

# The Gozo Regional Development Strategy

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**GOZO REGIONAL**  
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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CHAPTER 1

# Purpose and Status



## Legal Background

The Gozo Regional Development Authority (GRDA), set up through the Gozo Regional Development Act XVIII of 2019 CAP 600, has as one of its main aims, the drawing up of the Regional Development Strategy for Gozo (RDS) and overseeing its implementation.

Indeed, Article 8(1)(a) of the GRDA Act states that:

*To consult with the Government, the private sector, constituted bodies and non-governmental organisation, and private citizens in connection with any work which it intends to carry out with regard the design of a regional development strategy for Gozo.*

The Regional Strategy Document aims to be a central tool in the development of Gozo, expressing a clear, coherent vision and serving as a roadmap for the next ten years.

The formulation of the Regional Development Strategy aims to:

- Promote the regionality of the Island of Gozo and the re-valuing Gozo's characteristics;
- Serve as the territorial development strategy for Gozo for the period 2023-2033;
- Be consistent with other already established national, EU and global strategies.

## Regional Development Strategy Design Process

The development of the Regional Development Strategy was designed through a three-step approach.

### STEP 1

#### Publication of a Consultation Document

In July 2021, the GRDA published the Regional Development Strategy Consultation Document. The publication of this document initiated a public debate amongst the general public and stakeholders on the setting up of a ten-year strategy for Gozo.

This document outlined the GRDA's vision for Gozo and the role of the Authority to achieve such a vision.

The document identified eight priority areas that aim to address Gozo's specific needs. The eight priority areas embrace the effort to protect the Gozitan lifestyle - fully respecting its environment, resources, culture and identity. They also aim to ensure that all these play a significant part in presenting a vibrant community that attracts visitors and investors to the island while sustaining the balance between economic growth and sustainable development. Finally, the Consultation Document also gave a brief overview of the Authority's methodology in its assessment and prioritisation of measures.

### STEP 2

#### Consultation Process

To draw up a Regional Development Strategy for Gozo, the GRDA has sought feedback from several stakeholders, including national entities and NGOs, on the eight identified priority areas, their corresponding measures and prioritisation of actions. This was done through a thorough consultation process that took place during 2021.

The consultation process was designed to achieve the following goals:

- i. Create a transparent, inclusive development strategy process;
- ii. Engage a range of stakeholders with varying backgrounds and expertise;
- iii. Increase awareness within the Gozitan community that a new strategy for Gozo is being designed and implemented;
- iv. Provide opportunities for people to make their views known;
- v. Improve the relevance, quality and value-added of the regional development strategy.

Throughout the consultation period, the GRDA organised three public meetings where the Authority solicited input from the general public. The GRDA also organised over thirty bilateral meetings with government bodies, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders. A central point of the consultation process was the formation of eight technical workings, where each group focused on one of the previously established priority areas. These technical working groups involved around eighty individuals with different backgrounds and expertise and representing different entities.

### STEP 3

#### Feedback Analysis

Throughout the consultation process the GRDA received over 350 ideas, proposals and suggestions, including recommendations on improving and adjusting the measures as presented in the Consultation Document and proposals of new measures that were not put forward in the original document.

The GRDA reviewed, analysed and considered all the ideas and proposals suggested during the consultation process. Each recommendation was classified according to its relevance (high/medium/low).

A recommendation was only deemed to be highly relevant if it met the following criteria:

- Improved the quality of the strategy;
- Improved the relevance of the strategy;
- Added value to the strategy.

Finally, all the recommendations that met the above-mentioned criteria were considered as an input into this document.

## Structure of the Document

This whole process led to the final Regional Development Strategy for Gozo. The document starts by presenting a detailed insight into Gozo's present socio-economic reality, the aim of which is to present a clear picture of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing Gozo. This serves as a platform on which a vision for Gozo is presented. The vision for Gozo is a very important part of the strategy as it outlines the main philosophy that drives the entire strategy. The next chapters represent the core of the regional development strategy and cover the 3 main thematic areas, namely (1) the promotion of sensible use of land and the natural environment, (2) the re-alignment of economic growth with wellbeing, and (3) the enhancement of Gozo's identity. Under each of these thematic areas, priority areas are listed providing strategic actions to attain the vision. The last part of the document, provides a wider dimension of the regional development strategy, linking the strategic actions to the global sustainable development goals.



## CHAPTER 2

# Understanding Gozo

Any strategy, especially one that aims to set the path for socio-economic development needs to be built around a very clear understanding of present realities. It needs to acknowledge the strengths that made Gozo so resilient in the past, but also face those weaknesses that need to be addressed and managed to not undermine the attractiveness and the same resilience of the Island. While assessing the recent past and observing the present, a development strategy needs, above all else, to look to the future. To do so, it is imperative to examine the threats. Identifying threats needs to be a holistic exercise that factors in possible behavioural adjustments, including threats that might have emerged because past

weaknesses have been overcome. The final step needs to consist of identifying opportunities. Opportunities are not limited to the present, but more importantly, potential ones with a high probability of occurrence in the near future.

This section presents a analysis that aims to identify the strengths which this strategy will build upon, the weaknesses to be addressed, the opportunities to be exploited and the threats to be mitigated during the term of this strategy. This section hopes to bridge the gap between the development needs and the potential areas of development within this strategy.

