

5-YEAR

STRATEGIC VISION





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Minister's Foreword

HON. CLIFTON GRIMA

Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation

Books are more than printed words bound together — they are repositories of culture, memory, and imagination. They ignite curiosity, nurture empathy, and help us understand the world and our place in it. In Malta, the book industry forms a cornerstone of our educational system and is a vital expression of our national identity and cultural heritage.

In recent years, the sector has faced significant challenges: a global decline in readership, rising production and distribution costs, and competition from digital media. Yet, despite these pressures, Malta's literary community has continued to persevere with resilience and creativity. Our authors, publishers, illustrators, translators, editors, proofreaders and printers continue to push boundaries, telling — and, crucially, crafting and distributing — the stories that matter most to us.

As a government, we recognise that the health of this industry is not only a cultural imperative but also a strategic investment in education, innovation, and national development. Through various measures — from tax reductions and financial support mechanisms to export promotion initiatives — we have reaffirmed our commitment to a sustainable and thriving literary ecosystem. The National Book Council, with its wide-ranging initiatives, continues to serve as a crucial ballast of both support and innovation, offering a focal point for all literary stakeholders while also pushing the industry beyond our shores through dynamic internationalisation efforts.

This five-year strategy sets out a clear and ambitious roadmap for the future of Malta's book industry. It calls upon all stakeholders — writers, publishers, educators, policymakers, and readers — to come together in a spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility. The goals outlined here are not just institutional targets; they are a collective invitation to shape the next chapter of Maltese literature.

We look ahead with optimism. This strategy identifies real, tangible opportunities to elevate Maltese books to new heights, enhance professionalisation, expand readership, and ensure that Maltese voices remain vibrant and influential on the world stage.

Together, let us keep turning the page — and ensure that Malta's literary legacy continues to grow for generations to come.

Chairman's Message

MARK CAMILLERI

In the last few years, the National Book Council (NBC) has made significant strides in shaping and strengthening Malta's literary landscape. Through flagship initiatives such as the Malta Book Festival, the National Book Prize, and our expanding presence at international book fairs and events, we have championed Maltese literature both locally and abroad. These accomplishments underscore our commitment to fostering a vibrant publishing industry and supporting authors, publishers, readers, and other stakeholders alike.

The NBC's growth has been remarkable, not only in scale but also in impact. As we continue to expand our reach internationally, our focus remains steadfast on ensuring that Maltese literature finds new audiences and opportunities in the local market. The years ahead promise even greater advancements, as we build on these foundations and set ambitious goals for the industry's future.

At the heart of this forward momentum is the NBC's new five-year strategy for 2025–2030, structured around five key pillars. These strategic priorities aim to deliver tangible benefits for all stakeholders, ensuring long-term sustainability, enhanced professionalisation, and increased opportunities for authors and publishers. Through this Strategy, we reaffirm our role as a proactive force driving solutions, whether in addressing financial and structural challenges or in creating pathways for growth and innovation within the sector.

However, meaningful progress cannot be achieved in isolation. Collaboration is paramount and the key to any success. The strength of our industry lies in its ability to unite through partnerships, knowledge-sharing, and collective action. I urge all stakeholders to actively engage with the NBC's initiatives, participate in workshops, and share their expertise and insight. Your involvement is instrumental in shaping a thriving literary ecosystem that benefits us all.

Together, we have the power to elevate Maltese literature to new heights. Let us continue striving and working towards a future where our stories are not only heard or read but celebrated in Malta and worldwide.





Our Present Tale

SETTING THE SCENE: Defining the Book Industry

A book, at a superficial level, is a stack of bound pages that are filled with printed or handwritten text and images. But in its purest form, the book is regarded as an object of historical and cultural significance with the ability to act as a vessel for ideas, stories, thoughts, and knowledge encoded into symbols to be consumed from generation to generation, transcending time and space. Books, like media such as film and music, serve as an instrument of communication to various audiences with the intent to inspire, educate, or simply spark emotion in the reader.¹

The book industry encompasses all aspects of writing, publishing, printing, distribution, and retailing of books, providing consumers with the opportunity to engage with and enjoy the creative ideas of writers. It therefore involves a wide ecosystem of authors, publishers, readers, and other stakeholders² engaged in the creation and consumption of printed and digital literary material. In countries with established publishing sectors, this industry also serves as a cultural and economic driver, albeit its economic potential is only evident in truly large economies such as the US, UK, Germany, and China.

The book industry is unique compared to other driving industries as it transcends direct economic value and offers a distinct cultural and educational benefit, serving as a pillar for literacy, cultural enrichment, and historical preservation, among other vital areas. This does not imply that the book industry's value should be measured solely on its positive externalities. The financial aspects involved in writing, editing, publishing, and distribution are essential to its sustainability. Without financial viability, the book industry (and its associated benefits) would not be able to thrive.

TURNING THE PAGES: The Evolution of Malta's Book Industry

The first known reference to the establishment of a printing press in Malta is found in a letter by Grandmaster Lascaris, dated 14 October 1637 and addressed to the Order's Ambassador in Rome, Fra Carlo Aldobrandini. At the time, a Papal commission was scrutinising an edition of the Order's statutes prior to printing. In his letter, Lascaris urges Aldobrandini to press for the approval of the statutes to have them printed in Malta.³

Forward five years, and Rome grants permission for a printing press to open in Malta for which the licence was granted to a certain Pompeo de Fiore, a Sicilian member of the Order.⁴ What is now known as the first publication in Malta, *I Natali delle Religiose Militie de' Cavalieri Spedalieri, e Templari, e della Religione del Tempio l'ultima roina*, also did not bear any imprint origins.

Only two years later, in 1644, a dispute arose about who held the authority to censor, apart from the Inquisitor, and a lack of agreement resulted in the suspension of printing in Malta.

After a hundred years without a printing press, Grandmaster Manoel Pintode Fonseca – heralded by continental illuminism – succeeded in resolving this perennial issue, and in 1756 a new printing press was established, named Stamperia di Sua Altezza Serenissima, or SAS in short. The press saw the publication of many and varied works of literature, medicine, theology, and sonnets, compendia, regulations, calendars, and prayers, among others.

During British rule, strides were made by Alphonse Maria Galea with the publication of the first series of books in Maltese, *Mogħdija taż-Żmien*,⁵ which ran from 1899 till 1915 and featured authors such as Sir Themistocles Zammit, Ġużè Muscat Azzopardi, and Ġan Anton Vassallo.

In the 1960s, the Moviment Qawmien Letterarju worked to revitalise the local book industry,⁶ ushering in the way for Pawlu Mizzi's establishment of Klabb Kotba Maltin (KKM) in 1971.⁷ The KKM paved the way for other publishers to appear on the scene, each addressing a specific niche or genre. At the same time, the KKM also became the preferred house for authors such as Oliver Friggieri, Rużar Briffa, Frans Sammut, Immanuel Mifsud, and Maria Grech Ganado.⁸ Today, the KKM remains very much active in the local book industry, also having diversified their offering with a subsidiary research-based arm, Midsea Books Ltd. Together with publishers like Mireva and Publishers Enterprises Group Ltd, who shared KKM's expansive focus, the past 40 years also saw the birth of Minima Press, which famously launched Ġużè Stagno onto the scene.

In the nineties, Skarta gave a platform to local authors Adrian Grima, Nadia Mifsud, and Simone Galea, amongst others, who would later go on to form the core of the Inizjamed literary NGO. This in turn recalls the Moviment Qawmien Letterarju that characterised the development of Maltese literary culture midway through the 20th century.

More recently, some notable micro-publishers have emerged. Namely, Kotba Calleja and Ede Books placed the onus on the book as an artisanal object, and Faraxa Publishing specialised in books translated into Maltese. In the early noughts, Merlin Publishers split off from Merlin Library to corner the literary market for children and young adults, whilst also offering some notable examples of contemporary Maltese fiction for adults.

While some of the abovementioned publishers are now defunct and others have established themselves as key players in the market, they have all left and built a notable legacy, regaling us with books for all ages, through fiction, poetry, children's books and research works.

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1 Book Industry – an overview | ScienceDirect Topics

2 These include, but are not limited to editors, translators, literary agents, book designers, printers, distributors, booksellers/retailers, libraries, literary critics, and reviewers.

3 Zammit, W. (1988). *A bibliography of works printed in Malta during the Order's rule: 1642–1798* (Diploma long essay, University of Malta).

4 Fenech, V. (2003). *Kullana kulturali*: Vol. 55. Il-ktieb Malti: Perspettivi. PIN.

5 National Book Council. (2019, August 6). 'The book industry in Malta': An article by Pawlu Mizzi for the first Malta International Book Fair. <<https://ktieb.org.mt/en/news/the-book-industry-in-malta-an-article-by-pawlu-mizzi-for-the-first-malta-international-book-fair/>>

6 Busuttill, K. (2000). *Il-moviment qawmien letterarju: It-twaqqif u s-snin tal-bidu* (Bachelor's dissertation, University of Malta).

7 Zammit, L. (2021, April 4). *The birth of a literary institution*. Times of Malta. <<https://timesofmalta.com/article/the-birth-of-a-literary-institution.862465>>

8 National Book Council. (2019, August 6).

BEYOND THE COVER:**Trends Shaping the Book Industry**

According to national statistics, the book industry's gross value added based on books sold in Malta amounted to €2.77m in 2021,⁹ representing 0.02% of Malta's total GVA for that year.¹⁰ In terms of new publications, Malta registered 545 new titles in 2022 (c. 5% over 2021), with most titles written in Maltese and English.¹¹ While it is a minor contributor to Malta's economy compared to other financially-driven industries, the book industry is a core ingredient of Malta's culture and identity, keeping our stories alive.¹²

With the rise of social media platforms affecting regular reading habits, the traditional book industry continuously feels the weight of new trends. As these habits worsen over time and people's lives become fuller and more hectic, the effect on the industry will be felt at all stages of the value chain.¹³ Other developing trends impacting the industry are the increasing demand for interactive storytelling¹⁴ and declining levels of readership, with 56.3% of Maltese aged 16 and over not reading a single book in 2022.¹⁵

PLOT TWISTS:**Navigating an Industry at a Crossroads**

The Maltese book industry, a vital part of our cultural fabric, is currently facing significant challenges that threaten its future. The rising cost of paper over the years, the limited size of the local market, and the fierce competition with imported books have all converged to create a challenging situation for local industry actors. Distribution costs and the dominance of new forms of media consumption further compound these issues, leaving many industry players struggling to stay afloat.

