



Dipartimento
Architettura
Ferrara

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HOUSING, PLANNING, AND RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERRITORY

TOWARDS EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVES

OCTOBER 16th-17th, 2025

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2nd International Conference on Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory

Towards Euro-Mediterranean Perspectives

Conference Theme and Rationale

This conference returned for the second time within the Albanian and Mediterranean academic context, aiming to build a tradition of collaboration centered on scientific research and academia. Following the success of the first edition held on October 13th-14th, 2023, where proceedings were published in the Book of Proceedings, Albanica journal, and various international academic platforms, POLIS University and the Academy of Sciences of Albania relaunched this important event. The 2025 edition focused on housing, urban planning, and resilient territorial development, offering a platform for researchers, policymakers, and experts from the region and beyond.

Albania and the Western Balkans have faced major transformations in urbanization, spatial planning, and environmental management. Demographic changes, economic pressures, and environmental challenges created a need for new strategies in architecture, planning, and governance. This conference brought together diverse voices to explore these themes and promote resilient and sustainable development.

Key topics included architecture and the city, with emphasis on urban form, housing typologies, and the role of cultural heritage in modern urban design; urban mobility, addressing traffic challenges, public transport, and the use of technologies like GIS and AI in planning; and new housing models, focusing on affordability, energy efficiency, and innovative materials.

Discussions also covered demography and economy, exploring territorial governance, smart cities, social enterprises, and digital technologies such as AI, VR, and the Metaverse in urban management. Finally, the urban and natural environment was addressed through topics like pollution, adaptive planning, and nature-based solutions for climate resilience.

Through this conference, POLIS University and the Academy of Sciences of Albania aimed to foster a broad interdisciplinary debate on these pressing issues, combining academic and practical perspectives to offer concrete recommendations for future urban and territorial development policies and projects.

Organizers' Announcement

The International Scientific Conference on Housing, Urban Planning, and Resilient Territorial Development: Toward Euro-Mediterranean Approaches was held on October 16th-17th, 2025, in Tirana, Albania. Organized by POLIS University in collaboration with the Academy of Sciences of Albania and supported by national and international partners, including the University of Ferrara and Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development, the event brought together researchers, academics, policymakers, and professionals to address key challenges in urban development, with a focus on resilience and sustainability in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The first day of the conference took place at the Academy of Sciences, while the second day was hosted at POLIS University.

The conference explored five main themes:

- I. Architecture and the City, which investigated the typological and morphological dimensions of urban form, the evolution of collective and individual housing types, the relationship between architectural design and urban identity, and the role of historical and cultural heritage in shaping contemporary cities;
- II. Urban Mobility and Resilient Cities, which addressed traffic congestion, infrastructure challenges, and public transportation, while also promoting the redesign of public spaces – such as streets, squares, and pedestrian zones – to improve accessibility and mobility; it also explored the integration of digital technologies like GIS, AI, and simulation tools to enhance planning, automation, and infrastructure management;
- III. New Housing Models, which examined innovative approaches to affordable and social housing in response to demographic shifts and technological change, along with energy efficiency strategies, passive energy systems, and the application of new sustainable materials and construction technologies;
- IV. Demography and Economy, which focused on macro-regional and national dynamics impacting territorial development, including urban governance, disaster risk reduction, and the rise of smart and inclusive cities; it also explored how emerging technologies – such as AI, VR, and the Metaverse – along with social enterprises and circular economy practices, could foster more equitable and adaptive urban systems; and
- V. Urban and Natural Environment, which analyzed environmental degradation in urban settings, including air, water, and soil pollution, and promoted nature-based solutions, ecosystem-based planning, and adaptive strategies to enhance environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

The conference was conducted in English and Albanian (with self-translated texts where applicable) and was free of charge, with all registration fees fully covered by POLIS University in support of open academic exchange. Key deadlines included abstract submission by June 15th, acceptance notification by June 30th, first draft of papers by September 15th, and final submissions by October 31st.

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Infrastructure and public transport in relation to urban crises: The impact of urban form on circulation and mobility.

Public space design (squares, streets, sidewalks) and the reduction of architectural barriers for free movement.

New technologies in planning (GIS, AI, etc.) / Modeling, simulation, and digitalization / Co-progress in regenerative urban development / Automation of planning, architectural, and engineering processes.