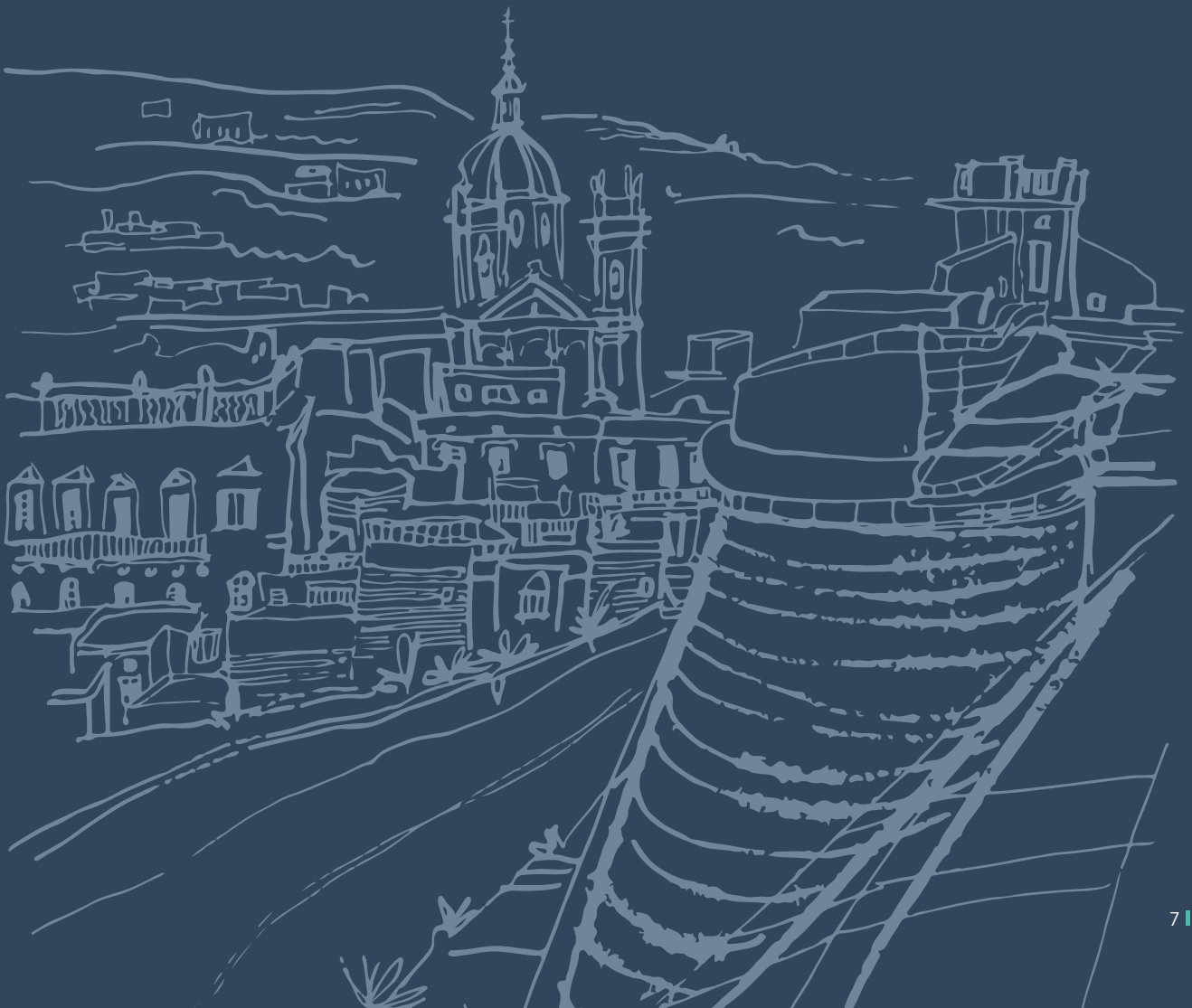


Table 1: Understanding Gozo

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Despite its small size, Gozo offers very attractive geo-physical characteristics, with its coastline exhibiting differing features every few kilometers</p>	<p>Lack of economies of scale</p>
<p>Gozo has traditionally been so tranquil that people literally used to leave their front doors open until a few short years ago. Although times have changed, Gozo is still one of the safest and most secure spots in the whole world</p>	<p>Perceived as an extension of Malta</p>
<p>The heritage assets, both tangibles and intangibles, are disproportionate to the size of Gozo. Its richness in terms of historical, religious and cultural assets is a prominent feature of the Island</p>	<p>Cultural assets need to be revalued, especially those privately owned</p>
<p>Strong tourism market</p>	<p>Limited economic diversification with high dependence on the tourism industry</p>
<p>Short producer-to-consumer services</p>	<p>Relatively high input costs for businesses due to double insularity</p>
<p>Good primary road connectivity</p>	<p>Limited infrastructure capacity due to the island's small size</p>
<p>Good public transport system</p>	<p>Relatively high transport costs for business</p>
<p>Overall, the labour force is relatively flexible and skilled. Furthermore, due to cultural factors - including historically higher competition for opportunities - Gozo has a relatively high share of tertiary education graduates</p>	<p>Potential brain drain from Gozo can lead to skills mismatches and a shortage in labour supply, especially at the high end of the skill spectrum</p>
<p>Adequate number of sports organisations</p>	<p>Current inter-island transport system is largely dependent on multi-purpose Mġarr harbour</p>

## OPPORTUNITIES

Enhance infrastructure that would further improve connectivity, both physical and digital, and increase the Island's quality offering

Conserve and preserve Gozo's cultural heritage, including historical landmarks and traditional skills and techniques

Protect and promote Gozo's environment through the preservation of rainwater, better beach and coastal management, as well as the designation of natural open areas

Re-use and retrofit existing buildings through the renovation of old and derelict properties

Develop potential niche markets especially, in tourism but not only

Attract foreign direct investment by positioning Gozo as an attractive destination for the expansion and development of business activities due to the potential availability of skilled workforce and quality of life

Promote Gozo as an ideal test-bed for new and innovative ideas

Focus on digital and technological investments to boost local production

Diversify and adapt the Gozitan economy to present demographic trends and industry needs

Further valorise Gozo's identity, making this central to the socio economic development of the Island

Shift towards low-carbon transportation modes, increase the deployment of renewable energy technologies, centralised and decentralised energy storage systems, deepen energy efficiency and promote green building development

Strengthen the social fabric and promote inclusion of non-natives within the community

Increase the provision of and access to high-quality health services and specialised medical treatments

## THREATS

Pressures on the environment due to increased activity and competition for space

Gozo risking losing its identity and becoming more like the main island in terms of challenges and constraints

Climate change can impact the rural environment of the Island negatively

Increased pressure on land use due to building and real estate development

Shifts in the global and national economy might put additional pressure on Gozo's economy

Although the threat of gentrification has declined in the past years due to better connectivity and increased use of technology, the danger of brain drain needs to be continually monitored

Gozo's architectural and rural heritage is heavily dependent on traditional skills. Over the years, the attractiveness of pursuing and mastering such skills has diminished significantly, putting at risk the same heritage

Over the past years, the number of non-locals living in Gozo has increased significantly. While this has contributed to the economic development of the island and made Gozo a more open society, it has also challenged Gozo's identity and at times resulted in increased social issues

An ageing population as youths seek better employment opportunities outside of Gozo

Increases in population and demand for private vehicles are leading to increased traffic congestion and higher pollution levels resulting in negative health effects

Activities, especially during peak tourism season, put pressure on the carrying capacity of the Island

Although the economy has seen increased diversification over the last years, the risk of over-dependence on tourism is still present

Fossilisation and over-distinction of identity characteristics

CHAPTER 3

# A Shared Vision for Gozo



## Gozo: An Island of Villages

Gozo is an 'Island of Villages' that has distinctive characteristics. Characteristics, both physical as well as social, that form part of Gozo's heritage and its identity. Their preservation, enhancement, and promotion, out of a concern for their intrinsic value and uniqueness for present and future generations, is key to a long-term strategy.

This necessitates a strategic framework that provides greater protection to Gozo's heritage and its distinctive characteristics. It also means directing the economy towards a greener transition, with success being determined not solely based on economic growth, but also on the quality of life and wellbeing.

The vision for Gozo as presented in this strategic document has three main thematic areas, which consist in:

### 1. PROMOTING SENSIBLE USE OF LAND AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Key to Gozo's future is the persistent adoption of a formula that maintains a sustainable and balanced territorial development through optimal use of land and above all the preservation and valorisation of Gozitan traditional urban and rural features. The preservation of the village heritage is crucial to a long-term strategy for improving the quality of Gozo's built environment. This requires a holistic spatial planning approaches that reconcile the social and economic claims for spatial development with Gozo's ecological and cultural functions.

### 2. RE-ALIGNING ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH WELLBEING

Gozo still has untapped potential in terms of quality employment and business development. There are opportunities to grow business while also offering a high quality of life. Creating productive employment on the Island must continue to be at the core of a long-term strategy, that ensures the interests of future generations. Such a strategy can be achieved by enhancing human capital with a skilled workforce and striking the right balance between economic development and the use of scarce land.