Government interventions, though well-intentioned, have not been sufficient to stem the tide. Without further action, the financial pressures could erode the local book industry, leaving fewer opportunities for Maltese voices and stories to reach readers. Meanwhile, imported, mass-market publications would continue to dominate the limited shelf space in local bookshops. The situation is unsustainable, and local key industry actors are running out of options to keep the lights on.

The pandemic, further exacerbating existing issues, was another critical blow to the local book industry. In fact, NSO data shows that between 2019 and 2021, there was a 19.67% decrease in revenues for local publishing entities from books sold. Whilst these revenues had slightly bounced back between 2020 and 2021 (reflecting recovery rates globally),¹⁶ the underlying issues bringing about a dying cultural appreciation of locally-written books continue to persist.

⁹ Statistics | Eurostat (europa.eu).

¹⁰ According to NSO data, Malta's GVA for 2021 amounted to €13.998B (NR099/2024) 29 May 2024 – NSO Malta | Gross Domestic Product: Q1/2024 – NSO Malta (gov.mt)

¹¹ Amongst local publishers, 29 published books in Maltese, 29 published in English, 3 published in Italian, and 1 published in another language.

¹² Farrugia, A. (2022, October 18). *Saving the book industry*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/article/saving-book-industry-aleks-farrugia.988142>

¹³ Howarth, J. (2024, June 3). *11 top publishing trends (2024)*. Exploding Topics. <https://explodingtopics.com/blog/publishing-trends>

¹⁴ Fulton Books. (2024, April 3). *Publishing and writing trends of 2024*. <https://fultonbooks.com/blog/publishing-and-writing-trends-of-2024/>

¹⁵ Statistics | Eurostat (europa.eu)

¹⁶ National Statistics Office. (2022, September 26). *Publishing entities survey: 2021*. <https://nso.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/News2022_169.pdf>

A CHAPTER IN COLLABORATION:**Stakeholder Insights**

In the face of these challenges, we are presented with the opportunity to take stock of the existing issues and craft a strategy that addresses the needs of the Maltese book industry. The NBC has long been aware of the obstacles locally and has consistently advocated for improvements. Recognising the importance of stakeholder input, the NBC has actively sought feedback from those directly involved in the book industry to ensure that this Strategy is both relevant and grounded in reality.

Through a survey aimed at industry stakeholders¹⁷ and workshops with publishers, authors, and other creatives, the NBC obtained crucial insights that mostly reaffirm the issues outlined earlier. The most beneficial aspect of these consultations was the coming together and collective thinking on opportunities to address these issues to potentially create a better future for all Maltese book industry stakeholders. The survey responses indicated that the top three persistent pain points across stakeholder groups were:

- (1) financial constraints to operate (each stakeholder group noted specific constraints depending on the area they operate in);
- (2) distribution issues regarding the consumption of books by readers; and
- (3) limited market size, resulting in high levels of competition (specifically for new entrants) and a lack of opportunities for promotion, given the limited number of bookshops.

In a follow-up, respondents were asked to rank the top priority areas for the next five years. In order of importance, the top four areas identified were: increased financial support, exploring different distribution channels, training opportunities to improve the quality of work, and audience development.

Following the survey, the NBC hosted a workshop with publishers and another with authors and creatives. The above pain points and priority areas were discussed in detail during these workshops to frame them within each group's context. The exercise was followed by a visioning exercise whereby the group co-created several opportunities and solutions that inform the strategic initiatives listed later in this document.

The importance of these consultations cannot be stressed enough. Without input from the stakeholders living through these issues, the Strategy would be disconnected from reality. This Strategy aims to be **informed by the industry, for the industry**.

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¹⁷ Stakeholders included publishers, authors, translators, editors, proofreaders, booksellers, distributors, illustrators, collaborating entities, and NGOs, amongst others.

MAPPING THE INDUSTRY LANDSCAPE

Building on the insights gathered from stakeholders, it became clear that understanding the full spectrum of the Maltese book industry is essential for crafting an effective strategy. The industry is broad and comprises several key players, each with a role contributing to creating an interdependent value chain from ideation and creation to the consumption of books.

At a high level, this value chain can be divided into three fundamental **components**: authoring, publishing, and reading (Figure 1). Each pillar encompasses several stakeholders, each with an integral role in the development and consumption of books both locally and abroad.

Figure 1: The Maltese Book Industry Value Chain



KEY INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Authors/Writers/Illustrators are the main characters of the authoring pillar. Creatives are the lifeblood of the industry, producing compelling stories, experiences, and novel ideas to be consumed by readers. Authoring is characterised by the ideation, creation, and fine-tuning of stories stemming from the authors who put pen to paper and are supported by other industry professionals to arrive at a more polished product. As it stands, the NBC is aware of 308 authors who are registered via the Public Lending Rights (PLR) database and an additional 478 active authors. However, if one considers the broader definition of an author as *'the living writer of creative works of an original nature'*, the actual number is much larger.

From the stakeholder consultations, it emerged that the primary concern for authors is the inability to focus on their craft full-time due to low to no profit being made from their works. While for the most part, authors are driven by their passion for writing over monetary gains, the lack of full-time authors is partly caused by the small scale of the industry in Malta.

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Illustrators play a key role in enhancing the book reading experience by visually interpreting and complementing a book's narrative through book cover designs or internal illustrations.¹⁸ In genres such as children's literature, illustrators are not merely contributors but co-creators who work collaboratively with authors from the early stages of a book's development and help in shaping the story through their artwork.

Publishers serve as the vital link between authors and readers, playing a pivotal role in the value chain. They bring together various stakeholders, including authors, illustrators, graphic designers, editors and translators, to transform a manuscript into a book ready to be consumed by its intended audience.¹⁹ In its 2022 publishing survey, the NSO indicated that there are just over 50 registered publishers in Malta ranging in size and focus.

Over the years, local publishers have suffered due to several contributing factors, including the rising cost of paper²⁰ and consequent increased production costs,²¹ and

18 Malta Community of Illustrators. (2023). *Illustration annual 2023*. <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f648ce821749c5c6b9e5809/t/654a16d45cdb130a599d186e/1699354332538/MCOI-Annual-2023-spreads-compressed.pdf>>

19 Manaher, S. (2023, July 7). *Publisher vs publication: How are these words connected?*. The Content Authority. <<https://thecontentauthority.com/blog/publisher-vs-publication>>

20 Calleja, C. (2022, October 15). *Local book publishers struggle with rising costs and declining sales*. Times of Malta. <<https://timesofmalta.com/article/local-book-publishers-struggle-rising-costs-declining-sales.987071>>

21 Independent. (2024, February 1). *National Book Council expresses concern in face of soaring book production costs*. <<https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2024-02-01/local-news/National-Book-Council-expresses-concern-in-face-of-soaring-book-production-costs-6736258252>>

decreasing sales.²² The emergence of digital publishing (such as ebooks) has been a positive addition to the traditional publisher's arsenal. However, this format has not gained significant traction locally, with publishers reporting a disappointing uptake of ebooks. Moreover, the growing trend of self-publishing has added complexity to the market, as the proliferation of very small print runs often fails to achieve shelf presence, contributing to market fragmentation rather than sustainable growth.²³

Readers are the largest and most influential group in the book industry's value chain. As the end consumer, they shape the market through their preferences and behaviours, playing a critical role in the success of authors, publishers, and the overall book ecosystem. Over the years, developments specifically around how readers can consume books, have created new opportunities for authors and publishers to reach their intended audience. This notwithstanding, Eurostat data has revealed that around 56% of Maltese citizens aged 16 and above did not read a single book throughout 2023, with 41.7% expressing no interest in doing so.²⁴ A possible explanation for these statistics, though not limited to books by local authors, could be a general decline in the reading culture on the Maltese islands, likely driven by competition from other forms of media. Literary engagement and the development of both existing and new audiences are key priorities for the industry, as identified during the stakeholder consultations leading up to this Strategy. Without local readers, the book industry will continue to struggle.

OTHER CONTRIBUTING STAKEHOLDERS

Editors / Proofreaders Editors are professionals with specialised skills and extensive knowledge in writing and publishing, tasked with enhancing a manuscript's clarity, coherence, and overall quality. They analyse structure, style, and grammar, providing feedback and suggestions that help authors refine their work and ensure it meets industry standards. There are varying degrees of editing in the literary world; however, editors typically work closely with authors and writers, proposing changes to improve a manuscript.²⁵ In 2022, 37 of the 55 active local publishers surveyed by the NSO directly employed editors, with 17 of these being in-house editors.²⁶ Proofreaders and editors share some similarities in their work towards quality improvement, attention to detail, and collaboration with authors. However, the key distinction lies in their roles. While editors focus on enhancing the overall content and structure during the editing process, proofreaders scrutinise the final draft to identify any remaining errors after editing. Their primary responsibilities include checking for any orthographic errors, typos, and incorrect usage of Maltese and regional English. A key insight from the stakeholder consultations was that there are not enough trained editors and proofreaders in Malta, leading to potentially lower quality work in the finalised product.