Tactical Urbanism as a Catalyst

Shaping People-Centred Mobility in Malta through Experimentation

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Abstract

As Euro-Mediterranean cities grapple with traffic congestion, limited public space and rising climate vulnerabilities, there is growing interest in adaptable, citizen-led solutions to reframe urban mobility. This paper explores the role of tactical urbanism – temporary, low-cost and participatory interventions – as a strategic tool for testing and transitioning towards more resilient and sustainable mobility systems, centring on the Maltese Islands.

Malta's long-lasting car-centric culture has posed significant barriers to mobility transformation. At the same time, its compact urban form offers potential for tactical experimentation. This paper presents some key case studies that have attempted to push the tactical urbanism agenda. These include the Slow Streets project, which positioned tactical urbanism as a key mobility strategy. Other examples include initiatives within the Vjal Kulhadd projects, sustainable mobility guidance for Local Councils and efforts to establish temporary play streets and weekend street closures. These endeavours have aimed to reimagine urban streetscapes as shared, flexible and inclusive spaces, though not without challenges. A notable case is Mosta Square, where pedestrianisation during weekends sparked political and community controversy but also demonstrated how temporary closures can challenge car dominance and reclaim civic space.

Localised play street projects – facilitated through short-term road closures and signage – have generally been well-received, fostering social and recreational functions. The paper explores why some projects are more successful than others, suggesting that the interventions' temporary nature might influence community acceptance.

Ultimately, the research argues that these modest interventions may influence behavioural changes and promote institutional learning. They serve as prototypes for longer-term spatial and policy shifts. The conclusion calls for formalising tactical urbanism as a core component in mobility planning across Euro-Mediterranean regions, emphasising its potential to address spatial constraints, promote civic engagement and enable low-risk experimentation to drive sustainable urban transitions.

Keywords

Tactical urbanism, Malta, sustainable mobility, people-centred mobility, Slow Streets

1. Introduction

This paper examines the role of tactical urbanism in shaping and testing sustainable mobility options in Malta, to create more resilient urban development and urban areas that are more people-centred. It provides a comprehensive overview of the contemporary mobility landscape in Malta's car-dependent island setting, examining recent developments characterised by a rise in both top-down and grassroots experimentation, as well as an intensifying public debate on the island's mobility futures.

Tactical urbanism – comprising short-term, flexible interventions in public spaces – is increasingly being embraced in several urban areas worldwide as a tool to advance sustainable mobility and liveability goals. It involves reclaiming street space through measures such as temporary pedestrian zones, pop-up bike lanes and traffic-calming installations, allowing cities to test and refine solutions before implementing them permanently (Lydon and Garcia, 2015). Tactical urbanism, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Meinherz et al., 2021), has demonstrated its potential as a tool for reallocating street space to support active travel modes, such as walking and cycling. Such temporary interventions have allowed cities to test alternative mobility solutions, challenge car-dependence norms and introduce people-centred designs (Suslowicz and Hillnütter, 2025). Meinherz et al. (2021) highlight how tactical urbanism, implemented during the COVID-19 crisis, served as a rapid and reactive approach to manage mobility challenges. It leveraged the crisis as an opportunity to test and implement sustainable mobility infrastructures, such as bicycle lanes, which could catalyse a shift toward people-centred urban mobility.

By allowing communities to experience these changes first-hand, tactical urbanism builds support for permanent infrastructure that prioritises sustainable mobility (ITDP, 2020). In this manner, streets take on another important role in the development of a city, as they become urban laboratories, allowing authorities and local communities, especially residents, to experiment, gather feedback and build the momentum for more permanent changes.

