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Spaces and places for children and young people living in Gozo

Carmel Cefai, Rachel Spiteri and Natalie Galea

Abstract:

Although so far Gozo has been spared the massive and rapid development taking place in Malta, the impact of the development may be more significant in view of the island's environmental vulnerability, limited size, population density and limited resources. This study explored the views of children, adolescents and parents in Gozo on the quality, safety, cleanliness and accessibility of the play, nature and leisure-time spaces in their towns and villages. A sample of 191 children (8 - 11 year old) and adolescents (12 - 16 year old) and 316 parents completed a survey examining their views on, and satisfaction with the various aspects of their locality. This paper presents the findings of the study, describing how satisfied children, adolescents and parents are with the play, nature and open spaces in their locality, including accessibility, safety, cleanliness, as well as their say and participation in their locality. While participants in Gozo appear to be more satisfied with their localities than those in Malta, they expressed less satisfaction with particular areas in their locality, and made various suggestions on how their localities may be embellished and become more child-friendly.

Keywords:

Gozo, towns and villages, spaces, child-friendly, environment.

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Spaces and places for children and young people living in Gozo¹

Introduction

The Maltese islands have been undergoing considerable and rapid development over the past decades leaving an impact not only on the physical environment but also on the quality of life, health, and wellbeing of the people. The land covered by buildings has doubled in less than 20 years, from 15.6% in 1990 to 29.9% in 2018. In the last decade there has been a 4% increase in developed land within the development zone, a 19% increase in developed land outside the development zone, and a 4% decrease in agricultural and natural areas (ERA, 2021). In 2022, the number of registered cars on the street (400,500) is close to one car per person living on the Maltese islands. In its policy document consultation, ERA (2021) underlines how "lack of green open spaces in urban areas and the overdependence on private vehicles, discourage active mobility and exercise and contribute to air pollution and an overall lower environmental quality" (ERA, 2021). Maltese children themselves

¹ Parts of this paper are based on Cefai, C., Spiteri, R.& Galea, N. (2022) Healthy Spaces: Co-Creating Child Friendly Towns and Villages. Malta. Commissioner for Children.

have expressed their concern about the encroachment of their play and open areas by construction and traffic, rendering them less accessible and safe for them (Cefai, 2018; Cefai and Galea, 2020; MFWS, 2021; Satariano et al., 2021).

As children's open spaces for play decrease and traffic increases, their play time decreases, with consequent negative impact on both their physical and mental health. Recent statistics by WHO amongst 40 countries show that Maltese children and adolescents still have the highest rate of obesity and highest problematic use of social media, and below average participation in physical exercise (Inchley et al., 2020). On the other hand, there is increasing evidence that the quality of play, physical exercise and social spaces are related to children's level of overall wellbeing and health. Children who play regularly outside for instance enjoy a higher level of wellbeing than those who do so rarely (Rees, 2018; UNICEF Innocenti, 2020), whilst adequate exposure to green spaces enhances children's physical and cognitive development and promotes their social and emotional development (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2016).

This study explores the views of children and families living in Gozo on the state of the environment in their locality, such as adequacy of play and nature areas, issues of safety and cleanliness, and inclusion and civic participation in the life of their communities. Although Gozo has been spared so far the massive and rapid development seen in Malta, the impact of the development may be more significant in view of its environmental vulnerability, limited size, population density and limited resources (GRDA, 2021). This study thus sought to explore the views of children, adolescents and parents in Gozo on the adequacy, quality and safety of the open spaces in their towns and villages and how

these may be embellished and enhanced to ensure the wellbeing and healthy development of children and young people living in Gozo. It sought to listen to the voices of the children and young people themselves as well as the parents, on how satisfied they are with the play areas, nature areas, cleanliness, safety, accessibility, and inclusion for children in their locality as well as the say and participation of the children in their community.

Methodology

The sample in this study consisted of 92 children (8 - 11 year old) and 99 adolescents (12 - 16 year old) attending five primary and three secondary schools (state and non state) in Gozo. Most of the adolescents were female whilst there was a good gender balance amongst the younger group. The sample included also 316 parents who resided in Gozo, the great majority being female. Forty percent were parents of children aged 0 - 11 years, 30% were parents of had children aged 12 - 17 years, and another 30% of children of mixed age groups (*Tables 1 and 2*). Both children and adolescents as well as parents were recruited through schools in Gozo.

Data collection took place during the academic year 2020/2021, between the months of January and June 2021. Separate questionnaires were developed for children, young people and parents respectively. The questionnaires explored the various aspects for the locality, with a particular focus on physical and social spaces, such as open areas where children play and spend their leisure time, nature or green areas close to where the children live, places where children and young people meet in the locality, accessibility, inclusion, mobility, cleanliness, safety, participation and say in the life of the locality. Participants were

also asked which of these areas they would like to improve to make their locality more child-friendly. Some of the questions were adapted from the self-assessment tools in the Child-friendly Cities Initiative by UNESCO².

Table 1 - Children and adolescent participants

Age	N	%	Age	N	%
8 years old	20	21.7%	12 years old	5	5.1%
9 years old	25	27.2%	13 years old	30	30.3%
10 years old	36	39.1%	14 years old	29	29.3%
11 years old	7	7.6%	15 years old	18	18.2%
No answer	4	4.3%	16 years old	9	9.1%
			17 years old	2	2.0%
			No answer	6	6.1%
Gender			Gender		
Male	46	50.0%	Male	11	11.1%
Female	46	50.0%	Female	86	86.9%
			No answer	2	2.0%
Nationality			Nationality		
Maltese	91	98.9%	Maltese	93	93.9%
EU (non-Maltese)	1	1.1%	EU (non-Maltese)	6	6.1%

Table 2 - Parent participants

Parent Gender	N	%
Male	43	13.6%
Female	272	86.1%
Other	1	0.3%
Total	316	100%

² <https://childfriendlycities.org/?popuppress=building-a-cfci-assessment>.

Parent Nationality		
Maltese	284	89.9%
EU (non-Maltese)	32	10.1%
Total	316	100%
Relationship to child		
Mother / step mother	273	86.4%
Father / step father	36	11.4%
Grandmother	0	0.0%
Grandfather	0	0.0%
Carer	5	1.6%
No answer	2	0.6%
Total	316	100%
Age of Children		
0-11 years	128	40.5%
12-17 years	93	29.4%
Mixed age groups	95	30.1%
Total	316	100%

Due to COVID-19 restrictions during data collection, the surveys were administered remotely via Microsoft Teams by the research team, or else by the classroom teachers who were present in the classroom, according to the respective schools' preference. Primary school students who received parental consent completed the online survey during school hours. Secondary school students were originally asked to complete the online survey at school, but due to on-going restrictions and limitations faced by schools related to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the students completed the questionnaire at home following parental consent. All parent participants completed the questionnaires online.

Statistical analysis of the survey data was performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 28. Quantitative analyses included general descriptive

statistics, Chi-square tests, ANOVA and post-hoc tests including Tukey and Games-Howell, to check for significant differences across different regions. The level of significance for all tests was taken as $p < 0.05$.

Findings

Play areas - *Children and adolescents*

Two thirds (67%) of the children said they have enough open areas to play in where they live, but only 46% of adolescents agreed; 53% did not agree or agreed just a little. The children participants spend most of their play time at football grounds, with 89% going there at least once a week or more frequently, followed by open fields (71%) and public parks or gardens (63%). They spend least time at swimming pools. The most favourite play areas places were football grounds (50%) and playing fields (44%), while streets, sports centres and pavements were the least popular (26% to 13%).

On the other hand, just over one half of the adolescent participants spend time in open fields (56%) or football grounds (54%) at least once a week or more, while the majority visited sports centres and playing fields less than once per week (77% and 70% respectively).

While the majority of children (70%) indicated that they have enough walking and cycling routes where they live, only 46% of adolescents agreed.

The great majority of children like to walk or cycle in their locality (82%), but only 39% who do so frequently or regularly. Similarly 71% of adolescents like to walk and cycle where they live. When asked

whether there are adequate places where participants can meet and spend time with friends, 60% of adolescents agreed, but one third (33%) did not.

The majority of the child participants indicated that it is possible to play different and new games, physical activities and sports in these areas (77%) and that they discover and learn new things when playing in these areas (62%). Adolescents found the play and sports areas less stimulating, however, with only 43% to 45% agreeing that it is possible to play different and new games and sports or that they can discover and learn new things when playing. 42% of adolescents did not agree that the play areas stimulate their learning.

Participants indicated that most of these places are open on all days of the week (46% - 48%), and for the whole day (39% - 50%), but some indicated that the places are open only during some days or part of the day or weekends only (15% - 5%). The great majority of child and adolescent participants agreed that the play areas can be used when it is nice weather (95% - 98%), but their availability decreased significantly in inclement weather, especially when it is raining (7%). Around half of the child participants go to these play areas by car (52%) or on foot (50%); on the other hand, most adolescents go on foot (74%) followed by car (52%). Only around 20% of both children and adolescents go by bike, and public transport is hardly used.

The vast majority of both groups of participants agree that children of any gender can use these play areas, but around 18% indicated that the places are not fully accessible to children with physical disability.

Play areas - *Parents*

Only around one third of the parents agreed that there are adequate play and nature areas for their children in their locality, namely that there is enough space for play and sports (37%), that the play spaces are easy to use and developmentally appropriate (30%), that there are enough open and green play areas (34%), and that there are enough places for walking and cycling (29%). The great majority (80%) agreed that there is a need for more pedestrian areas and less areas for traffic. On the other hand 48% agreed that the places for play can be used by children with physical disabilities, young children and parents with pushchairs and 69% agreed that their children can walk to shops, play areas and other public places. The majority of the parents however, disagreed that their children have enough routes for walking and cycling (55%) or that their children can go out to play in different weather conditions. Parents also disagreed that places for children are colourful, easy to use and age appropriate (46%) or that their children have enough space for play, games and different sports (42%).

Nature - *Children and adolescents*

Most children (79%) and adolescents (76%) agreed that there is a garden, park or nature area close to where they live which they usually visit on foot (60% and 84% respectively) or by bike (23% and 30% and respectively). Children go with mostly their parents (75%) or siblings and relatives (36%); on the other hand most adolescents visit the nature areas with friends (61%), parents (51%) or siblings (43%), but 37% go on their own. Over one third of children and adolescents visit these places frequently (36% - 37%) but 17% of children and 28% of adolescents go less than once a week. Most

child participants (67%) prefer playing in playing fields/playgrounds rather than natural open spaces (33%); in contrast adolescents prefer natural open spaces (60%) than playing fields (40%).

Nature - *Parents*

Most parent participants agreed that there are places in their locality or within close reach where their children can enjoy nature (61%), and these are within a ten-minute walk from home (65%), but 53% disagreed that the children can visit nature spaces on their own. 45% agreed that there are nature trails that their children could follow.

Three quarters (75%) of parents state that there is a garden, park or natural open area close to their house, but only one third (32%) visit these places at least once a week or more and 38% go there less than once a month. Most visit these places on foot (67%) or by car (28%). Parents visit the nature areas mostly to enjoy the greenery (60%), sit and relax (59%), walk for pleasure (52%) or to accompany their children (49%). When asked what they would like to improve in the nature areas in their locality, most participants mentioned more play areas for young children (53%), enhanced maintenance (50%), more nature walking routes (47%) and plants and flowers (41%) and cleanliness (43%).

Cleanliness - *Children and adolescents*

Most child participants agreed that the places where they play are clean and cared for (69%) and there were no dangerous houses where they live (65%). On the other hand, they have less favourable opinion of their level of pollution in their locality: only 46% agreed that there is no noise, dust and dirty air where they live whilst only

28% agreed there is no rubbish or dirty water where they live.

Similarly most adolescent participants agreed that the places where they play and spend time are clean and cared for (64%), and that there is little or no vandalism in their locality (68%). They have more positive views of the environment than the young children, with 67% agreeing there is just a little or no rubbish or dirty water where they live, and 57% there is little or no noise and pollution.

Cleanliness - Parents

Half of the parents (50%) agreed that places for children such as parks, gardens and playing fields are clean and well kept, and only one third (33%) agreed that there is a problem with rubbish, open drains, dust, and dog mess in their locality. Half of the parents (50%) however, complained about the level of noise and pollution from cars, engines and factories.

Safety - Children and adolescents

The great majority of child participants feel safe in their locality, reporting that they are not bullied when they go out to play (84%), that there is no arguing among adults in their locality (76%), that they know how to get help if they feel in danger (77%). Most also feel safe to cycle where they live (65%), and to go out to play or walk on their own (60%). On the other hand, 43% of children do not feel protected from strangers.

Similarly the majority of adolescent participants do not feel bullied when out playing or with friends (90%), do think there is a lot of

crime, drugs and violence (77%) or dangerous or broken buildings where they live (65%) and agreed that their locality is safe for all children including boys and girls, children with a disability and children from other countries (72%). They also agreed that there are safe crossings to the playing field, parks and school (66%) and that they feel safe to go out to play or walk on their own (63%).

Safety - *Parents*

The majority of parents did not agree that their locality is safe for their children to go to walk or cycle on their own (58%) or to go out and play on their own (51%). Parents also expressed concern about lack of safe crossings to playing field, parks and schools (40%), and lack of safety for their children from crime, drugs, and violence (38%). On the other hand, most parents agreed that there is adequate street lighting and no dark areas in their locality (40%), that it is safe for their children to use buses in their locality (43%), that their children are safe from bullying by other children (41%) and that their locality is safe for all children including those with a disability and from other countries (36%).

Citizenship - *Children and adolescents*

The majority of children participants agreed that in their village all children are respected including those with a disability and foreigners (69%), and that adults listen to and respect children (83%). On the other hand, 70% would like to have more voice in their locality, such as being asked on how play areas and parks for children can become better, while around 50% would like to be consulted when they do things for children and to participate in projects that take place in their locality.

Similarly the majority of adolescent participants agreed that all children and young people in their home town are respected regardless of colour, religion, nationality or disability (66%), that they have opportunities to participate in social activities organised in their locality (61%), and that adults in their locality listen to and respect children and young people (56%). However like the children, they would like a stronger voice in their locality, indicating that their opinions on how facilities and services in their locality may be improved are not adequately heard (40%), and that they have little or no opportunities to help with projects to change the area where they live (38%).

Citizenship - *Parents*

The majority of parents (66%) agreed that in their locality all children are respected regardless of their colour, religion, nationality or disability, and that their children have opportunities to participate in projects or activities organised in their locality, outside school (51%). However, 49% did not agree that their children have opportunities to give their opinion about projects for children.

Satisfaction and areas for improvement

The majority of children participants are satisfied with the parks, gardens and other open areas where they can enjoy nature (87%), the places where they can play and do sports (86%), and that they have opportunities to participate in what happens in their locality (82%). The aspects they are least satisfied are related to safety, namely safety from strangers or other people (27%), safety from cars and traffic (26%) and safety from bullying by other children (23%). The areas they would like to be improved most are safety from cars and traffic (65%), a cleaner

and healthier environment (53%), more places where they can play and do sports (49%), more open and green areas (48%) and safety from strangers (47%) (Table 3).

On the other hand, the adolescent participants are most satisfied with the inclusion of children and young people in their locality (77%), buses and public transport (74%) and safety from bullying by peers (72%). Most are also satisfied with adequate space to play, walk and cycle (65%), green and open areas (64%) and suitable places where to meet and socialise (59%). The aspects which participants are least satisfied with are opportunities to give their opinion on what they would like in their home town (38%) and that their opinions are taken seriously (27%). The areas in their locality they would like to be improved most include more suitable places where they can meet and hang out with friends (57%), and increased safety from traffic, more adequate places where they can go to walk, play, do sports or cycle, and a cleaner and healthier environment (48%) (Table 3).