22 Vella, M. (2024, February 1). *Rise in paper prices is major hit for Maltese publishing industry*. MaltaToday. <https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/arts/books/127332/rise_in_paper_prices_is_major_hit_for_maltese_publishing_industry>

23 Poliakov, E. (2021, May 25). *Self-publishing may be the answer to shakeups in the book world amid COVID-19*. The Conversation. <<https://theconversation.com/self-publishing-may-be-the-answer-to-shakeups-in-the-book-world-amid-covid-19-157098>>

24 Statistics | Eurostat (europa.eu)

25 National Book Council. (2017). *The Author's Manual*. <https://ktieb.org.mt/app/uploads/2017/12/KNK-authors-manual-EN-2017_23-dec-final.pdf>

26 National Statistics Office. (2022, September 26).

Translators Translation plays a crucial role in promoting the accessibility of literature across the globe, allowing readers from different linguistic backgrounds to enjoy and understand works while preserving their original essence and cultural nuances. In Malta, the translation trend moves in both directions: books are translated into Maltese, as well as from Maltese into other languages. Translations from and into Maltese are supported by funding opportunities, such as the Malta Book Fund.

Literary Agents Though their role is not yet established in Malta, literary agents typically act as intermediaries between authors and publishers, offering support in the negotiation process for a book deal and ensuring rights are fairly managed.²⁷ Currently, Malta has no full-time professional literary agents, which often leaves authors negotiating on their own or relying on individuals who may not be fully versed in industry dynamics and best practices. During the stakeholder consultations, the need for dedicated literary agents and foreign rights agents across different genres was highlighted as crucial to help authors and publishers succeed. Currently, the NBC acts as an informal facilitator at foreign book fairs, promoting National Book Prize-winning authors, and those authors and publishers who choose to be part of the annual Foreign Rights Catalogue for Malta. However, the NBC does not engage in literary agency operations.

Printers provide essential services in turning finalised manuscripts and ideas into tangible products across several industries, including publishing.

Distributors bridge publishers with sellers, ultimately connecting them with end consumers. Traditionally, distributors handle the storage and transportation of books to sellers and, in some cases, directly to consumers, depending on the type of distribution channel and network they operate within. While the local book industry has key service providers in this stakeholder group, due to the size of the local industry, many publishers act as their own distributors to cut down on costs and commissions paid.

Booksellers While most publishers have e-commerce sites to sell their books, independent brick-and-mortar booksellers are crucial to preserving traditions and enhancing the book-buying experience. In many countries, independent bookshops continue to emerge, offering tailored experiences to their customers. However, in Malta this practice is less common, with only a handful of boutique bookshops open, struggling to maintain steady sales. A healthy book ecosystem would benefit from a mix of boutique and chain bookshops catering to different audiences. The former would attract those seeking a curated shopping experience, while the latter would appeal to the casual reader in their offering of both books and a variety of other products.

Libraries are essential places where readers can find an array of local and foreign books. Malta Libraries, similar to other institutions across the globe, is essential to the book industry, providing a platform for authors, publishers, and others to showcase their works and host reading events. With 60 public libraries across the Maltese islands, book readers have

27 Reedsy. (2023, February 10). *What is a literary agent, and how can they help you publish?*. <<https://blog.reedsy.com/guide/literary-agent/>>

ample opportunity to explore their collections. In a recent push from Malta Libraries, ebooks, audiobooks, and digital library services are now also available.²⁸ Unfortunately, most ebooks and audiobooks are not in the Maltese language. Furthermore, the partnership between the NBC and Malta Libraries results in substantial annual donations, directly contributing to the PLR scheme.

Other stakeholders

The Maltese book industry benefits from a diverse network of stakeholders, including activists, policymakers, academic institutions, NGOs, and international partners, who contribute to the industry's ecosystem. Ministries responsible for culture and education are instrumental in shaping policies that drive the industry's growth. Meanwhile, public entities like Arts Council Malta spearhead initiatives to foster the cultural and creative sectors, supporting artists and cultural operators through funding and strategic initiatives, and also collaborating with various stakeholders to enhance Malta's artistic landscape. Academic institutions and NGOs such as the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association further strengthen the industry through research, events, and strategic development. Additionally, international collaborations with literary networks and cultural organisations, such as the recent membership with the European Network for Literary Translation and the Commonwealth Foundation, help extend the reach of Maltese literature beyond local borders.

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THE NATIONAL BOOK COUNCIL AND THE FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY

At the heart of this interconnected ecosystem, the NBC plays a vital role in the Maltese book industry by promoting and safeguarding the interests of authors, publishers, and the broader literary community. As the primary public entity supporting the Maltese book industry, the NBC offers essential services, strives to foster a culture of reading, and promotes books as vital communication tools in all formats.

Established in 2017 by the Maltese Parliament through Subsidiary Legislation 605.12, the NBC aims to promote books and reading within the Maltese society and represent the interests of authors and publishers.²⁹ According to its establishment order, the NBC is responsible for a number of functions to achieve this goal, including:

- coordinating events to boost book consumption (such as the Malta Book Festival);
- advocating for and safeguarding the interests of authors

- and publishers in state-level policies;
- promoting Maltese literature abroad, for instance by participating in foreign book fairs (such as the London Book Fair and the Frankfurt Book Fair);
- allocating and regulating financing opportunities for authors and publishers (such as via the National Book Prize and the Malta Book Fund); managing an updated database of all locally issued ISBNs; and managing and distributing PLR.

Over the years, the NBC has actively supported the industry and its stakeholders, both financially and through initiatives that enhance visibility and engagement. The NBC's annual contributions include direct financial support via the Malta Book Fund, the National Book Prize, the PLR scheme, and subsidies such as the 75% discount on Malta Book Festival stand costs and the Education Exception. Additionally, the NBC allocates funds to events that promote industry engagement, including the Malta Book Festival, international events, and literary export activities.

Through this five-year strategy, the NBC aims to redefine its role and, concurrently, the book industry, by enhancing its offering and providing tailored support to industry stakeholders, thereby strengthening the cultural foundation of reading across the Maltese islands.

The functions of the NBC position it at the core of the industry, but the involvement of various stakeholders is crucial for collectively fortifying the local book scene. Key focus areas for the NBC strategy include:



The purpose of this strategy document is to outline the current state of the Maltese book industry and map out the necessary steps to foster a more sustainable and thriving literary ecosystem that supports and empowers its stakeholders. The industry's growth hinges on a collaborative approach, which this Strategy strongly advocates for. It outlines not only the enhancement of the NBC's existing initiatives but also the introduction of new measures designed to provide more effective support for stakeholders within the book industry.

²⁸ Falzon, C. (2023, March 5). *The evolution of Malta Libraries*. Times of Malta. <<https://timesofmalta.com/article/evolution-malta-libraries-a2.1016949>>

²⁹ *National Book Council (Establishment) Order: Subsidiary Legislation (S.L.) 605.12*. Legislation Malta. <<https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/605.12>>



Our Future Storyline

VISION

To create a thriving and sustainable book ecosystem that preserves and celebrates Maltese cultural heritage, fosters creativity, and ensures local books and authors are accessible to both local and global audiences.

MISSION

To support and promote Maltese authors, publishers and publishing stakeholders by advocating for their interests, nurturing new talent and expanding the reach of locally produced literature worldwide.

STRATEGY PRINCIPLES

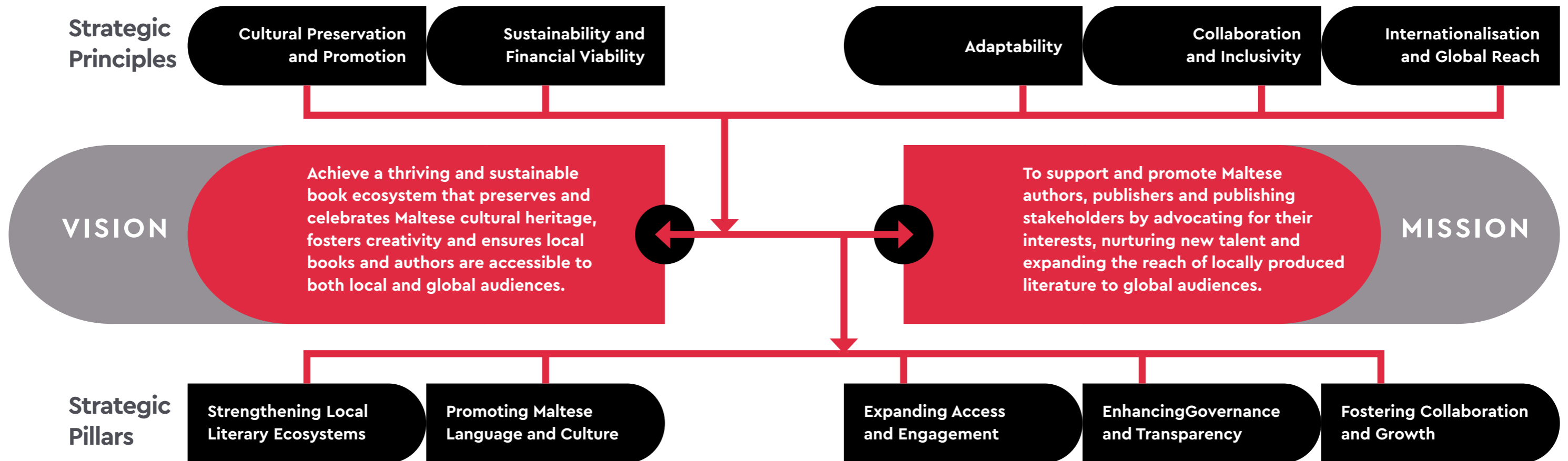
This Strategy is built on core principles that form the foundation of our efforts to revitalise, sustain, and support stakeholders of the Maltese book industry. These principles guide our actions and initiatives, and reflect our unwavering commitment to cultural preservation, innovation, and the growth of a vibrant literary community. They also emphasise collaboration and financial sustainability, ensuring the long-term viability of the local industry in a rapidly changing global landscape.