Although economic activity generates economic growth, it is important to minimise detrimental impacts on natural

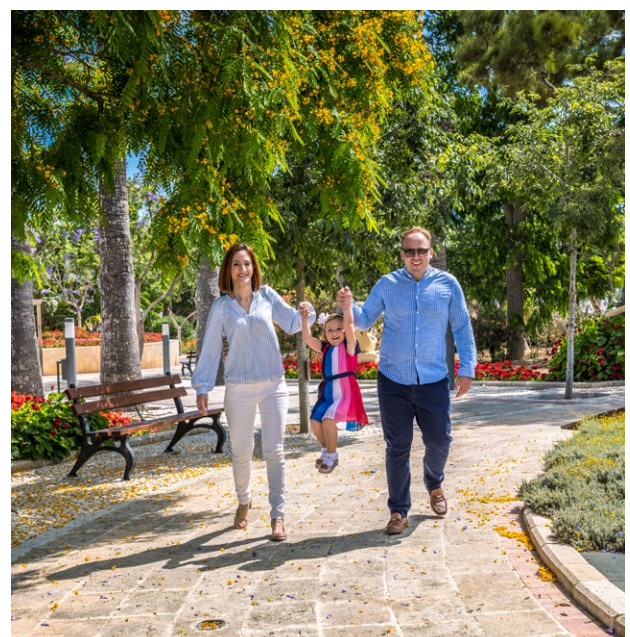
and cultural resources. Standard of living does not depend exclusively on the income and the productivity scale. In some instances, islands like Gozo may offer a better quality of living resulting from a higher level of safety and security. The safety and security of all residents are essential indicators of quality living, and these can flourish in a way that complements sustainable economic activity in Gozo.

### 3. RE-VALUING GOZO'S IDENTITY

Without Gozo's identity there is no Gozo. The preservation, enhancement and promotion of Gozo's identity need to be at the centre of any discussion that regards Gozo. To enhance this identity, distinctiveness in policies must be present. Gozo needs to apply specific policies that do not necessarily replicate what is already being implemented on the main island. Being different is a source of added value. Gozo needs policies that are conducive to well-being, and that enhance its attractiveness both as a visitor destination and as a location that can offer investment, job and life opportunities for all.

## Achieving the Vision

To achieve the vision, the Gozo Regional Development Strategy will be presenting eight priority areas grouped under the three thematic areas. Each priority area will expand on the vision, presenting a more complete narrative, followed by a set of goals and strategic actions.



CHAPTER 4

# Promoting Sensible Use of Land and the Natural Environment



Gozo has a more rural dimension to that of mainland Malta and this is reflected in its towns and villages. These urban characteristics include traditional architecture characterised by limestone buildings and balconies. These features contribute strongly to Gozo's distinctive identity.

Gozo may be considered as a smart pilot project presenting a responsible urban design aesthetic and the implementation of nature-based solutions. The symbiosis between nature and habitable spaces should form the fundamental relationship for living in Gozo. This should also entail the revaluation of its heritage and identity in the concept of Gozo as an 'Island of Villages'.

Gozo's positioning as a distinctive from mainland Malta, especially in terms of its streetscapes and infrastructure, offers an appeal which should attract a particular kind of quality investment that deserves encouragement as much as it requires attention. Building on these values when mapping out the use of space and infrastructure in Gozo allow for the development of communities which can enjoy economic and financial benefits as well as general wellbeing.



# Gozo Spatial Planning and Sustainable Urban Development

Gozo requires a focused approach to its spatial planning and urban development, directing its efforts towards a fully integrated system where land use, planning and sectoral policies are built on, and in synergy with, the local context and ecology. Spatial planning needs to go beyond the physical and also consider the economic, social, cultural and environmental trajectory of the island since all of these elements are interlinked.

As an 'Island of Villages', the symbiosis of land and environment is the bedrock for all growth on the island, particularly given its size limitations. Should urban growth and development not be properly planned in Gozo, the risk would be that of losing the island's identity and distinctiveness. This could lower the quality of life on the island with the consequence of deterring high-quality tourists, high value investments and businesses. A sustainable strategy would provide opportunities to safeguard and enhance Gozo's cultural and natural characteristics in the long term, while harnessing these very principles as the foundation for economic and social growth.

## GOALS:

- Seek a better quality of life for the residents of Gozo and visitors alike;
- Build on Gozo identity as an 'Island of Villages';
- Achieve a natural network of accessible open spaces within the urban and rural environment for residents and visitors alike in which the island's biodiversity can thrive;
- Provide opportunities for innovative methods of sustainable construction;
- Ensure that the urban landscape of Gozo represents the rich communities that live within and offers opportunities for interaction and communication;
- Encourage planning policies that safeguard and build an ecologically sustainable environment over the long term; one which contributes positively to the economic prosperity and quality of life of the present and future generations.



Achieving these Goals

### DESIGNING ACCORDING TO CONTEXT

Gozo's identity is a strength and its distinctiveness from the main Island is a source of value added. Urban and architectural design play an integral role to preserve and enhance these features. The preservation of such characteristics is not compatible with low-quality urban and architectural buildings that impose a negative impact on the community in terms of both visual and social terms. To ensure that Gozo's urban and architectural distinctiveness is maintained, policies need to adopt a more context-derived design. This approach includes, but is not limited to, the contextual delivery of both residential and commercial properties and should seek to incorporate sensitive contemporary interventions within heritage urban fabrics in a way that ensures long-lasting, high quality urban environments; whilst prioritising the preservation of areas of high conservation.

### PROVIDING FURTHER OPEN GREEN SPACES

Anticipated economic growth and increase in population need to be supported and facilitated through the design of accessible villages in which individuals and families feel safe. The demand for open spaces to be enjoyed by families and individuals is high, and with the increasingly fast pace of life such initiatives acquire added value in terms of wellbeing. A clear vision needs to be set out to ensure that parks serve the community living in Gozo beyond the seasonality of its incoming tourist population. Family parks aimed directly at residents of the Island need to be clearly planned out as a walkable and accessible network. To this end, EU funds under various programs can be explored.

### IMPROVING WASTE MANAGEMENT

Due to its economic structure including a higher dependency on seasonal tourist arrivals, Gozo faces a different reality in terms of waste generation. Waste collection should also reflect this reality. Increased efforts among economic actors to factor in waste management and conservation needs to be actively encouraged.

A data-driven waste monitoring and management plan can help Gozo take on a more strategic approach to waste treatment on an island-wide scale. This might include exploring the possibility of conducting a feasibility study on the concepts of underground collection units.

### PROMOTING GREEN BUILDINGS

As part of Gozo's ecological transition, there needs to be a shift towards greener infrastructure that is not only more aesthetically pleasing and beneficial for physical and mental wellbeing, but also necessary for a more sustainable future by mitigating rising temperatures and other climate change effects.

Incentives to encourage individuals to invest in sustainable design principles should be explored while taking also into account the contextual reality of the building. This should be complemented with an educational campaign to help communicate the benefits of green buildings as well as more demand-side incentives for households and business owners.

### RE-THINKING MOBILITY

Over the last 20 years, the number of locally registered vehicles in Gozo doubled. This exponential use of vehicles is putting strain on the infrastructure of the Island and need to be tackled through a number of initiatives such as prioritising the electrification of public transport in line with the EU's 'Fit for 55 Legislation'. Other measures such as encouraging multimodal mobility by providing the necessary infrastructure need to be explored. This will improve the quality and walkability of the streets, allowing for better enjoyment of the villages in Gozo.

### TRANSFORMING STREETS TOWARDS PEOPLE CENTRED

Towns and villages in Gozo should aim to cater for people to move freely within the town and make use of the public spaces without needing to use the car. Shared streets should be prioritised and pedestrianisation should be introduced wherever possible. Projects should be undertaken to rethink public spaces in Gozo to allow for activities to happen and for children to play.