Table 3 - Children's and adolescents' satisfaction with their locality

Children	N	%	Adolescents	N	%
Safety from cars and traffic	60	65.2%	Suitable places where I can meet and hang out with friends	56	56.6%
Clean and healthy places (no rubbish, noise, dust, smells)	49	53.3%	Safety from cars and traffic	47	47.5%
Places where I can play and do sports	45	48.9%	Adequate places where I can go out to walk, play, do sports or cycle	47	47.5%
Parks, gardens and other open areas where I can enjoy nature (trees, plants, animals, water)	44	47.8%	The environment is clean and healthy (no rubbish, noise, dust, pollution)	47	47.5%

Safety from strangers or other people	43	46.7%	There are parks, gardens and other open areas where I can enjoy nature (trees, plants, water, animals)	39	39.4%
The space where I can cycle	39	42.4%	Safety from crime, drugs and violence	33	33.3%
Play and nature areas can also be used by children with a disability	35	38.0%	Safety from abuse by strangers and other adult people	33	33.3%
Safety from bullying by other children	34	37.0%	Play and social areas can be used by young people with a disability	31	31.3%
All children (boys, girls, children with disability, children from other countries) have the opportunity to participate in what happens in my town/ village	32	34.8%	Safety from dangerous and abandoned buildings	29	29.3%
Opportunities to help with projects to change my town / village	22	23.9%	I have opportunities to give my opinion on what I would like in my town / village	28	28.3%
Opportunities to be asked about what I would like to change in my town / village	17	18.5%	All children and young people are included (boys / girls, children with a disability, children from different countries)	26	26.3%
			Buses and public transport in my village / town	22	22.2%
			My opinions are taken seriously when I say something	21	21.2%
			Safety from bullying by peers	20	20.2%
			I have opportunities to participate in local council, parish council, other youth organisations in my town / village	11	11.1%

Parents

Parents had mixed views on the adequacy, cleanliness and safety of their locality for their children. While 40% were satisfied with the green areas where their children can enjoy nature, another 40% were not satisfied. Parents were also divided on the state of the play and clean areas (39% satisfied / 34% dissatisfied), the accessibility of places for all children (31% satisfied / 34% dissatisfied), the availability of social places for children (37% satisfied / 32% dissatisfied) and safety from drugs (35% satisfied / 33% dissatisfied). More than half did not agree that there are adequate space where their children can go to play and cycle (54%) or that these places are safe from cars and traffic (57%). Parents also expressed concern about lack of opportunities for children to express their opinions (45%), lack of cleanliness and pollution free environment (40%), and lack of safety from bullying (35%). On the other hand 49% were satisfied with adequate means of transport for children and 41% with the inclusion of all children in their locality.

The areas parents would like to be improve most are: increased safety from cars and traffic for their children (71%), more adequate spaces where their children can play different games, sports, physical exercise and cycling (61%), and more green areas where children can enjoy nature (58%). They would also like to see increased safety from crime, drugs and violence (51%), more suitable places where children can meet and socialise with others (49%), clean and well maintained play and nature spaces (49%), and clean and healthy environment (no rubbish, noise, dust or pollution) (48%). Public transport, peer bullying and inclusion were the areas least mentioned for improvement.

Table 4 - Parents' satisfaction with their locality

	N	%
Safety from cars and traffic for my children	224	70.9%
Adequate space where my children can play different games, sports and physical exercise	193	61.1%
Adequate space where my children can go out to play and cycle	192	60.8%
Green areas where my children can enjoy nature such as parks, gardens and natural open spaces	182	57.6%
Safety from crime, drugs and violence	160	50.6%
Clean and well maintained play and nature spaces for children	156	49.4%
Suitable places where my children can meet and socialise with others	155	49.1%
Clean and healthy environment (no rubbish, noise, dust or pollution)	152	48.1%
Opportunities for my children to participate in social activities organised in my locality	129	40.8%
Accessible places for all children, including children with a disability, young children, parents with pushchairs	119	37.7%
Opportunities for my children to give their opinion about what they would like in their locality and for those opinions to be taken seriously	118	37.3%
Safety from bullying by other children	110	34.8%
Inclusion of all children in my locality (boys / girls, children with disability, children from other countries)	91	28.8%
Adequate means of public transport for my children	52	16.5%

Living in Gozo vs other regions in Malta

When compared to children living in other regions in Malta, particularly the Harbour and Northern regions, children living in Gozo are more likely to visit playing fields and football grounds more frequently, while children and adolescents in Gozo are more likely to agree that they have sufficient open play areas and that the places where they play are clean and cared for. Adolescents living in Gozo

in comparison to those living in various regions in Malta are also more likely to visit green areas and to play in parks, football grounds, and in their streets more frequently, and to agree that adults listen to and respect young people, and that they have opportunities to participate in social activities organised in their locality.

Similarly parents living in Gozo are more likely to agree, when compared to those living in various regions in Malta, that their children can walk to shops, play areas, and other public places and that they can visit these places on their own, to go out to play, walk or cycle on their own, and that children have opportunities to participate in projects and activities in their locality. On the other hand, parents living in Gozo are less likely to agree that there is noise and pollution from cars and factories in their locality, that public buildings and facilities are frequently vandalised, or that there is a problem with rubbish, drains, dust, or dog mess.

Conclusions and recommendations

Most children and adolescents in this study are satisfied with their play, open and nature areas, safety and cleanliness, but would appreciate to have more say in what happens in their locality. Adolescents are less satisfied with the play and sports areas than younger children, while the latter appear to be more concerned about pollution and safety issues. Both children and adolescents would like increased safety from traffic, a cleaner and healthier environment and more adequate play and sports areas. Adolescents would also prefer more places in their locality where they can meet with friends.

On the other hand, most parents did not agree that their children have adequate play and sports areas and would like more cycling,

walking and play areas for their children in their locality. They agreed that there are adequate nature areas, but would like to see more play and nature trails for their children. Most parents agreed that children are respected and have opportunities to participate in activities in their locality, but would like their children to have more say in what happens in the locality. The areas parents would like to improve most include increased safety from cars and traffic, more spaces where children can play different games, sports and cycling, more green areas where children can enjoy nature, and increased safety from crime, drugs and violence.

Recommendations

Local councils may establish formal procedures on how to include the voices of children and young people in their locality, and appoint designated members responsible for policy actions on how to make the locality more child and family friendly.

National indicators of child-friendly towns and villages, leading to the award of quality labels to local councils who satisfy the established criteria. An inter-ministerial committee led by the Commissioner for Children, has started to work on the development of the indicators.

Initiatives by regional authorities (eg. Gozo Regional Development Authority) and local authorities (local councils, community leaders) in collaboration with the communities themselves (including children and adolescents), on how localities in Gozo may continue to be transformed into a more child-friendly ones, such ensuring there are adequate, varied, accessible, inclusive, well maintained, safe and clean open, play and nature areas; nature and adventure trails; adequate, accessible and free physical exercise and sports facilities, develop mentally appropriate

spaces for young people where they can engage in physical activity and meet and socialise with their peers; enhanced safety for children and adolescents from traffic and crime; enhanced mobility within and between localities; inclusion of all children and young people in the community; and enhanced participation and stronger voice for children and young people in the locality.

Empower communities in Gozo to actively participate in the protection of the environment in their towns and villages, and in feeling more responsible to take care of their locality and protect the environment as a whole.

Raise more awareness on the relationship between the environment and wellbeing, and how the quality of life and physical and mental health are impacted by the quality of the living spaces in residential areas as well as in recreational and nature areas.

Prioritise environmental education from the early years up to lifelong learning, to promote an eco-friendly culture and practices at regional, local and individual levels.

Children and young people living in Gozo, as well as their parents, appear to be more satisfied with the quality of their living spaces and the environment when compared to those living in various other regions in Malta. Care must be taken however, not to be complacent and take this advantage for granted. Children, young people and parents in this study have raised a number of issues and underlined the need to protect their towns, villages, and countryside in Gozo from overdevelopment, traffic, commercialisation, pollution and construction. Living in Gozo is still characterised by numerous benefits, including less urbanisation, healthier environment and more nature areas. At the same time however, Gozo may be more

vulnerable than Malta as the impact of development may be more significant and evident in view of Gozo's environmental vulnerability, limited size, population density and limited resources (GRDA, 2021).

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Reviewing Gozo

A look at TripAdvisor data

Reuben Ellul Dimech

Abstract:

An analysis of TripAdvisor reviews for Gozo reveals some key insights in the strengths and weaknesses of Gozo as a tourist destination. These data are used to better understand tourism in Gozo, measure the performance of the industry, and assess the implications of the findings from a managerial perspective. Web-scraped data confirms that reviews for attractions in Gozo on TripAdvisor dropped significantly after 2019, and do not appear to be back to their pre-Pandemic levels. This makes the flow of new reviews all the more precious. The bulk of reviews for attractions in Gozo are directed at restaurants. While there was a strong improvement in review scores since 2017, there was also a surge in the number of customers reviewing their experience at the lowest end of the scale - in particular for restaurants. Reviews are highly concentrated, with positive reviews linked with staff interactions coming across as knowledgeable or well-informed, as well as excellence in service received. Negative sentiments, on the other hand, are linked with communication issues or cleanliness.

Keywords:

Gozo, Malta, tourism, web-scraping, TripAdvisor reviews, sentiment classification.

Author's Bio-Note:

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Reviewing Gozo

A look at TripAdvisor data

Introduction

Tourism is a major economic driver for the Mediterranean island of Gozo. In recent years, the island has seen a significant increase in the number of tourists visiting, contributing to economic growth and development.

Gozo is known, amongst others, for its beaches, historical landmarks, and vibrant culture, attracting a large number of tourists yearly. The island's tourism industry is supported by a range of different accommodations, including hotels, guesthouses, and holiday rentals, as well as a variety of restaurants and shops catering for tourists.

The influx of tourists also led to the growth of a range of tourist-oriented businesses, like boat tours, diving and water sports, which provide employment opportunities for the Gozitan population. In addition, the tourism industry has spurred investment in infrastructure, including the upgrading of the island's electrical distributions, harbours, road network and transportation systems.

With the economic benefits of tourism, some challenges associated with the industry in Gozo also appear. One of the main concerns is the potential impact on the island's environment and natural resources, due to the increase in the number of tourists hence increased strain on local ecosystems and infrastructure. In addition, there are concerns about the effects of over-tourism on the island's culture, the viability of societies in the face of property speculation, and challenges to the Gozitan way of life. All of this is framed in the context of the potential for price inflation, and gentrification.

Overall, tourism plays a crucial role in the economy of Gozo, providing employment and driving economic growth. However, it is important for the island to carefully manage the industry to ensure its long-term sustainability, its fit with Gozitan society, and the preservation of the island's unique culture and environment.

While tourism is an important element in the Gozitan economy, information on quality, numbers and trends remains limited. While efforts to report regional statistical data have improved significantly the ability of policymakers to gauge the island's economy: a lot remains to be done with regards to Gozitan data published by the National Statistics Office (NSO) are often aggregated, published infrequently and lacking a lot in terms of granularity.

To obtain high frequency data on Gozitan tourism, one has necessarily to be creative. A very good source of data is TripAdvisor. This is a popular platform for tourists to share their experiences and provide feedback on the destinations they visit.

An analysis of TripAdvisor reviews from tourists about the island of Gozo would reveal some key insights in the strengths and weaknesses of the island as a tourist destination. Unfortunately,

TripAdvisor data is not easily accessible. To solve this issue, this study constructs a scraper to read, save and clean all the reviews published by visitors for Gozitan hotels, restaurants and attractions.

These data are then used to better understand tourism in Gozo, measure the performance of the industry, and assess the implications of the findings from a managerial perspective.

Literature review

The study of online reviews is at the heart of many studies on tourist flows. Reading reviews by other travellers is identified in the literature as an essential part of the planning and pre-consumption stage of the voyage. It helps to provide all the information and data required for visits, be it dietary restrictions, accommodation size, as well as looking at real life photos taken by actual visitors. Reviews therefore become a significant marker for the eventual success of businesses, and act as electronic word-of-mouth (Cantalops and Salvi, 2014). Visitors choose to express their rating of an experience for various reasons, such as to aid fellow travellers or to feel part of a community, beyond the need to analyse the services received (Yoo and Gretzel, 2008).

Reviews published on rating sites tend to have a number of elements in common (Korfiatis, et al., 2012), such as numerical ranking, usually on a scale from 1.0 to 5.0, with 3.0 signifying an average experience, 1.0 a terrible experience and 5.0 an excellent one. A qualitative version of the individual experience is usually also shared, typically in the form of a summary of the personal experience. Venue managers can also, in certain cases, reply to these reviews. The review publication date, which may be different from the visit date is also usually shared. The

reviewer's profile, which is not always linked to a traceable user, and some sort of vote linked with the platform users' perceived usefulness of the individual review may also be present.

When users begin their search for accommodation, for a restaurant or activity, they are presented with various alternatives. Travellers can form opinions quickly on the relative preference of, for example, a restaurant by consulting the aggregated rating from users, or by the relative ranking with respect to other options in the neighbourhood. If the prospective customers prefer, they can then further their study of a particular venue by reading the in-depth reviews left by other travellers (Mariani and Baggio, 2020).

Xie et al. (2017) look at the related research on managerial responses, and find how online reviews published by patrons who ate at a restaurant, or visitors who stayed at a hotel, are a crucial source of information for managers of these venues: customers are testing the service being offered for free, and are providing timely information to decision makers. Pantelidis (2010) discusses how the act of a managerial response may turn a dissatisfied customer into a loyal one. Venues should consider in earnest the situational awareness and power of reviewers and learn from their language. Meek et al. (2021) argue that managers who communicate like their customers – that is, in a more informal way, without “hard selling” will resonate more with their consumers.

Venue managers are also able to present themselves online, sharing photos of their hotel or cuisine, and reply to comments. The strategy of operators is to create a feeling of trust in users' reviews, thus leading to an increase in the positive perception of their venue, and just how knowledgeable and discerning they are with respect to their aptitude for the services provided (Pantelidis, 2010).

Given the importance of reviews to narrow down prospective customers' choices, the literature focuses considerably on the weight given to factors such as the overall rating or the number of reviews for each venue. For restaurants, for example, Liu et al. (2008) argue that the number of reviews for a restaurant is the most important factor, while Dellarocas (2003), believes that it is the average of all ratings given by users that takes precedence in decision making. Zhang et al. (2009), show how before whittling down venues to investigate further by reading individual reviews, prospective users first look at the overall rating. When this is high, prospective clients will read the experiences of other users. This applies even if the number of reviews is low. On the other hand, if the overall rating is low, the touristic product is simply ignored outright.

Published reviews, and the sentiment that they report, may influence successive users. In fact, Zhang et al. (2010), Sridhar and Srinivasan (2012) and Aral (2014), discuss the phenomenon of social influence. Under certain conditions, a social conversation or discussion will lead to a consensus among participants, with a group opinion forming. The theory, applied to online reviews, implies that if there are predominantly positive reviews for a venue, these not only serve for users to adjust their expectations and expect better service, but interestingly enough, lead to a self-fulfilling positive experience.¹ This view is even more valid if the positive information is found across multiple sources. High ratings across different channels will strengthen the good reputation of the hotel or restaurant reviewed, making it likelier for them to reach out, and for example, book a table (Zhang et al., 2009).

¹ For a review of the literature see Orlikowski and Scott, (2014).

Following the above literature, this study aims to collect, document and assess information on attractions in Gozo as found on the popular reviewing website, TripAdvisor. The literature in this subject area, in particular for restaurants, is vast. For example, studies have shown how even if users have very different social or cultural backgrounds, the basic premise of their reviews tend to be similar, such that the factors which determine the choice of a restaurant or hotel tend to always fall on a number of determinable factors. For restaurants, the literature agrees that this is linked with the quality of the food, atmosphere and service are the most important factors in decision making by reviewers (Pedraja and Yague, 2001; Zhang et al., 2010; Jeong and Swank, 2011).