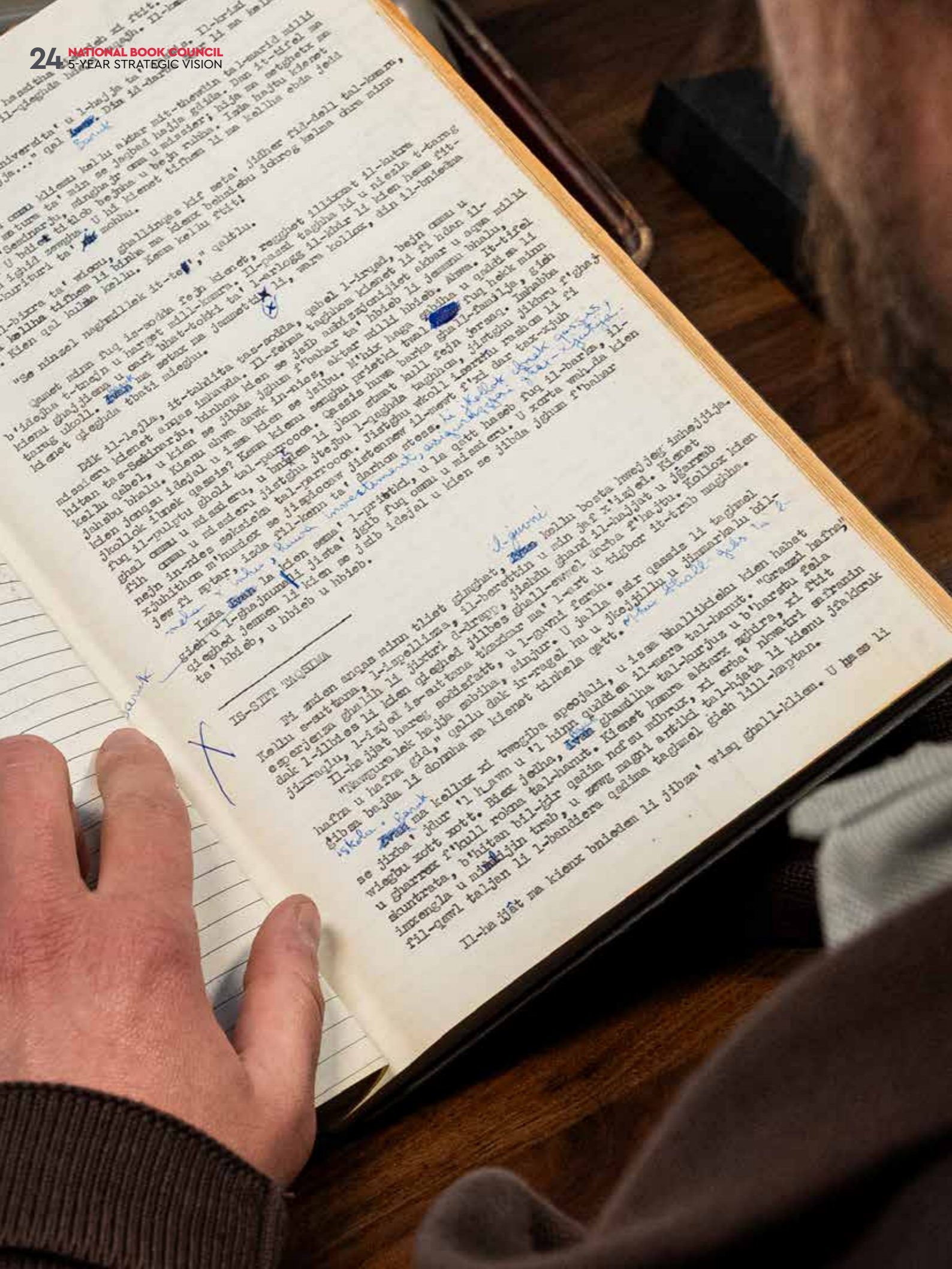
- Cultural Preservation and Promotion
- Sustainability and Financial Viability
- Adaptability
- Collaboration and Inclusivity
- Internationalisation and Global Reach

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

This chapter outlines the pillars that form the core of our strategic framework, detailing the actions and initiatives we aim to prioritise over the next five years. All the pillars are interconnected, collectively working towards our vision and mission, and contributing to the overall enhancement of the literary ecosystem.

Figure 2: Overarching Strategic Framework





PILLAR 1: Strengthening Local Literary Ecosystems

Goal To nurture a resilient and thriving literary ecosystem that supports local talent and enriches the cultural fabric of Malta.

Context In recent years, Malta's book industry has been grappling with several critical challenges that threaten its very existence. The small size of the local market, combined with rising costs (such as for paper), limited distribution channels, and financial instability, has left many stakeholders struggling to sustain their operations. Without immediate government intervention, the industry is at serious risk of failure. While the industry plays a vital role in preserving and enriching Malta's cultural identity, its long-term viability is increasingly uncertain.

The stakeholder consultations made clear that financial support alone will not resolve the deeper, structural issues at play. What is required is a comprehensive approach that not only provides financial relief but also focuses on strengthening the professional capacities of those working in their respective fields. This includes fostering professional development, enhancing distribution networks, and incentivising new business models that align with both local and international market dynamics.

This strategic pillar aims to secure the future of Malta's literary ecosystem through targeted interventions. It seeks to create a more resilient, self-sustaining industry that can withstand external pressures while continuing to serve as a cornerstone of Malta's cultural landscape. The following actions are designed to directly address the immediate financial and structural needs of the industry, while also setting the groundwork for long-term growth and sustainability.

This strategic pillar aims to secure the future of Malta's literary ecosystem through targeted interventions.
It seeks to create a more resilient, self-sustaining industry that can withstand external pressures while continuing to serve as a cornerstone of Malta's cultural landscape.

ACTION 1.1: LOBBY FOR FISCAL INCENTIVES FOR THE INDUSTRY

The book industry is at a critical juncture, with many stakeholders finding it increasingly difficult to remain competitive locally. The NBC will be intensifying efforts over the next five years to advocate for vital fiscal incentives that directly support the sustainability of the industry. This includes pushing for targeted financial packages to stimulate growth, incentivise investment, and ultimately, safeguard the future of Malta's literary ecosystem. The NBC will explore opportunities to provide more targeted fiscal support to ensure sustainability, foster growth, and preserve its cultural contributions. Building on the insights gathered during consultations, the NBC will address the top challenges identified by stakeholders, including financial constraints, limited market opportunities, and rising costs of production.

- a) **Continue working towards fiscal incentives, including removing tax paid on royalties.**
Building off previous successes with the government in reducing the income tax paid by authors on royalties (from 15% to 7.5%),³⁰ the NBC shall continue to lobby and advocate for the removal of this tax entirely, to incentivise existing and prospective authors to continue developing literary work – income tax rates for authors' royalties to be reduced from 7.5% to 0%, and a 100% refund on tax paid by publishers on royalties to authors.
- b) Lobby for **fiscal support to publishers**, including government-funded **grants for first-time publishers** and incentives for those exploring innovative practices such as ebooks, audiobooks, and environmentally sustainable production methods. These measures aim to promote diversity and innovation within the industry.
- c) Advocate for **cost-reduction strategies** to mitigate rising expenses for publishers:
- Introduce **subsidies for the cost of paper and printing materials**, modelled after international practices, to alleviate financial pressures on local production.
 - Propose **VAT exemptions on locally-produced publications**, enhancing the competitiveness of Maltese books against imported alternatives and making them more accessible to consumers.
 - Initiate government support for reducing **distribution and shipping costs**, both locally and internationally, to expand the reach of Maltese publications by **introducing a postage subsidy** (see also 2.3.d).
- d) **Initiate discussions with the government to offer a financial incentive package for the opening of new boutique bookshops and directly financing pop-up bookshops during public events with a curated selection of books.**
While there already are a number of bookshops on the Maltese islands, many argue that there is a lack of boutique bookshops with a curated selection and knowledgeable individuals operating them. While discussions are ongoing for a bookshop to be launched as part of the Malta Book Centre, the NBC shall be lobbying to increase interest in the area for a wider audience spectrum.
- e) **Initiate conversations with the government on establishing a basic living for writers** in order for them to pursue writing as a full-time career. The idea would be connected with the Charter for the Status of the Artist by Arts Council Malta and similar to Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot scheme,³¹ which via an initial impact assessment has proved beneficial in supporting the profession.

ACTION 1.2: LAUNCH A PROFESSIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME FOR INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

Addressing the immediate financial concerns of the industry is only one aspect of creating long-term sustainability. Equally important is the need to elevate professional standards and skillsets to keep pace with international trends and quality expectations. By introducing specialised training, workshops, and mentorship programmes, the NBC aims to provide necessary resources to enhance the expertise of local editors, translators, authors, illustrators, and publishers. This initiative, contingent on a budget increase, is designed to equip industry professionals with the skills to drive innovation and competitiveness.

- a) **Professional development for authors and editors** via specialised training and workshops with leading editorial institutions and publishing houses abroad (following the opening of the Malta Book Centre in 2027, the NBC will also endeavour to host masterclasses or residencies to support this initiative);
- b) **Professional development for translators** via a mentorship programme and translators as ambassadors initiative in collaboration with foreign entities or via direct funds to attend training (similar to the above, following the opening of the Malta Book Centre, the NBC will endeavour to host masterclasses or residencies to support this initiative);
- c) **Training on the development of ebooks and audiobooks** via the introduction of a funding strand for authors and publishers to attend specific sessions to develop their skills and understanding of the subject;
- d) **Introduce a literary agent training fund** to begin the journey of having established agents in Malta. The funds would need to be spent on specific training to gain recognition as a literary agent and could be used, for example, in consultation with the Simon Trewin Literary Agency in the UK; and
- e) **Encourage training on the development of booksellers** to increase the curated bookshop experience on the island, similar to other countries, and facilitate the pop-up bookshop initiative (see 1.1.d).

