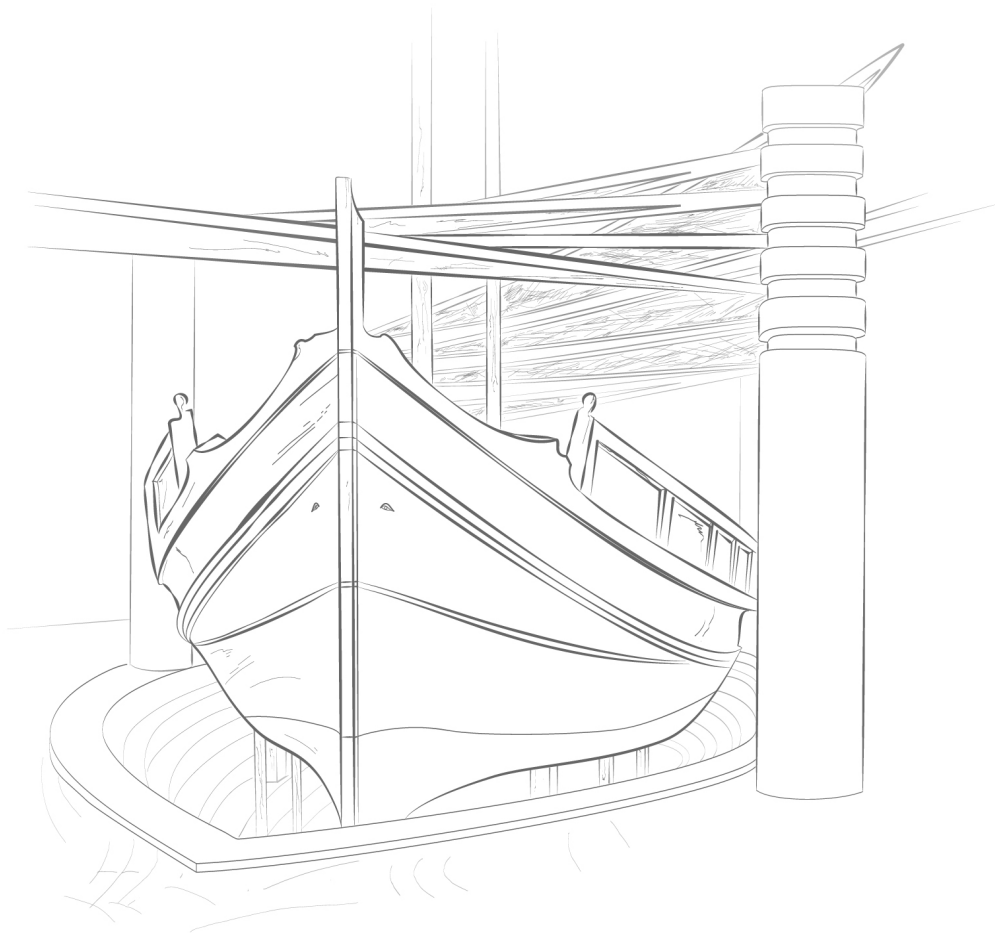


# Perspettivi

A Gozo Review

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# **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**

**A regional analysis of the Island of Gozo**

**Juergen Attard and Marthese Cassar**

**Abstract:**

Climate change has come to the fore of global agenda due to changes in weather patterns and the increased occurrence of extreme weather events, which are significantly impacting the well-being, the environment, and the economic activities of various regions worldwide. To combat climate change, nations have, over time, reached a consensus on a common set of international targets. These climate targets represent collective objectives aimed at reducing global emissions and restraining temperature rise. As a member state of the European Union, Malta is fully committed to meeting its target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. The climate-related goals established for Gozo, an island within the Maltese archipelago, are notably more ambitious, positioning Gozo as a leader in attaining the set national climate targets. There is a clear determination from the government to prioritise climate change, as demonstrated by the recent publication of the Regional Development Strategy for Gozo, which firmly places sustainability and ecological concerns at its core. Nevertheless, the island still faces a long road ahead to reach the desired climate targets, emphasising the urgency of continued future actions. The actions taken today will resonate in the future, and if these actions are anaemic, they may necessitate costly future interventions.

**Keywords:**

Climate change, policy, regional development.

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# **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**

## **A regional analysis of the Island of Gozo**

### **Introduction**

Climate change has become one of the greatest challenges in the twenty-first century. The issue of climate change has come to the forefront of social debate as changes in weather patterns and extreme weather events can have a significant impact on wellbeing and economic activity, particularly in climate-sensitive sectors.

Climate change is caused by an increase in temperatures referred to as global warming. This increase in temperature is a result of the release of various greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide (European Commission, n.d).

Many may ask what causes the release of greenhouse gases. This is mainly attributed to the burning of fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas to generate energy. What makes greenhouse gases special, is that these gases within the atmosphere have the ability to attract the sun's heat, hence causing an increase in temperature (United Nations, n.d.). Scientists have noted that average global temperatures have increased, by 1.1 degrees Celsius since 1880 (Earth Observatory, n.d.).



This increase in temperature is causing a change in climate, where different countries and regions are experiencing severe weathers. Certain areas are becoming drier leading to uncontrolled fires and drought. While other areas are flooding due to torrential rainfalls and melting of the ice (United Nations, n.d.). Furthermore, sea level is rising due to increased water temperatures as well as ice melts. These extreme weathers are leading to loss of biodiversity, restricted crop supply, infrastructural damages as well as health burdens. Hence, negatively impacting mankind, especially those who are already in a vulnerable state (United Nations, n.d.).

In Malta, the effects of climate change are already evident to some degree. For instance, in February 2019, a storm brought wind gusts of 133km/hr and nearly 50mm of rainfall. This extreme weather event caused considerable damages, especially in sectors highly susceptible to weather fluctuations like agriculture and fishing. Recent scientific reports indicate that as global climate patterns continue to undergo unprecedented changes, occurrences of weather-related shocks similar to this one may become more frequent in the long run (European Council, n.d.). Consequently, there is a pressing need for increased efforts from both the public and private sectors, as well as individuals, to combat climate change and shift towards a more environmentally sustainable economy.

## **Climate-relevant targets**

### *International targets*

Political determination is crucial when addressing the severe consequences of climate change. Although different nations advocate for distinct measures to adjust to and alleviate the effects

of climate change, nations have along the years come to a consensus on a set of common international targets. These climate targets are collective goals which aim to globally reduce greenhouse gas emissions and curtail the rise in temperature. Such targets serve as important guidelines for governments and other stakeholders in their efforts to address climate change.

Some of the most notable international climate targets are the Paris Agreement and the Kyoto Protocol. The latter is an international treaty adopted in 1997 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which set binding targets for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 5.2% below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012 (United Nations Climate Change, n.d.). Meanwhile, the Paris Agreement is a legally binding treaty signed by 196 countries in 2015, also under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The main aim of the agreement is to keep the global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius (United Nations Climate Change, n.d.). There is also the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are a set of 17 goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015, with a target deadline of 2030. One of the SDGs, Goal 13, specifically targets climate action, with a focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy, and increasing climate resilience (United Nations Sustainable Development, n.d.).

### *EU targets*

The European Union has prioritised the response towards climate change by committing itself to an ambitious climate policy. The European Union's main priority for the coming decades is to

achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, a target that was set into binding legislation with the European Climate Law. To push the European Union towards carbon neutrality, the 2030 greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction target of 40% was raised in December 2020, to a net domestic reduction of at least 55% in GHG emissions. This will promote green investments, spur more sustainable economic growth and create considerable health and environmental benefits for citizens (European Council, n.d.).

To achieve climate neutrality, that is when almost no greenhouse gas emissions are released, the EU has set out a plan, focusing on different areas, termed as the European Green Deal. The European Green Deal is a package of policy initiatives, which aims to set the EU on the path to a green transition, with the ultimate goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050. The European Green Deal was presented on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2019 (European Commission, n.d.).<sup>1</sup>

The EU is mitigating climate change not only by greenhouse gases reductions but by also pushing for renewable energy sources and energy efficient buildings and appliances. The EU has set an overarching renewable energy consumption target of 32.0% of 2030. In view of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Commission has proposed to increase this target to at least 42.5% (European Commission, n.d.).

### *National and regional targets*

As a European Union Member State, Malta is also committed to fulfil its obligation of becoming carbon neutral by 2050. To smoothen the transition towards a carbon-neutral economy, Malta has set

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/>.

a binding non-ETS emission reduction target of -19% by 2030 compared to 2005 emissions (European Parliament, 2021).

Gozo is set to take a leading role in attaining climate-related targets. The climate-related objectives set for Gozo are notably more ambitious, as clearly stated in the political electoral manifesto Malta Flimkien, as well as in public statements made by the Prime Minister. In January 2021, through the Gozo Regional Development Authority (GRDA), Gozo has submitted its application and was subsequently chosen to participate in the Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission. The aim of this mission is to have 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030, an ambitious target of the European Green Deal and in line with the EU's commitment to global climate action under the Paris Agreement. Climate neutrality is basically when greenhouse emissions are low enough for natural processes to absorb them. The 100 selected cities were invited to develop Climate City Contracts, which will include an overall plan on how cities will reach climate neutrality across the various sectors, including an investment plan and commitments from the various stakeholders (European Commission, n.d.).

### **Climate-relevant initiatives**

Being an urbanized and densely populated country, the islands of Malta and Gozo are more sensitive to climate risks. The country's low resource productivity, growing population and economic growth are anticipated to further exacerbate environmental issues. Therefore, the government should strive to reach its climate objectives.

To reach the aforementioned targets, over the last decade, the Maltese government has introduced several climate-relevant

measures, focusing on climate mitigation and climate adaptation. Locally, with regards to climate mitigation measures, these are mainly in the form of subsidies, including various schemes to promote and encourage the use of renewable energy sources (Attard & Vella, 2022). Such initiatives include schemes that support the installation of photovoltaic systems and solar water heaters, favourable tariffs for electricity produced by solar photovoltaic systems and eco reduction benefits to encourage less electricity consumption. Other schemes are specifically targeted to firms, such as initiatives that assist hoteliers to invest in energy efficiency projects, grants to facilitate investment technological solutions that provide higher energy efficiency and other investment schemes for large scale renewable energy projects. Although these initiatives were launched on a national level some of the abovementioned schemes were more favorable for the region of Gozo compared to other regions in Malta. As a result, the take up of such schemes was higher in Gozo when compared to mainland Malta. In fact, according to the data published by the National Statistics Office, Gozo has a higher concentration of PV panels when compared to mainland Malta. This was due to better feed-in tariffs for Gozitans.