A caveat particular to TripAdvisor is the phenomenon of fake reviews. Studies have argued how fake reviews carry a sufficiently strong economic impact that actors who are endowed differently on an economic scale will venture in “promotional reviewing to a measurably different extent” (Mayzlin et al., 2014).

Recent literature on TripAdvisor’s effects on restaurants and hotels is increasingly specialising into particular questions, such as differences between general public and expert ratings (Yoo and Suh, 2022), geographical applications – such as the Mediterranean (Mandić, et al., 2020), and spatial clustering (Mossay et al., 2020).

Methodology

As the individual reviews make up the main structure of the feedback given to individual attractions, this study performs content analysis of the whole corpus of reviews obtained from TripAdvisor. Defined by Berelson (1952), content analysis is the description of the content

of communication. Krippendorff (1980) describes it as one of the most important methodologies in social sciences. Today, this field of research is understood to be a heterogeneous and wide collection of techniques used to interpret documents deriving from processes linked to communication, with the final aim being valid and trustworthy inferences (Stemler, 2000). Content analysis is typically used to process and understand mass media channels, such as newspapers, radio transmissions and TV debates. This approach was found to be so useful in finding applications in the fields of linguistics, sociology and history. It was also applied in medical fields like psychology, (Krippendorff, 1989). In fact, as early as in Kerlinger (1973), this method of analysis was found to be a plausible alternative to questionnaires and interviews. This is because it is based on the analysis of different verbal relationships that happen between users, rather than the questioning of users themselves.

From the 1990s onward, the use of internet led to significant advances in the fields of computer aided qualitative data analysis software. These allow the labelling of text portions with concepts favoured by researchers (Krippendorff, 2013).

While useful, these methods are difficult to apply to lengthy texts. Nonetheless, the content analysis continues to support many disciplines to describe different phenomena, to observe relationships and interpret the consequences of these contacts (Riffe et al., 2014).

There are various methodologies behind content analysis. However, there are two broad categories, namely the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The first focuses on data and computations derived from it, and provides a descriptive analysis based on inference. The latter is a categorical or thematic analysis, where the

presence or essence of the pinpointed attributes is in turn chosen as the basis for the inference process. The objective, therefore, in this latter approach, is the analysis of the identified themes - or sentiments - and to assess whether these can be categorised. This latter approach is very sensitive, as the methodology has to be able to fulfil a number of criteria. The categories ought to be exhaustive and exclusive, and they should be objective and relevant to the sentiment's classification. The structure can be defined either a priori or after the corpus of the text is analysed. The automatic classification of the content is only possible if the process was designed and operated correctly.

After cleaning the data,² a classification algorithm was chosen based on the literature on sentiment analysis. Classification, as discussed above, simply means placing data in different categories or classes based on a computation or algorithm that determines the sentiment implied by the data. The number of classes depends on the problem chosen. A restaurant may be good, or bad. It can have a scale of five stars, or three. Many classification algorithms are available, such as the support vector machine, baseline, and the naïve Bayes classifier. This study focuses on the latter, as it is preferred for classification because of its advantages - namely in terms of simplicity and speed.

² Large datasets present their own problems. Those scraped directly from the internet more so. The dataset has to be cleaned, and processed properly, before the data is analysed by the classification model. It is expected to always remove any part of the data which is irrelevant, especially if it makes the classification system more efficient. For example, reviews left in Italian or French, will not be parsed properly by an English based parser. Likewise, reviews contain many different data types and characters. Unicode characters have to be sanitised, as do URLs. Moreover, there are different data types at play in the dataset: dates, text strings, floats and integers all present unique challenges for the data modeller. Location or user profiles can be published as well, but as an option and not as strict requirements.

Naïve Bayes classifiers assume that the existence of a single feature in a class is not linked with the existence of any other feature. If one is classifying texts, the algorithm will be presented with a hypothesis - that a particular text belongs to a particular category class (c). The proof, or evidence, that this is the case will be the words (w) occurring in the text. If the classifier is discriminating between religious historical texts and modern French literature reviews, the presence of words like “filioque” will support the hypothesis that it is in the former category, while words like “existentialist” will support the latter. The hypothesis with the highest likelihood, will be the final classification.

Mathematically, for a class c and a word w , Bayes' Theorem implies:

$$P(c|w) = \frac{[P(w|c) \cdot P(c)]}{P(w)} \quad (1)$$

assuming $P(w) \neq 0$, where $P(c|w)$ is the probability of being in class c , given word w . $P(w)$ is the probability of word w , and $P(c)$ is the probability of class c . The naïve Bayes classifier will then be:

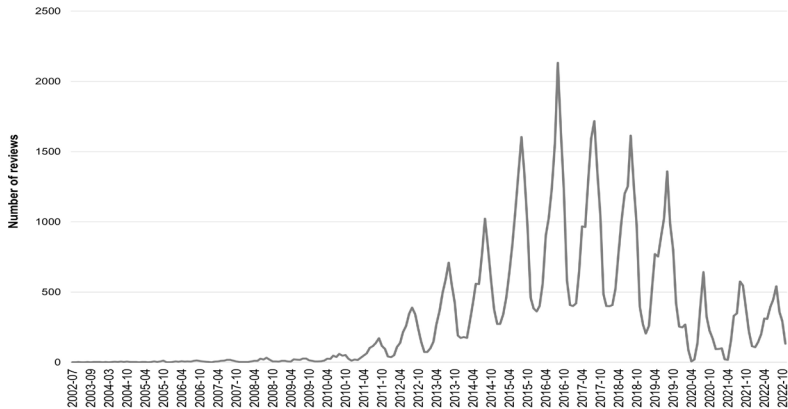
$$c^* = \operatorname{argmax} P(c|w)$$

Data

A Python 3.10 environment was specified and used to scrape tourist reviews for attractions and activities in Gozo. Using these methods, 74,549 reviews were scraped with reviewers who visited the islands between July 2002 and November 2022 (see *Chart 1*). These tourists visited 443 sites with reviews, of which 58.0% were restaurants,

33.6% were attractions, and 8.4% were hotels. Of the roughly 74,500 reviews mentioned above, 48.3% were directed at restaurants, 37.6% at attractions, and 14.2% at hotels.

Chart 1 - Reviews posted on TripAdvisor (July 2002 to November 2022)



One immediately notices a seasonal pattern in the data, coinciding with the seasonal nature of tourism in Malta in particular, and the Mediterranean in general. Before 2010, there appears to be a limited number of reviews of Gozitan amenities, with a significant surge in 2016, which then eases down by 2019.

In 2020, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic leads to a significant break in the series, which remains at these lower levels all the way to November 2022 (see Table 1). Of course, there are two competing factors at play in the above series. On the one hand, the number of reviews on TripAdvisor will be affected by the popularity of the website with internet users.

Competition from other reviewing sites, and the site's relative obscurity in the early 2000s affected the website's ability to attract reviewers. The second factor at play is the link between visitors to

Gozo, and those who write reviews. By definition, review writers have self-selected. There may be hundreds of visitors, but only very few reviewers. In fact, a look at official statistics reveals that for every 100 official visitors, only around 2.1 to 2.7 tourists write reviews. Post-COVID, this drops to 0.7.

Table 1: Visitors to Gozo and reviews per visitor ^A (Number of reviews)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Foreign visitors	183,159	204,849	180,979	39,724	70,655
Maltese visitors	236,838	227,121	215,272	348,489	365,252
Total visitors to Gozo	419,997	431,970	396,251	388,214	435,907
Reviews on TripAdvisor	11,304	10,092	8,253	2,625	2,896
Review per visitor	2.7	2.3	2.1	0.7	0.7

^A Data obtained from the Regional Tourism releases published by the NSO. Data included in this table were sourced from NRI29/2022, NRI33/2021, and NRI10/2020.

Using NSO data, which only provides annual data from 2017 onward, Table 1 shows how total visitors rose in 2018, and declined thereafter - only reaching 2018 levels again in 2021, on the back of Maltese visitors, rather than foreigner visitors who remained at around a third of 2018 levels.

The decrease in reviews makes the case for a drop in the power of reviews as quality indicators post the COVID pandemic. Representativeness may have been lost, with the sharp break in series affecting the usefulness of reviews on this platform. One may conjecture, that this makes the lower flow of new TripAdvisor reviews all the more precious for attractions in Gozo, and operators in this sector.³

³ TripAdvisor discusses “Recency” as an important component to a listing’s popularity indicator - see: <https://www.tripadvisor.com/business/insights/hotels/resources/tripadvisor-popularity-ranking>.

While total visitors rose to 2018 levels in 2021, scraped reviews remained only marginally above 2020 levels. This is significantly below the 10,092 reviews recorded in 2018. It appears that while visitors returned in the post-COVID world, the typical reviewer demographic did not.

Of the 74,549 reviews scraped in the dataset, 68.3% are left in English. The second and third most popular languages are French and Italian, at 7.5% and 7.1% respectively. Around 5.5%, or 4,122 reviews, are left without text - and therefore the language is not directly observable. The next largest reviewing languages are German (4.3%) and Dutch (1.6%).

When it comes to identifying the location of the reviewing users, the information becomes slightly sparser - as users may choose not to divulge their location. In fact, of the total number of unique reviewing users in the dataset, that is, 46,577, only 30,763 (or 66.0%) chose to share their location. Of these, the largest single group were users reviewing from the United Kingdom (10,166, or 33.0%), followed by users from Malta (7,726, or 25.1%). Interestingly, while 5,726 reviewers were from the island of Malta, 2,000 reviewers were Gozitan themselves. The next group of reviewers were from Italy, (2,479 reviewers), followed by France (1,999 users), and Germany (1,202). These figures are similar to the language figures discussed above, although one must note that certain countries may share a common language and affect the ranking order in the two definitions. Turning to ratings given by reviewers on TripAdvisor, the majority of Gozitan hotels, restaurants and attractions were rated with a five. In the first eleven months of 2022, 73.9% of reviews were fives (see *Table 2*).

Table 2: Ratings in Gozo reviews by attraction type, and total (Percentage distribution)

	Rating	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	(Jan - Nov)						
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Restaurants	1	3.6	4.5	6.3	6.5	6.7	6.7
	2	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.1	4.0	4.3
	3	7.2	7.1	6.7	4.2	3.7	4.4
	4	21.6	21.7	17.8	10.7	9.8	10.8
	5	64.2	63.4	65.9	75.5	75.8	73.7
Hotels	1	3.4	3.0	2.6	3.8	4.8	3.1
	2	3.1	3.1	3.7	3.8	6.4	5.0
	3	10.4	9.8	8.8	8.9	9.9	6.6
	4	28.3	26.2	23.3	16.6	14.4	14.7
	5	54.8	57.9	61.6	66.9	64.5	70.6
Other	1	2.1	2.1	2.1	4.6	2.9	3.1
	2	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.3	1.7	2.0
	3	8.4	9.0	7.9	7.5	4.3	6.6
	4	26.0	24.4	22.5	17.8	18.3	11.7
	5	61.2	62.4	65.6	68.9	72.8	76.6
Total	1	2.9	3.3	4.3	5.7	5.6	5.3
	2	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.8	3.9
	3	8.1	8.2	7.4	5.6	4.6	5.3
	4	24.2	23.3	20.2	13.1	12.3	11.6
	5	62.0	62.4	65.3	72.8	73.7	73.9

An interesting insight is how the overall quality of experiences reviewed by visitors improved from 2017 to 2022. More five-star ratings were given in 2021, than in 2017 (that is, 73.7% against 62.0%). It is apparent that users rating with a four, halved in the five years

to 2021, presumably reviewers rated restaurants, hotels and other attractions higher, explaining the increase in highest ratings in latter years. Another interesting point is linked with restaurants. While this category also saw a surge in ratings of fives, restaurants rated with a 1.0 rose to 6.7% in 2021, from 3.6% in 2017. So, while there was an improvement in ratings at the higher end, the lower end experienced an increase as well.

Table 3: Ratings in Gozo reviews by attraction price point class

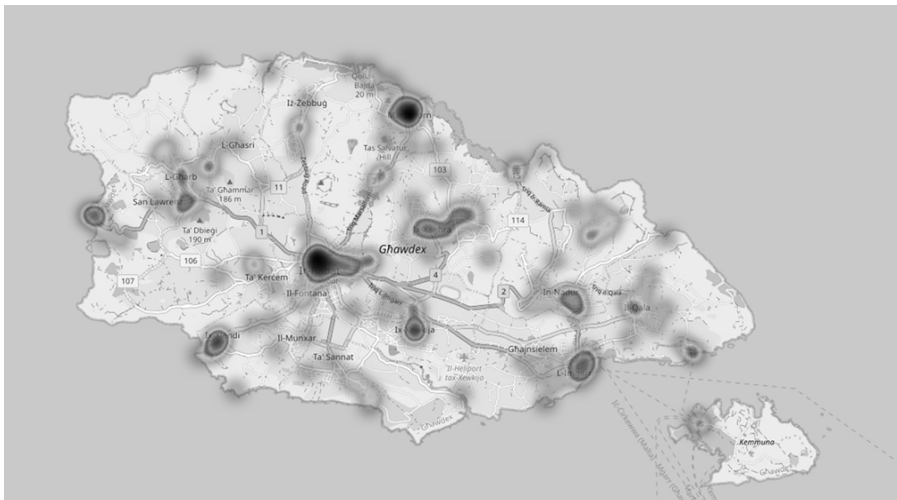
	Positive Reviews		Neutral Reviews		Negative Reviews	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
\$	3759	86.4	282	6.5	308	7.1
\$\$ - \$\$\$	24678	84.8	2053	7.1	2354	8.1
\$\$\$\$	1851	87.4	119	5.6	149	7.0

Table 3 presents the distribution of reviews by the price point quality class identified by TripAdvisor using dollar symbols, with \$ being the lowest range, and \$\$\$\$ the highest ranged attraction. These ratings tend to be listed for eateries, cafes, snack bars and restaurants. These are mapped onto the reviews, split into three classes: Positive reviews are those reviews rated 4.0 or higher, neutral reviews are rated 3.0, negative reviews are rated 2.0, or lower. This analysis is only possible for 35,553 reviews, as the other 40,000 reviews are for attractions without the “dollar symbol” categorisation. Across the three classes, there is a strong degree of homogeneity in the distributions. The bulk of reviews are positive, irrespective of quality range, and positive reviews exceed 84.0% of the total for all categories. This may indicate that each quality range of attraction caters for distinct types of tourists who visit Gozo. The largest of these, representing the largest target market, is the mid-

range \$\$ - \$\$\$ category, followed by the lower end \$ category and then the highest one.

