

## UNESCO Historic Cities, Sustainability and Historic Cities; challenges and opportunities speech.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to join my colleagues in welcoming you to Malta, to Valletta.

Welcome, to what I expect to be  
three very interesting days on the Sustainability of Historic Cities;  
on their challenges and their opportunities.

Looking at the programme and the list of speakers,  
I am sure this distinguished audience will have a lot to chew on;  
a lot to think about,  
and hopefully a lot of room where to act,  
incisively and decisively, if we want to reap tangible results.  
So I will leave this in the able hands  
of the experts and the experienced.

On the other hand,  
I wanted to use these few minutes of introductory remarks  
to pose a few pertinent questions,  
which may not be rhetoric as they may sound.

It is easy to tick off some questions as rhetoric,  
when actually they do merit an answer –  
no matter how difficult the question, or indeed the answer, may be.

First of all, I believe we need to set straight  
what we understand by sustainability;  
what the benchmark or the yardstick of sustainability is.

Controversies abound  
when people measure sustainability with different yardsticks,  
and what goes for one stakeholder, does not for another.

And even more importantly;  
is sustainability actually the same for everyone?

When ends do not meet, who is to get the upper hand?  
By whose yardstick of sustainability should we move?

This question already raises bigger questions about the stakeholders – the residents, the tourists, the commercial sector, the real estate, the culture militia, the economic drivers, and what not.  
And should they be placed in a hierarchy?  
Should they be placed in an order of priority?  
Where and how do we strike the balance?

You see? You think these are rhetoric questions.  
I say, these questions need a solid answer  
before we can move forward.

And if you have Valletta in mind, I dare challenge you further.  
Valletta is the UNESCO world heritage city  
on which we need to solve these dilemmas.

But to a different extent, but no less important,  
we have Mdina and the Gozo Cittàdella,  
as two potential liveable sites waiting  
or hoping to make it onto the same list of World Heritage.

Can we anticipate?  
Can we set the benchmarks beforehand?  
Can we decide what we want  
and what we don't want for these two sites?

The topic of  
Sustainability and Historic Cities; challenges and opportunities  
will very much and very frequently present us  
with wants and needs that are diametrically opposed.

It takes skill and tact to tweak and adjust  
so that wants and needs can live together.

It takes greatness to make wants and needs  
*help* and *sustain* each other.

But it takes courage and boldness  
to choose a need over a want when these cannot,  
absolutely live together; when they are mutually exclusive.

Distinguished guests and participants,  
I commend Rotary International  
on the organisation of this 6th international conference  
on UNESCO Historic Cities Heritage of Peace.

I really wish you a most successful endeavour  
in your quest of identifying ways  
how to translate challenges into opportunities.

This should help our historic cities  
become truly our added value that we truly cherish,  
and not our added challenges  
that burden the way our people live  
and the workload of those who work and militate  
in the cultural heritage sector.

Thank you.

Ambassador Joseph Vella Gauci  
4th April 2025  
Valletta, Malta