## REGENERATING GOZITAN SQUARES

Gozitan villages are characterised by their 'pjazza', a square generally at the centre of the communal life of the village. Their preservation and regeneration where applicable should be a priority and EU funding can be explored. Measures for the preservation include restrictive parking and traffic flows. Such initiatives will enable residents and visitors to enjoy these village centres in a safe, secure and unpolluted environment, while supporting the commercial activities of the respective localities. The regenerated 'pjazez' will also provide another cultural space for artists to come together and showcase their talents.

## REHABILITATING VACANT BUILDINGS

Despite the increased demand for real estate registered over the last years, there still are a considerable number of vacant and unused buildings. Several measures are already in place that aim to encourage the rehabilitation and restoration of building in Urban Conservation Areas. Options need to be explored to extend similar incentives to other areas. It is essential that any intervention in this regard is carried out in a manner that complements the form, scale, finishings, and character of the urban core. Furthermore, any future considerations need to consider as much as possible gentrifying factors and prioritise the city's local community.





# Infrastructure and Accessibility

Gozo's double insularity impacts on the movement of people and goods as well as the provision of services. Gozo's economic performance is underpinned by constraints on production and the lack of diversification that makes the strengthening of connectivity, both physical/digital (infrastructural) as well as social (economic, cultural) a primary consideration. Improved connectivity is crucial in the effort to continue improving Gozo's productivity and close development gaps. This will require an approach based on sustaining resilient infrastructure that can enhance connectivity in a safe and enduring manner, while enabling competitiveness. Increasing connectivity brings prosperity but also presents risks, particularly with regards to Gozo's distinctiveness that need to be taken into consideration.

## GOALS:

- Create a safe and resilient infrastructure that is efficient for Gozo today and has a vision for its future needs;
- Improve accessibility and connectivity to mitigate the negative insularity and increase the economy's productive capacity;
- Build safe and enduring internal infrastructure enabling Gozo to boost competitiveness, including attracting inward knowledge-based investment;
- Work closely with lead ministries responsible for implementing core backbone infrastructure;
- Preserve Gozo unique characteristics and using this as a focal motive to generate more sustainable economic progress rather than rapid and short term expansion.

## ENHANCING CONNECTIVITY SERVICE BETWEEN MALTA AND GOZO

Connectivity to the main island of Malta is critical for Gozo's development. A service that needs to be consistent and available almost constantly. For this reason, the ferry service needs to reflect new realities and continue to ensure delivery of the required capacity for both commercial and passenger vehicles.

The introduction of the fast ferry services between the islands marked an important achievement. It facilitated passengers' travel along the Mgarr-Valletta route. Such a service needs to be safeguarded and where possible improved further.

## UPGRADING OF AIRFIELD

Presently, Gozo is only connected to the island of Malta by sea transport. This could change in the coming years as an application to the Planning Authority has been submitted for the upgrading of the present heliport facility. The eventual upgrading of the airfield will, amongst others, enable the introduction of a fixed wing airlink service between Gozo and the mainland. The upgrading of the airfield will take place entirely within the confines of its present boundaries and will not require any further agricultural land acquisition.

The eventual upgrade will also open up the possibility of targeting further activities to Gozo including flying schools and drone research, amongst others. This will support diversification of Gozo's economy making it more future resilient and resource effective.

## UPGRADING AND RECONSTRUCTION OF ARTERIAL, SECONDARY AND TOWN ROADS

Part of Gozo's infrastructural road network is under pressure due to current number of vehicles, especially during the peak tourism season. At times, this has resulted in bottleneck congestion, particularly in Mgarr Harbour and Victoria, and other critical infrastructure points. Budget funds are being allocated on a yearly basis for the upgrading and reconstruction of roads. The bottleneck areas need to continue being specifically tackled.

The infrastructural roads need to prioritise the quality of life, safety and security of residents while respecting the natural and urban environment and context. Where possible, the use of more sustainable and environmentally friendly construction materials should be explored. These include a better and more adequate lighting system to reduce light pollution and use of road material for better rainwater management.



## OPTIMISING WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Water management is one of the prevalent issues within the Maltese Islands. Water management practices are already being implemented in certain localities on the island, however, efforts towards adopting more sustainable water management practices in buildings should be intensified.

Water management practices also need to be extended to the natural environment. Measures to protect natural waterways in Gozo to mitigate against flooding and allow for the natural cycle of water need to be continued and strengthened.

## UPGRADING MĠARR HARBOUR

Mġarr Harbour plays a major role both as an inter-island connection point as well as multimodal and logistics hub serving the whole island. Therefore, the possibility of expanding the harbour should be studied from a wide socio-economic perspective, including environmental concerns.

## RE-VISITING GOZO CARRYING CAPACITY

Over the last few decades, Gozo has experienced a considerable increase in activities, resulting in population growth and increase in the urban sprawl. This has implications on the identity, quality of life, and wellbeing. Efforts should be made towards assessing the sustainability of the current economic model and towards the identification of stress points on both the physical infrastructure of the island and the natural environment and resources. Efforts towards diversification of the Island's energy mix, by increasing the use of alternative energy sources should be undertaken.

## RE-EXAMINING THE NEED OF THE GOZO TUNNEL

Connectivity with the mainland, has always been a determining factor for Gozo's development, both economically as well as socially. Over the years, considerable investment was made to improve such connectivity, with the Gozo Channel significantly increasing the frequency of its service and with the introduction of the fast ferry service. Furthermore, the upgrading of the Gozo Heliport is currently under consideration at the Planning Authority and its eventual approval will pave the way for a permanent air link. In view of this, the project of linking Gozo and Malta by an underwater tunnel needs to be reconsidered and its cost-benefits trade-off re-examined.



# Rural Development

Gozo's topography and its rural characteristics are key features of Gozo's identity. The Island is rooted in its rural culture and preserving the cultural and traditional tapestry will make Gozo a more pleasant place for its community and visitors. A sensible use of rural areas plays a vital role in improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of Gozo as well as strengthening the Island's distinctive character.

The preservation of Gozo rural identity is intrinsically linked with the rural community. Thus, Gozitan farmers need to be encouraged amongst others by improving the support system around them.

## GOALS:

- Make rural Gozo a better place to live and work;
- Valorise Gozitan food and produce as a brand and strengthen its value under the EU Framework on Geographical Indications (GIs) and Traditional Specialities Guaranteed (TSG);
- Support farmers in building sustainable enterprises and, in doing so, increasing rural employment, particularly among the younger generation;
- Encourage practices to counter climate change impacts;
- Protect and enhance Gozo's biodiversity, natural, traditional and historical heritage;
- Heighten Gozitan communities awareness and appreciation of our natural, traditional and historical heritage;
- Hand over a sustainably managed environment to future generations.

## Achieving these Goals

### ENCOURAGING GOZITAN FOOD AND SPECIES

The regional branding of food and produce, and the marketing of Gozo as a gastronomic centre will result in higher value. Hence as part of the process, it is necessary to create suitable incentives for farmers to start growing once again the indigenous vegetables, fruits and livestock. In this regard, collaboration between the Gozo Experimental Farm in Xewkija and the farmers will continue, to help identify the different varieties that grow in Gozo and find cultivation methods to enhance their production for commercial purposes.

### INCREASE AWARENESS OF GOZITAN FOOD AND PRODUCE

For Gozo to be marketed as a distinct gastronomic region, there is the need for a change in how residents and visitors perceive the local product. Therefore, a long-term information campaign needs to be drawn up and implemented with relevant stakeholders. This campaign should seek to educate and increase awareness regarding the direct and indirect benefits of local food and produce.