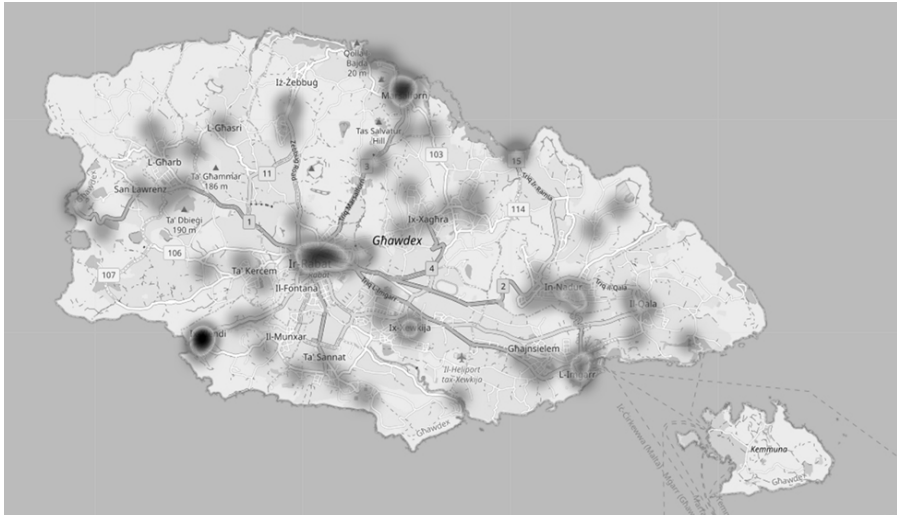
Finally, looking at restaurants and hotels only, in terms of review count, the top ten reviewed locations, or 3.4% of all locations, accounted for 29.4% of all reviews. This is an indication of a highly unequal distribution for hotels and restaurants, with a limited number of highly popular venues attracting the most reviews - and thus, presumably, visits. This difference is highlighted in Figures 1 and 2. The first shows the heatmap of hotels and restaurants reviewed. The second is a heatmap for all the reviews for these location types, with the unequal weighted distribution of reviews making the heat map more concentrated. Immediately, one notices how reviews for hotels and restaurants centre on Rabat, Marsalforn and Xlendi, with minor concentrations in some other villages.

Figure 1: Geographical heatmap for hotels and restaurants in Gozo as individual locations



Base map: [openstreetmap.org](https://www.openstreetmap.org)

Figure 2: Geographical heatmap for reviews of hotels and restaurants in Gozo weighted by distribution



Base map: [openstreetmap.org](https://www.openstreetmap.org)

A number of other insights appear from the two heatmaps. Certain localities have a high number of restaurants and hotels for visitors, but have a lower relative number of reviews. A case in point are the villages of Xagħra, Għasri and Għarb. The concentrations in Figure 2 are much lighter than in Figure 1.⁴ The hypotheses behind the data would imply that there are either fewer visitors to these villages, that there are fewer attractions in these villages, or that the visitors to these villages leave, on average, fewer reviews than others.⁵ Another reading of the data would be that plotting the reviews on a map serves as an indicator for the degree of commercialisation of a particular area of Gozo.

⁴ One has to note that Figures 1 and 2 also includes seasonal food kiosks, and other non-permanent structures. Figure 2 will assign a lower heat value to areas with lower frequency of reviews.

⁵ From a scientific point of view, one cannot exclude the possibility that the data is somehow biased against these locations due to some other unexplained factor.

The villages of Xewkija, Qala, Nadur, Għajnsielem, as well as the harbour of Mġarr, appear to have a strong concentration of both reviews and venues.

Sentiment analysis

A casual reading of the reviews on TripAdvisor reveals some strengths and weaknesses of Gozo. The island's natural beauty, particularly the many beaches, and the countryside, is a major draw for tourists. Many TripAdvisor reviewers praise the scenery, and several activities available to visitors. Gozo's historical landmarks and cultural attractions also receive positive feedback, with many reviewers mentioning the island's rich history, and cultural highlights. This fits with the literature on cultural heritage in Gozo (Borg, 2017). The local hospitality and friendly atmosphere are also frequently mentioned as strongpoints of a visit to Gozo.

Some reviewers also highlight areas for improvement. A common criticism is the lack of public transportation options on the island, with many tourists citing difficulty in getting around without a motor vehicle. In addition, some reviewers mention issues with cleanliness, rude interactions and maintenance of some of the island's facilities and attractions. The latter appears to be a stronger driver for negative reviews, than the former.

Figure 3: Word map for top words in TripAdvisor reviews for attractions and venues in Gozo



Figure 4: Filtered top words for venues and attractions in Gozo



Digging a bit further in the reviews reveals some commonalities across the different reviews in the English corpus of the text (see Figures 3 & 4). Except for the word “Gozo”, Figure 3 reveals how reviews in English for attractions in Gozo are linked with expected holiday related terms like “trip” and “boat”, as well as geographical

placenames, and activity related terms (“swimming”, “snorkelling”, etc.). Looking at the filtered version of these keywords, Figure 4 shows particular words used in reviews for attractions in Gozo, that are more frequent than normal in reviews. Words like “bus” appears particularly more than expected, as does “focus” and “go”. Other words like “dive”, “show” and “light” again indicate the type of activities carried out in Gozo.

Naïve Bayesian classification methods were applied on a partitioned sample for positive and negative reviews of restaurants in Gozo.⁶ Restaurants were chosen as they represent the largest component of attractions in the sample. After controlling for common stop words in the English language, the classifier functions identified 15 top contributing words that flagged a review as negative, or positive.⁷ These are shared in Table 4. Positive reviews appear to be linked with restaurants’ interactions coming across as well-informed “knowledgeable”, or of extremely good quality - “perfection”. This analysis also shows how cleanliness and communication issues (rude, complained, excuse) are crucial to negative sentiments recorded by reviews of Gozitan restaurants. A further step from this classification exercise was focusing only on adjectives and nouns (see Table 5). Communication and cleanliness issues again appear as the key contributors to negative sentiment classification. Keywords linked with food preparation also appear (tasteless, salty, frozen) in the top 15 flags for sentiment classification.

⁶ TripAdvisor ratings of 1.0 and 2.0 are deemed to be negative, reviews with rating of 4.0 and 5.0 positive. Reviews of 3.0 were deemed to be neutral, and removed from the sample of English language reviews in this sub-analysis.

⁷ A sample of 1500 positive and negative reviews was first applied to the dataset, to train the model. The rest was used to test the accuracy of the model.

Table 4: Key sentiment contributors (All words)

Keyword	Sentiment	Sentiment likelihood vs. other option
dirty	negative	60.2:1
awful	negative	44.3:1
perfection	positive	40.2:1
disgusting	negative	36.2:1
breathtaking	positive	32.7:1
rude	negative	32.4:1
terrible	negative	29.6:1
toilet	negative	28.5:1
worse	negative	27.2:1
worst	negative	25.5:1
awesome	positive	25.4:1
complained	negative	22.2:1
tasteless	negative	20.7:1
poor	negative	18.9:1
excuse	negative	18.6:1

Table 5: Key sentiment contributors (Nouns and adjectives)

Keyword	Sentiment	Sentiment likelihood vs. other option
rude	negative	58.2:1
dirty	negative	52.5:1
perfection	positive	36.2:1
terrible	negative	32.3:1
toilet	negative	26.8:1
poor	negative	23.4:1
tasteless	negative	22.4:1
mediocre	negative	20.2:1
salty	negative	15.9:1
old	negative	15.3:1
superb	positive	15.0:1
extensive	positive	14.9:1
knowledgeable	positive	14.3:1
frozen	negative	14.1:1
shame	negative	13.7:1

Conclusions

Web-scraped data confirms that reviews for attractions in Gozo on TripAdvisor dropped significantly after 2019, and do not appear to be back to pre-pandemic levels. This makes the flow of new reviews all the more precious.

The bulk of reviews for attractions in Gozo are directed at restaurants. Reviews are mostly left in English, with most reviews coming from the United Kingdom. Visitors from Malta and Gozo come in second, followed by users from France and Germany.

Comparing 2017 with 2022, the overall quality as reviewed by customers improved. However, this hides a surge in customers reviewing their experience at the lowest end of the scale - in particular for restaurants.

The reviews are evenly distributed along the rating classes used by TripAdvisor, with the mid-ranged restaurants and eateries prevailing in the dataset.

Reviews are highly concentrated. The top ten hotel and restaurant locations on their own accounted for 29.4% of all reviews. Heatmaps reveal the difference between the concentrations of locations and reviews.

Naïve Bayesian sentiment classification for Gozitan restaurants reveals how positive reviews are linked with interactions coming across as knowledgeable or well-informed, as well as excellence in service received. Negative sentiments, on the other hand, are linked with communication issues or cleanliness.

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The Malta-Gozo Air Service

Part 1 - The Early Endeavours

Joseph Bezzina

Abstract:

Malta is an archipelagic nation that wants for its people equal rights to such as immediate access to the best education and health facilities, good job opportunities, environmental enhancement, as well as simple and easy connectivity with the rest of the nation and the outside world. Sea and air transport is thus crucial and essential for the thriving of Gozo. This research describes the early endeavours to link Gozo with Malta with an air service. Initiatives from entrepreneurs and leading Gozitans were not wanting, but the powers that be, hardly showed any interest in the enterprise and one project after another floundered.

Keywords:

Air transport, Gozo-Malta, inter-islands connectivity.

Author's Bio-Note:

Joseph Bezzina, born in Victoria, Gozo, is a graduate of the University of Malta and the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, from where he earned a first-class Honours doctorate in Church History. He was for seventeen years Head of Department of Church History at the University of Malta. In 1989, he founded the Gozo Section of the National Archives, which he directed until his retirement in 2020. During the same time, he was Assistant National Archivist. He is the author of close to eighty books and many studies published in English, Maltese, French, German, Italian, and Portuguese.

The Malta–Gozo Air Service

Part 1 - The Early Endeavours

Malta is an archipelagic nation that wants for its people, it is plausible to presume, equal rights to such as immediate access to the best education and health facilities, good job opportunities, environmental enhancement, as well as simple and easy connectivity with the rest of the nation and the outside world. Sea and air transport is thus crucial and essential for the thriving of Gozo, the second largest island of the Maltese archipelago.

1 - The early inter-islands connectivity

Rafts have operated for at least eight thousand years and it was on such a pretty reliable craft that, some seven thousand years ago, a group of immigrants crossed the seventy-nine-kilometre stretch of open sea that separates Gozo from Sicily, its closest major hub. It was not long before these Neolithic farmers in search of land crossed over from Gozo to Malta, situated just under six kilometres to the south-east. Comino, the other island of the Maltese archipelago, lies almost midway in *il-fliegu ta' Għawdex*, the Gozo-Malta channel.

Around 2500 BC, the ancient Egyptians began to build boats that were able to withstand sailing across the open seas. By 1500 BC, the Phoenicians of ancient Canaan developed a sailing vessel powered by manpower that was used both for fighting and trading. These must have first appeared in the Gozo-Malta channel around 700 BC, when the Phoenicians reached and took over the Maltese archipelago.

The *dgħajsa ta' Għawdex*, the Gozo boat, may have developed from this Phoenician prototype. It was to dominate the Gozo-Malta and the Gozo-Sicily channel for centuries. This lateen-rigged boat, up to sixteen metres long with a four-metre beam, was rated between forty and fifty tons. It had two lateen sails normally rigged to port and starboard.

The inter-islands connectivity made a big step forward when a regular steamship service was introduced on 13 June 1885. Steamships had been sailing on the high seas since the beginning of the nineteenth century, but progress in the means of connectivity always reached the archipelago with considerable delay. These Gozo boats and the steamships facilitated connectivity and played an important role in the commerce between Gozo and its major hubs.¹

On 17 December 1903, the brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright flew the world's first successful motor-operated airplane in North Carolina. It was the first controlled, sustained flight of a powered, heavier-than-air aircraft that they had invented and built themselves. Forty years later, on 23 June 1943, a far-advanced model of their invention landed in Gozo for the first time.

¹ Joseph Bezzina, *The Gozo - Malta Ferry service - Il-Vapuri ta' Għawdex. From prehistory to present days* (= Gaulitana 10), Valletta 1991.

2 - The first Malta-Gozo flight (1943)

World War II had taken a positive turn for the Allies in May 1943 when they had succeeded to gain control over the whole of North Africa. They immediately started preparations for the next major campaign in the Mediterranean, the invasion of Sicily.

Operation Husky, the code-name of the planned invasion, had been in the pipeline for months. Meticulous preparations in Malta were spearheaded by Sir Keith Park AOC, RAF who, since 14 July 1942, had become the Air Vice-Marshal, the Air Officer Commanding, on the besieged island of Malta.² By the first quarter of 1943, the Fighter and Bomber squadrons had taken up all available space in the airfields of Malta. He was eager to have at least three additional Spitfire squadrons on stand-by in Gozo. It was imperative to construct an addition airfield on that island.³

Viscount Andrew Browne Cunningham, Admiral of the Fleet, had floated the idea of an airfield in Gozo as early as 1938. In a meeting of the Defence Committee, responsible to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the War Office, he had put forward such a suggestion to enhance the defence of the Maltese Islands.⁴ However, to no avail.

By early May 1943, Sir Keith Park had convinced the War Office to

² Franco Masini, *When planes landed on Gozo... 20th anniversary of wartime airfield*, in *The Sunday Times of Malta* (09 Jun 1963) 9.

³ Charles Bezzina, *The Gozo Airfield*, Victoria/Gozo 2004 - an invaluable record of the whole undertaking.

⁴ [Andrew Browne Cunningham], *A Sailor's Odyssey, the autobiography of Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope*, London 1951, 548.

undertake that enterprise. Aerial support, it was agreed, was of paramount importance for the success of Operation Husky and the airfields in Malta could not take the additional Spitfires required for the purpose.⁵ “However, the RAF Construction engineers said it was impossible to construct an airfield in Gozo because of its rocky nature”.⁶

Major John Colt Beaumont Elliott, a renowned US military engineer, thought otherwise. Having been made aware of Sir Keith’s request during a brief stopover in Malta, he made a lightning visit to Gozo. On his return, he assured Sir Keith “that the American Construction Engineers could built an airstrip in two weeks”.⁷ Major Colt immediately cabled General Carl Andrew Spaatz, then Commander of the Allied Northwest African Air Force, to dispatch an engineer from the Aviation Regiment to assess the locality - a strip of garigue bordered by cultivated fields known as Ta’ Lambert, roughly situated between the villages of Xewkija and Għajnsielem.

The 21st Engineer Regiment, Aviation, of the United States of America, then based at Bône (Annaba), Algeria, obliged immediately. The engineers assured Sir Keith Park that with their specialised manpower they could build an airstrip in ten days and indicated Marsalforn Bay as their beachhead. Orders to the Regiment to move to Gozo were issued on 27 May.⁸

Company E, 2nd Battalion, of the 21st Engineer Regiment, departed

⁵ Vincent Orange, *Park: the biography of Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, GCB, KBE, MC, DFC, DCL*, London 2009, 164.

⁶ Keith Park to John Bezzina (16 Feb 1959), in *The Gozo Airfield*, 35.

⁷ *Ibid*, 35 - 36.

⁸ *The Gozo Airfield*, 16. 19.

from Bône on nine LCTs, Landing Crafts Tanks, on 1 June.⁹ On 3 June, the convoy reached Sousse, Tunisia, from where a destroyer guided the convoy through one minefield after another across the treacherous Mediterranean towards their destination. On 5 June, it dropped anchor off Malta as rough weather prevented it from reaching Gozo. At long last, on 6 June, they entered Marsalforn. The convoy was made up of six officers and one-hundred-and-ninety-seven men.

The landing of tractors, scrapers, mechanical shovels, and large trucks, the like of which the Gozitans had never seen, started immediately. Hundreds of Gozitans lined the route from Marsalforn to Xewkija to enjoy the spectacle. The plan was for one runway and a taxiway system with seventy-eight hardstands, paved areas for parking planes.

With the help of several hundred Gozitan labourers, the cleaning up of the area started immediately. On 10 June, Sir Keith Park visited the site and it was decided there and then, that a second shorter runway was necessary. Work went on around the clock and the laying of the main runway on an East-West axis, roughly from Ġhajnsielem to behind the Xewkija Church, started on 15 June. By Sunday, 20 June, both runways were completed. Incidentally, it was on that same day that His Majesty King George VI paid a visit to Malta.¹⁰

On Wednesday morning, 23 June 1943, Sir Keith Park “personally made the first landing on the airstrip”.¹¹ It was the first Malta-Gozo

⁹ Robert R. Lewis, *History of Company E (1 June - 21 July 1943)*, a detailed chronicle of events obtained through diplomatic channels by Franco Masini, *ibid.*, 9. It is reproduced in full in *The Gozo Airfield*, 19 - 27.

