

GRDA NOTE



The importance of cultural heritage
and practice in the context of the
Regional Development Strategy

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A Note on the importance of cultural heritage and practice in the context of the Regional Development Strategy

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Cultural heritage and practice are both of interest and application to the development of cultural developments in Gozo. Additional value is generated by adopting a wide-angle view, that tries to include as many aspects of society as possible in an attempt to continue to push Gozo's cultural heritage into contemporary manifestations that combine tradition with innovation.

This note tried to assess very briefly the growing significance of the relationship between environment, heritage and tourism in the development of cultural products and services in Gozo. One also needs to keep in mind the distinctiveness of Gozo's cultural and heritage dimension that gives a unique identity to the Island & which is central to other activities especially tourism.

Addressing the main challenges & exploiting opportunities

The Arts Council Malta's Cultural Strategy for Gozo 2021-2031 is an important reference document for the Regional Development Strategy. Overarching strategic priorities have been identified on the basis of a set of clear, simple questions, that highlight possible future actions and priority areas. These include:

- i. What are the big picture strategic priorities for Gozo from the perspective of a region?
- ii. What are the distinctive cultural strengths and areas for potential specialisation in the region?

- iii. How do these areas reflect the cultural strength of the Gozitan localities which also among themselves have particular traditions and forms of cultural expression?

The draft Regional Development Strategy which was published as a consultation document in July 2021, tried to address some of these issues. More specifically, it included and acknowledged the following points:

- The need to maximise the benefits originating from having economic growth based on quality of life and the appreciation of tangible and intangible heritage.
- Contributing to a strategy that prioritizes balance and sustainability that stems from the community level and reaches up to engage with public and private sectors including Government, Ministry for Gozo, local authorities, businesses and civil society.
- Develop identifiable cultural expressions that support strong community participation.
- Main challenges and opportunities identified may centre on immediate and short-term future plans for improving transport and commercial (including tourism) connectivity to Malta and abroad while making good use of high-visibility international platforms like the possibility of hosting the European Capital of Culture in 2031.

A High level Roadmap

The draft Regional Development Strategy builds on the acknowledgment of the strong tradition linking Gozitan cultural expression to its geography, topography, village social and intra-structural structures and particularities. This recognition in turns motivates a perspective that supports the development of these elements that is sustainable and conscious of the need to balance short-to medium-term objectives with eventual, longer-term ones.

The draft Regional Development Strategy also notes the need to adopt measures that stem from local and regional work practices in order to reflect those characteristics that nurture further good practice.

The recognition of the value intrinsic to Gozo and its communities, may allow

for the development of forms of cultural expression, support by adequate operational tools and infrastructure, that makes the region all the more attractive to potential collaborators in Malta and internationally.

Finally, there is acknowledgment that a great number of activities and festivals, including religious and tourism-oriented populate the Gozitan cultural calendar. Nevertheless, to enhance sustainability and quality one may need to start looking at resource deployment aiming to obtain better coordinate and streamlining the different forms of cultural expression in ways that are more suited to local dimensions and dynamics.



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