The government has launched a number of initiatives which try to promote other alternative and more efficient modes of transport. In 2014, the car scrappage scheme was introduced with the aim of promoting the scrappage of older vehicles and replacing them with cleaner or electric vehicles. This scheme for vehicles registered on Gozo is more favorable as the average age of registered cars on the island is higher than that in mainland Malta. Other grants for electric bicycles and motorcycles were also launched. Furthermore, other initiatives included the gradual introduction of free public transport which started in 2017 and the extension of free school

transport which was introduced in 2018 with free public transport for all Tallinja card holders as of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022. The government also launched several other initiatives to enhance the use of electric vehicles which includes the extension of electric car charging points and the introduction of zero interest on loans on the purchase of electric vehicles.

Other climate related measures include government outlays on environmental protection. These outlays mainly entail spending related to afforestation projects, the protection of biodiversity, energy efficient renovation of public buildings and regeneration of parks. Examples of such projects in Gozo include improvement in the energy efficiency of public buildings including that of the Ministry for Gozo, the construction of a carbon-neutral school in Nadur, the rehabilitation and afforestation of tal-Qortin landfill in Xagħra, and Mġarr Grove. There are also a number of climate-relevant projects which are currently underway. This includes a new park and ride facility in the limits of Xewkija, the renovation of Ulysses Grove in Xewkija, as well as the first carbon neutral garden in Xewkija - Ġnien il-Kunsill and a Rainwater Harvesting Theme Park in Għajnsielem.

Furthermore, different Ministries issued strategies in order to tackle climate change. During 2021 the Ministry for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning (now the Ministry for the Energy, Environment and Enterprise) issued the Low Carbon Development Strategy.<sup>2</sup> This strategy focuses on the different sectors and how emissions from these sectors are mitigated. The sectors include energy systems, transport, buildings, industry, waste, water, agriculture and land-use, land-use change and forestry. Also, in 2019 the Malta's 2030 National

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<sup>2</sup> Low Carbon Development Strategy is available on: <https://unfccc.int/documents/311041>.

Energy and Climate Plan was published by the former Ministry for Energy and Water Management.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, during 2016, Transport Malta has issued the National Transport Strategy by 2050.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, the GRDA published a strategic plan for Gozo's regional development.<sup>5</sup> The Gozo Regional Development Strategy outlines the envisioned path for Gozo over the next decade. A central theme of this strategy is the promotion of sensible use of land and the natural environment. The strategy outlines several pivotal objectives, including establishing a network of accessible open spaces in both urban and rural areas, fostering biodiversity, encouraging sustainable construction methods, and mitigating the effects of climate change. The strategy also outlines a series of initiatives to realize these objectives. These initiatives encompass expanding green areas, promoting eco-friendly building practices, reevaluating current transportation modes, optimizing water resource management, rehabilitating valleys, restoring wells, supporting water distribution systems for Gozitan farmers, and extending afforestation initiatives.

### **Gozo vis-à-vis its climate targets**

In order to understand Gozo's stance with the established climate targets, it's essential to first establish its starting point. While statistics, studies, and research on the primary sources of emissions are readily available at the national level, the same cannot be said for Gozo, as these studies primarily focus on a national scale rather

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<sup>3</sup> Malta's 2030 Energy and Climate Plan is available on: [https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-01/mt\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-01/mt_final_necp_main_en_0.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> For more information see: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/>.

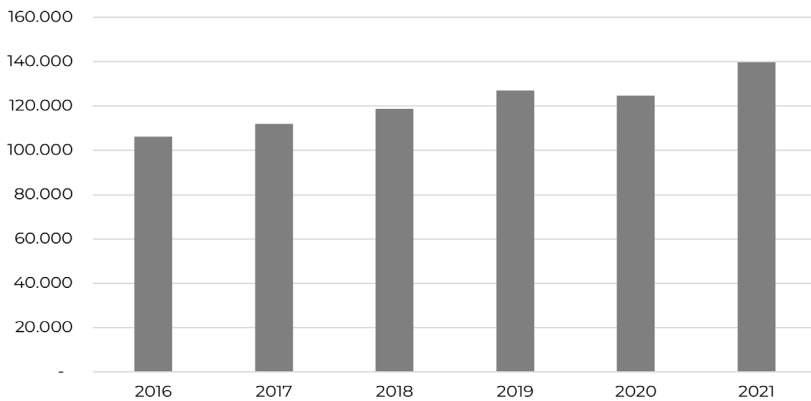
<sup>5</sup> The Gozo Regional Development strategy is available on: [https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/GRDA\\_RDS-Document\\_A4\\_VH\\_2023\\_Web-1.pdf](https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/GRDA_RDS-Document_A4_VH_2023_Web-1.pdf).

than a regional one. This section of the document aims to bridge this information gap by presenting a summary of the major CO<sub>2</sub> emission contributors in Gozo. Specifically, this part of the note delves into key areas such as electricity consumption, intra-island transportation and transportation to and from the island.

### *Electricity consumption*

Gozo receives its electricity supply from mainland Malta through three underwater cable circuits. The only energy production source in Gozo is renewable energy, primarily generated through solar panels. The installation of solar panels is more widespread in Gozo compared to Malta, as explained in an earlier section of this note.

**Chart 1: Electricity consumption (Gozo, GWh)**



*Data Source: National Statistics Office*

As outlined in Chart 1 electricity consumption in Gozo has increased over the past years driven by a number of factors including the registered economic growth, record levels of tourism inflows



and an increase in Gozo's population.<sup>6</sup> The biggest consumers of electricity are residents which on average consumed 60.0% of the total electricity consumed in Gozo over the 2016 to 2020 period. This is followed by the commercial and public services sectors and the industry sector. The remaining sectors, including the agricultural sector, have residual effects on total electricity consumption.

### *Intra-island transportation*

Malta exhibits one of the highest ratios of registered vehicles per resident among European Union member states, underscoring the nation's heavy reliance on private transportation. This pronounced dependence on private vehicles is substantiated by a climate survey conducted by the European Investment Bank (EIB), indicating that Maltese citizens are the most resistant to relinquishing their private vehicles compared to other EU nations.

Consequently, this overreliance on private vehicles results in significant emissions stemming from transport-related activities. Indeed, emissions from transportation have more than doubled between 1990 and 2019, with a major contribution attributed to private transportation (Attard & Vella, 2022). This reliance on private vehicles is not confined to mainland Malta but is also noticeable in Gozo. In fact, in per capita terms, the number of registered vehicles in Gozo exceeds that of mainland Malta. A considerable proportion of registered vehicles in Gozo comprises passenger cars, which, by the end of 2021, stood at 691 per every 1,000 residents, underscoring the island's heavy dependence on private vehicles.

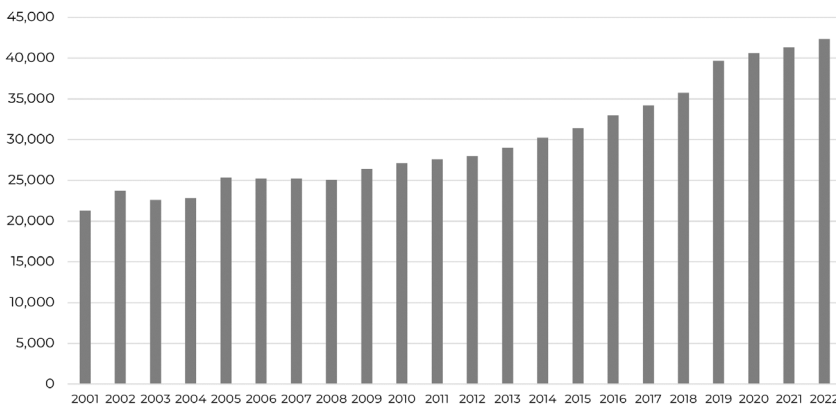
As of the end of 2022, the stock of registered vehicles in Gozo

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<sup>6</sup> For a description of the recent population developments in Gozo see: <https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Macroeconomic-Outlook-2023-2025-06.09.23.pdf>.

reached 42,339, marking an increase of nearly 50.0% over the past decade (see Chart 2). Apart from a higher stock of vehicles per capita, the average age of vehicles registered in Gozo is also higher in comparison to the vehicle stock in mainland Malta. Furthermore, most of the vehicles are ICE vehicles, resulting in the release of greenhouse gas emissions.

**Chart 2: Stock of licensed motor vehicles, Gozo**



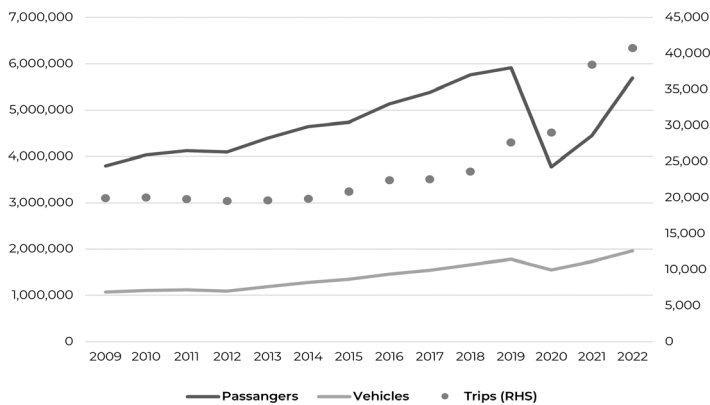
*Data Source: National Statistics Office*

### *Transportation to and from the island*

Given Gozo’s insularity, transport, to and from the island is another important transport-related activity. Demand for travelling between the two islands has increased significantly over the last decades on the back of higher tourism flows, both domestic and international, higher number of Gozitan residents working and studying in Malta and an increasing number of Maltese residents owing a property in Gozo. According to official data, the number of vehicles and passengers that crossed the two islands increased by 83.4% and 50.2% respectively over the 2009 to 2022 period (see Chart 3). Given

the increase in demand the number of trips increased by more than 100.0% over the same period. To accommodate for the rise in demand, in 2019 the government leased the MV Nikolaos ferry to charter additional trips between the two islands. The new vessel increased the capacity of the service, reduced waiting times and improved the overall efficiency of transportation between the two islands. Moreover, in 2021 a new passenger fast ferry service was introduced between the port of Mġarr and Valletta.