### SUSTAINING THE DISTRIBUTION NETWORK FOR NEW WATER TO GOZITAN FARMERS

Water has always been an issue for agriculture. The Water Services Corporation (WSC) has invested heavily in a New Water network in Gozo to support farmers. New Water is treated wastewater that is highly filtered to remove bacteria, chemicals and other pollutants. This reclaimed water can then be safely used for agriculture, landscaping and other industrial uses while at the same time contributing to achieving a net-zero impact on the natural water cycle. The production and distribution of New Water is to be encouraged and sustained.

### REVITALISING GOZO'S RURAL COMMUNITY

Failure to attract youth to the rural economy could result in its demise and potentially, the despoliation of the rural environment. The challenge of reversing the decline of the farming community is considerable. The immediate needs of the farming community as well as the mid to long term challenges need to be analysed and support provided where possible.

Targeted measures, funded amongst others through the LEADER program, should be explored.

### EXPLORING A FARMER ADVISORY SERVICE

Existing rural/farming partnership organisations in Gozo need to be revitalised or possibly even reconceived to give them more relevance within the current context. A farmer advisory programme could be set up to provide essential technical, scientific and entrepreneurial advice.

### REHABILITATING VALLEYS AND RESTORATING WELLS

Valleys are an important part of the rural ecosystem. Equally important are agricultural wells that allow farmers to harvest and use natural water for irrigation purposes. Continuous rehabilitation of valleys and restoration of wells throughout Gozo should continue to be encouraged and promoted. The creation or restoration of dams should also be explored.

### SAFEGUARING NATURA 2000 SITES

Natura 2000 sites need to be safeguarded. Improvement of the conservation status can include the preservation of the natural habitats and species of wild flora and the removal of invasive alien species. Particular attention should be paid to the island of Comino, which is entirely covered by Natura 2000 status.

### EXTENDING AFFORESTATION PROGRAMME

Afforestation programs, in line with the Trees and Woodlands Protection Regulations, should be encouraged to have a greener Gozo. Trees assist in combating desertification and wind, rain and soil erosion, sustaining endemic flora and fauna, wildlife habitat and contributing to atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> reductions by acting as a valuable carbon sink. Measures to control the importation of invasive alien species are important and efforts should be directed in this regard, coupled with continuous efforts to improve habitats.

CHAPTER 5

# Re-Aligning Economic Growth with Wellbeing





The Gozitan society is a reflection of its recent history. A history of the last 100 years has seen the Island moving away from a sleepy and conservative rural community - at times facing material deprivation - to one which is more open and affluent.

National accounts data shows that Gozo's per capita output and income have traditionally and constantly been lower than those registered in Malta. This can be attributed to many factors, amongst them the economic structure, the share of the working-age population and the cost structure faced by enterprises. However, this lower income per capita has often been met with scepticism from some quarters partly due to failure to understand the relationship between income generation, saving rates and accumulation of assets.

It is a fact that a recurrent feature of Gozo over a long period has been the volatility of employment and thus income. As a result, high levels of emigration were registered with Gozitans seeking to look for better opportunities abroad. Indeed, around 14,000 emigrated between the 1950s and 1980s, exceeding the total number of births registered over the period. This has resulted into an imbalance in the overall population structure with less people within the working- age bracket available to support the local economy. The Island's economic conditions and demographic state had a particular impact on the labour market. The Gozitan labour market has traditionally been characterised by a high incidence rate of self-employment within a number of sectors like agriculture, fishing and small industry. The presence of a small industrial sector that emerged during the 1960s pushed employment levels up. However, the contribution to the regional economic activity of this sector has been in decline since the early 1990's with services, including tourism, replacing the manufacturing industry over the years.

The persistent volatility of employment opportunities and income deeply impacted how Gozitans factor in risk. On the one hand, this uncertainty augmented Gozitans' capability to adopt and maximise the limited resources at their disposal, hence augmenting their resilience. It also contributed towards a generally higher saving rate, thus resulting in accumulated assets over time. On the other hand, the income volatility added value to the stability and security associated with employment within the public sector. Indeed, the prevalence and importance of employment within the public sector have characterised the employment sector in Gozo for several decades.

A further important feature of Gozo is the share and character of non-natives that have decided to move to Gozo over the years, attracted mainly by the slow pace of life in Gozo. These have contributed positively to the socio-economic development of the Island. A relatively recent phenomenon, taking place over the last ten years, is an increasing influx of foreigners coming to Gozo seeking work opportunities. Indeed, the number of foreign workers in 2020 represented over one-fifth of the local workforce, and if one were to exclude the public sector, this share would be close to half of the employment in the private sector.



## Economic and Human Talent Development

The Gozitan economy is less developed than that of the island of Malta and tends to centre on low productivity sectors. In recent decades, a shift towards services became more evident, but a manufacturing base, albeit small, is still present. There has also been increased diversification within services, with some new sectors starting to gain a foothold in Gozo. Irrespective of the type of activity, human capital is central to economic development. Gozo provides an excellent opportunity in this regard as it tends to have a higher per capita degree of educational attainment and mastery of skills than the rest of the country. Gozo stands to gain by better valorising the educational attainment of its population while attracting talent and promoting training and skills, organisational and career development.

### GOALS:

- Continue to foster the diversification of the Gozitan economy;
- Attract talent from outside the Island by offering a good business and lifestyle platform;
- Close the development gap between Malta and Gozo by creating higher value-added employment;
- Provide opportunities for start-ups and existing micro-firms better suited for Gozo's economic development;
- Further enhance the excellence of Gozo's labour force by investing more in education and continuous professional development.

## Achieving these Goals

### SUSTAINING PUSH FOR BACK-OFFICE WORK IN GOZO

Historically, employment opportunities in Gozo have always been limited. Back-office work, both public and private, adds to the demand for labour in Gozo. Schemes and incentives to transfer back-office work in both the public and private sectors from Malta to Gozo are already in place. Efforts need to be redirected towards sectors that will increase high value-added employment in Gozo.

### REASSESSING THE SKILL PROFILE

The rise in economic activity observed over the last decade led to increased demand for labour. This surge in demand was partially addressed by an influx of foreign workers. Efforts should be made to assess the demand for labour in the coming decades and the levels of skills required. This exercise would also bring together education and training providers with representatives from business, to effectively respond to skills needs, and to advise on priority skills needs.

### SUPPORTING EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN GOZO

Adult education is fundamental for economic growth and also for social and personal development. It is a key mechanism for upskilling and reskilling adults, to support them into work or to enable employees to progress within work. Thus, efforts should continue to enhance and further expand on the existing educational opportunities in Gozo in areas congruent to the strategy's aims. Additionally, training opportunities that provide support to developing modern business skills need to be prioritised.

### SUPPORTING QUALITY EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES

Economic growth should not only result into employment but into good quality employment opportunities. The ambition is to explore ways how to support employers transform their businesses to meet the new demands and operate as much as possible with a local workforce and paying their employees better salaries.

### SUPPORTING GOZITAN SMEs

Micro and small medium sized enterprises (SME) constitute practically all business in Gozo. Efforts need to be sustained and strengthened, where possible, to help Gozitan enterprises become more competitive in their business/production processes. Such support might consist in providing information regarding the possible costs and benefits of the various options available to them across the e-commerce ecosystem and help business in accessing finance to be able to invest in the process of digitalisation.