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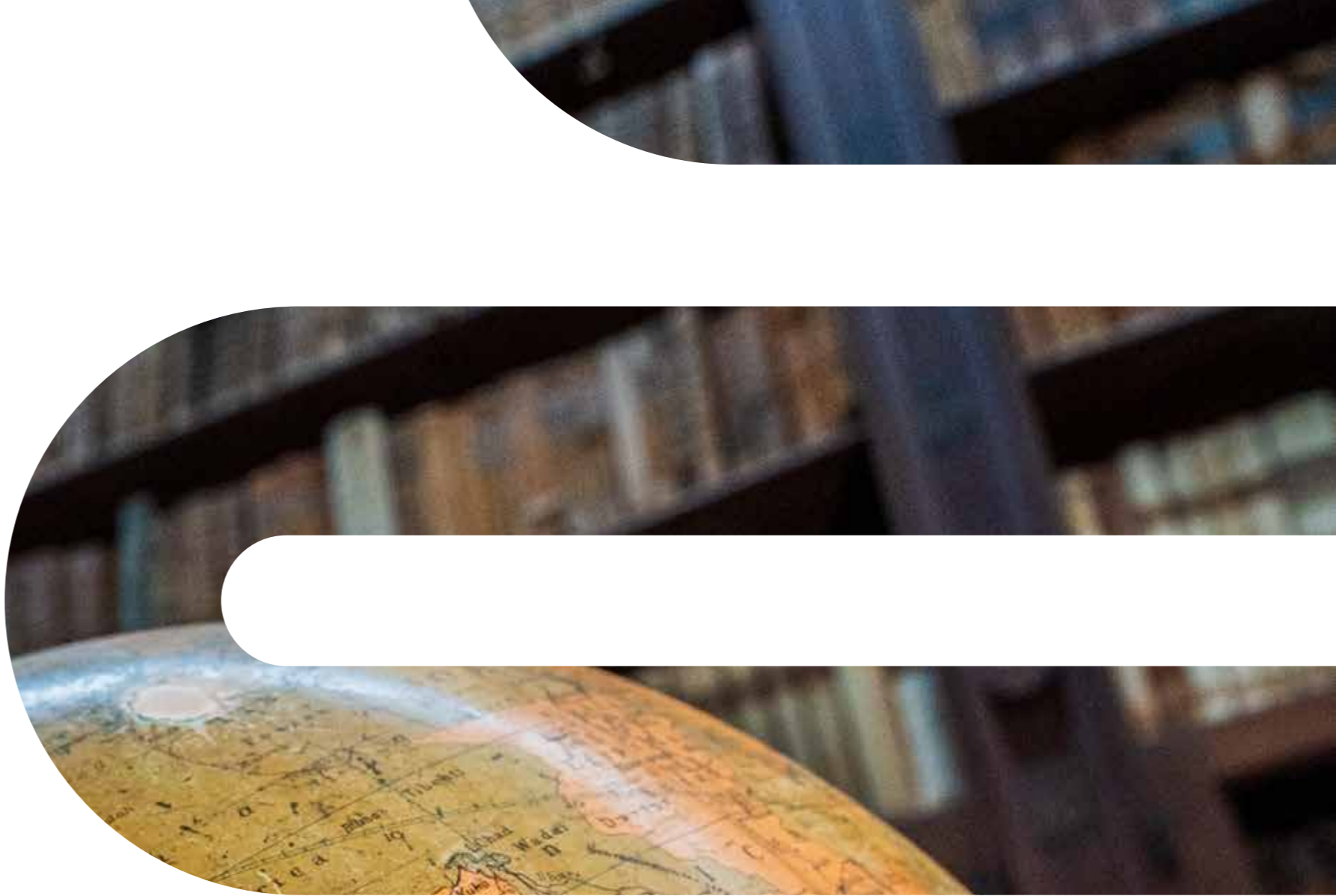
³⁰ National Book Council. (2024, January 11). Income tax rate on authors' royalties reduced by half. <<https://ktieb.org.mt/news-en/income-tax-rate-on-authors-royalties-deducted-by-half/>>

³¹ Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media. (2023). *Basic income for the arts: Initial impact assessment (6-month)*. Government of Ireland. <<https://assets.gov.ie/278306/10ae2240-851a-4411-af8d-064e21c322ca.pdf>>

ACTION 1.3: ENHANCE THE BUDGET LINKED TO EXISTING FUNDS

As the industry grows, the government funding mechanisms must evolve to meet the changing needs of the sector and its stakeholders. Existing funds such as the Malta Book Fund are no longer sufficient to keep pace with rising costs and the increasing demand for support. By advocating for larger, more sustainable funding pools, the NBC aims to future-proof the industry against economic pressures and enhance opportunities for those who contribute to Malta's rich literary landscape. The NBC shall lobby for a budget increase to benefit:

- a) **Public Lending Rights:** In 2025, this particular line vote saw an increase for the first time since 2018. The number of stakeholders registered in the scheme keeps growing exponentially, thus lowering the average unit loan remuneration value. The NBC will keep leveraging for a yearly budget increase for this remuneration scheme, benefitting authors, co-authors, editors, illustrators, and photographers whose books are available for borrowing from the Public Libraries of Malta and Gozo and the University of Malta Library.
- b) **Malta Book Fund:** Increase the value of grants, in an attempt to match market prices and address rising costs, as well as the number of potential beneficiaries in each strand.
- c) **National Book Prize:** Increase the current budget allocation to cover actual expenses, including prize money and the ceremony, ensuring alignment with current expenditure.



**PILLAR 2****Promoting Maltese Language and Culture****Goal**

To promote and preserve the Maltese language and culture by elevating its visibility locally and internationally through literature.

Context

Literature is not just an art form – it is a lifeline for the preservation of our language, culture and identity. In an age where globalisation threatens smaller cultures, Maltese literature stands as one of the few remaining bulwarks against the erosion of our national heritage. Through stories and books, our literature captures the essence of who we are as a people, preserving our language and unique traditions for generations to come. However, the local book industry faces an existential threat. With our limited market size, combined with growing international competition and changing reading habits, Maltese authors and publishers are at a disadvantage.

A severely compromised literary ecosystem would have a wide-ranging negative impact on the local literary community. Not only would it dampen a key area of Maltese cultural and artistic expression, but it would also prevent up-and-coming voices from fully developing their craft and contributing their unique perspective in a way that ensures literature remains fresh and relevant.

The NBC has long recognised these challenges and has already taken steps to mitigate these risks. Through initiatives such as the Malta Book Festival and participation in foreign book fairs, the NBC has provided important platforms and opportunities for local authors and publishers to showcase their work. These efforts must now be intensified. This pillar is focused on strengthening and expanding support mechanisms for Maltese literature to ensure it remains a vibrant and integral part of the literary landscape.

Through stories and books,
our literature captures the
essence of who we are as
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for generations to come.

ACTION 2.1: ENHANCE MARKETING EFFORTS TO FURTHER SUPPORT PROMOTION OF THE INDUSTRY LOCALLY

In a market as small and saturated as Malta's, local promotion plays an indispensable role in sustaining and growing the book industry. The NBC acknowledges that reigniting interest in Maltese literature starting from our own homes is crucial to fostering a culture of reading that can fuel long-term industry growth. To effectively nurture this culture, increased visibility of Maltese authors and their works is necessary. Therefore, the NBC will enhance its focus on targeted and strategic marketing activities, ensuring that Maltese literary works gain broader recognition and engagement within the local community and thus contribute to the sustainability of the Maltese literary landscape.

- a) **Nationwide Reading Campaign:** Collaborate with key stakeholders to spearhead a nationwide campaign aimed at reigniting a reading culture in Malta. This initiative will target homes, schools, and local communities to foster a lifelong love for reading, and it already features a collaboration with the National Literacy Agency through a Memorandum of Understanding.

The NBC acknowledges that reigniting interest in Maltese literature starting from our own homes is crucial to fostering a culture of reading that can fuel long-term industry growth.
- b) **Cross-Media Promotional Campaign:** Launch a dedicated promotional campaign to increase the visibility of Maltese literature by exploring adaptations across various media platforms, including film, theatre, streaming platforms, and television. This will elevate local creatives and give broader exposure to literary works in a dynamic and modern way.
- c) **Stakeholder Engagement and Insight:** Expand the NBC's reach and deepen engagement with stakeholders by organising regular webinars, workshops, conferences, and meetings. These forums will serve to offer insights, share updates on emerging opportunities, and encourage active feedback and discussion among authors, publishers, and other industry professionals.
- d) **Event Facilitation and Collaboration:** Provide active support and facilitation for various events throughout the year, such as book festivals, author talks, and reading initiatives. By doing so, the NBC will engage directly with the Maltese community and foster collaboration between industry players, further embedding literature into Malta's cultural fabric.