**Chart 3: Sea transport between Malta and Gozo**



Data Source: Gozo Channel & National Statistics Office

### CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions in Gozo

The GRDA, together with the Energy and Water Agency and the Gozo Business Chamber, has collaborated with the Clean Energy for EU Islands, to conduct a study on Gozo’s energy consumption situation. This analysis does not only identify the main contributors of energy consumption in Gozo but also quantifies the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions emitted by each activity. To do so this entailed a number of conversion factors. Initially, these conversion factors

were used to compute the energy consumption of each activity. Subsequently, other conversion factors were applied to convert the measured energy consumption of each activity into corresponding CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

**Figure 1: Overview of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in Gozo (tonnes)**

| Sector                           | 2016             | 2017             | 2018             | 2019             | 2020             |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Final electricity consumption    | 69 440,0         | 48 700,0         | 42 317,4         | 45 316,5         | 44 524,3         |
| Transport on the island          | 51 357,4         | 53 366,3         | 54 430,5         | 78 601,4         | 45 375,9         |
| Transport to and from the island | 16 635,0         | 16 734,2         | 17 435,0         | 20 691,0         | 20 346,0         |
| Heating and cooling              | 9 729,9          | 10 221,1         | 9 443,9          | 9 388,2          | 8 086,9          |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>147 162,3</b> | <b>129 021,6</b> | <b>123 626,8</b> | <b>153 997,1</b> | <b>118 333,1</b> |

*Source: Clean energy for EU islands Gozo Report*

According to this study, the activities with the highest amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is electricity consumption and intra-island transport (see Figure 1). These two activities averaged 54.2% and 41.6% respectively of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over the observed period. The high share of emissions generated from transport on the island is attributed to the high amounts of vehicles in particular ICE vehicles. This highlights the importance of tackling the use of private vehicles to achieve the desired climate targets. This was also outlined by Attard and Vella (2022), who stated that while progress has been made in curbing the number of emissions generated on a national level, particularly through the introduction of a new power station, emissions generated from transportation still remain an area of concern.

Moreover, transport to and from the island is also a significant contributor of emissions with an average share of 13.5% over the

observed period. Emissions from this activity have also increased driven by a rise in the number of trips between the two islands. It is also important to highlight that this analysis excludes the impact of the of the fast ferry service as this was only introduced in June 2021. Moreover, this analysis also excludes the emissions generated by private leisure boats as data is not available. Therefore, the overall impact of this activity is larger than that reported in this report.

Another sector that releases CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is the heating and cooling sector. Within Gozitan households, LPG is mainly used for heating and cooking purposes. In commercial services and industrial sector, other fossil fuels are used for heating and cooling purposes such as gasoil, fuel oil and diesel. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions generated from heating and cooling purposes have gradually declined as inhabitants are switching to electrical systems.

## **Policy recommendations**

Having reviewed the climate-related initiatives implemented at both national and regional levels, and having outlined Gozo's position regarding the established climate targets, this section of the note lists a number of policy recommendations which if implemented, will assist Gozo in attaining these predetermined targets.

### *Public and alternative modes of transport*

To tackle the significant dependance on the use of private vehicles, as clearly outlined in earlier part of the note, the present public transportation system should be ameliorated. This view also mirrors that of the general public as according to a recent EIB survey more than 60% of Maltese believe that an improvement in public

transportation is pivotal. Future fiscal policy should focus on the use of clean transportation methods and increased efficiency of public transport. In this regard, the introduction of free public transport for all was definitely a good initiative which should enhance the use of public transport in Gozo, however this will not be enough. To meet the desired targets this initiative should be complemented by other measures which enhance the efficiency of the public transport service. The efficiency of public transport in Gozo could be ameliorated by:

- Increasing route frequency during the morning and afternoon peak hours.
- Smaller buses to accommodate the narrow roads of our villages.<sup>7</sup>
- Introducing an on-demand Tallinja bus service to/from Mgarr and Victoria.

This measure should be complemented by a series of other green initiatives which discourage the use of privately owned vehicles. This includes the ban of high emission vehicles in city centers and the introduction of pedestrian areas in city and village cores. Moreover, the use of other alternative ways of transport such as cycling, and walking is rather limited in Malta when compared to other EU member states. In fact, according to the EIB climate survey only 3.0% cycle to work every day, with the main impediment being Malta's dangerous roads. Therefore, future infrastructure projects should, where possible, incorporate bike paths and walking lanes to improve road safety for other means of transport. Meanwhile, other incentives should aim at reducing the need of commuting. In particular, the focus should be on enhancing teleworking activities through the provision of additional

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<sup>7</sup> The Malta Public Transport has recently introduced a new pilot project that will test the use of new electric minibuses. [https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/125097/electric\\_minibus\\_to\\_be\\_tested\\_on\\_maltese\\_roads\\_next\\_week](https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/125097/electric_minibus_to_be_tested_on_maltese_roads_next_week).

benefits to firms who offer employees teleworking opportunities.

### *Introduce a test-based personal mobility carbon allowance scheme*

Gozo, with its manageable size, is an ideal location for implementing test-based initiatives. The success of previous projects, such as the organic waste program that began as a pilot project in Gozo and later expanded nationwide, underscores the island's potential as a testing ground for innovative solutions. Consequently, other initiatives, especially those focused on encouraging the use of alternative transportation methods, could follow a similar path.

To address the country's reliance on private vehicles and reduce the carbon footprint, a new personal mobility carbon allowance scheme could be introduced as test-based initiative in Gozo. The primary aim of this initiative is to decrease the dependency on private cars by encouraging the adoption of eco-friendly transportation methods. Similar initiatives have been introduced in other cities, such as Lahti in Finland, which successfully prompted residents to reassess their mobility patterns and reduce emissions.

The proposed new initiative shall work through the development of user-friendly digital application that can be downloaded for free. Users will accumulate credits within the app by utilizing environmentally friendly modes of transportation, such as walking, cycling, and public transport, with credits earned and tracked based on the carbon emissions saved through these sustainable transport choices. The digital platform will also feature a virtual marketplace where users can exchange their earned credits for various environmentally friendly products. Besides promoting the use of alternative transportation methods, this initiative will also

gather comprehensive data on citizens' mobility choices. The data collected will provide valuable insights for mobility planners and serve as an open-access mobility data source for innovators.

### *Change in structure of present transport tax system*

Malta's transport related taxes largely consist of non-fuel related taxes. While these taxes promote fuel efficiency by tying the tax rate to a vehicle's carbon dioxide emissions rating, they do not necessarily discourage driving. In contrast, several EU member states employ fuel taxes that have a greater impact on lowering carbon emissions from car use, since they affect the marginal cost of driving a private vehicle.

To address traffic and congestion issues there should be a radical shift in individual behaviour. To promote this, changing the current transport tax system should in the longer run be reformed in favour of fuel taxes rather than non-fuel taxes. By discouraging car use and promoting alternative modes of transportation, fuel taxes can play a crucial role in the use of private vehicles and thus traffic congestion in the long term.

### *Higher fees on Gozo Channel private vehicle tickets*

The number of vehicles that travelled between Malta and Gozo in 2022 was approximately 2.0 million, this figure is expected to continue to increase in the future due to an increase in both domestic and foreign tourism. Although tourism plays a significant role in Gozo's economy, it is recommended that tourists are encouraged to use alternative modes of transportation, such as public transport, rather than relying solely on private vehicles (for domestic tourists) or rental cars (for foreign tourists). To alleviate congestion and parking issues and preserve Gozo's attractiveness,



one solution proposed is to impose higher fees on leisure vehicles traveling between the islands. However, this strategy is dependent on the availability of a dependable and effective public transport system.

### *Alternative sources of energy*

Malta has made significant strides in diversifying its energy mix in recent years, with 71.0% of its electrical supply generated by power plants, 19.1% via net imports, and 9.9% produced from renewable sources in 2021.<sup>8</sup> The main source of renewable energy generation is through photovoltaic systems (PVs). Installations of PVs in Gozo accounted for 14.9% of the total installations across all regions in Malta, with a 4.9% increase from the previous year, slightly lower than the national increase.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, despite this improvement, Malta still lags behind other EU countries as it has one of the lowest proportions of renewable energy consumption. The current focus on constructing apartments instead of residential homes makes it even more challenging to expand the share of PV panels. To partly address this problem, there should be an enhanced emphasis on turning large spaces into green investment opportunities. In Gozo, the marshalling area of the Mġarr Harbour could be considered for this purpose. Additionally, as highlighted within the draft National Policy for the Deployment of Offshore Renewable Energy over the longer term the government should consider offshore solar and wind farms.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Source NSO NRI77/2022.

<sup>9</sup> Source NSO NRI06/2022.

<sup>10</sup> Draft National Policy for the Deployment of Offshore Renewable Energy is available on: [https://energywateragency.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/MEE-National-Policy-23\\_-DIGITAL-.pdf](https://energywateragency.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/MEE-National-Policy-23_-DIGITAL-.pdf).

## *Urban Green Projects*

The government should also allocate funds for urban green projects in Gozo. Such projects have a number of benefits both environmental and social. These include better air quality, the reduction of urban heat island effect and biodiversity promotion. In the Budget for 2023 it was announced that Gozo will be allocated €60.0 million under the Sustainable Urban Development initiative. The aim of the latter is to finance urban greening projects in Gozo.

In July 2023, the GRDA has put forth a vision for Victoria, the capital city of the island. The city of Victoria serves as the primary administrative and commercial centre of the island, and it is also home to some of Gozo's most popular historical and cultural heritage sites. The GRDA's vision for Victoria includes urban upgrading which is centred around establishing a green park in the existing parking area. Victoria's urban upgrading aims to rejuvenate the area and prioritize pedestrians and cyclists, promoting a vibrant public life while meeting social, environmental, political, and cultural objectives. Incorporating nature into daily life and creating public spaces is intended to foster a sense of community and improve the overall livability of the region. If the proposed V. Park concept materializes it will have significant environmental and social benefits whilst it will also lead to economic and financial gains.<sup>11</sup>

## *Enhance the sectors resilience to climate change*

As highlighted earlier, climate change greatly impacts different sectors, including those which directly rely on climate, such as

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<sup>11</sup> For more information about the V.Park concept as proposed by the GRDA including its potential benefits see: <https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/V.Park-Proposal-Note-09.07.23.pdf>.

agriculture and fisheries. The agricultural sector is particularly susceptible to climate change, as rising temperatures and insufficient rainfall diminish the productivity of valuable crops, and the occurrence of severe weather events necessitates expensive interventions (Gozo Regional Development Authority, 2022). One potential solution is the implementation of early warning systems specifically designed to anticipate extreme weather events. This system would serve as a vital tool in planning and managing natural disasters, ultimately reducing losses and damages for farmers and also fishermen, and other business owners.