2. Theoretical foundations

Numerous urban areas confront challenges of congestion, road safety and environmental degradation rooted in entrenched car-centric mobility systems. Tactical urbanism is a transformative, grassroots approach that offers rapid, low-cost interventions, reclaiming streets for pedestrians, cyclists and social activities. Conceptualised by Lydon and Garcia (2015), with the phrase "short-term action for long-term change", tactical urbanism operates as an experimental, participatory "urban prototyping" process fostering rapid feedback and community empowerment. Its agility and affordability contrast with conventional infrastructure projects and rigid traditional planning processes, as it reallocates public space to active modes in a reversible and visible manner (Lydon and Garcia, 2015) before committing to expensive and permanent infrastructure on the ground. Lydon and Garcia's (2015) work demonstrates how small, rapid interventions may generate broader shifts in urban design and mobility culture, emphasising adaptability, community engagement and empowerment as core principles. This approach echoes Christopher Alexander's incremental urbanism theory (1987) and it has been celebrated by Curitiba's former mayor, Jaime Lerner, whose "urban acupuncture" approach was instrumental in the city's rethinking and restructuring. In his words (in LCA, 2025):

"The lack of resources is no longer an excuse not to act. The idea that action should only be taken after all the answers and the resources have been found is a sure recipe for paralysis. The planning of a city is a process that allows for corrections; it is supremely arrogant to believe that planning can be done only after every possible variable has been controlled."

In addition, by reclaiming streets for people and community uses, tactical urbanism further contributes to broader social resilience and urban liveability goals (Fernandes Barata and Fontes, 2017). These authors extend the discourse of tactical urbanism by linking it directly to sustainability, particularly through the promotion of active transportation modes such as walking and cycling. They argue that tactical urbanism projects provide an experimental and participatory platform for testing and implementing interventions that encourage less car dependence and healthier urban mobility patterns – an approach that fosters the creation of sustainable urban environments, by reallocating space and prioritising non-motorised transport.

In Malta, these thoughts have found themselves in good practice guidance published by the Local Councils' Association (LCA), which seek to empower Local Councils with knowledge on various subjects, under the *Resident First* initiative (LCA, 2020). To date, the LCA has published several documents related to its first pillar, sustainable mobility. These documents serve as manuals or toolkits, translating important theoretical concepts and national policy goals into actionable measures at the community level. They provide technical advice, promote best practices and facilitate the comprehension of technical jargon.



Figure 1. *Guidelines on Sustainable Mobility: Walkability and Accessibility.*

Source: Zammit and Local Councils' Association (2023).

Its *Walkability and Accessibility* guidance document (Figure 1) includes a dedicated section on tactical urbanism, contending that if a pedestrian area is to thrive, it must be suited to local conditions, and tactical pilots may allow the community to experience potential change before permanent works are implemented. Some practical examples of tactical interventions are provided, such as using temporary signage and

bollards to close streets for special uses (for instance, as play streets); deploying planters to define pedestrian zones or narrow intersections; putting out movable street furniture to turn parking spots into mini-parks (parklets); painting pavements or crossroads to signal pedestrian priority; and adding appropriate signage that discourages through-traffic and encourages walking or cycling. These examples mirror actual proposals suggested to different localities participating in the *Slow Streets* project, which is discussed later. The guidance underscores the trial-and-error nature of tactical urbanism; however, this flexibility is seen as an opportunity for creative solutions. It frames tactical projects as the “starting point for real change”, noting that they can accelerate the implementation of ideas that may otherwise languish in plan form (Zammit & LCA, 2023).

The extent to which lessons derived from such experimentation may subsequently feed into policy development and complement formal planning instruments, by providing a feedback loop where community responses and observable outcomes can guide broader strategic plans, is debatable. Authors such as Bertolini (2020) have been critical as to whether these temporary experiments could truly lead to lasting change – the transformative potential of these experiments is often limited by their short duration and low frequency. While street experiments may be radical in challenging dominant practices, feasible due to their temporary nature and highly communicative and mobilising, their connection to long-term change pathways might prove to be weak, especially if they lack integration with broader urban policies and structural interventions, such as permanent infrastructure changes or transport policy reforms. Bertolini’s analysis highlights the need for such experiments to become part of broader policy frameworks and to involve broad stakeholder engagement to drive a modal shift and urban mobility transformation effectively – a critical discussion we return to later.

In a similar vein, assessing international practice and institutional uptake of tactical urbanism for active travel promotion, Suslowicz and Hillnhütter (2025) identify institutionalising tactical experimentation as one of the key challenges. They argue that this transition, from temporary experiments to permanent changes, requires strategic planning and public support, including adequate funding. Their research suggests that temporary interventions often fail to address systemic issues, such as wider connectivity opportunities and other complementary mobility measures, which are essential for fostering sustainable mobility habits and ensuring project longevity. These issues find parallels in the Maltese context, to which our attention now turns.