ACTION 2.2: ELEVATING MALTESE LITERARY EXCELLENCE

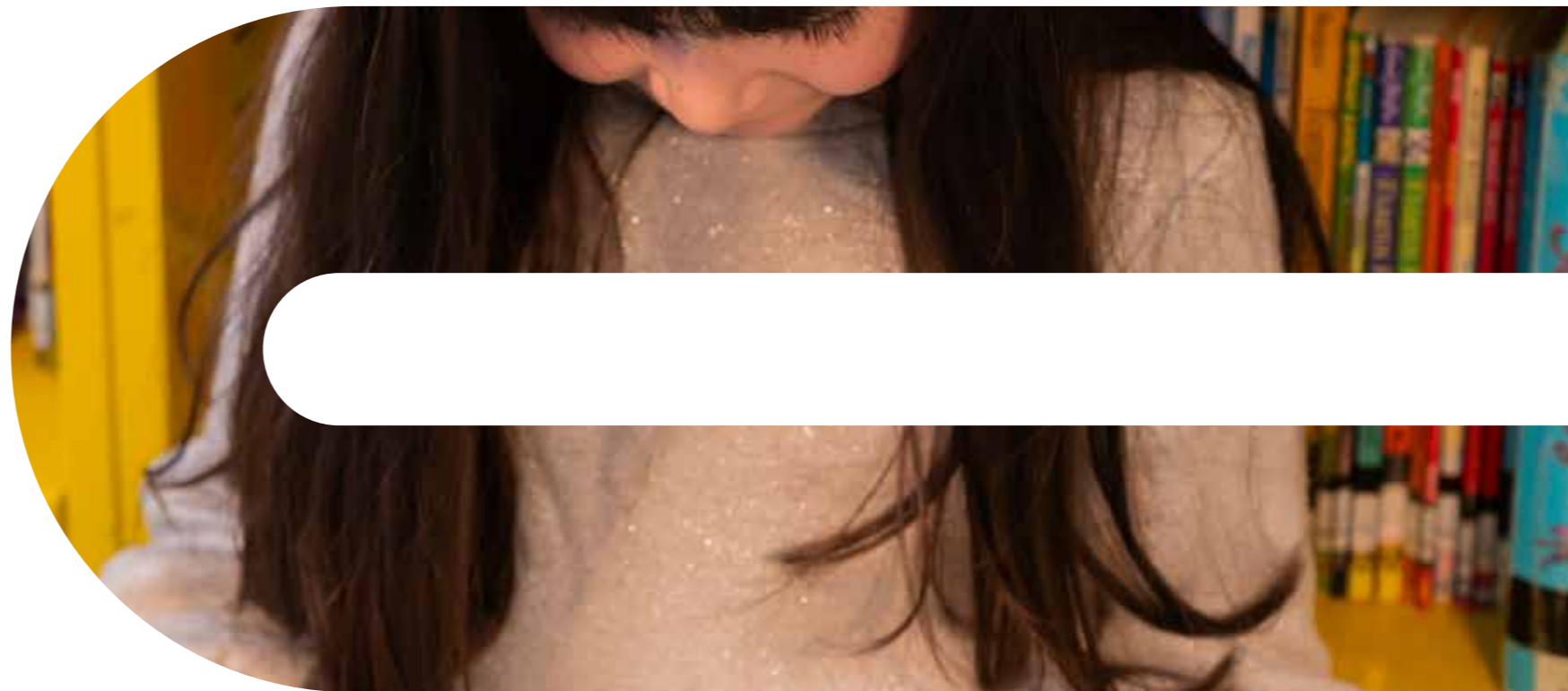
To ensure Maltese literature competes effectively locally and internationally, enhancing the quality and visibility of works produced is crucial. As the literary landscape evolves, Maltese authors must not only be visible but also acknowledged for the excellence of their contributions. Part of achieving this involves critical discourse around literature and promoting a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring Maltese works stand out in an increasingly competitive global market.

- a) **Encourage the organisation and collaboration of literary initiatives across the Maltese islands** to increase the visibility of Maltese literature. This initiative is intended to provide more exposure opportunities to writers and emphasise the importance of literary quality; this also complements the pop-up bookshop initiative (see 1.1.d);
- b) **Work towards further developing a Book Review Programme** designed to strengthen the critical evaluation of literature. This initiative would expand on existing models like *Illum 'Paġna Letterarja*³² by collaborating with other platforms, such as leading news portals, to foster a critical culture that supports the continuous improvement of literary quality for works in Maltese and English; and
- c) **Seek funding to reinstate educational and professional grants** or associated sponsorships (in line with Action 1.2) to raise the standard of Maltese literature productions.

ACTION 2.3: CONTINUE ADVANCING THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA

Given the limitations of Malta's small market, it is crucial to look beyond our borders to secure the future of Maltese literature. The NBC's internationalisation strategy is central to unlocking new opportunities for authors, publishers, and other stakeholders. In the coming years, the NBC will continue to drive its international agenda, promoting 'Authentic Malta' literary products at international book fairs and advocating for improved conditions for book exports. All efforts will focus on expanding the global reach of locally produced books, creating new opportunities for the local industry to thrive in a competitive international landscape.

- a) **Continue developing an international promotion programme for Maltese literature** by attending foreign book fairs, encouraging local industry players to participate, and establishing communication channels with foreign book centres, Maltese embassies and more. Starting in 2025, the NBC will oversee the publication of the new edition of the *Literature from Malta* foreign rights catalogue with the support of Memorandums of Understanding signed with Malta Tourism Authority, Arts Council Malta, and Gutenberg Press;
- b) **Further strengthen the presence of Maltese authors and publishers in international literary institutions and fora**, increasing awareness of their work to build greater opportunities;
- c) **Initiate discussions with the government** and postal service providers **on introducing a postage subsidy for shipping books with a Maltese ISBN**, both locally and internationally, to boost literary exports and financially support local publishing (see also 1.1.c);
- d) **Continue investing in initiatives to translate and disseminate Maltese literature abroad**, expanding its reach both locally and internationally, for instance, through the publication of Maltese literature in anthologies and magazines internationally; the facilitation of competitions, such as the Commonwealth Short Story Prize; and the publication of book projects such as the Comma Press *Book of Valletta* (these initiatives are separate from the Malta Book Fund); and
- e) **Strengthen the local industry's voice in foreign fora** by seeking membership in organisations such as the European Union National Institutes for Culture, similar to the newly obtained membership of the European Network for Literary Translation and Global Association of Literary Festivals. Initial steps have been taken in 2025, with participation in the London Book Fair in March, the Frankfurt Book Fair in October, and the Mediterranean Publishing Forum in September as a guest of honour.



PILLAR 3

Expanding Access and Engagement**Goal**

To break down barriers by making books and literary opportunities more accessible to all, fostering a culture of widespread engagement.

Context

Shifting reading habits, the declining number of readers,³³ and the rise of digital platforms globally have presented more threats than opportunities for Malta's book industry. These changes require the industry to adapt and evolve with a clear focus on expanding access to local literature and fostering deeper engagement with a broader audience.

This pillar seeks to address these challenges and changes to secure a future that embraces technology, widens audience reach, and bridges the existing gaps between literature and people. The industry's ability and readiness to evolve will be central to keeping Maltese literature an active part of Malta's culture and creative scene, with the aim of making local literature accessible to current and future generations locally and abroad. The actions and initiatives outlined below are designed to empower stakeholders by creating spaces for collaboration, driving technology advancements, and further enhancing marketing efforts.

By fostering greater collaboration and innovation within the sector, these initiatives aim to safeguard the industry and actively drive its growth, ensuring that Maltese literature and its stakeholders remain a vital part of the nation's cultural fabric. The need for action is clear: without embracing opportunities to adapt, the industry risks stagnating in a rapidly changing world.

ACTION 3.1: CREATING A COLLABORATIVE SPACE FOR ALL INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS

Over the years, discussions and works have been ongoing to introduce a literary hub in the heart of Malta's cultural centre – Valletta. The NBC has been working with the government to create the Malta Book Centre, aimed at opening to the public after Q4 2027. The Malta Book Centre will be host to several initiatives, many of which are referenced throughout this document, such as organising residencies, workshops, masterclasses, reading nights, and more. The centre will also host a café, a bookshop, and the NBC offices. More information on the Malta Book Centre can be found via its vision document.

The vision of the Malta Book Centre is to foster a resilient book culture that nurtures tomorrow's talents and celebrates Maltese literature – a hub for creative development and future-proofing the industry.

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³³ Borg, N. (2024, August 12). *Read and weep: Over half of Maltese don't read a single book in a year.* Times of Malta. <<https://timesofmalta.com/article/read-weep-half-maltese-don-t-read-single-book-year.1096570>>

ACTION 3.2: EXPANDING ACCESS AND BEST USE OF READILY AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGICAL TRENDS

As technology continues to reshape the way people discover and engage with literature, it is essential that the local industry harnesses these advancements to remain relevant and accessible, especially to younger generations. The Strategy should ensure that stakeholders make the best use of readily available technological trends – which might be overlooked or their importance taken for granted – to develop a more creative and healthy literary ecosystem. In doing so, new pathways for audience engagement will be created while providing the necessary tools for the industry to adapt to a changing landscape.

- a) **Invest in automating the submissions system and judge portal** for all Prizes and contests managed by the NBC. This was already implemented in January 2025;
- b) **Update the ISBN database** of all locally published books for a more **user-friendly and comprehensive technology** that allows for a more accurate and accessible database of Maltese books' ISBNs; and
- c) **Invest in developing a Malta Books Database** for hosting on **leading news providers**, increasing access to information on locally produced literature and, in tandem with Action 2.2, allowing for more engaging discussions on each book.



ACTION 3.3: ENHANCING MARKETING ACTIVITIES FOR BETTER ENGAGEMENT

Part of the NBC's goal is to ensure that its initiatives and those of industry stakeholders reach individuals not actively invested in the industry. **The NBC will focus on more specific and targeted marketing strategies** that increase visibility and foster meaningful engagement with readers who may not yet be involved in the literary world. This initiative will involve creating **targeted campaigns** to spark interest and conversation around Maltese books, focusing on **interactive and community-driven approaches**.

With a sustained and consistent budget allocation, **the NBC will also seek to collaborate further with local and international entities to develop multi-channel campaigns** using television, news sites, social media, and other platforms that invite participation and engagement, ensuring that Maltese literature becomes a part of everyday cultural experiences for all generations. As part of its enhanced marketing efforts, the NBC has also undergone a **rebranding**, reflected in a **revamped website and an updated logo** that embodies its renewed visual identity.

- a) **Focus on more specific and targeted marketing strategies** that move beyond broad promotional efforts to actively connect with different reader demographics, focusing on both digital and traditional media channels. This includes data-driven approaches to identify audience interests and optimise engagement;
- b) **Develop targeted, interactive, and community-driven campaigns** that promote books and create spaces for discussion and engagement. These campaigns will be designed to encourage reader participation;
- c) **Enhance collaborations with local and international entities** to amplify reach and impact. International partnerships already leveraged include the European Network for Literary Translation and the Global Association of Literary Festivals, which the NBC joined as an official member in January 2025. On a national level, the NBC is strengthening ties with key institutions through Memoranda of Understanding, including with the National Literacy Agency, Arts Council Malta, Malta Tourism Authority/ Visit Malta (in progress with the 'Authentic Malta' initiative), the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association, and Gutenberg Press;
- d) **Overhaul and modernise the NBC website** to improve accessibility, navigation and engagement. This revamp aims to create a more user-friendly platform that provides updated resources and event details while reflecting the NBC's rebranded visual identity; and
- e) Rebrand the NBC logo and all initiatives to be displayed across all its communication channels (website, social media, and promotional materials).