¹⁰ *Times of Malta* (21 Jun 1943) 1. 6.

¹¹ Keith Park to John Bezzina (16 Feb 1959), in *The Gozo Airfield*, 36.

flight. Shortly afterwards, Group Captain John 'Jack' Bernard Riley landed in a Spitfire on Runway No 1, followed in quick succession by Wing Commander Ronald Thomson who landed on No 2. Later in the day, the famous British Ace Wing Commander Adrian Warburton landed in another Spitfire and, on leaving, he put up an acrobatic aerial display to the enjoyment of the hundreds of Gozitans who had flocked to the site.¹²

In the evening of the following day, Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Secretary of State for Air, arrived in Malta¹³ and on 25 June he toured the Maltese aerodromes, including the Gozo airfield, accompanied by Sir Keith Park.¹⁴ They probably flew in a two-three seater Beaufighter. Mable Strickland commented in the Times of Malta leader: "Such is the measure of achievement here (in air strategy), no small credit for which is due to Malta's fighting Air Chief, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park".¹⁵

The Allies launched Operation Husky before sunrise on 10 July 1943 with a massive amphibious assault on the southern shores of the island. For the next three days, it involved more than 3,000 ships landing over 150,000 ground troops, covered by more than 4,000 aircraft, a number of which flew from Gozo. Operation Husky came successfully to an end on 17 August.

By early August, the airfield had already been abandoned and the whole area was returned to its original owners. The fields and farmhouses were reconstructed and the owners fully compensated for any losses sustained.

¹² Robert R. Lewis, *History of Company E*, in *The Gozo Airfield*, 19 - 27.

¹³ *Times of Malta* (25 Jun 1943) 1.

¹⁴ *Times of Malta* (26 Jun 1943) 1.

¹⁵ *Times of Malta* (26 Jun 1943) 2.

¹⁶ *Masini, ibid*, 9.

3 - Plans for a helicopter service (1947)

As early as mid-1943, many were of the opinion that the landing strip should have been left to stand to be converted to civilian use.¹⁶ As a matter of fact, the possibility of a permanent air link between Malta and Gozo was not overlooked by a local entrepreneur. Everyone had actually been impressed by the building and benefits of the Gozo airfield.

Anthony Hugh Cassar (1909-1988), a leading businessman, was the first to come up with the idea of a helicopter service between Malta and Gozo. In 1946, he founded the firm Cassar & Cooper with his close colleague Frederick Cooper. The following year the firm set up Malta's first-ever aircraft operating company, Air Malta Ltd.¹⁷

The revelation of his plans was triggered by a report in *The Sunday Times of Malta* on a test flight made by Captain A. G. Lamplugh in an Irving Bell Helicopter that landed in front of the British Aviation Insurance Company offices in Lloyds Building, London.¹⁸ Captain Lamplugh was at the time a fellow director in the local aircraft servicing company British Aviation Service (Malta) Ltd, a subsidiary of Air Malta Ltd of Cassar & Cooper.

Anthony Cassar revealed that the possibility of running a helicopter service between Malta and Gozo and vice-versa had already been discussed during a meeting in London with Air Commodore Griffith J. Powell, Managing Director of Silver City Airways Ltd. Powell was no mean aviator; in 1937, when he served as a pilot for Imperial Airways, he broke the then existing record for the North Atlantic crossing in a flying-boat. This meeting had taken place in the second half of 1947.

¹⁷ Michael J. Schiavone, *Dictionary of Maltese Biographies (A - F)*, Malta 2009, 516.

¹⁸ *The Sunday Times of Malta* (23 Nov 1947) 7.

Cassar further affirmed that as soon as the Irving Bell Helicopter is manufactured on a commercial basis, "it is intended to bring to the sister island of Gozo a fifteen-minute service between the two islands."¹⁹ The Bell 30 helicopter was the prototype for the first commercial helicopter and the first helicopter built by Bell Aircraft Company, Buffalo, New York. Its first flight had taken place on 26 June 1943. It served as a demonstration testbed for the successful Bell 47 referred to by Cassar - the first helicopter in the world to be certified for civilian use on 8 March 1946. It soon became a civilian and military success.²⁰

The entrepreneurship of Cassar is incredible. Just over a year later, he was proposing its use between the Maltese islands "as soon as the helicopter is manufactured on a commercial basis". Cassar further suggested a take-off in Floriana, Malta, and a landing in Victoria, Gozo.²¹ Cassar had another dream. He would have preferred the employment of an aircraft from his Air Malta Consul Service, but, alas Gozo had no landing strip and no such crafts could be employed.

Koli Apap, then Gozo correspondent for Allied Newspapers, immediately expressed his and the Gozitans' appreciation for the initiative of Cassar & Cooper.²² The Government, he affirmed, should support this enterprise by all means as it would be of enormous benefit to the island of Gozo. He suggested that the ideal landing pad in Victoria would be in the large open space next to Il-Mall, Rundle Gardens. It was probably the same spot that Cassar had in mind as indeed a large open space was then available for the purpose.

¹⁹ *Times of Malta* (26 Nov 1947) 4.

²⁰ Alain J. Pelletier, *Bell Aircraft since 1935*, Annapolis/MD 1992, 55 - 58.

²¹ *Times of Malta* (26 Nov 1947) 4.

²² *Il-Berqa* (01 Dec 1947) 7. My sincere acknowledgements to Toni Calleja (Għasri) for providing me with the relative references in *Il-Berqa*.

By a mere coincidence, on 4 December 1947, a few days after the revelation of Cassar, a helicopter, described as “unorthodox in appearance”, landed in Malta for the first time. It took off from the aircraft carrier USS Midway, since 29 October 1947 on its first annual deployment with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. It landed at Hal Far airstrip to pick up the post. On that same day, the helicopter was successfully employed in a rescue operation. It winched up an American pilot of a Skyraider fighter after ditching his plane in the sea during a heavy swell, a mile from Hal Far.²³

The report did not fail to comment that “it is interesting to note that a local airways firm contemplates purchasing a fleet of these craft to operate between Malta and Gozo as soon as they are placed on the commercial market.”²⁴

4 - The venture goes into hibernation

Weeks before this revelation, on 5 September 1947, the Crown Colony of Malta had been granted a responsible Government.

In the run-up to the first election after World War II, Dr Francesco Masini (1894-1962), a lawyer from Victoria, set up the Gozo Party convinced that it was the only way out of the bleak situation in which the island was wallowing.²⁵ In those post-war years, the situation in Gozo was utterly depressing. There was a lot of unemployment and poverty; thousands of Gozitans had to emigrate to find a job to be able

²³ *Times of Malta* (05 Dec 1947) 5; *Il-Berqa* (06 Dec 1947) 7.

²⁴ *Times of Malta* (05 Dec 1947) 5.

²⁵ Joseph Bezzina, *Francesco Masini, founder of the Gozo Party (1894-1962)* (= Gaultiana 14), Rabat/Gozo 1995. This book, based on original papers and an analysis upon them by Franco Masini, Francesco's son, discusses the subject at length.

to maintain their families; and the Gozo-Malta ferry service was in a shamble. The British did preciously nothing to alleviate the suffering.

In the election held between 25 and 27 October, the Gozo Party polled a total of 5,491 first preference votes, 52.16% of the 10,727 valid votes cast in Gozo and returned three of the five candidates from the Gozo district. The election was won by the Labour Party and Dr Pawlu Boffa, its leader, became Malta's fifth Prime Minister. The Gozo Party worked hard to set the ball rolling for reforms and was successful to some extent. However, Boffa had a comfortable majority and he did not need the votes of the Gozo Party, who for most of the time was left to languish in opposition.

It is plausible to presume that the Government poured cold water on the proposal of Cassar & Cooper and the Malta Labour Party, who had not elected a single candidate from Gozo, could not care less. Besides, the Gozo Party itself seemed to harbour little hope on the viability of the helicopter venture. No mention of the project could be traced in their writings.

The Gozo Party did however succeed to convince the Prime Minister to appoint a Commission "to inquire into and report on the requirements of the island of Gozo" and offer suggestions to solve the inherent problems. Instituted on 15 October 1948,²⁶ it did tackle the appalling Gozo-Malta Ferry service, but made no reference to the helicopter project.²⁷

When in mid-1948, the Government launched the first campaign to

²⁶ *Government Notice 630*, in MGG (15 Oct 1948) 1391.

²⁷ See *Passenger and Mail Service*, in Report of the Commission appointed by Government to inquire into and report on the requirements of the island of Gozo : NAG, ZM, 01/103.

attract tourists to Malta, Koli Apap did not fail to refer again to the project of the air link as, he rightly argued, it would help in bringing quality tourists to Gozo.²⁸ Franco Masini could not but agree with such a proposal.²⁹ However, the project soon went into hibernation.

5 - An aerial transport with a difference (1960)

In the following years, several other suggestions were floated to improve the inter-islands connectivity - some of which, it must be acknowledged, were mere wishful thinking.

In early 1960, a different aerial transport was proposed - a suspended cableway linking Gozo to Comino and Malta.³⁰ The idea of this so-called “aerial ropeway” continued to be aired for years³¹ and it was even discussed in a meeting of the Gozo Civic Council on 16 September 1966.³² The Council, a statutory Local Government body having a distinct legal personality, started to function on 4 July 1961.

The idea of a bridge linking Hondoq ir-Rummien, off Il-Qala, Gozo, to Comino, and to Marfa was also aired in the mid-1960s.³³ Discussion on a bridge was at the time encouraged by the inauguration of Forth Road Bridge, on 4 September 1964. This suspension bridge, 2512 metres long and 33 meters wide across the Firth of Forth in east central Scotland, was then the longest suspension bridge in the world outside the United States.

²⁸ *Il-Berqa* (23 Feb 1948) 7.

²⁹ Masini, *ibid*, 9.

³⁰ *Times of Malta* (17 Nov 1960) 8.

³¹ *Il-Berqa* (05 Jan 1961) 3.

³² *Gozo Civic Council* 11/27 (16 Sep 1966) : NAG, CC, 01/02; *Il-Berqa* (29 Sep 1966) 7.

³³ *Il-Berqa* (13 Oct 1966) 7.

In November 1968, G.M. Vella-Gatt, a local businessman, formally launched the project of the bridge and also gave a break-down of the costs.³⁴ In 1969, he founded a Mutual Unit Trust and proposed the still more ingenious idea of a causeway, a raised road across the Gozo-Malta Channel. He even brought Ralph George Covell (1911-1988), a renowned English architect and engineer, to Gozo to promote the project.³⁵ It soon vanished into thin air.

In the meantime, in 1964, the idea of an air-link was revived, but not between Malta and Gozo, but between Malta and Comino. John Gaul, owner of Comino Development Co. Ltd, started discussions with BEA, the British European Airways, for the provision of a helicopter service to the island to serve his hotel and bungalows. At one time, not only the building of a helicopter pad, but even a short airstrip on Comino was being contemplated.³⁶ In late 1967, an unidentified Mr James Crampton requested the Gozo Civic Council to be given permission to operate a light aircraft between Marfa and Gozo through the company Gozo Air that he was setting up. It would be at the service of quality tourists and could be used in emergencies.³⁷ It seemingly went soon into oblivion.

6 - The idea of an air link resuscitated (1968)

Malta and Gozo had become an independent nation within the Commonwealth on 21 September 1964. After that historic date, the first significant proposal for an air link was made by the Malta-Gozo Air Services Ltd a limited liability Maltese company established on

³⁴ *Il-Berqa* (30 Nov 1968) 8.

³⁵ *It-Triq fil-Baħar Għawdex - Malta*, in *Il-Ħajja f'Għawdex* (Jun 1969) Supplement.

³⁶ *Għawdex* (01 Sep 1964) 2.

³⁷ *Gozo Civic Council* III/09 (14 Dec 1967) : NAG, CC, 01/09; *Il-Berqa* (15 Dec 1967) 12.

30 March 1968.³⁸ The person behind the idea was Thomas Ketley, a British entrepreneur.³⁹

On that same day, the company brought over an Islander to Malta to promote its project.⁴⁰ The Britten-Norman BN-2 Islander, the aircraft that it was proposing to operate the Malta-Gozo scheduled service, was a twin-engine ten-seater aircraft. The first production Islander had performed its first flight on 24 April 1967 and its UK type certification was received in August 1967 and that in US in December 1967.

The Company was registered with the specific intention to operate a regular air service between Malta and Gozo and vice versa.⁴¹ Its directors were F.D. Albanese, Marquis A.R. Cassar de Sain, E.N. Ketley, Franco Masini, and Nigel Desmond Norman. Masini was a Gozitan destined to render sterling service to the industrial community throughout his life; while Nigel Desmond Norman (1929-2002) of Britten-Norman Ltd was one of the aircraft's designers. On that same 30 March 1968, a number of ministers and local personalities were taken on a trial flight over Gozo.⁴²

Jerry Maynard, a former naval aviator and the firm's sales manager, who was present for the trail flight, expressed confidence that the Islander would prove ideal for an inter-island scheduled service. Its other uses could include charter work for the Government and commercial and touristic tours to neighbouring Sicily and Libya.⁴³

³⁸ See <https://mlt.databasesets.com/company-all/company/1055>.

³⁹ *Times of Malta* (28 Jun 1969) 1.

⁴⁰ *Times of Malta* (30 Mar 1968) 9; *Il-Berqa* (30 Mar 1968) 8.

⁴¹ Registration No C 1066 · Progressive No 258/1968 in MGG (10 Apr 1968) 1015.

⁴² *Times of Malta* (30 Mar 1968) 9.

⁴³ *Times of Malta* (30 Mar 1968) 9.

The Company had in the meantime sought the expertise of the Royal Engineers, a locally recruited unit of the British army, to carry out a survey of the site earmarked for an airfield - an area known as at Ta' Lambert, 1.6 kilometres south-east of the village of Xewkija. It was more or less in line with Runway No 1 of 1943. By then, the site had been surveyed and estimates obtained for its conversion into a safe landing field.⁴⁴ The venture had the approval in principle of the Government, the Gozo Civic Council, as well as of the Public Works Department.

The Company proceeded its lobbying with the Government so that the Department approves the survey and sets in motion the building of the airfield. At the time, four out of the five members of Parliament elected from Gozo were from the Nationalist Party, the Party in Government, but Gozo was not represented in the cabinet to press and insist on the advantages of the air link.

The project was amply promoted in the Gozo stand at the Malta International Trade Fair of that year. On 9 July 1968, Prince Charles, the present King Charles III, on an informal visit in Malta, toured the stand. It was announced on that occasion that the Company had paid deposits for two Islanders and that the aircrafts were expected for delivery the following Spring.⁴⁵

John Parnis-England, the newly appointed Managing Director of the Company, acknowledged that the introduction of the air service largely depended on the speed with which negotiations with the Government and the authorities concerning a landing strip in Gozo would be finalized.

⁴⁴ *Times of Malta* (10 Jul 1968) 9.

⁴⁵ *Times of Malta* (10 Jul 1968) 9; *Il-Berqa* (10 Jul 1968) 8.

By coincidence, on that same week of July 1968, it was announced that the preparatory survey work on the first stage of the new Mgarr Harbour breakwater was concluded.⁴⁶ This was the result of two and a half years' work by a Commission appointed by the Government in December 1965 to assess this major project. As a result of its findings, in May 1969, the Government authorised the building of two modern breakwaters that would enlarge the harbour area to 30 acres, 121,406 square metres.

7 - The Islander Calypso (1969)

On 20 June 1969, the first Islander, captained by Chief Pilot A.M. Milnes, landed at Luqa Airport after an eight-and-a-half-hour flight from London.