3. Malta

As an island state that became independent in 1964, and following centuries of foreign rule and occupation, Malta’s recent history has frequently seen decisions favouring short-term economic growth – especially via tourism and development – often at the expense of sustainable planning, infrastructure capacity and environmental or social resilience (Oglethorpe, 1984; Grech & Rapa, 2017). In the space of a few years, road building and subsequent road widening initiatives transformed the Maltese territory, facilitating vehicular movement, liberating areas for development and relegating pedestrians in the process. The exponential population increase over the past decades, with a corresponding high housing demand, has accelerated this trend. Fostered by a culture of both home and car ownership, vehicular pressures have been immense. Malta has one of the highest rates of private vehicle ownership in Europe, with the latest statistics showing 450,794 licensed motor vehicles at the end of June 2025 (NSO, 2025); a number that obtains even more

significance when considering that, in 2023, there were 277,837 driving licence holders (NSO, 2024). This entrenched car-oriented culture has posed significant challenges to implementing people-centred sustainable mobility initiatives and shifting the mindset, even within institutions responsible for transport planning (Bajada, Mifsud and Scheiber, 2023).

Local streets in Maltese towns and villages are often narrow and heavily used by vehicles, leaving little space for pedestrians or cyclists; indeed, many pavements are under 1m in width, forcing people to walk close to traffic (Zammit, 2022a). These conditions contribute to a plethora of issues – ranging from road safety, congestion, air pollution to serious threats to public health – and highlight the urgency for a modal shift towards sustainable mobility. In turn, opportunities to rethink new road design have been few and far between – often, prioritised by road standards to facilitate vehicular flow, even if this has implied overly generous road space (Zammit, 2022a) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Streets in Malta – varying realities.

Source: Author.

4. Mobility efforts in Malta

The paper now discusses key interrelated mobility efforts, some of which have seen this author's involvement over the past five years:

- the *Slow Streets* programme that was modelled around tactical urbanism suggestions;
- local play streets initiatives;
- the government-backed *Vjal Kulħadd* (*Everyone's Street*) project to create safer, greener streets; and
- on the ground, the case study of partial pedestrianisation of the locality of Mosta's main square.

Cross-cutting themes are subsequently discussed to assess the success of tactical urbanism in advancing sustainable mobility efforts in Malta. While the focus remains local, some of the issues addressed in this paper are shared by other Southern European cities, potentially allowing the extrapolation of the Maltese experience to similar urban contexts in the Mediterranean region.

4.1. The *Slow Streets* project

In 2020, inspired by the dramatic lack of vehicular traffic during lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LCA, together with the Ministry for the National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government and in coordination with Transport Malta (TM) and the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects,

announced a joint effort to implement *Slow Streets* across Malta and Gozo (Zammit, 2022b). The idea was to create pedestrian-friendly areas by reducing vehicular traffic, lowering speed limits and making it safer to walk or cycle, thereby contributing to improvements in residents' quality of life. 43 out of the 68 Local Councils throughout the Maltese and Gozitan territory signed up for this project, reflecting a growing appetite for more liveable, less car-dominated urban environments. Detailed studies and consultative designs were prepared for these Local Councils by a team of urban designers led by this author and his team (Figure 3).