### CREATING A SPIRIT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONGST GOZITAN YOUTHS

In the past, the Gozitan labour market has traditionally been characterised by a high incidence of self-employment, also reflecting the low opportunity for paid employment on the Island. However, over the recent decades, there was a shift towards employment especially with the public sector. Fostering and revaluing the importance of self-employment and entrepreneurship is vital for the development of new and innovative business ideas. Efforts should be made to support this aim.

### MAINSTREAMING THE GOZITAN DIMENSION

The provision of efficient and effective public services is vital for the wellbeing of communities. This assumes even greater importance in a small island society like Gozo where the incidence of market failure is higher and thus public sector intervention is called for. It is critical that national policies and strategies reflect the Gozitan dimensions. Thus, efforts should be maintained to ensure that all national regulatory entities fully factor in the Gozo element within their strategies and policies, as well as offering their services in Gozo through a physical or virtual presence.



## New Economy

For the Gozitan economy to make the next leap forward, a more adequate digital and innovative ecosystem is required. Gozo has the potential to attract new, high growth industries that can be a driving force for economic growth and productivity. Technological improvements will not just benefit new sectors but also have the potential to provide traditional sectors with renewed dynamism and provide them with a new lease of life. Furthermore, an economy based on new concepts and methods will be more conducive to achieving broader environmental and societal goals, especially in view of the ambition to put at the forefront of the green transformation of the Maltese economy and the decarbonisation goals.

### GOALS:

- Foster the adoption of new technologies and digitalisation within traditional industries;
- Develop an ecosystem of companies in the digital sector in Gozo;
- Help attract businesses making use of green technologies;
- Help create a conducive ecosystem for businesses to play a central part in the decarbonisation efforts;
- Increase the overall competitiveness and resilience of the Gozitan economy;
- Revigorated traditional activities through the adoption of new technologies.

Achieving these Goals

### SUPPORTING STRUCTURES FOR NEW ECONOMY SECTORS

An economy based on new processes and technologies needs a conducive ecosystem that support it. An ecosystem that reflects the applicable legislative framework and support from public authorities. Currently, Malta Enterprise has several schemes to support new investments. Efforts need to be maintained towards supporting the establishment and growth of businesses in new economy sectors in Gozo, through soft and hard infrastructure, including business support resources and services.

### SUPPORTING RESEARCH ORIENTED ACTIVITIES

Gozo's small size and the micro nature of the business present significant barriers to research and innovation. However, efforts should persist towards enhancing the quality of the processes, including the promotion of business investment, and the development of synergies between enterprises and higher education institutions.

### ATTRACT DIGITAL WORKING NOMADS

In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, Gozo should be promoted as a digital nomad destination of choice where nomad workers can perform their jobs in a peaceful and quiet ambience equipped with robust digital connectivity, good accommodation and business-friendly policies.

### EXPLORING GOZO AS A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN AGRITECH INDUSTRY

The concept of 'new economy' is not limited to digital and financial activities. It also encompasses the application of new processes and application of technologies to more traditional sectors. Agritech is a good example of such use. Gozo, with its relatively more rural setting, offers opportunities in this regard.

As part of the efforts, a Centre for Research and Innovation in Agriculture should be explored at the Government Experimental Farm in Xewkija. This centre could serve as a testing hub, where knowledge exchange and innovative technological practices in farming can take place.

### SUPPORTING MORE INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE MEDICAL SECTOR

Gozo offers various advantages in medical tourism, especially when it comes to rehabilitation. In collaboration with the relevant stakeholders including Queen Mary University of London - Gozo Campus, efforts should be made to further explore the introduction of initiatives in the medical sector in Gozo. This should build upon the infrastructures for health care provision and education that have been and are being developed in Gozo.

### SUPPORTING EFFORTS FOR DECORBONISATION

As part of the 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities initiative under the EU Horizon Programme, Gozo aims to work towards ambitious targets to achieve carbon neutrality. Apart from efforts at national levels, efforts at a more regional level should take place, helping support the transition towards less intensive use of energy resources and more use of renewable sources. This will also help Gozo becoming more attractive to new forms of economic activities.

An underwater photograph showing a diver in the upper right corner, illuminated by a bright light source. The diver is wearing a full scuba gear and green fins. In the center, a large, dark piece of driftwood is covered in green and brown marine life. The background is a deep blue ocean with some smaller fish visible. A large orange graphic shape is in the bottom right corner of the image area.

# Sustainable Tourism

Tourism related activities generate considerable income and employment in the economy of Gozo. At the same time, increased activity inevitably puts pressure on the infrastructure and the environment. Thus, it is essential that more emphasis is placed on quality rather than on quantity. This requires that a specific type of tourism is incentivised and supported while monitoring continues to take place to help minimise any undesirable consequences.

## GOALS:

- Spread more the number of visitors to minimise excessive pressure on the infrastructure and the natural environment;
- Encourage the private sector to play their part in improving the Gozitan brand and product;
- Increase destination loyalty and encourage return visits;
- Shift from mass tourism towards higher quality tourism;
- Create new 'anchor' attractions and leverage existing ones.

Achieving these Goals

### UPGRADING TOURIST OPERATORS' CAPABILITY

There have been considerable shifts over the last two decades in how tourists plan their stays as well as in their expectations. This is constantly evolving reflecting changes in technology, costs structures, and connectivity. The tourism industry needs to adopt especially in upgrading their quality standard and improving management aspects of their operations including the adoption of digital marketing. Support is already in place through separate schemes that help tourism operators in Gozo to promote their activities. Such support needs to be sustained and tailored to the needs of the industry in Gozo and to the targeted profile of tourist.

### ENHANCING QUALITY OF CLIENT-FACING EMPLOYEES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Tourism is an experience that is heavily dependent on how people in the industry provide their service. Thus, for Gozo to attract higher quality tourists, the quality of service must reach a higher level. This applies particularly to client facing employees. Improvement in the quality of the service across the tourism sector in Gozo can consist, in amongst others, the enhancement of interdisciplinary skills such as knowledge of Gozo's folklore, gastronomic traditions, rural and natural aspects. These are all elements that contribute to Gozo's its local character. Programmes to support the industry to upgrade their employees in these aspects should be actively explored.

### DEVELOP TOURISM NICHEs

Higher quality of tourists also means higher expenditure per tourist. Tourism niches provide such outcome. Eco-friendly tourism activities are just one niche. The development and further promotion of such activities help to shift tourist demand to off-peak periods whilst also helps to tackle the impacts of tourism on the environment. Support and promotion schemes are already in place. Their continuation will support further growth of tourism niches including cultural, sports, and religious tourism.

### PROMOTING GOZO'S CHARACTER AND TRADITIONS

Visitors choose Gozo for several reasons. The sea and the weather are amongst the main reasons for non-repeated visitors. For repeated visitors, Gozo's character and its traditions are a principal reason for their choice to revisit the Island. Thus, these must be protected and promoted in a sensitive manner in order for Gozo to increase its destination loyalty and continue to encourage return visits.

### ENHANCING THE DIVING INDUSTRY

The diving industry in Gozo is well established and contribute significantly to the target of attracting higher quality tourism as 'divers' tend to stay longer with a higher expenditure per person. The Diving Master Plan for Gozo and Comino needs to be continuously monitored and upgraded where necessary to meet the present and future needs of this industry and enhance its competitiveness.

CHAPTER 6

# Re-valuing Gozo's Identity





Gozitan identity may be considered as an ever-changing set of idiosyncrasies that have characterised Gozitan communities and their interaction among one another and with other community groups across the centuries.