It was welcomed at the airport by J.K. Arbuthnot, the Chief Executive of Malta-Gozo Air services and Malcolm Archer, Director. Its name Calypso together with the Maltese flag were painted prominently on the sides of the fuselage. The livery had been designed by Guy Maynus, a commercial artist.⁴⁷ It was the first aircraft to bear the flag of Malta and to be owned and maintained by a Malta registered company.⁴⁸

On 27 June, it was officially christened Calypso by Lady Dorman, the wife of the Governor-General Sir Maurice Dorman, and blessed by His Lordship Nicholas Cauchi, bishop of Gozo. The ceremony took place on the apron of Luqa airport.⁴⁹ The guests were then taken on a short flight. It was calculated that the trip from Malta to Gozo

⁴⁶ *Times of Malta* (10 Jul 1968) 9.

⁴⁷ *Times of Malta* (21 Jun 1969) 17.

⁴⁸ *Times of Malta* (28 Jun 1969) 1.

⁴⁹ *Times of Malta* (28 Jun 1969) 1. 32.

would take seven minutes. The aircraft, it was confirmed, would also be used for charter and pleasure flights.

The Company soon applied to the Civil Aviation Authority for the registration of the aircraft in Malta.⁵⁰ It was technically referred to as BN-2A Islander carrying the Constructor's Serial No 73. It was formally registered with the mark 9H-AAB on 7 August 1969.⁵¹ This was the second time that the code 9H, the National aircraft registration prefix for Malta, had been granted.⁵²

The Company had been informed by the Government that the airstrip in Gozo would only take three months to build. So as to emphasise its resolve, the Company - according to Franco Masini,⁵³ one of its directors - applied to the DCA, Director of Civil Aviation, so that in the meantime it would be granted permission to land the Islander upon Tax-Xħajma, a segment of the Victoria-Nadur road. Its feasibility was backed by experts, including Chief Pilot A.M. Milnes,⁵⁴ and it only entailed the relocation of a number of electricity and telephone poles. The road would be closed for traffic for only a few minutes, from the aircraft's landing to take-off. Gerald H. Ferro (1914–2005), the DCA, who was not enthusiastic about the project, does not seem to have spared a thought for the proposal.

With the ongoing major project of Mġarr harbour, that undoubtedly was more urgent and of greater utility for the population of Gozo, and the fact that an air link would only benefit a minority, it is not

⁵⁰ NAM, OPM, 0882/1969.

⁵¹ NAM, OPM, 0882/1969, 8.

⁵² The Malta registrations range from 9H-AAA to 9H-ZZZ. Previous to Independence, the Colonial allocation was VP-M.

⁵³ Franco Masini, personal communication (03 Dec 2022).

⁵⁴ Anton Tabone, personal communication (06 Dec 2022).

recorded that the planning of the airstrip was ever taken seriously in hand. Once again the Malta-Gozo air link did not materialize.

The bottom line - up to the attainment of Independence in 1964, Malta and Gozo were a colony of the British Crown; the colonial mentality was not erased after Independence. Gozo became a colony of Malta and not a region within the Maltese nation. History bears witness that the interest of colonizers in their colonies was never a priority.

Migration and Social Wellbeing in Gozo

JosAnn Cutajar

Abstract:

In this paper, data from the 2021 census on population and housing will be used to find out which areas in Gozo have experienced an increase in population. To find out what effect this increase in population has had on Xlendi and Marsalforn, the two areas that have witnessed a drastic increase in population, data from the needs assessment survey carried out by The Malta Trust Foundation in 2022, will be used.

Keywords:

Migration, Gozo.

Author's Bio-Note:

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Migration and Social Wellbeing in Gozo

In this paper, the focus will be on the population changes which Gozo has experienced in the last decade, and how prepared Gozo is when it comes to the integration of migrants. The United Nation's International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2019a, p. 132) regards the word 'migrant' as:

"An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students."

Gozo's drastic population change in the period between 2011 and 2021 was evident mainly in Xlendi and Marsalforn. A needs assessment study (Cutajar, 2022) was carried out in these two localities since these were mentioned in an exploratory exercise which The Malta Trust Foundation conducted in 2021. A number

of psycho-social experts who took part in this study expressed their concern that certain segments of the population residing in these localities were at risk of poverty, social exclusion, abuse and perhaps violence on the basis of their migration status, sex, family status and income. Although there were Gozitans who were also at risk, migrants, they feared, did not have access to an informal social network which the rest of the Gozitans depend upon to survive, namely the extended family. This informal safety network is crucial on an island which suffers from double insularity, and where a good number of services and amenities provided by the government, private or non-governmental sectors are available in Malta, but not in Gozo due to economies of scale.

Armed with the suggestions and recommendations made by the psycho-social experts, The Malta Trust Foundation approached the Gozo Regional Development Authority and persuaded this entity to conduct a needs analysis study in Marsalforn and Xlendi. The arrangement was to eventually conduct the research in other areas of Gozo, and to take Marsalforn and Xlendi as pilot studies. The research was designed by Prof Cutajar, and involved a survey conducted with 86 residents (59 from Marsalforn and 27 from Xlendi) on a face to face basis, while face to face interviews were also conducted with 14 enterprise owners or managers who ran businesses in the localities. The data was collected by MISCO for the Gozo Regional Development Authority from December 2021 up to February 2022, and analyzed for The Malta Trust Foundation by Cutajar. A descriptive analysis of the data was undertaken since this was a pilot project and the purpose was to find out the viability of the research design before it was carried out in other localities in Gozo (Cutajar, 2022).

The study set out to see how satisfied the respondents were with

the different services and amenities available in Gozo in general or in their locality of residence, and whether there were gaps in services / amenities offered in these localities which the respondents were concerned about. This study also found which segments of the population depended on which services or amenities, and who they resorted to when they could not access these.

Analytical levels

The survey and the qualitative part of the research focused on the individuals' perception of what was taking place around them. Individuals tend to be embedded in a household or family, which in turn forms part of a community or group, which tends to be situated in a broader social environment (IOM, 2019b) - regional, national or supra-national. All these levels can put the individual at risk or protection, depending on a number of issues as will be underlined in this section.

At the individual level, a person's status in society, is often linked to their physical and biological characteristics. Their sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ability, family status or age among others, can put them at risk or improve their capabilities to avoid, cope with or recover from negative experiences. A Gozitan able bodied, Roman Catholic, middle-aged, heterosexual male who has a Mediterranean countenance, is less likely to face ill treatment in Gozo - but perhaps not in Malta. He is less likely to face exploitation or exclusion from health, education or other services available in Gozo. Non-Gozitan persons, especially Third Country nationals, might be more at risk of social exclusion and/or discrimination in Gozo. Apart from their physical and biological characteristics, other factors can put them at risk. These include their histories and experiences, their beliefs and

traditions together with their emotional, psychological and cognitive character as well as their physical and mental wellbeing (IOM, 2019b).

Different groups of people enjoy a differential status in a given locality at particular moments of time. Their status is linked to their political, cultural and social characteristics. In a country where the Roman Catholic church and the discourse related with this institution abound, non Roman Catholic persons might find themselves socially excluded and their lack of belonging to the mainstream community might affect their access to social contacts and hence information, which in turn can influence access to resources, whether these are material or immaterial. Their positionality can also lead to discrimination, harassment and barriers when it comes to accessing services and resources. When individuals belonging to minority groups are not supported by other members of the community, they can become isolated and vulnerable. They then become easy targets for people who can abuse or exploit them (IOM, 2019b).

Migrants - whether these are Maltese and non-Maltese - are more vulnerable when they are not part of a group. Gozitans for example migrate to Malta in search of work and employment, and they are vulnerable, but being part of a group, helps safeguard their interests. Maltese migrate to Gozo, and in turn they are also vulnerable. This status interacting with sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, family status and disability, can also influence people's experiences within families and communities - whether within migrant groups, or mainstream community in a particular locality or in general.

Families / households and communities tend to reflect and sustain structural inequalities present in any given society (IOM, 2019b). That is why in the survey, although the focus was on individuals, data

was also collected on their positionality within the household and family in which they were located. Consideration was taken of their age, sex, gender, social class, nationality, level of education, migration history, and religion among others, since the intersection of these can render individuals vulnerable to discrimination or exploitation if they do not have the support provided by the extended family, community members and/or social welfare services.

The household and family can constitute risk, depending on the individual's role and position within these structures, as well as the family's circumstances, history and experiences. The family can however prove to be a safety net for those who need support, especially those facing racism (Hill Collins, 2000). Individuals who do not have this safety net to depend on, in regions, or communities where some of the social services and amenities that make life easier are not available, are at risk. Gozo, because of its double insularity and limited economies of scales, is missing certain services and amenities available in Malta. This paper will also explore the effect this has on non-Maltese migrants.

Individual's, family's, household's and household's wellbeing is effected by the economic, cultural and social structures made available in a given community - whether these are found on a local or regional (Gozo) level. The International Organization for Migration (2019b) maintains that a community consists of a number of persons who interact with each other within a particular space, and tend to share common norms, values, attitudes and beliefs. Not all communities have strong social networks that ensure that all individuals and groups embedded within them have access to resources, or are provided with the needed support and protection. Certain individuals or groups are socially excluded on the basis of their sex, gender, race, ability, and others. Access to quality

educational opportunities, health care, social services, leisure and sports resources, decent employment opportunities, and the natural environment depend on one's location in such communities and how the community reacts to people who are different on the characteristics mentioned above (IOM, 2019b). This is what the study set out to find - who had access to what, and on which basis.

Structural factors include the political, economic, social and environmental conditions and institutions found at a local, regional, national and supra-national level (namely, the European Union). The study focused mainly on the local and district, namely Gozo. Racist, sexist, ableist and any other discriminatory discourses and policies at local, regional, national and supra-national level, can lead to systemic marginalization and discrimination of certain groups. So does poor governance, absence of accountability mechanisms and weak rule of law, according to the International Organization for Migration (2019b).

Gozo - the Context

Gozo, Malta's sister island, faces problems of double insularity, for movement of people, import, export, and other economic activities which are vital for the island's quality of life and economic performance. Gozo's GDP performance is underpinned by constraints on economic production and the ability to reap economies of scale, the lack of diversification of products, high transport costs, low attractiveness for investment opportunities, a large public-sector activity and a lack of absorption of technological capacities (Malta Independent, 2012, n.p.).

Apart from this, job opportunities in Gozo are limited, so a number

of people residing there either migrate permanently to Malta or abroad, or commute to Malta for work purposes (Smallwood Cassar, 2020). NSO (2022a) stated that in 2021, 3,642 persons, 1 out of 5 employed residents in Gozo, of which 50.7% were female.

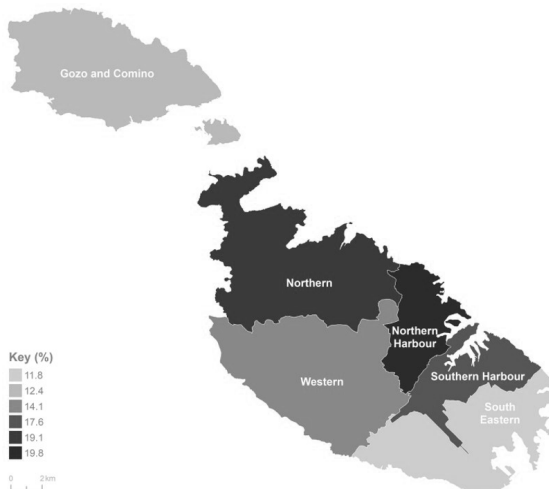
NSO (2022a) data also demonstrates that in 2021, a higher percentage of Gozo residents (35.5%) worked in the public sector when compared with Malta residents (20.1%). Gozo residing workers, like their Maltese counterparts who were employed on a full time basis in the private sector, were during the time-frame mentioned above, concentrated in wholesale and retail; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; transportation and storage; accommodation and food services activities (38.9% of Gozo residing workers' total jobs vis-a-vis 23.6% of Malta ones). In the public sector, Gozitans were concentrated in "the public administration and defense; compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities (O, P and Q) (NSO, 2022a, p. 2).

Briguglio (2016) adds that people who work in Gozo are paid a lower hourly rate than that earned in Malta in any one industry. Data cited by the Malta Independent demonstrates that "the average basic pay for Malta was €19,721 while the one in Gozo was €17,533 showing a €2,188 discrepancy between the two" in 2019. This happens despite the fact that the number of Gozo university and MCAST graduates proportionally surpasses that of Malta. Briguglio (2016) also notes that a higher proportion of those who reside in Gozo have access to low paid jobs. This couples with the factors mentioned before means that those who work in Gozo might face underemployment (Cutajar, 2000).

At risk of poverty rate

Although the wages earned by Gozo residents might be low, the NSO SILC maintains that the Gozo and Comino district had the lowest at risk of poverty rate in 2021 at 12.4% (*Map 1*). The NSO (2022b) notes that the Gozo and Comino district had the lowest at risk of poverty and social exclusion rate by district in 2021 at 13.8% when compared to the other districts. This low rate of poverty and social exclusion is very surprising when one takes into consideration the fact that those who work in Gozo are paid a lower hourly rate, and that the average basic pay is more than 2,000 euro lower than that in Malta. This lower at risk of poverty might be due to the fact that Gozitans tend to have more than one job (Cutajar, 2000) to make up for this income difference. Briguglio (2016) would add that the latter might be in the informal economy. What economists leave out is the fact that Gozitans tend to produce some of the food they consume. This helps to reduce the household's expenditure when it comes to food intake.

Map 1 - Distribution of at-risk-of-poverty rate (ARP) by district: 2021



Source: NSO, 2022b, p. 7

Gozo and Migration

According to the 2021 census, Marsalforn and Xlendi experienced the highest population increases in Gozo and Malta (NSO, 2022c). The psycho-social experts consulted in 2021 noted that people were moving from Malta to Gozo because of the relatively cheaper property rates in Gozo; others were being sent there by social housing officials.

The 2021 Census demonstrates that the Żebbuġ Local Council, which Marsalforn is part of, and the Munxar Local Council, which Xlendi is part of, both experienced a drastic increase in population. Between 1995 and 2021, the population more than doubled in size. Munxar Local Council was also one of the localities which recorded one of the highest increases in population in 2021 due to an increase in residents residing in Xlendi. The population in this locality increased by 75.4% between 2011 and 2022 (NSO, 2022c). Borg (2021) notes that in 2020, the localities with the highest ratio of foreign residents were Marsalforn (28.39% of the population), Xlendi (22.7% of the population) and San Lawrenz (20.1% of the population).

The majority of the people who migrated to these localities were young, adult, males. Their move to Gozo helped to slightly reduce the average age, but to date, Gozitan “residents are still older than their Maltese counterparts” (NSO, 2022c, p. 30). As Gozitans know from experience, this is due to the fact that a good number of young Gozitans aged 18 and over move to Malta or beyond to further their education or to find lucrative employment (Cutajar 2000). Some of those who migrate never return, resulting in aging population and brain drain (Taylor, 2022).

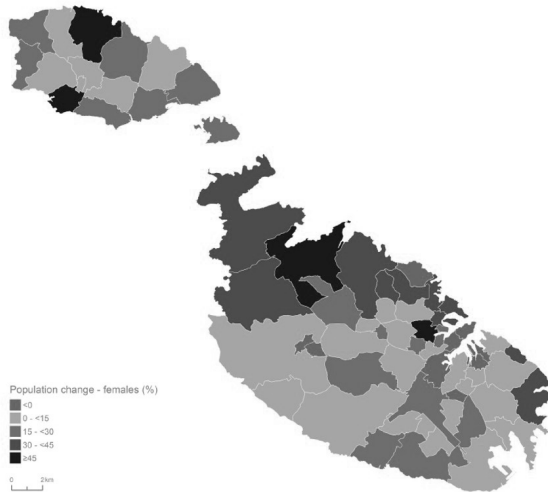
The average age of those who reside in Gozo is also high because a number of British expats set up residence there when they retire.