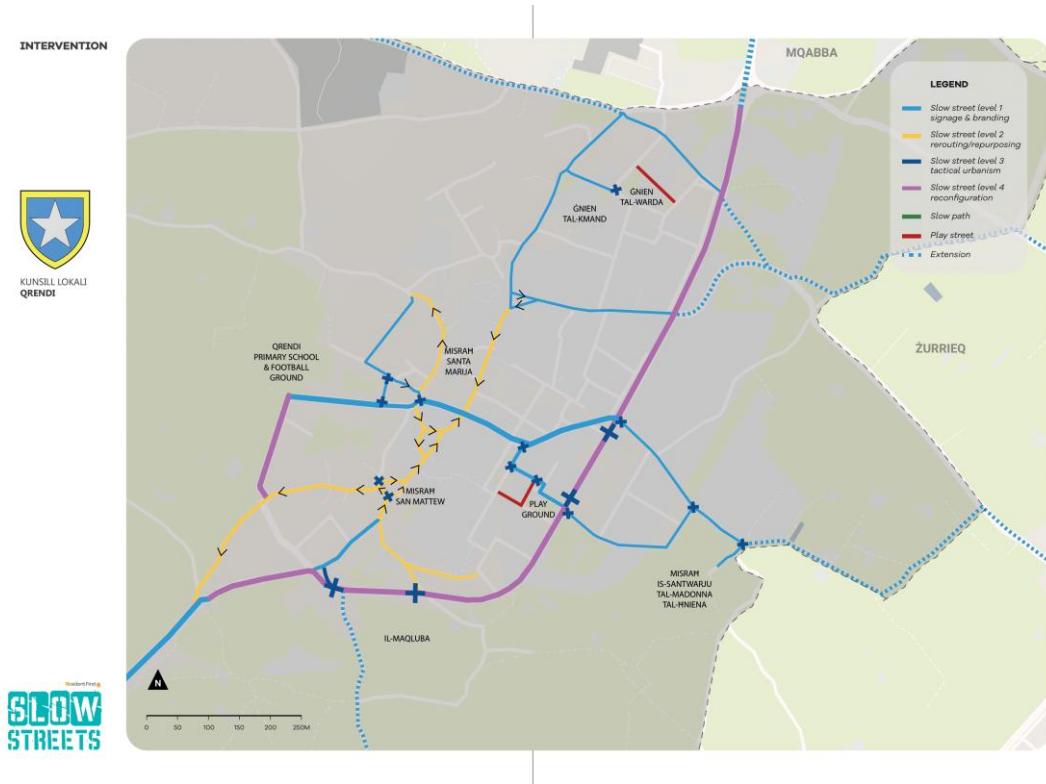


Figure 3. Typical Slow Streets document/mapping strategy illustrating intervention levels. Source: Studjurban, LCA.

Tactical urbanism constituted a central approach within the *Slow Street* project, which proposed removable planter-lined corridors and the introduction of road paint that increased the allocation of safe pedestrian space within streets (simultaneously narrowing the available road space in order to reduce vehicular speeds), improved signage to facilitate walking and temporary road and square closures (accompanied by traffic management and rerouting) to create play streets and give back town centres to people (Zammit, 2022a) (Figure 4).

LEGEND

Signage/Tactical Urbanism

- Fully pedestrian space
- Floor marking - slowing cars
- Car parking space
- Planter
- One-way
- Limited access

Traffic Management

- Existing traffic direction
- Proposed traffic direction
- Private Cars
- Public Buses
- Bicycles
- Pedestrians
- Cars + Buses
- Buses + Bicycles
- Bicycles + Cars



Figure 4. Tactical urbanism in Slow Streets, Malta.

Source: Studjurban, LCA.

The overarching objective was that local residential streets and town centres would become safe walking corridors connecting key landmarks, locality assets and services, with vehicular traffic potentially diverted to peripheries. This approach is now being touted within a wider national strategy, which is seeking to strategically place mobility hubs on the peripheries of localities to liberate town centres and return such critical urban spaces to the people (MTIP, 2025). In turn, this strategy stems from recent work on the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP; Transport Malta & Ministry for Transport, 2022), which provides the high-level policy context for sustainable mobility, complementing tactical on-the-ground efforts. SUMP Measure 1.3 (*Trial timed-pedestrianisation in the direct vicinity of schools*) specifically addresses the possibility to use tactical urbanism to enhance safe accessibility to and from schools. It further spells out the potential of tactical projects in commercial hubs, stating that “[i]n the spirit of a tactical urbanism approach, these spaces may be tested for increased pedestrian activity and subsequently reverted back, or they may be made even more permanent, depending on the outcome of such pilot initiatives” (Transport Malta & Ministry for Transport, p.63).

Sadly, despite high initial hopes and the identification of dozens of candidate streets, the *Slow Streets* rollout in Malta has been markedly slow. The primary obstacle has been funding. The LCA estimated it needed about €8.3 million to implement Slow Streets in the interested localities for design, materials and management and its President has repeatedly expressed his frustration at the lack of a central funding mechanism (Times of Malta, 2024). Despite this funding shortfall, some Local Councils proceeded independently with tactical changes aligned to the *Slow Streets* ethos. In the village of Xewkija in Gozo, for instance, the village square became car-free every Saturday and Sunday (Gozo News, 2021). Local play street initiatives have also increased. We turn our attention to these projects next.