Identity and culture cannot be separated. Cultural expression in Gozo is visible in heritage sites and museums, local theatres, digital and multi-media libraries as well as traditional libraries, schools, religious groups and band clubs. It can be experienced in the village cores, in the very façades of the residential houses, churches and public buildings built over the course of the last few centuries and even more recent urban growth and development. The Island region's cultural asset base is expected to increase when the Gozo Museum project is completed.

Gozo's art, culture and heritage should be protected and preserved so that age-old traditions can survive the process of renewal and innovation. It should also be actively promoted through strategic and sustained investment so that it may continue to nurture community relations and meaning, as well as yield cultural, economic and social benefits for years to come. Furthermore, protecting culture and heritage not only protects identity but also enhances the social development of Gozo by engaging communities and foster social interaction.



## Social Development

Social development addresses the specific and long-lasting demographic, economic, and environmental reality of Gozo by investing in citizens to increase social capital and enable shared prosperity. Future social development for sustainability and inclusion in Gozo will require all socio-political institutions and sociocultural systems to re-culture their operational processes and practices to build up their ability to meet the challenges of globalization successfully. Social sustainability and inclusion are central to improving the overall wellbeing and standard of living of every citizen and resident in Gozo.

### GOALS:

- Strengthen Gozo's society and its social capital;
- Develop secure communities;
- Increase efforts to fight social exclusion and discrimination;
- Facilitate the acceptance of diversity and enable the inclusion of different ethnic and racial minority groups;
- Ensure an adequate social development infrastructure;
- Develop appropriate and effective responses to housing needs.

## Achieving these Goals

### IMPROVING MIGRANT SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

The impact of migration on the small community of Gozo is a reality which needs to be recognised and addressed. The Social Vision for Malta 2035 encourages ‘tailor-made measures aimed towards social inclusion’ since it ‘is in the interest of society to ensure that the benefits and challenges brought about by migration are appropriately managed’. Integration happens through many aspects of one’s life such as education, employment and social life. Through evidence-based policy, capacity building and a stakeholder approach, adequate measures need to be identified to address the diverse migrant population of Gozo.

### CONTINUE EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Over the last decade, Gozo experienced a significant shift in terms of its social outlook. It became more open and more willing to accept new forms of social relationships. Socially, it has evolved and enriched itself. Without diminishing the importance of Gozo’s traditional values that are part of its identity, support should continue to be provided in embracing diversity. Important communities such as LGBTI+ form an integral part of Gozo’s society and efforts should be maintained to support them.

### ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY AND PROMOTING ACTIVE AGEING

To address the challenge of an ageing society, a forward-looking approach need to be adopted that assess not only current needs but more importantly those of the coming years. For this purpose, potential demographic changes in Gozo over the medium and long term should be studied and the implications of such shift in terms of adequate infrastructure and policies examined.

### ENHANCING LEISURE AND SPORTS WELLBEING

Once completed, the new Sports and Aquatic Centre in Victoria will play an important contribution in upgrading the sports facilities in Gozo. Other sports infrastructure, such as the Ta’ Xhajma racecourse and the Żebbuġ shooting range will also be upgraded to meet present and future needs of sports enthusiasts.

Sports and leisure wellbeing should continue to be promoted in partnership with the relevant stakeholders, including sports organisations and NGOs. Further investment needs to be undertaken for the organisation of sports activities and events.

### IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In line with Gozo’s aim to be a sustainable and inclusive society that takes care and supports its most vulnerable community members, regardless of their age, gender, race and creed, the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) Gozo Branch should continue to strive to strengthen the social infrastructure in Gozo and align its services with those provided on the main Island.

### ASSESSING HOUSING NEEDS AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

Over the last few years, Gozo has seen a considerable increase in construction activity which has heavily impacted the neighbourhoods. It has also significantly increased the supply of residential units on the Island. This will have consequences on the demography of Gozo in the coming years. It is therefore important to assess the housing needs in Gozo and to understand the landscape of users of Gozo. This will help form the basis for the development of more studied and targeted approach, helping to better identify what is needed both socially and economically across the Island.



## Culture, Heritage and Arts

Despite its small acreage, cultural activity is very much present in Gozo. Moreover, in part due to its small size, this activity is very intense, visible and accessible. Cultural activity in Gozo is, by its very nature, participatory, particularly in relation to its centuries-long traditions which allow for the celebration of ritual, ceremonial and communal gatherings in public spaces in accordance with established social calendars, be they of religious or secular natures.

This characteristic of Gozitan cultural expression is not only what distinguishes Gozitan communities from other Maltese, Mediterranean, European and global realities. Rather, these features of social congregation with their inclusion of the arts and heritage (both tangible and intangible) place Gozo within the broader Euro-Mediterranean canvas to which it also belongs. These forms of expression contribute handsomely to the Island's culture richness and to the collective sense of identity and belonging.

### GOALS:

- Enhance accessibility and connectivity to cultural heritage, resources and activities physically and through digitalisation;
- Enable the right conditions for local talent to flourish;
- Revitalise and repurpose heritage assets for new forms of cultural activities;
- Enhance cultural connectivity and dialogue and strengthen regional cultural governance;
- Promote a culturally distinctive Gozo;
- Enhance economic diversification, enterprise stimulation and job creation through a more robust creative sector.

Achieving these Goals

### PROMOTING THE IDENTITY OF GOZITAN VILLAGES

Throughout the term of the strategy, efforts should be directed at promoting and conserving the 'physical identity' (the church, village square, village core, traditional alleys and surrounding UCAs) and 'cultural identity' (the festa, fireworks, band club, networks and small businesses) of Gozitan villages. Additionally, throughout the term of the strategy, the concept of using the village 'pjazza' or the village core where local and foreign artists can exhibit their work should be introduced and promoted.

### PROMOTING AND PROTECTING GOZO'S HERITAGE AND CULTURE

Despite its small size, Gozo's heritage and culture is significant. Gozo's built heritage includes churches, theatres, schools, monuments and public spaces that have contributed to the development of the identity and culture of the Island. Several historic and cultural assets in Gozo are privately owned. Gozo needs to reinforce the concept of guardianship and stewardship of its cultural assets to be bequeathed to future generations. Measures, including an inventory for intangible cultural heritage, should be undertaken, helping to pave the way for the protection and promotion of these cultural assets.

### STRENGTHENING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

In line with the Gozo Region Cultural Strategy 2020-2025, particularly its thematic priority for innovation in cultural tourism and the overall "cultural offer", theatres, museums and other cultural spaces run by NGOs that seek to connect contemporary culture with cultural heritage should be awarded the title of a Gozo Cultural Space. This can unlock new funding opportunities for these key cultural organisations enabling them to drive sector development across Gozo.

### WORKING TOWARDS INTERNATIONALISATION OF CULTURE

Gozo has the potential to attract cultural activities. Efforts should continue to promote Gozo as a creative space for international artists. This includes promotion of the artist-in-residence programme to invite artists and curators to reside in Gozo. These initiatives will enhance cultural and artistic exchange, nurture new ideas and support the development of new creative projects.

### AIMING TOWARDS THE TITLE OF EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2031

Following the submission of an expression of interest in 2021 by the Gozo Regional Council, Gozo is currently a candidate for the title of European Capital of Culture 2031. Gozo has also submitted a bid for the title of European Region of Gastronomy. Such initiatives should be supported as these efforts contribute to valorising the Gozitan heritage and identity.