As cited by Wilton (2021), the University College London stated that the number of expats in Malta has increased since 2014. Gozo also experiences the return migration of Gozitans who in the past had emigrated in search of better job opportunities abroad (Malta Daily, 2021). These factors explain why the average age in Gozo is higher than the national one, even with the incursion of new types of migrants.

Migration helps to address demographic challenges, maintains Gauci (2020), namely depopulation and ageing. It helps rejuvenate the work force in rural areas and small cities. In the case of Gozo, migrants are providing basic services (rubbish collection, street cleaning) and low-skilled work such as farming, caring for the elderly and construction. Their presence helps secure the viability of basic services such as schools, hospitals and shops. Economic growth, as highlighted by Gauci (2020), is associated with greater diversity. This is not an aspect that is not being taken into consideration by some sectors of the population that espouses xenophobic sentiments regarding certain groups of migrants.

Migrants who moved to Malta tended to be “predominantly males (59.3 per cent) and nine years younger (an average of 34.9 years) than their Maltese counterparts (43.6 years) (*Map 2*).” Those residing in Gozo, however, were just two years younger (42.1 years) than the rest of the population in 2021 (NSO, 2022c, p. 32). Migration has also led to change in the male to female ratio in some areas. There were more men than women mainly in Żebbuġ and Munxar (NSO, 2022c). In 2021, 53.1% and 55.6% of the population residing in Munxar and Żebbuġ respectively, were male (NSO, 2022c, p. 48). The short and long term ramifications of the increase of single men (some of these might have families back home), needs to be explored.

Map 2 - Population change - Females (percentage): 2011-2022



Source: NSO, 2022b, p. 7

Due to this in-migration, Munxar and Żebbuġ have a more diverse age striated population than other areas of Gozo. Due to this, the population in these localities had a lower average age when compared to other Gozitan localities (NSO, 2022c, pp. 55, 57). In Munxar, the average age for men was 40.2, while that for women was 42.1 years. This means that in Munxar, women were older than men on average by around 2 years in 2021. When it came to Żebbuġ, the average age for both men and women was around 41 years old (NSO 2022c, p. 59).

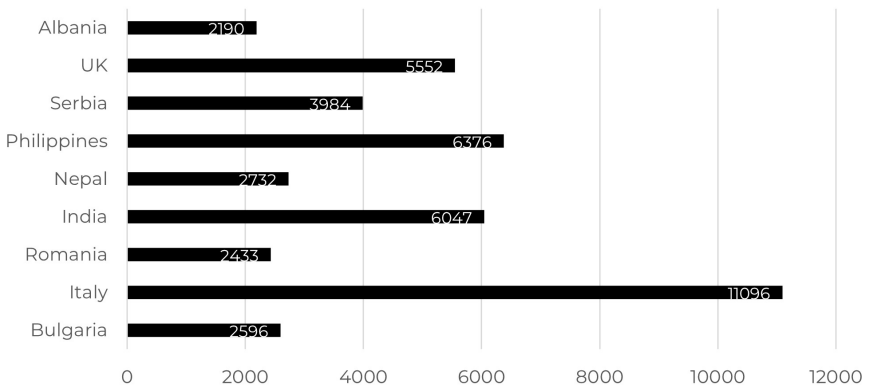
The old-age dependency by locality in Munxar and Żebbuġ in 2021 stood at 21.2 and 24.8 respectively. It has remained one of the lowest in Gozo thanks to the influx of migrants. The same could not be said of other localities in Gozo (NSO, 2022c, p. 62).

Foreign workers

Not all those who have migrated to Malta or Gozo did so for employment prospects only, but this section will focus on foreign workers.

In 2020, there were 3,079 foreign workers working in Gozo, which amounted to 21% of the total labour force in Gozo. The majority of these workers derived from the UK (616), Italy (534), Albania (317), and Serbia (202) (Borg, 2021). Data produced by Jobsplus (2022) denotes that the majority of foreign workers in the Maltese Islands mainly derive from EU member states. The highest represented nationalities are listed in *Chart 1*. When one compares the Gozo with the national Maltese data, one can see that the concentration of nationalities found in the Gozo labour force is somewhat different from that of the Maltese archipelago.

Chart 1 - Top 9 highly represented nationalities in total Maltese labour force, 2021

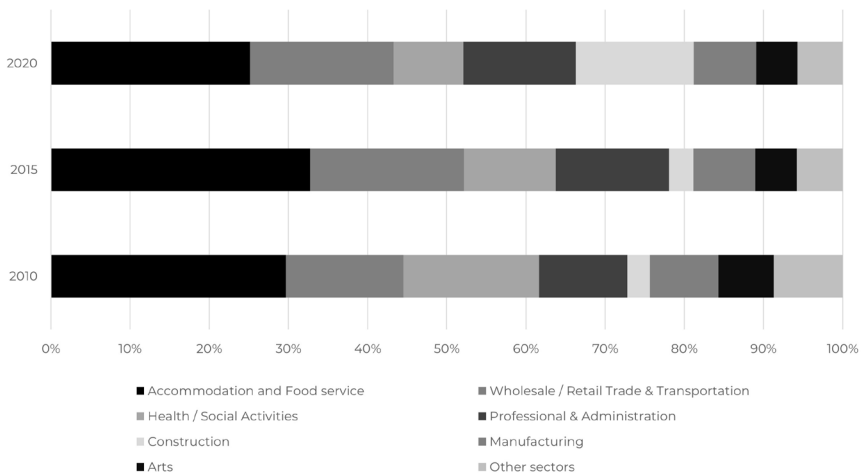


Source: Adaptation of data derived from Jobsplus (2022)

Different nationalities tend to be concentrated in different economic sectors. For example, Indian nationals are more likely

to be working in the health sector; Syrians in construction related employment. Borg (2021) sustains that between 2010 - 2020, 30% of the Gozitan foreign workers were working in accommodation and food activities. In 2020, 15% of these workers were found in the construction sector. The rest were working in the wholesale and retail; professional, scientific, technical, administrative and support services sectors (*Chart 2*).

Chart 2 - Share of migrant workers in Gozo by NACE, 2010-2020

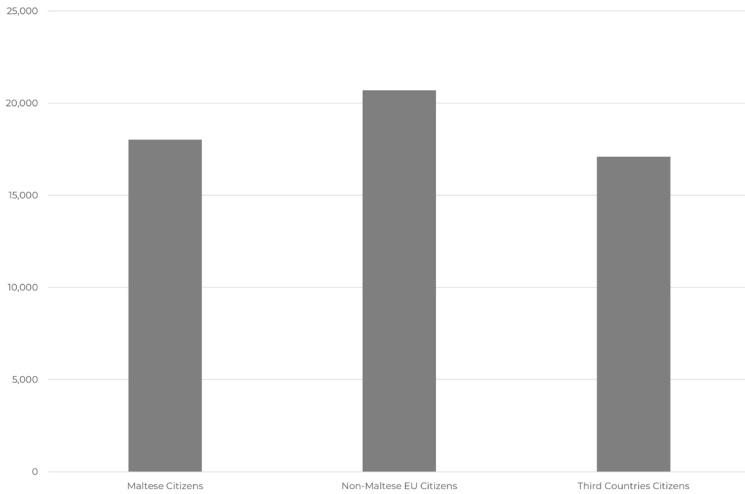


Source: Borg, 2021, p. 6

Maltese, EU and non-EU nationals tend to be concentrated in different major occupational categories. In 2017, Third Country nationals tended to be concentrated in elementary occupations, services and sales together with craft and related trades occupations in the Maltese islands (Cutajar, 2021). This meant that the majority of Maltese and EU nationals were more likely to be concentrated in better paid occupations. The fact that Maltese, EU and non-EU workers were concentrated in different economic sectors and occupational categories had an impact on the average basic salary made. Non-EU workers had a lower

average annual basic salary in 2017 (*Chart 3*) when compared to Maltese and EU nationals.

Chart 3 - Average annual basic salary by citizenship (2017)



Source: *Cutajar, 2021*

Characteristics of people living in Xlendi and Marsalforn

All participants who took part in the survey said that they lived in an apartment. The majority (55%) owned - fully or partially - their property. According to the Central Bank of Malta (2016), the home-ownership rate in Malta stands at 80% of the population. In this sample, the home ownership rate was lower than the national average. The rest (36%) of the respondents, were renting from the private sector, while 9% were in receipt of subsidized rent.

Over 90% wanted to remain living in these two localities because of the natural beauty of the area in which they lived and the employment opportunities they found there; four wanted to emigrate and another

four wanted to find accommodation outside Xlendi.

When asked why they were living in the locality in question, various answers were given. The majority of respondents (25) were more likely to say they had moved to these localities because of the natural environment; 21 respondents stated that they had lived there all their life. Others had moved to these localities because of the good working opportunities found in the area. Some had moved there to be near family or friends. A substantial number - 13 - had moved there for other reasons. A few had been sent there by the Housing Authority or because of the affordable housing found in the locality (*Table 1*).

Table 1 - Reasons why the participants were living in Marsalforn / Xlendi

Sent here by Housing Authority	4
Low priced accommodation	7
Good working opportunities	14
To be near family or friends	13
Natural environment	25
Married somebody from Marsalforn	7
Lived here all my life	21
Other	13
The good number of services and facilities available in the area	3
Inherited property	1
Other	1

Source: Cutajar, 2022

Marsalforn and Xlendi have been described by the psycho-social experts consulted as areas which attract those in search of affordable housing. At 2.8%, the rate of housing cost overburden in Malta is one of the lowest in the EU (7.9%), notes the European Commission report for Malta (EC, 2022). Non-nationals, the European Commission country report (EC, 2022, p.12) notes, “face a much heavier burden with a rate of 25%, against 2.1% for Maltese citizens”.

The business respondents who took part in this research described the population in Marsalforn and Xlendi as consisting mainly of a mix of middle, working and low class households. They also noted that these localities had a noticeable mix of Gozitan, Maltese, and non-Maltese households living together, and yet led separate, parallel lives.

Those who took part in the qualitative part of the research were asked whether they felt that the population living in Marsalforn and Xlendi were constantly changing. A constant population turnover makes it harder for migrants to integrate. The answers were mixed, depending on the clientele they dealt with. Some felt that “the non-Maltese workers change accommodation with a change of job.”

The Gozitan families do not change. Two added that “the constant turnover occurs amongst those in rented accommodation” because the “rent is too high to find something cheaper.”

The participants were asked what effect this constant shifting of residents has on the ‘community.’ The majority answered that it does not have any effect because “the Gozitan community ignores it.” The focus seems to be on the socio-emotional and financial wellbeing of Gozitans only since the rest - the Others - are perceived as transients. One participant underlined that “little community building” occurs.

Who needed help and when

When the participants who took part in the qualitative part of the research were asked whether there was a material divide between Gozitans, Maltese and migrant workers’ living in the two localities, two said no, four said yes and eight said don’t know.

What was clear from the survey though was the fact that the non-Maltese respondents were more likely to depend on state provided services. For example, non-Maltese female respondents with young children - and some Maltese ones at that - were more likely to say they needed childcare facilities after 5 pm or during school holidays. Working respondents who did not resort to the services provided by the extended family tended to rely on alternative structures when schools were closed. The same cohort maintained that their children needed help with their homework which they nor their non-present relatives could not provide. Non-Maltese participants were also more likely than their Maltese cohort to rely on public transport when it came to access work, school, health clinic and other services. They were also more likely than their Maltese counterparts to rely on state healthcare facilities. Around 62% of the non-Maltese cohorts used the health centre or the hospital (25%) - only around 19% depended on the family's doctor. Maltese respondents in both localities were more likely to resort to a private family doctor when they did not feel well.

Non-Maltese respondents who had age related mobility issues, relied on friends and neighbours, or transport for the elderly. They were less likely to be in a position to depend on family members to access banks, go on an outing, attend the health centre or hospital appointments, pharmacy or place of worship when this structure was missing.

It was clear from the data that those who had moved to Gozo, had to form their own support system to be able to survive when the services needed to enable them to live independently were not available. Childcare was an issue with a few. The scoping meetings with the psycho-social experts underlined that the childcare facilities available in Gozo close before the ones available in Malta.

The psycho-social experts also underlined that some of the services

provided by the state or civil society are not available in Gozo, which could prove to be a setback for those who need help. This for example became evident in an exercise which compared and contrasted FSWS services available in Malta and Gozo (*Annex B*).

Means of communication used in these multi-cultural localities

The respondents who took part in the qualitative part of the research were asked which language was used to facilitate communication between the different nationalities living in these two localities. In Xlendi, respondents mentioned that English, Italian and French were used as the primary means of communication. In Marsalforn, the primary means of communication were English and Maltese.

From the data collected it was obvious that some groups/individuals who did not speak Maltese, English, Italian or French were losing out. When the participants were asked whether there was an entity which was helping adults, youth and children to learn Maltese and/or English. They were not clear whether one existed. A Xlendi respondent mentioned the fact that a French man was conducting some language lessons. Another added that *“naħseb li hawn xi nies jgħallmu l-Malti u l-Ingliż b’mod privat. Isemmu wkoll l-iskola ta’ Kerċem”* (I think there are people who give private lessons in Maltese and English. They also mention the school in Kerċem).

A Google search was undertaken to find out whether there were any Maltese and English language learning provisions available in Gozo. From the data it was clear that the respondents would prefer state provided ones. A cursory look at the Migrant Learners’ Unit

site (Government of Malta, 2016, analysed on 22 October 2022) demonstrates that English language lessons are not provided by state or NGOs in Gozo:

Integra Foundation - Free lessons in English and Maltese. Offered in Malta.

Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers (Ministry for Education and Employment) - against payment at the same rate as Maltese citizens but may be offered free on a case-by-case basis. No language learning sessions were available in the Gozo sites listed.

St Andrew's Scots Church, Valletta, Malta - Lessons provided are free.

Youth.Inc - Free lessons, St Venera, Malta.

Unilang International School of Languages, General Workers' Union, Valletta, Malta - Lessons are given against payment.

Jobsplus Training Complex, Hal Far, Malta - Jobsplus offers free English courses.

In one of the scoping exercises undertaken with psycho-social professionals working in Gozo it was noted that some of the bigger enterprises who employ a number of non-Maltese nationals, offer their employees English language lessons. These experts however underlined that in certain areas of Gozo, more resources were needed to deliver induction lessons in Maltese and English to the children of migrant workers and the parents themselves. These participants underlined that in some schools in Gozo, the majority of the students in class did not speak Maltese and/or English, to

the detriment of the students in question. The MLU Induction Programme website mentions Naxxar as a hub for students attending secondary schools - no hub was mentioned as catering for secondary students in Gozo (Government of Malta, 2016).

Religious minorities

As underline in Annex A (*Chart D*), a number of respondents were not Roman Catholic. The only two religions with a devoted space of worship available in Gozo include Kingdom Hall of the Jehovah Witnesses in Victoria. Anglicans can also attend the Roman Catholic English masses at the Gozo seminary, but “if they wish to take the Sacrament they need to apply for written permission from the Bishop of Gozo” (Gozo Diocese, 2007).

The respondents who took part in the qualitative research were asked if they knew where non Roman Catholics worshipped and whether they were familiar with some of these community’s religious leader. None of them knew whether non-Roman Catholic communities met together to pray, where or who was their religious leader. It seemed that non-Roman Catholics kept their religious practices and mores hidden.

What can help bring the different ethnic groups together?

The participants who were running or managing a business were asked what can be done to help bring the myriad groups living in the two localities together. The majority (eight) stated that nothing can be done since these groups lead separate lives and do not want to mix. A few did not want any ‘mixing’ to be undertaken.