4.2. Local Play Streets

These initiatives are partly a result of the momentum generated by the *Slow Streets* project, which had introduced the concept of 'play streets' in Malta. They are furthermore the result of the Children's Local Councils, set up in 2002 with the support of the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (Children's Local Councils, 2025).

The pioneer in this movement is the locality of Haż-Żebbuġ, which in April 2025 launched "*Toroq Hajjin* (Living Streets) – *Playstreets*". Under this initiative, every second Saturday of the month, a different residential street in the locality is closed to vehicles from 1 pm to 4 pm, allowing children to take over the urban space safely (Malta Today, 2025). The selection of streets has been undertaken by the town's Children's Council, which chose streets that would benefit most from being car-free occasionally, together with the support of the Local Council. On these playstreet days, the street becomes a pop-up playground – children are free to run, cycle, play games, while parents, neighbours and the local community at large may socialise freely (Figure 5). Building on the project's success to date, the longer-term objective is to emulate it in other localities.



Figure 5. *Living Streets* project in Haż-Żebbuġ, Malta.

Source: Haż-Żebbuġ Local Council.

4.3. *Vjal Kulħadd* (Everyone's Streets)

In 2024, the newly appointed CEO of Infrastructure Malta (IM), the Government's road works agency, agreed to channel funds (€10 million in its first phase) into the *Slow Streets* initiative as part of a broader synergy, *Vjal Kulħadd*. In part, this was also intended to implement *Slow Streets*' objectives, with a dedicated funding stream and with the inclusion of further objectives, such as that of injecting more green

infrastructure within existing urban spaces to create more permeable surfaces for better stormwater management and shading to mitigate heat (IM, 2025). Both Local Councils and NGOs submitted proposals that were subsequently evaluated by IM and other experts for eventual implementation.

Vjal Kulħadd's core mission reflects a wider national policy shift toward people-centred infrastructure, encompassing interventions such as improved pedestrian paths, alternative mobility routes (with the potential incorporation of bicycle lanes), enhanced public transport access and green infrastructure on streets (Malta Independent, 2025).

One of the chosen projects is modelled on tactical urbanism principles and deserves to be singled out. In the locality of Msida, a local street (Trijq Oscar Zammit) shall be temporarily pedestrianised to host community events and promote sustainable mobility (Malta Independent, 2025). The inclusion of this project is significant because it effectively institutionalises tactical urbanism within a formally funded government programme, auguring well for the prospect of tactical urbanism being better integrated within local mobility strategies (Figure 6).



Figure 6. *Vjal Kulħadd* proposal for Triq Oscar Zammit, Msida, Malta.
Source: Infrastructure Malta.

4.4. Case Study – Mosta Square

The town of Mosta, home to one of Malta's largest and busiest squares (and notably the site of the iconic Rotunda Church), has become a focal point of debate on tactical pedestrianisation. Its trials illustrate the political complexities tactical urbanism faces.

In mid-2023, following IM's intention to upgrade the road network passing through the centre of the town, and building further on the *Slow Streets* project from previous years, the (Labour-majority) Mosta Local Council launched a locality-wide traffic management plan and decided to undertake a redesign of the square to introduce better pedestrian infrastructure and landscaping and thus elevate the town centre's status (Figure 7). For decades, the square was simply a traffic artery, characterised by significant vehicular volumes including numerous public transport routes. The proposed design aimed to enable the closure of the main square to traffic on designated days. At the time, the Local Council initiated evening weekend closures, effectively transforming the area in front of the church into a pedestrian plaza (Times of Malta, 2023).



Figure 7. Before and After images of Mosta Square project.

Source: Google Maps, Sean Mallia for Studjurban.

This project was championed as a pilot that would enhance the town's liveability, encourage leisurely activities and test traffic management alternatives for the busy intersection, wherein a limited amount of traffic could still navigate peripherally (Studjurban, 2025) (Figure 8). For some months, the square was closed on weekend evenings and open to pedestrians. This, however, was not without its critics. The most vociferous came from the opposing political party, which criticised the lack of initial consultation within the council and with residents about such a closure. During its local elections campaign, it vowed to remove the restriction on vehicles in its entirety if elected (Malta Today, 2024). A new Local Council, led by a

majority from the opposing party, was indeed elected. This was, naturally, due to several factors; however, the Mosta square project became a symbol of this political shift, and the newly elected council wasted no time in attempting to halt the weekend closure. The new mayor announced that, as of 1 November 2024, the temporary closure would end and the square would revert to full access at all times, thus restoring “free access” for the community and businesses (Malta Today, 2024).