PILLAR 4

Enhancing Governance and Transparency

Goal

To continue developing good governance and accountability within the NBC and the book industry as a whole, ensuring ethical practices and trust across all stakeholders.

Context

The book industry is composed of a rich ecosystem of authors, publishers, editors, translators, illustrators, booksellers, distributors, and more, each contributing to the production and dissemination of locally produced books. However, due to the small market size locally, this diverse landscape can lead to

The book industry is composed of a rich ecosystem of authors, publishers, editors, translators, illustrators, booksellers, distributors, and more, each contributing to the production and dissemination of locally produced books.

fragmentation, inefficiencies, and overlaps in functions, increasing the need for good governance practices to facilitate better collaboration among stakeholders.

As the industry evolves, so too must the structures that govern it. Clear governance and transparency are key to fostering trust among stakeholders and ensuring the ethical operation of the industry.

This pillar seeks to address these challenges by reinforcing the need for robust governance mechanisms that align with the industry's current and future needs. We can create a more cohesive and well-governed industry by defining clearer roles, improving accountability, and enhancing transparency in key initiatives. Strong governance will help all stakeholders, from authors to policymakers, work together more effectively, driving continuous improvement and ensuring that the industry operates with the highest standards of integrity and fairness.

ACTION 4.1: DEFINING THE NBC'S ROLE IN MALTA'S LITERARY ECOSYSTEM

As the book industry continues to evolve, it is essential that the structures supporting it adapt to meet the changing needs of its stakeholders. Over time, and recently reinforced by the stakeholder consultations related to this document, it was noted that there is a lack of clarity among the public and stakeholders regarding the specific role and functions of the NBC in conjunction with its current framework (the NBC Establishment Order)³⁴ and what the book industry needs. The following initiatives are designed to explore and implement the necessary changes that will bring the NBC closer to stakeholder expectations, enhancing its contribution to the cultural fabric of Malta. Through collaborative discussions and refined communication, the NBC aims to strengthen its position as a central figure in Malta's literary ecosystem, ensuring it is better equipped to support the industry's ongoing growth and transformation.

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- a) **Hold open discussions with the government and industry stakeholders to understand whether a shift to the Ministry for Culture** (i.e., *The Ministry for the National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government*) **would be an opportune step for the NBC and the industry**, further highlighting the importance that books have to the cultural fabric of society;
- b) **Conduct an independent policy evaluation exercise on the NBC Establishment Order** to understand whether the current needs of the industry are being met and establish whether changes need to be made. This evaluation exercise may be complemented by hosting targeted meetings, workshops, and forums to gather insights, concerns, and recommendations; and
- c) Subsequent to the above actions, **integrate communication activities and foundational messaging on the NBC's role within the other promotional and information campaigns proposed throughout this Strategy** (e.g., 2.1 and 3.3).

ACTION 4.2: EVALUATION OF NATIONAL BOOK PRIZE AND MALTA BOOK FUND

The National Book Prize and Malta Book Fund are the primary schemes by which recognition and financial support are provided to authors, illustrators, and publishers for their works. As the industry grows, the Book Prize and Book Fund must also adapt to better meet the needs of authors, publishers, and other stakeholders. Stakeholder feedback has indicated that these funding mechanisms require updates to ensure they remain transparent. The following initiatives, as well as 3.2.a, aim to enhance the schemes, ensuring they provide fair and effective support to drive the growth and sustainability of the industry.

- a) Work towards **increasing transparency in how the National Book Prize is adjudicated** by establishing a dedicated committee for conflict resolution, ensuring fair treatment for all stakeholders, as well as introducing an automated system for application and reviewing for more accountability and transparency. Currently, Prize regulations are readily accessible to the public and adjudication board comments are available upon request to ensure transparency and fairness;
- b) Begin discussions to obtain funding for **an independent evaluation exercise on the National Book Prize**. At this stage, the NBC's vision is to keep introducing regulations and amended categories reflecting emerging literary trends. Via this initiative, the NBC aims to present a clear plan for allocating funds to cover prizes, adjudicating boards, and event marketing;
- c) Work towards **ever-increasing transparency on how the Malta Book Fund is adjudicated** by establishing a dedicated committee for conflict resolution, ensuring fair treatment for all stakeholders, as well as introducing an automated system for application and reviewing for more accountability and transparency; and
- d) Begin discussions to obtain funding for **an independent evaluation exercise on the Malta Book Fund**. The NBC wishes to strengthen support grants for publishing culturally, educationally, and intellectually valuable work. Through this initiative, the NBC aims to present a clear plan for allocating funds to cover prizes, adjudicating boards, and marketing of the initiative.

³⁴ National Book Council (Establishment) Order: Subsidiary Legislation (S.L.) 605.12.

ACTION 4.3: ENHANCE DATA COLLECTION AND ITS DISSEMINATION

Between 2019 and 2022, the NBC, in collaboration with the NSO, collected and published key statistics related to the publishing industry. The lack of data in our country related to the book industry correlates with low-quality insights into the market and, subsequently, inefficient planning for improvements. The NBC seeks to reopen discussions with the NSO, publishers, and potentially a third party such as Nelson Book Scan to **refine and expand the data collection exercise for the industry**. By resuming data collection, the NBC also intends to develop **specific public relations campaigns** to highlight the economic and, more importantly, the cultural contributions of the book industry in Malta.

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PILLAR 5

Fostering Collaboration and Visibility

Goal

To strengthen partnerships and elevate the visibility of Maltese literature, both locally and on the international stage.

Context

The growth and success of Malta's book industry depend heavily on effective collaboration and the visibility of its works. As detailed in the initial section, 'Our Present Tale', the industry is supported by a broad yet often fragmented network of stakeholders. To ensure the industry thrives, there is a pressing need to bridge these gaps, encourage closer cooperation among stakeholders, and promote Maltese literature to both local and international audiences.

By fostering collaboration, the industry can pool resources, share expertise, and tackle common challenges together. Boosting visibility ensures that Maltese books and authors are not only celebrated locally, but also recognised internationally, opening doors to new markets and opportunities.

This pillar aims to unite Malta's book industry stakeholders, enhancing the reach of local literature in an increasingly competitive media landscape. The initiatives outlined here will help create a more connected, visible, and resilient literary community.

ACTION 5.1: INCREASING COLLABORATION
AND FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES

Collaboration and open dialogue are crucial for the book industry's continued development. Regular feedback from stakeholders ensures that the industry evolves to meet its challenges. Expanding consultation forums and establishing dedicated events will foster a collaborative environment where all relevant stakeholders work together to enhance the industry's resilience and growth.

- a) **Increase the frequency of meetings** with authors, illustrators, and publishers to gather feedback regularly (once the Malta Book Centre is operational, it can serve as a venue for these meetings); and
- b) Collaborate with other entities and secure funding to **establish an Annual Book Industry Conference**, providing stakeholders with a platform to discuss critical issues and opportunities. This event can also serve as a 'launch' event for an annual data-gathering exercise (see 4.3).

ACTION 5.2: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

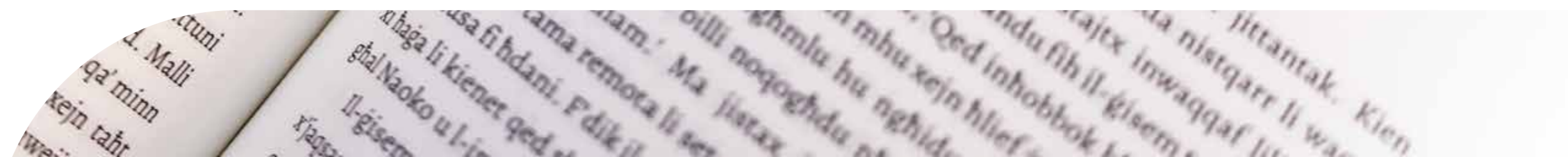
Collaboration with local and international organisations is essential for expanding opportunities for industry stakeholders. Building relationships with schools, libraries, cultural organisations, entities, and international bodies creates opportunities to promote Maltese literature locally and abroad.

- a) **Strengthen existing partnerships** with local and international collaborators (e.g., schools, libraries, entities, stakeholders, and cultural organisations) to enhance ongoing initiatives;
- b) **Explore new partnerships** aimed at supplementing the NBC's budget and providing more collaboration opportunities to local industry players; and
- c) **Strategically select and participate in international book fairs and festivals** to maximise networking opportunities and global exposure for Maltese literature.

ACTION 5.3: THE NBC AS A COLLABORATOR AND ENABLER FOR INDUSTRY INITIATIVES

The NBC's role is to lead as well as to support and empower stakeholders to pursue their own partnerships and projects. By advocating for policy improvements, offering strategic guidance, and connecting stakeholders with the private sector, the NBC can help create an environment where collaboration thrives.

- a) **Initiate discussions with publishers and authors, supporting their efforts to engage the private sector for financial backing** on specific works and topics of societal value;
- b) **Lead and participate in initiatives with other entities to promote Maltese literature** and foster collaboration between the public and private sectors; and
- c) **Advocate for publishers in discussions with policymakers, supporting policies that benefit authors and publishers.** The NBC will continue to align funding requests with cultural outcomes, emphasising the role of literature in education and cultural enrichment.





Appendix

Vision, Mission and Values Statement For the Malta Book Centre

THE MALTA BOOK CENTRE AND ITS PURPOSE

The Malta Book Centre is an initiative by the National Book Council (NBC) to strengthen Malta's literary culture. It aims to foster a thriving book ecosystem that supports writers, publishers, and readers while ensuring Maltese literature remains relevant and celebrated on both a national and international stage.

This document outlines the vision, mission, and guiding values shaping the Malta Book Centre's development and operation. It reflects extensive research into best practices in literary institutions in Europe and beyond, as well as consultations with key stakeholders to ensure that the Centre meets the needs of the local literary community and publishing sector. Developed through a collaborative process that included internal workshops and external stakeholder engagement, the Centre's vision and mission are integral to the NBC's five-year strategy as a key tool within its remit.