### WORKING TOWARDS HAVING CITTADELLA DECLARED A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The Cittadella is an ancient, fortified city on a strategically located hill-top in Victoria enjoying 360-degree views of all the Island. The Cittadella with its enthralling history is currently in Malta's tentative list to qualify for the UNESCO World Heritage status. Over the term of this strategy efforts to promote Gozo's Cittadella to the status of a UNESCO world heritage site should continue.

CHAPTER 7

# Global Issues, Local Actions



## Sustainability and Climate Neutrality

The increasingly urgent issues of sustainability and new climate regimes act on different scales, generating new environmental, social and cultural asymmetries. These pressing global issues need to be reflected and addressed in this regional strategy through interventions and actions on a regional and local level.

As the world strives to reach carbon neutrality by mid-century, in 2016 the Maltese islands pledged to do their part to limit global warming to below 2 degrees compared to pre-industrial levels. As outlined by the UNFCCC, such radical cultural shifts require economic and social transformation based on the best available science. Gozo too, seeks to contribute towards this collective long-term goal, by amongst others transforming its economy and culture in alignment with these pressing environmental priorities.

Accordingly, these actions also seek to respond to the requests of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the consequent Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Glasgow COP 26 summit. They support the 2016 Pact of Amsterdam and its strategic objective, the Urban Agenda for the European Union, which establishes the priority to be accorded to environmental sustainability standards (Sustainable Land Use, Energy Transition, Climate Adaptation, Urban Mobility, Air Quality).

Malta's Sustainable Development Vision for 2050 frames Malta as one of the few countries to have defined a sustainable development model, anticipating recent European ecological transition in the European Green Deal framework (2019–2024; no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050).

According to these guidelines, the suggested strategies focus on the following to reduce the temperature:

- Emphasis on accelerating the transition to a low-carbon digital economy;
- Reduce methane emissions by 2030 by executing sustainability actions;
- Building new transport infrastructure;
- Establishing production and circular economy systems;
- Ensure sustainable mobility in order to reduce atmospheric pollutants in line with the requirements

of EU Directive 2016/2284;

- Increase forestation and have tall green areas in designed locations: natural, public and private spaces should follow the principle of urban forestation;
- Transition towards low-carbon energy sustainable buildings and urban development protection, conserving and enhancing natural capital;
- Use cold construction materials, which are capable of minimising heat loss to the surroundings and the ground;
- Implement primary landscape strategies (village) rather than focus on urban densification.

The purpose is not only to actualise climate neutrality but also to act operationally to decrease the temperature and the consequent water scarcity, thereby transforming Gozo into a European location of best practice and innovation. In this regard, following a call by the European Commission, inviting cities to express their interest in being part of the EU Mission, "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030", Gozo was selected in April 2022, to join the Cities Mission. The 100 selected cities will act as testbeds for experimentation and innovation, paving the way for all other European cities to follow suit in their transition to become climate-neutral by 2050.

As a first step in the process, these 100 pioneering cities, including Gozo, will work towards having clear commitments, which will include innovation actions addressing climate neutrality across all sectors such as clean mobility, energy efficient buildings, waste management and green urban planning. Citizens and the private sector will all be involved in this process and the Cities Mission will also offer the possibility of joint initiatives and collaborations, with greater funding opportunities across EU programmes.

The GRDA Regional Development Strategy will therefore go hand in hand with Gozo's active participation and commitment in the 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities initiative.

## Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable development has emerged as one of the critical global issues of our time, amidst growing calls by private citizens and civil society to ensure that economic growth does not come at the expense of social and environmental wellbeing. As expected, the Maltese Islands have also embraced the concept of sustainability. In fact, in 2012 the Maltese government adopted the Sustainable Development Act, one of the first of its kind globally, focusing on ensuring that sustainability practices are mainstreamed across public sector operations and society in general. Furthermore, in 2018 the Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change launched its Sustainable Development Vision for 2050, incorporating many wide-ranging objectives, proposals and targets for ensuring progress towards sustainable development within the Maltese Islands in the long term. Sustainability is also of particular importance for Gozo. Using the Sustainable Development Goals as a benchmark to measure progress, Gozo can harness

its social and environmental assets to foster the island's prosperity, identity, and ecological diversity, forming a resilient backbone for the growth of new economic sectors and fuelling inclusive social growth.

Despite the apparent commonalities, Gozo possesses a distinct set of economic realities, socio-cultural characteristics, inherent strengths and weaknesses which distinguish it from the rest of the Maltese Islands. More specifically, the conditions and factors that underpin the sustainable development path for Gozo may differ substantially from those that prevail in its sister Island. Therefore, to ensure that the precepts of sustainability prevail in Gozo, a targeted, focused approach is required based on addressing the SDGs.

Given the holistic nature of the SDGs, the Regional Development Strategy has been developed from the ground-up with sustainability at the core of its focus and guiding every aspect of the strategy's conception. Indeed, the eight priority areas identified in this document align with both the themes and principles set out in Malta's Sustainable Development Vision for 2050.





Table 2: Mapping of Priority Areas to Malta's Sustainable Development Vision 2050 and the SDGs

PRIORITY AREAS FROM THE GOZO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY	PRINCIPLES FROM THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT VISION 2050	RELEVANT SDGs
Gozo Spatial Planning and Sustainable Urban Planning	Circular Consumption and Production Patterns; Transition towards Low-Carbon Energy; Sustainable Mobility; Sustainable Buildings and Urban Development; Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Capital.	SDG7 - Affordable and Clean Energy SDG8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities SDG12 - Responsible Consumption and Production SDG13 - Climate Action SDG15 - Life on land
Infrastructure and Accessibility	Sustainable Mobility; Transition towards Low-Carbon Energy; Good Health and Wellbeing; Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Capital.	SDG3 - Good Health and Wellbeing SDG7 - Affordable and Clean Energy SDG9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities SDG13 - Climate Action SDG15 - Life on Land
Rural Development	Circular Consumption and Production Patterns; Transition towards Low-Carbon Energy; Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Capital.	SDG7 - Affordable and Clean Energy SDG8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities SDG12 - Responsible Consumption and Production SDG13 - Climate Action SDG14 - Life below Water SDG15 - Life on Land

PRIORITY AREAS FROM THE GOZO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY	PRINCIPLES FROM THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT VISION 2050	RELEVANT SDG S
Economic and Human Talent Development	Creation of More High-Skilled and High Value-Added Jobs; High-Quality Education and Training; Fair and Inclusive Labour Market.	SDG4 - Quality Education SDG5 - Gender Equality SDG8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG10 - Reduced Inequalities
New Economy	Transition Towards a Digital Economy; Transition Towards a Low-Carbon Emissions Economy; Creation of More High-Skilled and High Value-Added Jobs; High-Quality Education and Training; Increased Investment in R&I.	SDG4 - Quality Education SDG7 - Affordable and Clean Energy SDG8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG10 - Reduced Inequalities
Sustainable Tourism	Transition Towards a Digital Economy; Transition Towards a Low-Carbon Emissions Economy; Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Capital.	SDG8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG14 - Life below Water SDG15 - Life on Land
Social Development	Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion; Building Safe and Integrated Communities; Increased Investment in R&I; Good Health and Wellbeing.	SDG1 - No Poverty SDG2 - Zero Hunger SDG3 - Good Health and Well-being SDG9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG10 - Reduced Inequalities SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
Culture, Heritage and Arts	Creation of More High-Skilled and High Value-Added Jobs; Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Capital; Building Safe and Integrated Communities.	SDG8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG10 - Reduced Inequalities SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities SDG15 - Life on Land





**GOZO REGIONAL**  
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