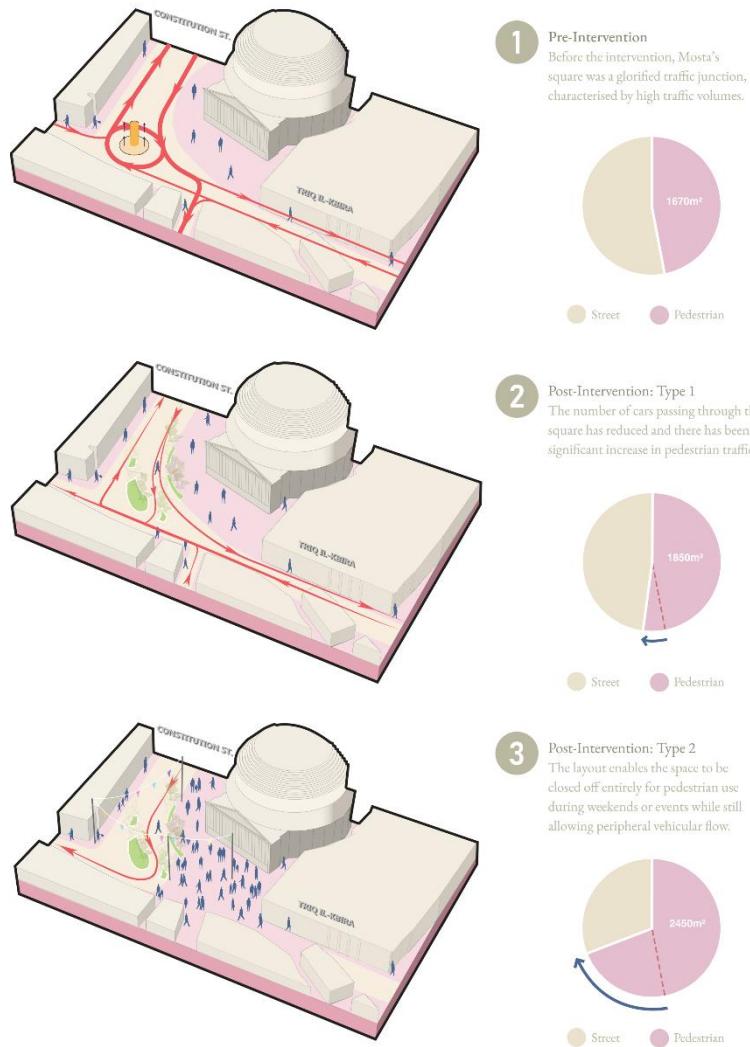


Figure 8. Mosta Square spatial distribution, pre- and post-intervention.

Source: Studjurban.

TM, on the other hand, publicly defended the pedestrianisation trial, together with other groups such as the Chamber of Architects (Malta Independent, 2024). In a rare move of a national agency overriding local government, TM stated it had already initiated procedures to extend the Friday-Saturday evening closures beyond October 2024, effectively revoking the new council's decision. TM cited encouraging public feedback and positioned the initiative as aligning with national policy goals of reducing car use and enhancing public accessibility within town centres. A compromise was reached in the end – today, the

square is closed off to vehicles for a limited amount of time during weekend evenings. At the same time, its take-up has progressively increased, with different events being organised by various activity groups.

The TM – Local Council standoff highlights the push and pull between car-oriented interests and pedestrianisation advocates, as well as the tension between different governance levels, especially when coming from opposing political ideologies. Importantly, it is also a lesson on the critical need for stakeholder engagement and multi-level coordination.