### *Alternative port*

The sole port on Gozo is the Port of Mġarr, which can only be accessed by a steep two-lane road that narrows as it approaches the ferry terminal. To address traffic congestion at this port, the GRDA has proposed the development of a new alternative port which can provide some of the services currently provided at the Mġarr port. These services could include the provision of fast ferry services on weekends. This could help to reduce the current weekend activity and alleviate congestion at the Mġarr port during weekends. Marsalforn could be considered as an alternative port, and the development of new berthing infrastructure could be linked to the construction of a new breakwater.

### *Review of the vehicle licensing system*

Consideration should be given to revising the minimum age for obtaining a vehicle license in order to promote a shift in culture and habits and reduce the reliance of the younger generation on private cars. It is recommended that any change to the licensing age is to be implemented gradually over the long term, rather than in the short term. Another initiative which should be explored is the

implementation of a vehicle license redemption program, where old-aged individuals can voluntarily forfeit their vehicle licenses. In exchange for surrendering their licenses and vehicles, these individuals will receive a government grant and will also be eligible for the Silver T service. This service, which is already in place in some localities in Gozo, should thus be expanded and improved.

### *Change in personal habits*

Although fiscal policy is an important tool in mitigating the impact of climate change, fiscal policy alone would not be sufficient to achieve the desirable goals. Therefore, every business and citizen should take responsible action and where possible change current habits. In other words, everyone should make the best possible effort to reduce their contribution to climate change. This could simply start by purchasing seasonal products and locally produced products. Such behavioural change is encouraged through various national campaigns, even campaigns specifically dedicated to climate mitigation and adaptation.

### **Concluding remarks**

Over the years, significant policy measures have been implemented both at a national and regional level to mitigate and address the impacts of climate change. Despite these efforts, the island of Gozo still has a long way to go to reach the desired climate targets, indicating the need for further action in the future. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable commitment from the government to prioritize climate change, as evident in the recent publication of the Regional Development Strategy for Gozo, placing sustainability and environmental concerns at its core.

While government policies are crucial in setting the direction and tone, fiscal policy alone may not be enough to achieve the set objectives. Therefore, we strongly believe that everyone has a crucial role in preventing, mitigating and adapting to climate change. The actions we take today will have lasting effects on the future. Hence, if these actions are anemic, they may necessitate costly interventions in the future.

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# **The role of external influencers on Gozitan employees' work values and career path**

**Jaclyn Magrin**



**Abstract:**

The objective of this research was to explore whether external influencers, such as family culture and Gozo's unique geographical features, impact the work values and career path of Gozitan employees. In order to assess whether accessibility and family culture impacted on the work values and career path of Gozitan employees, a mixed methodology research was carried out on thirteen different work values to analyse which values were preferred by the private and public sectors in Gozo. From research gathered, accessibility featured to be the vital contributor to changes in public and private sector employee's work values as well as to their choice of career path. It was also concluded in this study that employees in both sectors value family-friendly measures. With family being at the core of the Gozitan population's values, as Gozitans matured and came face to face with different life experiences, their work values changed due to these external factors that no longer permitted them to maintain their previous work values. As their life priorities changed, they were observed to substitute one work value for another, and thus sought an alternative career path.

**Keywords:**

Accessibility, small island state, family-friendly measures, family culture, work values.

### **Author's Bio-Note:**

Jaclyn is the current Assistant Director (People Management) within the Corporate Services Directorate at the Ministry for the National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government. With more than 10 years' experience in the Human Resources field, she considers employees to be a company's biggest asset and maintains that strong social relationships generate a more trusting and healthy work environment.

She also believes that protecting employees' welfare while making sure the company's human resource objectives are met is one of the primary goals of any HR professional.

Jaclyn graduated from the University of Malta in 2002 with a Bachelors' Degree in Communication Studies (Hons.) and International Relations, and a Diploma in Public Administration in 2016. In 2022 she was awarded a Master of Science in Management (Human Resource Management) with IDEA Academy (Malta).

In her spare time, Jaclyn enjoys running, hiking, and spending time with her family. She also enjoys travelling, discovering unique cultures, and socialising.

# The role of external influencers on Gozitan employees' work values and career path

## Introduction

The objective of this study was to explore whether Gozo's geographical features and family culture played a role in the chosen work values and the career path of employees working within the public and private work sectors on the island of Gozo.

As an island region, Gozo is the second largest island of the Maltese archipelago, having an estimated population of 33,388 residents (National Statistics Office, 2020). Similarly to other islands, it also displays various unique geographical and socio-cultural characteristics.

Hence it was hypothesised that some external characteristics, such as family values and the island's double-insularity would contribute to the decisions taken in respect of chosen career paths by Gozitans. It was also hypothesised that Gozo's lack of accessibility and a person's evolving family trajectories would contribute to one's career path. For the purpose of this dissertation, the phrase family trajectory is being defined as the whole sequence of family events

during the life course of early adulthood.

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Given the objectives of this study, the author shall be delving into the following research questions:

*What are the work values that distinguish the private and the public sector in Gozo? Are Gozo's geographical characteristics causing a shift in Gozitan employee work values?*

**H1:** Employees whose work values have been altered by family trajectories prefer to work with the public sector as this sector offers more family-friendly measures.

**H2:** The work values of Gozitan employees in the public and private sectors are affected by Gozo's geographical characteristics and this in turn alters their career path choice.

## **Literature Review**

### *Cultural influences on work values and career paths*

According to Gokuladas (2010), cultural values play a part in career choice since such values influence an individual's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. With people opting to therefore choose careers which they consider as meaningful to their choices or life objectives (Vigoda-Gadot & Grimland, 2008), this could also lead them to choose the private over the public sector, or vice-versa. Although researchers have focused on the impact of culture in job choice, it is argued that there is still a gap in literature as to why and to what extent cultural context plays a role in career development (Brown, 2002).

One's family culture, including the expectations and requirements engendered by one's family, is perhaps the most significant category of external factors determining most individuals' career growth. The influence of having children, having to make job decisions that affect both oneself and a partner, and the necessity to care for elderly family members greatly impairs career choice volition for individuals in the working environment (Duffy & Dik, 2009). The notion that family trajectories can affect people's work values is consistent with the life course paradigm's long-standing ideas (Elder, 1998 cited in Johnson, 2005, p.365). As individuals are subjected to singular life phases, conflict with internal aspirations is bound to transform one's previous orientations and beliefs. Changes in work values, and indirectly career paths, can eventually transpire.

More women and dual-earner families have entered the workforce in recent decades, resulting in the formation of a new work-family configuration (Tharenou, 1999 cited in Mayrhofer et al., 2008, p.312). Families and partnerships have evolved (Schmidt, 2001 cited in Mayrhofer et al., 2008, p.294). Family involvement has become a meaningful value to males and females alike. The stereotypical gender roles of males and females - the bread-winner and child carer respectively - although not a thing of the past have significantly decreased. As a result of this change, internal pressures have arisen to devote more attention and energy to the family sphere in order to meet the expectations of family roles (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001 cited in Mayrhofer et al., 2008, p.294).

Flexible working arrangements have been used by both the private and public sectors to enable work-life balance after being identified as a means of combining work and other responsibilities (Evans, 2001; Dex & Smith, 2002). This to deal with work-related stresses and

disputes, which can result in lower productivity and job discontent (Russell, O'Connell, & McGinnity, 2009).

From the standpoint of family relations, studies have shown that work-life balance is more common in the public sector. This sector offers and establishes more family-friendly measures and policies (Bygren & Duvander, 2006), including a combination of sick leave, paid lead and flexi work, amongst others (Feeney & Stritch, 2019). Scherer and Steiber (2007) concur and add that the public sector offers the least hierarchical pressure. Employees in the public sector report working fewer hours, with a gender variable of females working less hours onsite (Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007). Hence employees working within the public sector are less exposed to conflicts between family and work overall.

In Malta, the Maltese government introduced law and family-friendly policies to promote a positive work life balance for its employees, as well as to encourage women to return to work. National statistics for public employees utilising family-friendly measures registered an 8% increase between the years 2016 to 2019 (3140 to 3390) and a phenomenal 172% increase in the Gozitan public sector (128 to 348) over the same three years (Malta Public Service, 2021; Grech, 2021).

### *Geographical Characteristics*

Many career theories have placed a great emphasis on the individual and have paid little consideration to the context in which a job is undertaken. Location is considered as having little impact in such career conceptions, with individuals being seen as able to overcome spatial limits by travelling between locations domestically and globally. However, research has revealed that, in

addition to cultural factors, geographic location has a significant impact on career path decisions in a variety of ways (Duffy & Dik, 2009).

When companies are looking to hire and recruit talented employees, a logical question to ask in the absence of such employees would be *'What is restricting employees to apply for the position?'*. Most recruiting professionals blame things like pay, benefits, as well as employer reputation. However, according to Dr. Sullivan (2011), the geographical factor surpasses all other factors and is constantly being overlooked. He continues to state that commuting difficulties, as well as unwillingness to re-locate due to incurred costs, living preferences and family issues, are all reasons which see employees opting to work in environments which are more prone to allow remote working and offer flexibility at the workplace.

Small Island States are characterized by their small size, a condition which intrinsically implies a series of factors which make them more vulnerable. Briguglio (2002) refers to vulnerability as that potential attribute of a system which is damaged by exogenous impacts. Examples include factors of insularity and remoteness. Furthermore, Eurisles (2002 cited in Deidda, 2015, p.108) states that insularity can be regarded as a "permanent phenomenon of physical discontinuity", with such permanent geographical factors significantly impacting on the production potential and living and working conditions of citizens.

Accessibility plays a key role in island economic development since it is vital to island development and diversified economy. Increasing connection through the development of fixed links can help islands become more accessible. Fixed links, such as bridges, can reduce the negative impacts of isolation (Baldacchino, 2004 cited in Deidda, 2015, p.124) and address the migration phenomenon which is aggravated

by the lack of effective and efficient transportation (Armstrong, H.W., Ballas, D. & Staines, A., 2006 cited in Deidda, 2015, p.119).