VISION

To foster a resilient local book culture that nurtures tomorrow's talents and celebrates Maltese literature.

This vision identifies a resilient book culture as the Malta Book Centre's focus. The Centre aims to nurture a sustainable and thriving literary ecosystem that can adapt to shifts in technology, reading habits, and economic pressures.

The Centre is committed to current and future generations of local writers, readers, and publishing professionals. By nurturing talent and creative development, it will support emerging authors and ensure that new voices continue to shape the Maltese literary landscape.

The celebration of Maltese literature builds on the NBC's ongoing work to promote and showcase local literary works, both past and present. It fosters national cultural pride and ensures Maltese literature remains visible on local and international platforms.

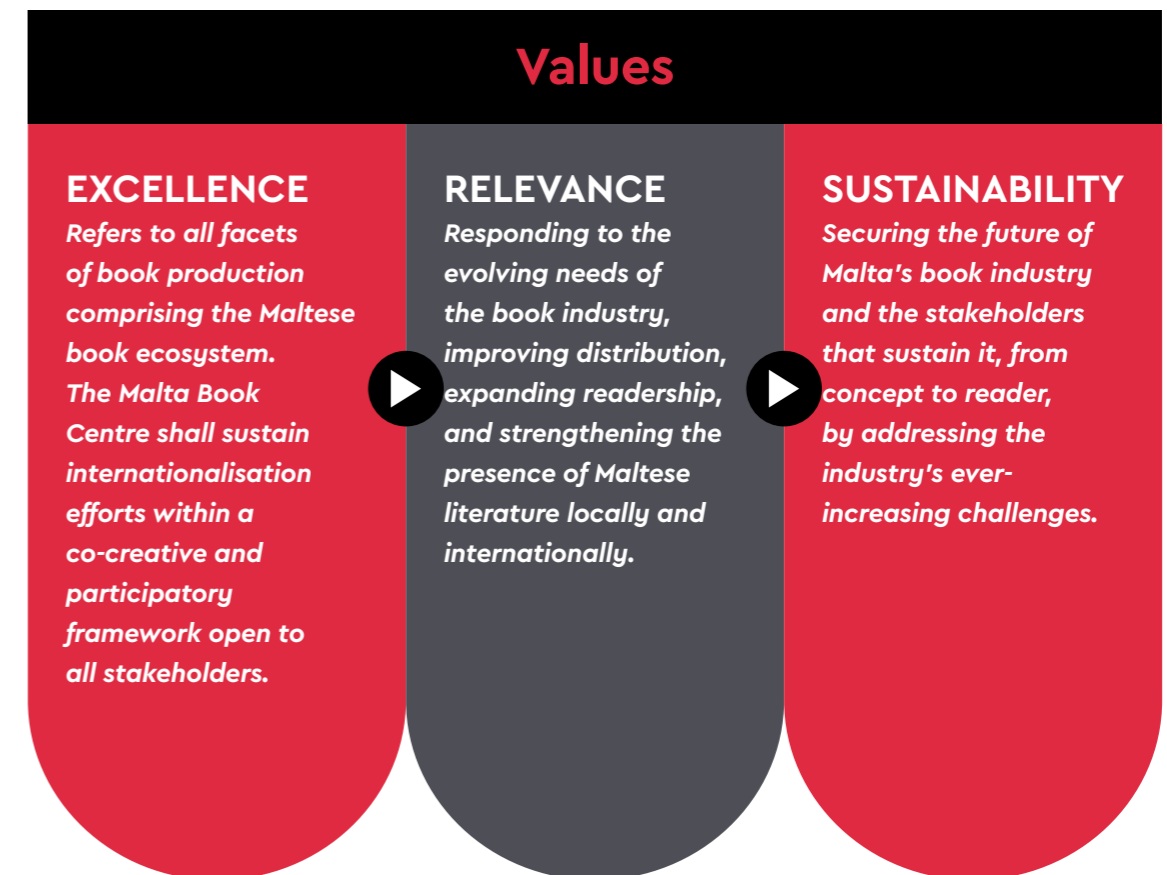
The vision for the Malta Book Centre seeks to create a sustainable and inclusive literary environment that honours Malta's literary heritage while investing in new talents, ensuring that Maltese literature continues to grow and remains vibrant for generations to come.

MISSION & VALUES

Mission

To invest in the relevance, quality, and readership of the Maltese book in all its forms.

With the proposed vision as a backdrop, the Malta Book Centre's purpose-driven mission is informed by a set of core values that shall guide the range of services and facilities offered on-site, developed in response to stakeholder needs, international best practices, and the NBC's five-year strategy.



THE MALTA BOOK CENTRE EXPERIENCE

The Malta Book Centre will be a dynamic space that offers a range of facilities tailored to support Malta's literary community and publishing sector:

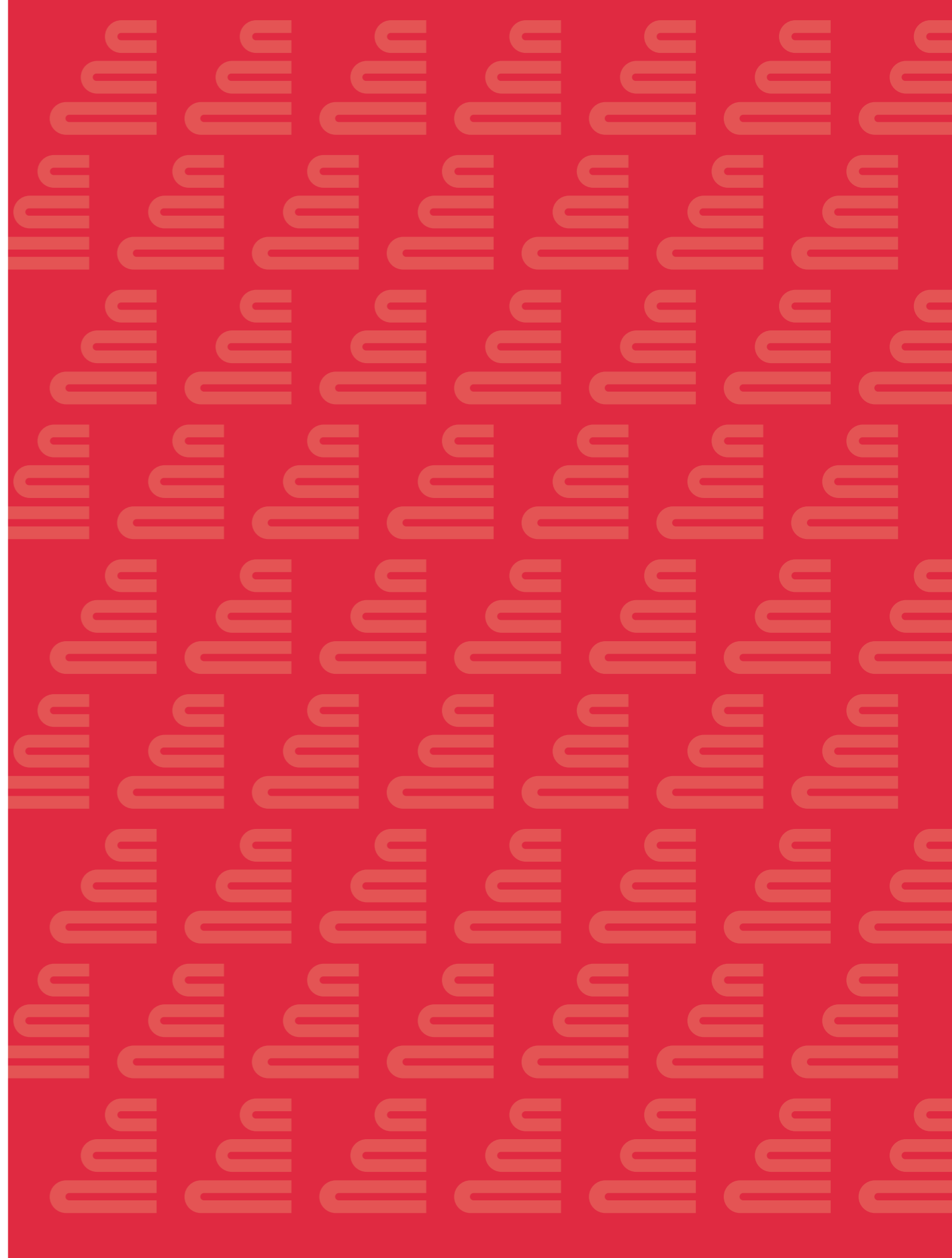
A Values-Driven Bookshop – A dedicated bookshop offering a curated selection of books and literature that reflects the diverse range and wealth of Maltese books and strongly supports distribution, including those that might not be widely available through mainstream outlets.

- **A Learning Experience** – An interactive exhibition designed primarily for young learners, offering insight into the book creation process and the various professionals involved, including authors, illustrators, and publishers.
- **A Cafeteria with a Curated Experience** – A literary café designed as a welcoming space for discussion, networking, and the promotion of a reading culture, which can also host book-related events and gatherings.
- **Reading Rooms and Library Facilities** – A specialised resource library, available both physically and digitally, supporting research, professional development, and industry needs.
- **Facilities for Stakeholders** – Flexible spaces for book launches, workshops, mentoring sessions, and advisory services to foster collaboration among publishing professionals and literary organisations.

NEXT STEPS

The Malta Book Centre will serve as a pivotal institution for Malta's literary sector, promoting excellence, inclusivity, and sustainability. It will provide a dedicated space for writers, readers, publishers, and industry professionals to connect, collaborate, and innovate.

As this vision is developed, public input will be invaluable in shaping a Centre that truly serves the needs of its stakeholders. The NBC invites feedback from the literary community and the general public to ensure that the Malta Book Centre becomes a cornerstone of Malta's cultural landscape.





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