5. Extracting key lessons

The Maltese case studies demonstrate the dual potency of tactical urbanism to rethink the dynamics of the physical urban form and drive wider social and institutional change. Even as a mostly planned (rather than fully implemented) initiative, the *Slow Streets* project has provoked vital public debates that have challenged car dominance, motivating grassroots experiments despite financial and political constraints. At the same time, the experience underscores that temporary interventions still require sustained political and financial backing to transition from plan to reality. Tactical urbanism is not a replacement for policy commitment; rather, it is a tool that flourishes under an enabling framework. The project's alignment with the high-level Resident First vision and its incorporation into guidance documents have been positive; however, execution has been hampered by the lack of committed funding. The lesson here is that quick-win projects often need integration into formal budgets and strategies. In contrast, by bringing together central government, Local Councils and civil society, the *Vjal Kulħadd* initiative addresses the lack of a centralised support system experienced in the *Slow Streets* project. Institutional support, through dedicated funding and inter-agency collaboration, is therefore imperative to sustain such initiatives, especially if they need to be scaled up.

Indeed, implementing national mobility recommendations and targets in the future (such as those present within the SUMP) could benefit from the expansion of tactical interventions nationwide. In a small island context, the scaling up of different micro-projects could have a macro-level impact. The Maltese experience suggests that strategic plans and tactical urbanism are most effective when used in tandem – strategic plans identify what needs to change and why, while tactical actions demonstrate how change could occur on the ground and rally public opinion in the process.

The play streets initiatives illustrate the grassroots capacity to shift societal values regarding street users and foster outdoor activity and community cohesion, essential ingredients for sustainable mobility and broader liveability objectives. The power of such projects should not be underestimated, especially when children are actively involved as co-creators, not just as users. First, they have the potential to shift mindsets, helping people envision a different use for their street, which could initiate longer-term pedestrianisation. Second, they educate the next generation to accept that streets do not need to be dominated by vehicles.

Conversely, the Mosta Square case study highlights political sensitivity and governance challenges that require transparent, participatory planning and alignment across levels of government. These findings are further supported by other studies (Meinherz et al., 2021; Suslowicz & Hillnhütter, 2025). Meinherz et al.'s (2021) study emphasises the importance of political processes and social dynamics in the success of tactical urbanism projects. In turn, Suslowicz and Hillnhütter (2025) contend that effective communication and participatory processes are critical for mobilising public support and reducing resistance to change. They

argue that projects that clearly articulate their rationale, align with long-term mobility goals and involve stakeholders in co-creation are more likely to succeed. This is further echoed by the ITDP (2020), which highlights how participatory processes can empower communities and align projects with broader sustainable mobility goals.

6. Concluding thoughts

The tactical urbanism efforts in Malta, as discussed earlier, have not yet resulted in significant modal shifts. Despite modest achievements, these small shifts have generated a much-needed debate and are slowly building momentum that is challenging the status quo. Historically, Malta's towns had vibrant street life, much of which was curbed by the influx of cars in recent decades. Tactical urbanism, in a sense, revives those traditions within a new reality. This is even evident in the language used by its proponents – the *Slow Streets* project is all about giving “streets back to people” (LCA, 2025) – and signals a return to core Mediterranean urban values of social interaction and human-scale environments.

Malta's practice-led urbanism experience offers lessons for other cities in the Euro-Med context. First, it shows that size is not a barrier – even micro-states or small islands may initiate wide-ranging tactical programmes. Indeed, their scale could be an advantage in quickly rolling out pilots across numerous local communities. Second, it highlights the value of coupling top-down frameworks with bottom-up action. A purely grassroots approach might not necessarily falter, as evidenced by the success of local play street initiatives; however, resource limits might hamper its implementation, as seen with *Slow Streets* initially. At the same time, a purely top-down approach has its own issues, as experienced in Mosta's Square. A ‘hybrid’ model, possibly on the lines of *Vjal Kulħadd* with its central funding and expertise empowering local projects, could be emulated in other countries through national urban resilience grants or EU-funded schemes aimed explicitly at tactical trials.

Moving forward, it will be crucial for authorities and Local Councils alike to measure impacts (including, but not limited to, traffic counts, air quality, economic footfall and public satisfaction) of these tactical projects to build the case for permanence. Continuous monitoring may further identify where a tactical project is falling short of expectations – measurement and iteration thus become critical points in this discussion.

By proactively shaping institutional and physical spaces for experimentation, the longer-term objectives of systemic, people-centred sustainable mobility may be achieved.

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