Apart from temporary or permanent migration, the National Statistics Office (2021) reflects that currently approximately one out of every five employed Gozitans commute to Malta by ferry for work. As per the Association of Gozitan Employees in Malta, apart from wasting time, Gozitans commuting to Malta daily also incur significant travelling expenses (Borg, 2017). Moreover, research on island commuters acknowledges that commutes are prone to more health and wellness issues since they get significantly less nocturnal sleep and suffer from increased hypertension (Walsleben et al., 1999 cited in Lyons & Chatterjee, 2008, p.186).

With an absence of a fixed link between the islands, issues relating to transport feature very predominantly in the Gozitan culture and provide Gozitans with higher constraints when compared to their Maltese counterparts (Briguglio, 2002). Career path by volition might therefore be found to be non-existent for those Gozitans who decide that the incurred cost of working on the mainland to realise their work values are not worth the extra economic costs, wasted travelling time, mental health and well-being, and family separation.

## **Methodology**

To investigate the research questions and test the hypotheses mentioned above, a mixed-methods approach was undertaken.

Data was collected via an attitude survey and four semi-structured interviews. The data collection tools were prepared in both the English and Maltese languages, to ensure a higher response rate.



In order to obtain a sample population that best represents the entire population being studied, a stratified random sampling technique was utilised since the populations being studied included two separate strata, i.e. the public and private sectors in Gozo. To increase dependability, the manufacturing, constructing and agricultural industries within the private sector were not included in the target population.

Using an online sample size calculator, the determined survey sample size was 350 and 365 surveys to be distributed to the public and private sector respectively. Calculations included a 95% confidence level and a 5% confidence level. Since 20% of people invited through random sampling were expected to respond, in order to counteract the margin of error, 500 respondents from each sector were invited to participate to increase the response rate. Distribution of surveys was done via email using a web-based survey program to increase efficiency, reliability and survey clarity. Web-based surveys also gave the participants the possibility to automatically skip unrelated questions, thus shortening survey completion time. After the one-month time frame had elapsed, the researcher gathered survey responses.

The gross response rate was that of 480 surveys. 20 respondents were immediately disqualified and deducted since they lived in Malta. Another 40 surveys were incomplete and therefore also removed from the study. Hence a net of 420 surveys remained, with 225 respondents coming from the public sector and the remaining 195 coming from the private sector.

To better understand the data responses gathered quantitatively, a qualitative perspective was also included. Using expert sampling, four key informants coming from the private and public sectors were chosen. These were the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry for Gozo (PS); a Senior Lecturer within the Faculty of Economics,

Management and Accountancy, Institute of the University of Malta (UOM); the President at the Gozo Business Chamber (GBC); and the Chief Executive Officer at the Gozo Regional Development Authority (GRDA). 40-minutes interviews were held to address and discuss certain factors which surfaced after the survey's analysis, as well as to highlight potential new areas of interest.

All quantitative data was categorised and analysed via SPSS, and several tests were conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the quantitative data. These included the chi-square test, Cronbach's Alpha test, the Mann-Whitney U Test, and the Shapiro-Wilk Test.

To assess the qualitative data gathered via the semi-structured interviews, consented recordings were conducted and transcribed. The researcher had already previously identified patterns that had emerged from the quantitative data. Hence a process of systematic searching and arranging of transcript data using categories and themes ensued (Table 1).

**Table 1 – Categories and Themes**

| Categories and Themes                                   |                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Analyses of Work Values                              | Main values for employees in the public sector                       |
|                                                         | Main values for employees in the private sector                      |
| 2. Priority of Work Values and the Impact on Job choice | Geolocation and Family-friendly measures vis-à-vis other work values |
| 3. Geolocation and Career Path                          | Value of 'accessibility'                                             |
|                                                         | Commuting time                                                       |
|                                                         | Family time                                                          |
|                                                         | Demographic impact on job choice                                     |

Finally, the data obtained was synthesised to interpret the meanings extracted, as well as prove, negate or leave as undecided the proposed research hypotheses.

## Analyses

### *Overview of Work Values and Family-Friendly Measures*

Research was carried out on 13 pre-defined work values. Public and private sector employees were asked to rate their most preferred work value. A marked difference was found in regard to the following values: being able to work independently; secure work; contribution to society; and family-friendly measures. In reference to family-friendly measures, public sector employees rated this work value higher than employees within the private sector (Table 2 and Table 3).

**Table 2 - Mean rating scores of work values of respondents working with the public sector**

| In which sector do you currently work? Public |      |                    |                         |                         |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                               | Mean | Standard Deviation | 95.0% Lower CL for Mean | 95.0% Upper CL for Mean |
| Being creative                                | 3.57 | 1.13               | 3.42                    | 3.73                    |
| Decision-making power                         | 3.31 | 1.10               | 3.16                    | 3.46                    |
| Having a high salary                          | 3.65 | 1.09               | 3.50                    | 3.80                    |
| Good human relations with supervisors         | 4.15 | 1.02               | 4.01                    | 4.29                    |
| Opportunities for advancement                 | 3.81 | 1.08               | 3.66                    | 3.96                    |
| Achieving work goals                          | 4.07 | 0.94               | 3.94                    | 4.20                    |
| Being active/busy at work                     | 4.06 | 0.91               | 3.94                    | 4.19                    |
| Interesting work                              | 4.23 | 0.93               | 4.11                    | 4.36                    |
| Being able to work independently              | 3.69 | 1.12               | 3.53                    | 3.84                    |
| Family-friendly measures                      | 4.08 | 1.17               | 3.92                    | 4.24                    |
| Work is secure                                | 4.56 | 0.81               | 4.44                    | 4.67                    |
| Work is varied                                | 3.88 | 1.01               | 3.74                    | 4.02                    |
| To contribute to society                      | 3.89 | 1.07               | 3.74                    | 4.04                    |
| Working with others and in teams              | 4.00 | 0.97               | 3.87                    | 4.14                    |

**Table 3 - Mean rating scores of work values of respondents working with the private sector**

| In which sector do you currently work? Private |      |                    |                         |                         |
|------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                                | Mean | Standard Deviation | 95.0% Lower CL for Mean | 95.0% Upper CL for Mean |
| Being creative                                 | 3.79 | 1.08               | 3.62                    | 3.95                    |
| Decision-making power                          | 3.87 | 1.10               | 3.70                    | 4.04                    |
| Having a high salary                           | 3.82 | 0.98               | 3.67                    | 3.96                    |
| Good human relations with supervisors          | 3.92 | 1.26               | 3.72                    | 4.11                    |
| Opportunities for advancement                  | 4.02 | 1.11               | 3.85                    | 4.19                    |
| Achieving work goals                           | 4.28 | 0.90               | 4.14                    | 4.42                    |
| Being active/busy at work                      | 4.33 | 0.73               | 4.22                    | 4.44                    |
| Interesting work                               | 4.58 | 0.74               | 4.47                    | 4.70                    |
| Being able to work independently               | 4.20 | 0.99               | 4.05                    | 4.35                    |
| Family-friendly measures                       | 3.73 | 1.39               | 3.52                    | 3.94                    |
| Work is secure                                 | 3.88 | 1.26               | 3.68                    | 4.07                    |
| Work is varied                                 | 3.96 | 1.00               | 3.81                    | 4.12                    |
| To contribute to society                       | 3.52 | 1.24               | 3.34                    | 3.71                    |
| Working with others and in teams               | 3.79 | 1.21               | 3.60                    | 3.97                    |

However, it was interesting to note that when employees were asked if they benefit from family-friendly measures, there was no significant difference in the percentage proportions of the family-friendly measures benefits when compared with workers from public and private sectors (Table 4). This shows that independently of the sector, the importance of having family-friendly measures at the work place is an important value to both sectors.

**Table 4 - Comparison between benefitting from family-friendly measures and work sector (Public/Private)**

$\chi^2(1) = 1.610, p = 0.226$

|                                                             |     |                                                 | In which sector do you currently work ? |         |        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------|--------|
|                                                             |     |                                                 | Public                                  | Private | Total  |
| Do you currently benefit from any family-friendly measures? | Yes | Count                                           | 102                                     | 56      | 158    |
|                                                             |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 57.6%                                   | 50.0%   | 54.7%  |
|                                                             | No  | Count                                           | 75                                      | 56      | 131    |
|                                                             |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 42.4%                                   | 50.0%   | 45.3%  |
| Total                                                       |     | Count                                           | 177                                     | 112     | 289    |
|                                                             |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%  | 100.0% |

When questioned as to whether employees ever changed their place of work/sector to start benefitting from family-friendly measures, 28.6% of public workers, compared to 34.6% of private sector workers, claimed that they had changed their place of work/sector due to this reason. Although the percentages suggest that therefore it is more likely for the public sector to be more attractive for its family-friendly measures when compared to the private sector, upon analysing the column percentages in the crosstab of Table 5 no significant difference was found.

**Table 5 - Comparison between changing the place of work/sector to start benefitting from family-friendly measures with the work sector (Public/Private)**

$\chi^2(1) = 0.337, p = 0.624$

|                                                                                                            |     |                                                 | In which sector do you currently work ? |         |        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------|--------|
|                                                                                                            |     |                                                 | Public                                  | Private | Total  |
| Did you ever change your place of work/sector in order to start benefitting from family-friendly measures? | Yes | Count                                           | 22                                      | 9       | 31     |
|                                                                                                            |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 28.6%                                   | 34.6%   | 30.1%  |
|                                                                                                            | No  | Count                                           | 55                                      | 17      | 72     |
|                                                                                                            |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 71.4%                                   | 65.4%   | 69.9%  |
| Total                                                                                                      |     | Count                                           | 77                                      | 26      | 103    |
|                                                                                                            |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%  | 100.0% |

Hence the overall analysis of this section verified that while 'family friendly measures' are important for both sectors, there does not seem to be a discrepancy in the way people choose a sector based on the availability or not of such measures in the respective sectors.

### *Overview of Work Values and Accessibility*

Survey questions relating to accessibility and whether location plays a part in the selection of the workplace were posed to public and private sector employees, with the Chi-square test revealing that there exists a statistically significant relationship between working in Malta and work sector (Table 6).

