghirlando: *Sustainable Thermal Comfort in a Baroque Theatre*
Senior Fellow and Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Engineering, University of Malta
15. Konrad Buhagiar: *From Renaissance to Revit*
Founding partner, AP Valletta, firm of Architects
16. Werner Sobek: *The future of architecture*
Professor Emeritus of Architecture and Structural Engineering, University of Stuttgart
17. Clubs presentations by RCs: La Valetta, Istanbul, Casalmaggiore (Sabbioneta), Venice, Florence and Zamosch.

Sunday

Mauro Bignami

Candidature of Lviv for 2026

Candidature of Venice for 2027

Robert Ghirlando
Rotary Club Malta