The most crucial thing for others was learning to communicate with each other. The next step would involve the organization of inter-cultural activities so that they would get to know more about each other's culture. From the data collected through the survey, it seemed that only the non-Maltese respondents were interested in these types of activities. As Gauci (2020, p. 10) citing the Council of Europe points out, integration is "a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States". Integration can only occur when community members view people, irrespective of their sex, age, race, ability, sexual orientation, nationality or ethnicity as full and equal participants in a community's cultural, social, economic and political life (IOM, 2019b).

A few of the respondents pointed that a number of these non-Maltese, due to their language barriers they were facing and xenophobia among the few, were at risk of exploitation by employers and landlord who took advantage of their lack of knowledge of local conditions, and the reduced bargaining powers in the community (IOM, 2019b). Exploitation and discrimination tend to foment anger and distrust. This can lead to trouble – people who are not happy, often turn to substance abuse and that is when "*jinqala' l-inkwiet*" (trouble ensues), the participants pointed out.

As these statements show, non-Maltese were seen as different, and the general contention was that they should deal with their own integration. Only a few felt that this should be the prerogative of the Maltese authorities. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the Maltese authorities, when they act, tend to provide services in Malta, leaving Gozitans to deal with such issues on their own.

Conclusion

Gauci (2021) sustains that in rural and smaller cities, migrants benefit from greater interaction with locals. He maintains that in this space, migrants find it easier to develop social networks that support their integration and they are at less risk of suffering from structural segregation. Insular and anti-immigration discourses might prove an impediment though. Gauci (2021) however adds that when it comes to the integration, and the social protection of some vulnerable groups, rural and smaller islands are left to deal with these issues on their own. This seems to be the case in Gozo in certain areas as has been underlined above.

Gauci (2021) is of the opinion that since they have less population, rural and smaller cities can be used to test policies and programmed approaches, supported by the provision of institutional structures. They would need skilled human resources and financial support to be in a position to implement integration measures. These are more likely to be given to larger cities. This is because smaller cities or smaller islands might find it difficult to access EU funding.

Malta, the larger island, is trying to address this issue with the help of formal and informal partnerships with civil society. Although such partnerships are available in Gozo, only a few of the entities there specialize in integration issues. The focus to date has been on soft integration measures such as the promotion of language acquisition and material help rather than cultural competencies or the promotion of employment skills.

This research has started the ball rolling. It has conducted a needs assessment analysis to find out the services Maltese and non-Maltese are accessing, and how satisfied they are with the services. The data collected will be used to tease out what other services are

needed, and what needs to be done, whether it is capacity building support for migrants and other vulnerable groups, training or material sustenance.

At the same time the primary objective of this study is to underline that different groups and individuals living on Gozo have distinct realities among themselves and when compared to those on the mainland.

Integration, Gauci (2021) notes, is both a process and an outcome. It involves the development and implementation of policies that promote the interaction between locals and migrants - some locals will resist interacting with the latter, as this research found. At the national level, the government needs to improve policies to ensure a more equitable access to employment, education, healthcare, social services, family, as well as other public goods and services. Policies are also needed to provide migrants with adequate protection (IOM, 2019b). These need to be complimented with the pursuit of pro-poor and equitable development policies which need to be implemented in all areas of Malta and Gozo, not just Malta.

The Maltese government, on its own or in collaboration with civil society, needs to address the barriers that lead to discrimination against specific groups. The efficacy of such policies will depend on whether or not, the population in question were consulted in the framing, development, implementation and monitoring of such policies, sustains Gauci (2021). These policies need to be accompanied by public information campaign on who migrants are, and how they benefit a country / locality. Migrants are needed for the promotion of the Maltese and Gozitan economy and society in general. The Maltese and Gozitans need to be informed about this state of fact.

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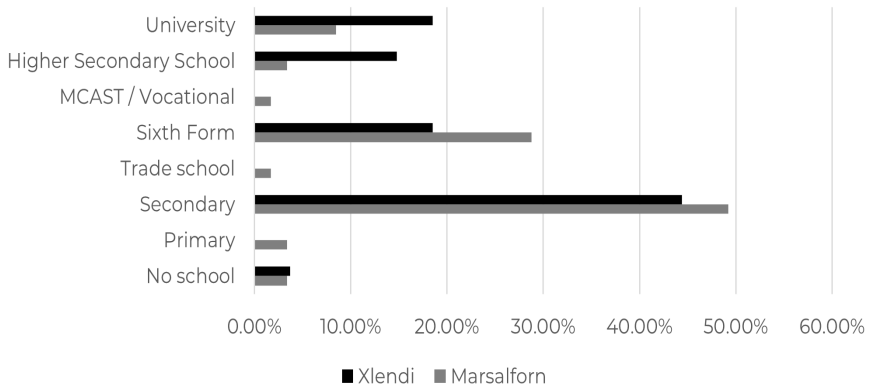
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Annex A - Survey (Sample) Characteristics

The focus of this section of the paper will be on the participants who took part in the survey. The majority (80%) of those who took part in this survey had been living in Marsalforn or Xlendi for less than 10 years. This might be an indication of the transient nature of the people who live in these localities. The majority were married (64% of respondents) or cohabiting (17.4%). The rest were single, widowed, or separated / divorced. The majority of those who took part were parents (47.4%) or other (41.9%).

The bulk of the respondents had a secondary level of education (47.7%) or a post-secondary level of education (34.9%). Only a few had a primary level or tertiary level of education (*Chart A*).

Chart A - Respondents' level of education



With regards to citizenship, the bulk 57 (66.3%) were Maltese, 7% were EU nationals, 4.7% were Brexit, 15.1% were Permanent Residents and 7% were Third Country nationals (*Chart B*). The highest represented nationalities among the respondents were those deriving from the UK, followed by Macedonians, Syrians and Serbians.

Chart B - Citizenship status of participants

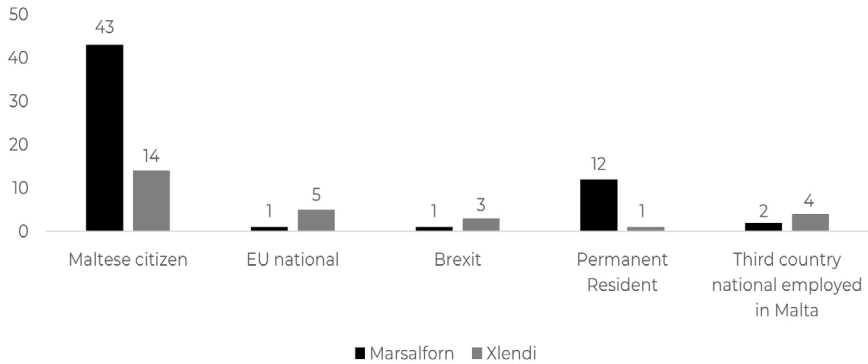


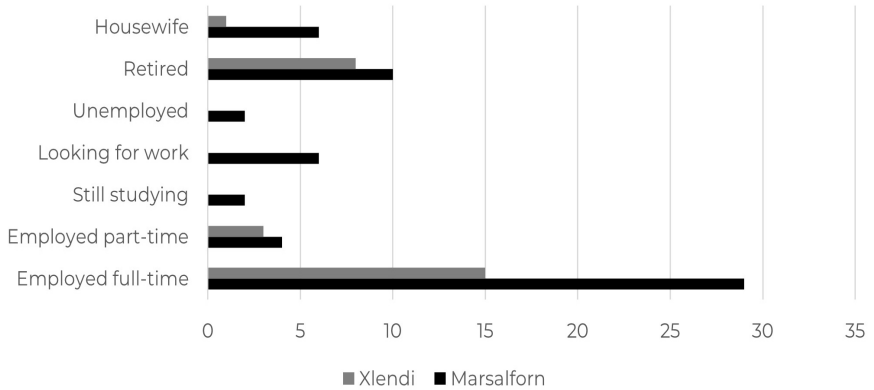
Table A - Nationality of migrant population in Marsalforn and Xlendi

Nationality	Xlendi	Marsalforn	Total
Serbia	1	1	2
Ukraine	1		1
Somalia	1		1
United Kingdom	4	4	8
Macedonia (F.R.Y.)	1	4	5
Italy	1		1
France	1		1
Romania	1		1
Pakistan		1	1
Poland	1		1
Netherlands	1	1	2
Nigeria		1	1
Syrian Arab Republic		4	4

The majority 51 (59%) were employed on a full-time or part-time basis, two were studying, eight were unemployed, eighteen were retired and only seven were housewives (*Chart C*). Marsalforn residents

were more likely to be in employment since on average they were younger than the respondents who took part in the survey.

Chart C - Employment status of participants



When it came to religion, the majority of the Maltese respondents stated that they were Roman Catholic. The rest of the respondents stated they had no religion, other, Russian Orthodox, Muslim and Christian (*Chart D*). The variety in nationality, age, sex and religion among the non-Maltese respondents underlines their diversity.

Chart D - Participants' religious affiliation

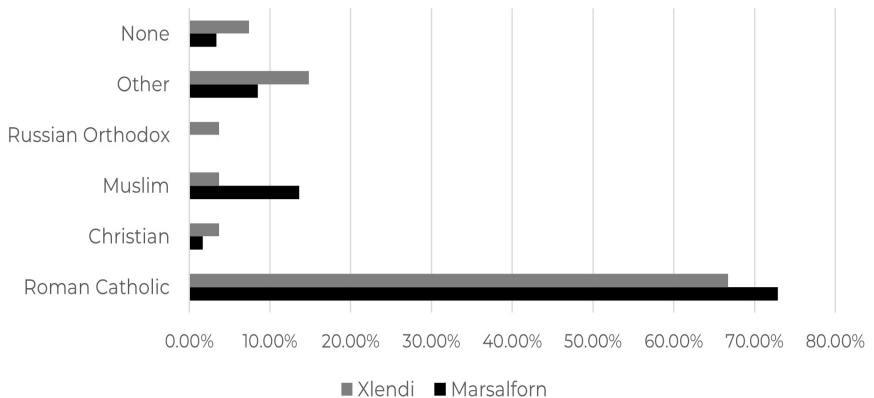


Chart E - Age

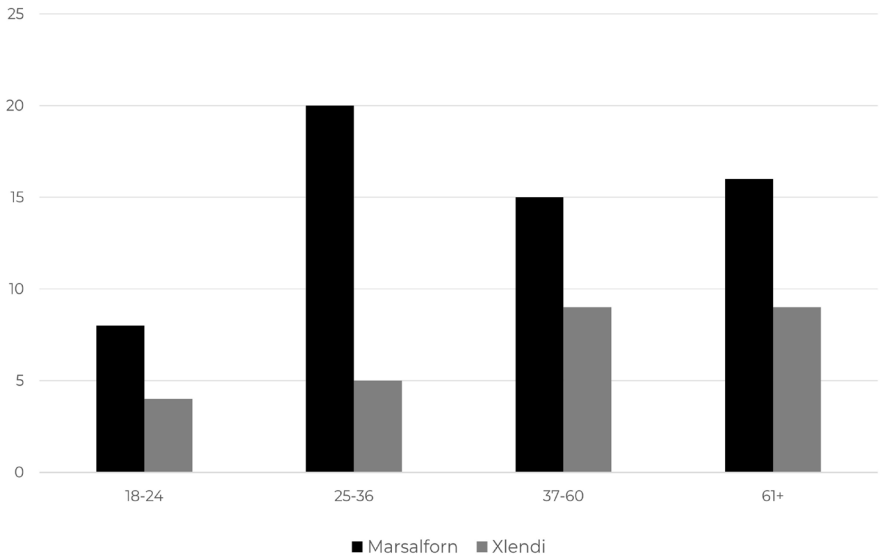


Chart F - How long have you lived there?

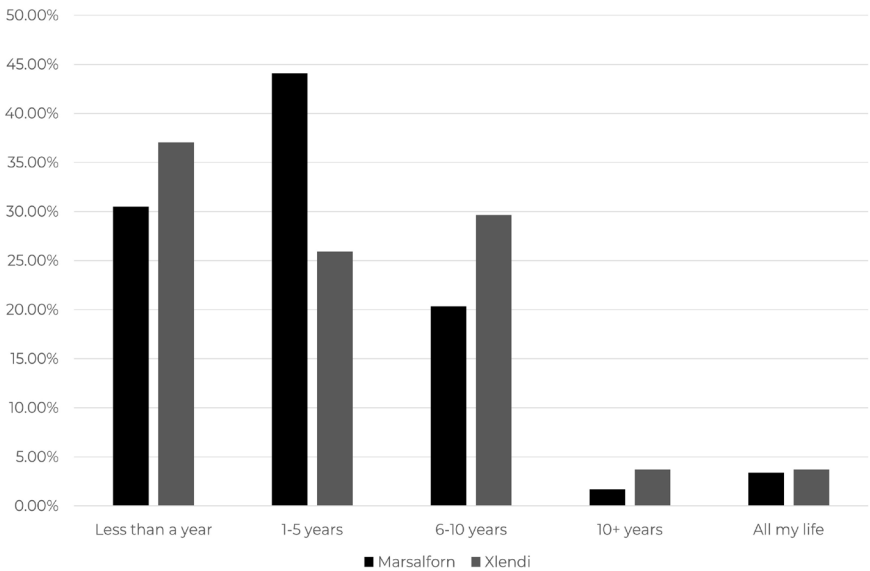
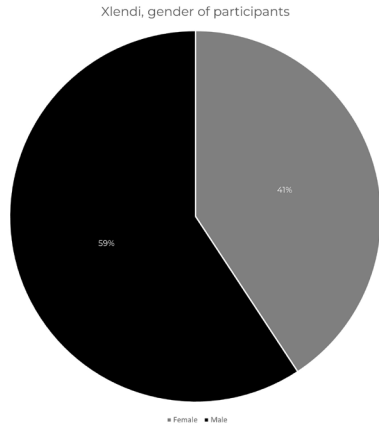
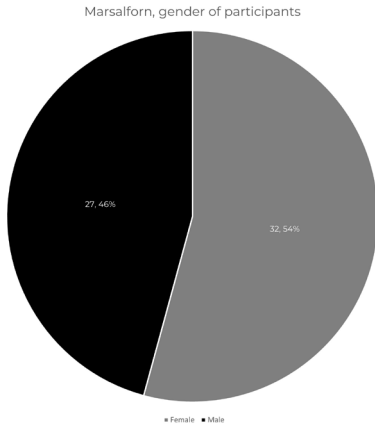


Chart G - Gender of participants



Annex B

FSWS Malta	FSWS Gozo
Residential Homes and High Support Service	Generic Social work Service
Siblings Community Home	Emergency On-call Service
Warm Haven Community Home	Marsalforn Community Service
Safe Haven Community Home	Victoria Community Family Centre
Toorak Flats	Home-Based Therapeutic Service
Carini Flats	Psychotherapeutic Service
Sta Margherita Home	Looked After Children - Gozo
Sempreviva Flat	Fostering Service - Gozo
Youth in Focus	Home-Start - Gozo
Adolescent Day Programme	Supervised Access Visits Service
Embark for life	TFAL 3 Program - Gozo
Emergency On-Call Team	Skola-Sajf Program - Gozo
Adoption Service	Gozo Prison Project
Fostering Service	Gozo General Hospital Social Work Service
Active Ageing and Community Care	Gozo General Hospital - Psychiatric Unit Social Work Service
Child Web Alert Hotline	
Intake & Family Support Service	
Human Trafficking	
Domestic Violence Service	
Sexual Assault Response Team	
Għabex Shelter	
Stop! The Violence and Abuse Service	
Benniena Service	
Oncology Social Work Service - Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre (SAMOC)	
Looked After Children Service	

Social Contact Service	
Children Dreams and Children's Funds	
International Social Services	
Media Assessments	
Child to Parent Violence	
Child and Young People's Service	
Programm Uljed Darna - Generic Programme	
Programm Uljed Darna - Progett Tereza	
Supportline 179	
Hotline & Helpline	



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