**Table 6 - Comparison between working in Malta and work sector (Public/Private)**

$\chi^2(1) = 41.745, p < 0.0005$

|                                |     |                                                 | In which sector do you currently work ? |         |        |
|--------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------|--------|
|                                |     |                                                 | Public                                  | Private | Total  |
| Have you ever worked in Malta? | Yes | Count                                           | 165                                     | 81      | 246    |
|                                |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 81.3%                                   | 49.4%   | 67.0%  |
|                                | No  | Count                                           | 38                                      | 83      | 121    |
|                                |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 18.7%                                   | 50.6%   | 33.0%  |
| Total                          |     | Count                                           | 203                                     | 164     | 367    |
|                                |     | % within in which sector do you currently work? | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%  | 100.0% |

Data was gathered to see how many respondents had previously worked in Malta and opted to shift their careers to Gozo due to the work location. The majority of reasons given for the change in location included to reduce the commute time, spend more time with family and look after children (Table 7). In addition, this analysis shows that the values among those who choose to work in Gozo does not vary independently of the sector.

**Table 7 - Reasons for starting to work in Gozo compared with work sector (Public/Private)**

|                                                   |                                 |             | In which sector do you currently work ? |         |       |     |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------|---------|-------|-----|
|                                                   |                                 |             | Public                                  | Private | Total |     |
| Reasons for starting working in Gozo <sup>a</sup> | Job Security                    | Count       | 7                                       | 3       | 10    |     |
|                                                   |                                 | % within Q8 | 4.8%                                    | 4.4%    |       |     |
|                                                   | Better pay package              | Count       | 2                                       | 5       | 7     |     |
|                                                   |                                 | % within Q8 | 1.4%                                    | 7.4%    |       |     |
|                                                   | Less commuting time             | Count       | 123                                     | 53      | 176   |     |
|                                                   |                                 | % within Q8 | 84.2%                                   | 77.9%   |       |     |
|                                                   | Spend more time with the family | Count       | 102                                     | 53      | 155   |     |
|                                                   |                                 | % within Q8 | 69.9%                                   | 77.9%   |       |     |
|                                                   | To look after the children      | Count       | 48                                      | 14      | 62    |     |
|                                                   |                                 | % within Q8 | 32.9%                                   | 20.6%   |       |     |
|                                                   | Total                           |             |                                         | 146     | 68    | 214 |

*Percentages and total are based on respondents.*

## Revisiting the Hypothesis

**H1:** Employees whose work values have been altered by family trajectories prefer to work with the public sector as this sector offers more family-friendly measures.

### 1. Family-friendly measures are highly valued by public sector employees – Hypothesis is retained.

When it came to choosing the most valuable work value for new careers, it was respondents from the public sector who highlighted family-friendly measures as the most significant

<sup>a</sup> Group.



work value. In fact, a significant difference was recorded in the distribution of the rating scores between public and private sectors ( $U = 29025.5$ ,  $z = -2.457$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ). Nonetheless, despite the availability of family-friendly measures in the public sector, it is both employees from the public and private sector who currently utilise and value the same in their current sectors.

**H2:** The work values of Gozitan employees in the public and private sectors are affected by Gozo's geographical characteristics and this in turn alters their career path choice – Hypothesis is retained.

1. Employees in both the public and private sector give high value to finding work and being employed in Gozo. There is no discrepancy based on the sector.
2. Employees who were previously employed in Malta opted to change their job and/or sector to avoid the commuting time (84.2% of respondents who work in public sector as compared with 77.9% of private sector workers).

## **Discussion**

The aim of the paper was to identify whether external influencers, such as family culture and Gozo's unique geographical features, impact the work values and career path of Gozitan employees. To this end, a mixed methodology design revealed how Gozo's family culture and unique geographical characteristics feature to be vital contributors to changes in employee work values and career path, especially as family trajectories change and thus cause employees to reassess their work values.

## *Family Culture and Accessibility*

Over the past ten years, researchers have been exploring the connection that exists between culture, values, individual preferences, and the economy. This finding was also highlighted in a specific report towards Gozo, wherein Briguglio (2011) clarified how Gozo's past economic conditions have changed and shaped the Gozitan culture, leading it to become a socio-culturally distinct island, with family at its apex. Hence, in comparison to Malta, Gozo has remained more traditional, safeguarding and promoting the extended family (Borg, 2017). This view was also shared by all interviewees in the study.

With the onset of different changing family patterns and global labour shifts, (National Commission for the Promotion of Equality Malta, 2009), more employees seek careers which cater to family-friendly measures. Although previous literature review, as well as statistics garnered from this study, do feature public sector employees to be more likely to seek family-friendly measures when choosing a new career path, the survey conducted showed both public and private employees in Gozo to utilise family-friendly measures when provided at their workplace.

In fact, both GRDA and GBC state that it is a misconception that only the public sector offers family-friendly measures to its employees in Gozo. Due to it being a macro-organisation, the public sector is equipped with the financial and human resources to invest and publicize such policies (Kim & Wiggings, 2011; O'Brien, 2012). Private companies in Gozo are, on the other hand, much smaller than those found on the mainland, with statistics reporting 3,800 micro companies (0 to 9 employees), 127 small companies (10 to 49 employees) and only 14 medium-sized companies (50 to 249 companies) (National Statistics Office, 2022). Due to a lack of resources, as well as with most of the micro-companies being

family-run, not all of them are able to afford to invest in such official policies (Grech, 2016 as cited in Magrin, 2016, p. 20).

Hence although official family-friendly procedures are rarely established within private companies in Gozo, the informal concept of '*nirrangaw*' is utilised to offer employees the same work malleability as that offered to public sector employees.<sup>1</sup> Such informal concepts are a deeply ingrained part of the Gozitan work-culture, with such systems working well due to the lack of rigidity and bureaucracy found in smaller private companies. Also, unofficial arrangements are often used to offer support to an employee, and when used well are seen as the ideal way to build relationships of trust and loyalty between employer and employee (GBC, 2022). Other studies recommend such a concept but also limit its usage to smaller firms and communities (De Kok & Uhlaner, 2011).

Although PS believes that the public sector is able to offer more family-friendly measures to its employees due to it not being a 'profit-making organisation', he also states that many firms within the private sector, especially since the Covid pandemic, are opting to offer family-friendly measures. UOM further specifies that the Covid pandemic has seen the utilisation of family-friendly measures being prioritised, with many private employers having no choice but to implement such measures. However, the availability of family-friendly measures would also depend on the type of business one operated from, regardless of sector (UOM, 2022).

This study confirms accessibility to be a common yet vital key element for employees in both the private and public sector, with 55% of public sector employees and 65% of private sector employees

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<sup>1</sup> '*nirrangaw*' is a Maltese term used to describe an informal relationship which will see the granting of measures by an employer to an employee regardless of whether a formal policy exists or not.

ranking 'working in Gozo' to be the most important work value for them. Moreover, survey statistics reflect how 84.2% of respondents from public sector employees and 77.9% of respondents from the private sector previously employed in Malta changed their job and/or sector to avoid the commuting time.

Up until this year, the only choice for commuters who work in Malta was to cross the channel through either the ferry service to Cirkewwa or the recently established fast ferry to Valletta, and then continue the journey by car or public transportation (Arena, 2021). Apart from daily travel being very costly (Dr. Sullivan, 2011; GBC, 2022) and having to cross regardless of the unpleasant weather conditions, Gozitans are very much aware of the fact that they must endure long hours of travel to commute to work when employed in Malta. It is felt to be a waste of time; time that can be better spent with their loved ones. To quote PS, "Gozitans say *tiela* Malta even though geographically Gozitans are actually *nežlin*.<sup>2,3</sup> The literal meaning would therefore represent 'going up a hill', a kind of suffering of sorts".

This reflects the findings of this study, with employees from both sectors marking 'working in Gozo' to be the overall most important work value (55% of public sector employees and 65% of private sector employees). This confirms accessibility to be a common yet vital key element that sees employees in both the private and public sector change their career paths. It also proves that family trajectories do indeed affect work values and career paths (Elder, 1998 cited in Johnson, 2005, p.365; Duffy & Dik, 2009) as accessibility is intrinsically tied to choices made because of family values. A career path by choice is much more difficult for Gozitans since they have to take into account additional variables, such as

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<sup>2</sup> '*tiela*' means to go up.

<sup>3</sup> '*nežlin*' means to go down.

extra-economic expenses, lost travel time, mental health, well-being, and family separation, due to Gozo's unique geographical characteristics. In this sense their choice of a career path has to take a back-seat to accommodate these more pressing variables.

With regards to individuals opting to work from Gozo, GRDA identifies age to be a determining variable. He states that older employees would most likely have more family responsibilities and commitments, and thus no longer have the ambition or career-drive associated with the younger generations. Such added family responsibilities would see them seeking more time to be close to the family, especially with the family tradition being much stronger in Gozo (Formosa, 2017). Also, commuting daily to and from Malta is a strenuous activity which senior employees might not have the physical capacity to endure (GRDA, 2022 & UOM, 2022). However, this does not exclude such a lack of adequate and efficient infrastructure linked to accessibility to not impinge on the personal and family life of younger people who remain in Gozo but find work in Malta.

Other influencing cultural factors associated with job choice and sector in small communities including Gozo are word-of-mouth opinions from dependable family and friends (Van Hoyer & Saks, 2011). Such a trait would explain why demographically there are older (+45) rather than younger public sector employees. Both PS and GBC agree that the older generation of parents are no longer seen to push their children towards public sector jobs. Moreover, GBC states that "whereas before it was the citizen who looked for a public job, today it is government and politicians who solicit employment within the government". Indeed, it is no new phenomenon for government officials to offer jobs to residents of their district in exchange for their vote (Calleja, 2021). This notwithstanding, the Maltese central government still represents the bulk of the government employment level (European Commission, 2018), with the percentage of Gozitans employed in the public sector being

larger in Gozo than the corresponding percentage for the Maltese islands (National Statistics Office, 2021).

Hence in view of the fact that family culture is an important aspect of Gozitan's lives, as well as changing life trajectories, Gozitan employees would indeed consider culture and location when choosing the organisation they would opt to work with (Higgins, 2001).

In spite of all this, the author tends to agree with UOM when stressing how the role of the different variables would partake in such a decision. Although the Gozitan family is more closely-knit and extended, the commute would not be the only impediment to one changing one's work values, but it would invariably include a more holistic look at the quality of life being sought.

## **Conclusion**

With the Gozitan culture still featuring family as a core value, family trajectories are presented as that variable which heavily influences the employees' choice of work values and ultimately career path. Hence as life priorities change, individuals within both the private and public sectors are observed to alternate work values, work sectors and sometimes even job location.

Family-friendly measures are in fact registered as a key component for public sector workers, with local public administration publicly publicising such measures to grant employees a work-life balance. However, contrary to previous literature and local public opinion, the private sector also offers such measures to their employees, albeit in an informal manner. Consequently, the quantitative aspect of this study identifies private sector employees to also utilise such measures.

Finally, accessibility featured to be the overall vital contributor to changes in public and private sector employee's work values as well as to their choice of career path. The commute and waste of time associated with having to travel for work on the mainland is quoted as the major deterrent for Gozitan employees. This is further explained by the high percentage of employees who although previously worked in Malta opted to change careers, even at the cost of a lower salary, to avoid the time-consuming and exhausting commute.

## **Recommendations**

1. With accessibility being cited as a major contributor to a shift in work values and career path decisions, it is vital that the public and private sectors work together to provide more possible job opportunities in Gozo.

Also, to facilitate the difficulties that surround the issue of the commute, more private companies can offer work from home policies [where possible and depending on the type of work], much like the public sector's back-office schemes.

In addition, the opening of more child-care centres in Gozo would offer parents, with an emphasis on those employees who work in Malta, the facility to continue working on a full-time basis.

Government could also offer incentives to private companies in Malta, such as subsidised transport to employees travelling to and from Malta on a daily basis, to aid with employee retention, travel costs and consequently less traffic congestion.

2. Written policies are a fundamental element for private and public sectors in Gozo in providing the needed supportive

work cultures. Policies impart trust, fairness and inclusion by outlining the responsibilities of both employer and employee in the employment relationship. They also impact on employee motivation, organisation reputation and the ability to attract and retain talent. This regardless to organisation size.

- The private sector in Gozo needs to focus on building formal family-friendly policies since the study showed a lack of awareness as to what this sector provides. Taking into consideration the strong family culture on Gozo, such an understanding could possibly attract more workers to join the private workforce knowing that such support exists.
- On the other hand, the public sector needs to re-visit its retention and reward policies since employees within the public sector in Gozo seem to excessively focus on job security. This group of employees requires motivation, and possibly more discipline, especially since they are observed to give minimal attention to career advancement, decision-making and being busy at work.

### **Scope for further study**

With the passing of time, a change in demographics is generating a different labour market: a market which is comprised of more generations having to coexist and work together. Changes in work values and working styles are thus inevitable, now as well as in the future. Thus, conducting a similar study over the next five years would prove an interesting investigation in the understanding of this multigenerational workforce and any impact it may have due to technological, generational, and social shifts. These past few years have seen, for example, more younger generations in Gozo



opting to permanently move to and settle in Malta. This due to various factors such as there being more job opportunities in Malta and to avoid the time-consuming commute. Insights as to the impact such a trend has on work values in the future would be a meaningful tool to navigate and understand challenges which lay ahead for the working community of Gozo.

Another fascinating future study would be a comparative one. As this research pointed out, Gozitan employees work values are influenced by external variables including accessibility and culture. Hence it would be interesting to study whether the same or different variables impact the Maltese working community.

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**Enhancing Employment  
Opportunities for Gozitans:  
The Impact of Active Labour Market Policies**

**Kurt Sant**



**Abstract:**

Gozo is characterised by inherent geographical and connectivity constraints, posing substantial challenges for its residents. These challenges include barriers to employment, such as limited job opportunities on the island and high transportation costs for those working on the main island of Malta. In addition to the introduction of several targeted policies to address such obstacles faced by Gozitans, a significant shift in national labour market policy occurred in 2014 when the government implemented a series of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs). This article examines the impact on employment of a national ALMP, specifically the Tapering of Benefits (TOB) scheme, on Gozo. The study investigates the scheme's influence on the job-finding rate amongst Gozitans and assesses its effect on the likelihood of Gozitans maintaining employment after transitioning from benefits to employment. To achieve this, survival analysis and Cox proportional hazard models are used. Results show that the TOB scheme improves the job-finding rate of Gozitan beneficiaries significantly, with the scheme improving employment prospects by 23.4% more than their Maltese counterparts. Furthermore, the scheme is found to significantly contribute to lower job terminations for Gozitans, leading to longer job tenures when compared to individuals residing in Malta.

**Keywords:**

Gozo, Labour market, unemployment, employment, ALMPs, survival analysis.

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# Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Gozitans: The Impact of Active Labour Market Policies

## Introduction

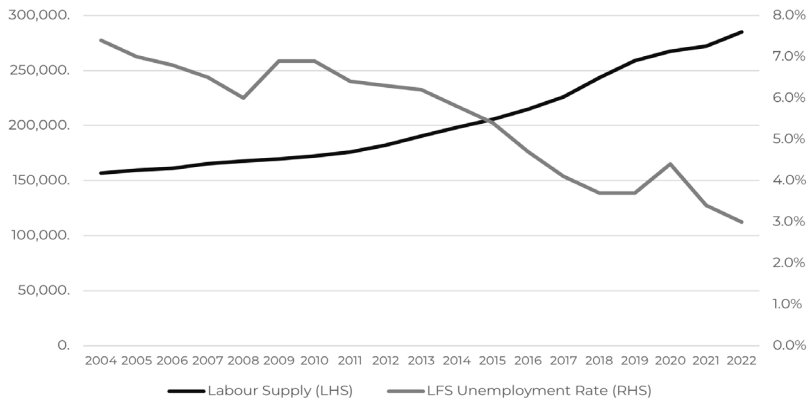
Ever since its independence from Great Britain in 1964, Malta has generally been considered an economic success story (Grech, 2015). Until the 1950s, the Maltese economy relied on British naval, air force and military establishments for revenue (Briguglio, 1988). Governments in office until the 1980s strived to achieve a competitive economic structure with the capacity of generating employment and overcoming the void left by the departure of British forces. Notwithstanding the difficulties and various failed development plans (Spiteri, 1997), in the first three decades after 1964 Alesina & Spolaore (2003) highlight that Malta was one of only six countries to obtain average annual growth rate of over 5%.

During this time, the Maltese Islands experienced a fundamental shift in their economic environment, most notably accession to the European Union in 2004 and the adoption of the euro as the national currency in 2008. During this path of economic transformation, successive governments sought to tackle new challenges arising across the years, including those pertaining

to the labour market and the welfare state. This is especially true for Gozo, which is characterised by inherent geographical and connectivity constraints, presenting significant challenges for its residents, including impediments to employment such as limited opportunities on the island itself and high transport costs if certain jobs are located on the main island of Malta. In fact, Ellul (2021) finds a deficit of between 1271 and 1948 jobs with respect to Malta for the 2000-2019 period, with a further shift-share analysis showing that employment in Gozo grew by 1.5% less than the national average.

Following the European Commission's Europe 2020 goals - including employment and poverty - the Maltese government committed itself to a paradigm shift and announced a number of new '*Making Work Pay*' initiatives in 2014. With these reforms, the labour market in Malta experienced considerable transformation since the country's accession to the EU. Solid and consistent economic growth together with an increase in net migration pushed unemployment levels to historic lows. This, coupled with a rise in female participation, meant the labour supply increased notwithstanding an ageing population. Figure 1 shows that labour supply reached 284,000 individuals in 2022, compared to 157,000 in 2004, with a marked increase experienced from 2013 onwards. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate upon Malta's accession to the EU stood at 7.4%, gradually declining to 6% in 2008. After rising to 6.9% in 2009 in the wake of the global financial crisis this has been declining steadily, falling to 3.0% by 2022.

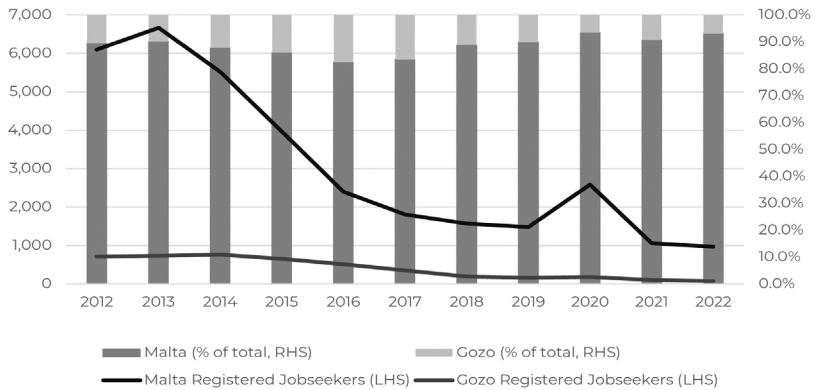
**Figure 1 – Labour Supply and Unemployment Rate in Malta**



*Data Source: Central Bank of Malta (2022); Eurostat (2022)*

With this study focusing on Gozo, it is also important to look specifically at its labour market developments. By 2019, Gozo had just under 14,000 employees, accounting to just over 5% of national employment. In the same year, the GDP per capita stood at 65.1% of the national level, with Malta progressing faster towards the EU GDP per capita levels when compared to Gozo (Ellul, 2021). Figure 2 shows that registered jobseekers have been on a steady decline since 2013 in both Malta and Gozo. However, in relative terms, the share of Gozitan jobseekers does not show a marked decline until 2018.

**Figure 2 – Registered Jobseekers in Malta and Gozo**



Data Source: Jobsplus (2022)

This study focuses on the Tapering of Benefits (TOB) scheme, an Active Labour Market Policy introduced in 2014 in a bid to bring about structural changes to the labour market (MFIN, 2013). The National Employment Policy (MEDE, 2014) pinpointed that many *Social Assistance (SA)*<sup>1</sup>, *Unemployment Assistance (UA)*<sup>2</sup> and *Social Assistance for Single Unmarried Parents (SUP)*<sup>3</sup> beneficiaries were faced with a substantial poverty trap. In this view the Tapering of Benefits (TOB) scheme was introduced to unlock this specific stalemate, since beneficiaries of SA, UA, and SUP experience a ‘tapering out’ of their benefits upon finding employment.

When an individual previously on benefits finds employment, the TOB scheme allows an individual to retain 65% of their benefit in the first year, 45% of their benefits in the second year, and 25% of

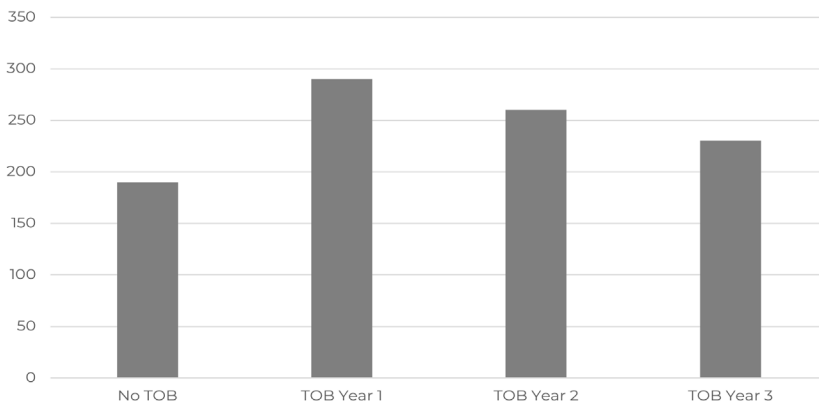
<sup>1</sup> Head of households who are inactive due to medical reason, legally separated women and single parents.

<sup>2</sup> Head of households who have been registering for unemployment.

<sup>3</sup> Single unmarried parent who is not engaged in a gainful occupation.

their benefit in the third year over and above the salary in their newly found job. This contrasts with the situation without the *TOB* scheme, whereby they would lose all their benefits upon finding a job. Hence, the *TOB* scheme works by increasing the opportunity cost of inactivity, making employment more enticing. Figure 3 illustrates the cost of inactivity. Without the *TOB* scheme, the cost of inactivity to an individual is €190 per week. With the introduction of the *TOB* scheme, this increases to €290 per week during the first year where 65% of benefits are retained, €260 during the second year where 45% of benefits are retained and €230 in the third year where 25% of benefits are retained. These rises in the opportunity cost of inactivity unavoidably creates an improvement in the personal motivation and drive in individuals to find full-time employment.

**Figure 3 – Cost of Inactivity (Income in €)**

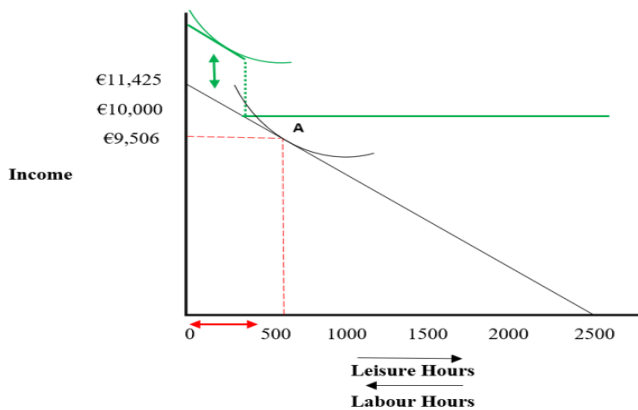


*Data Source: Author*

Thus, the *TOB* scheme aims to tackle the poverty trap through altering the budget constraint. Consider Figure 4. Existing welfare benefits are still in place, meaning that certain sections of society – such as single parents – still enjoy their benefits and

the hypothetical safety net depicted by the horizontal green line still exists. However, through the introduction of the *TOB* scheme – contingent on working for at least 40 hours a week (red arrow, horizontal axis) and earning at least a minimum wage as well as some other eligibility criteria discussed below – means that now the potential income gain from employment is much greater. There is a sizeable discontinuous jump (green arrow) at 2,080 hours (40hrs x 52 weeks), whereby in addition to your labour remuneration, you also get a part of your welfare benefits for a period of time, as explained above.

**Figure 4 – How the *TOB* scheme alters the budget constraint**



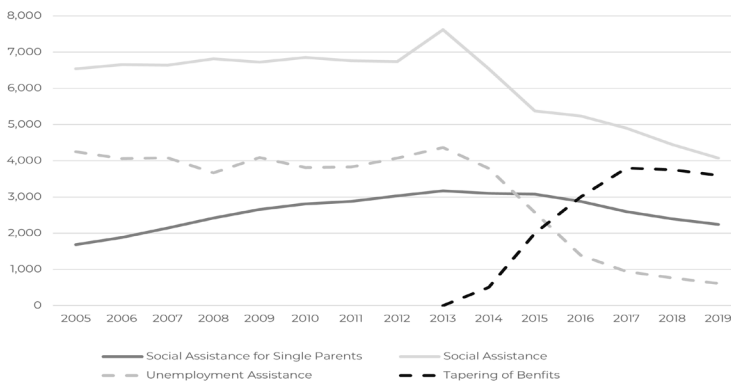
*Data Source: Author*

The introduction of the scheme coincided with a marked drop in recipients for each of the benefit types. In fact, Figure 5 shows the total number of *SA*, *UA*, *SUP* and *TOB* beneficiaries between 2005 and 2019. After the introduction of the *TOB* scheme in 2014, the number of *SA*, *UA* and *SUP* recipients dropped to 4992, 1099 and 2735 respectively in 2019, versus 9200, 6119 and 3467 in 2013. In this view, it is of great interest to explore the extent to which the *TOB*



scheme has helped Gozitans to integrate into the labour market, particularly when compared to Maltese counterparts. This is especially since alternative explanations for the drop in beneficiaries might be attributed to business cycle effects and other policies specifically aimed at Gozitans.

**Figure 5 – Number of Beneficiaries: SA, SUP, UA and TOB in Malta**



Data Source: National Statistics Office (2022)

Consequently, the aim of this study is twofold. Firstly, it aims to analyse the impact that the *TOB* scheme had on the job-finding rate amongst Gozitans on *UA*, *SA* and *SUP*. This will therefore test whether the *TOB* scheme has in fact been successful in bringing Gozitan jobseekers closer to the labour market and analyses the extent to which the poverty trap has been diluted. Secondly, it aims to analyse the impact that the *TOB* scheme had on the chances of Gozitans successfully retaining employment once an individual previously on *UA*, *SA* or *SUP* finds a job. This will therefore test how much the *TOB* scheme has successfully led to stable employment for Gozitans previously on such benefits.

This article thus aims to contribute to literature by providing a

rare insight into how a unique national policy can have a different impact on the employment possibilities of those individuals residing in different islands within an archipelago, especially for those islands – like Gozo – with fewer job opportunities and an increased connectivity burden to jobs located on the larger island.

## **Data**

The article utilizes two distinctive datasets acquired from the Maltese *Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights*. The first dataset includes official records on all *Unemployment Assistance (UA), Social Assistance (SA) and Social Assistance for Single Unmarried Parents (SUP)* recipients. The second dataset contains official employment records for those individuals receiving any benefits at any point in time within the first dataset. All data is fully anonymised and different observations are distinguished through the use of randomly generated reference ID codes.

The study spans from 2004 to 2019, with 2004 marking Malta's entry into the EU, and 2019 chosen as the endpoint to mitigate any potential influence from the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market. Following data cleaning, a rigorous data transformation was executed, aligning the datasets in accordance with the empirical framework employed.

## **Methodology**

The article employs survival models to achieve the desired objectives. Survival models are widely used in medical research whereby, for example, the event of interest is 'death' and time is defined as 'survival time'. However, such survival models can be extended to economic

research, enabling the study of a wide variety of issues and have been especially popular in studies related to labour economics and welfare economics, involving issues such as job duration, benefit duration or unemployment duration, amongst others (Bover et al., 2002; Gundel and Peters, 2008; Kavkler et al., 2009). In this article, benefit and unemployment durations are applied to such survival models.

To analyse the impact that the TOB scheme had on the Gozitan job-finding rate, the survival function  $S(t)$  represents the probability of an individual surviving  $t$  units of time on *UA*, *SA* or *SUP* without finding a job. Time in this case represents the number of months between the date when an individual starts receiving benefits and the date when an individual finds a job.

Several cox regressions are then constructed. Initially, regressions with only a number of appropriate covariates are run in order to gain an understanding on how the hazard of the event occurring changes according to the characteristics of individuals within the respective sample. Importantly, since the aim of this study is to analyse the particular impact on Gozitans, the variable '*Origin*' is differentiating the effect between Maltese, Gozitan and Foreign individuals.

The study controls for a baseline elapsed duration as well as year effects. Subsequently, given that the TOB came into effect in 2014 for those with 24 months of elapsed duration or more, a '*TOB Effect*' variable is added, which is identified by distinguishing between those observations who are not eligible and able to receive the *TOB* versus those who are eligible and able to receive the *TOB*. This is then interacted with the '*Origin*' variable, which will gauge the *TOB* effect on Gozitans.

To analyse the impact that the *TOB* scheme had on job durations of Gozitans, the survival function  $S(t)$  represents the probability of an

individual surviving  $t$  units of time into the job without experiencing a job termination. The time in this case is defined as the number of months between the job commencement date and the job termination date. Another set of cox regressions are constructed. Once again, the '*TOB Effect*' is interacted with the '*Origin*' variable in order to obtain the effect of the ALMP scheme on the job tenure of Gozitans.

## Results

All results presented hereunder represent hazard ratios and should be interpreted as the risk of the event happening when compared to the baseline, keeping other variables constant. The baseline category refers to Maltese individuals. A hazard ratio more than one means that the probability of the event occurring is more than that of the baseline category (i.e., Maltese individuals), while a probability between 0 and 1 means that the probability of the event occurring is less than that of the baseline category. Recall that the event for the first part of the study is defined as 'finding a job exactly after a UA, SA or SUP spell ends.' For the second part of the study, the event is defined as 'losing employment after being a UA, SA or SUP recipient', given that such recipients had successfully found a job.

The first set of Cox regressions show that before the Tapering of Benefits scheme is in place, foreigners on benefits have a 27.9% higher probability of finding a job when compared to Maltese beneficiaries. On the other hand, the results clearly show that Gozitan beneficiaries are initially at a disadvantage. In fact, compared to Maltese counterparts, Gozitan UA, SA or SUP beneficiaries have a 12.9% lower probability of finding employment (Table 1). This is significant at the 1% level.

However, upon augmenting the TOB Effect into the Cox regression, it

becomes evident that the Tapering of Benefits scheme significantly influences job-finding rates of Gozitans. Specifically, individuals in Gozo receiving Unemployment Assistance (UA), Social Assistance (SA), or Social Assistance for Single Unmarried Parents (SUP) benefits are experiencing a 23.4% higher improvement in their job-finding rate when compared to their Maltese counterparts.

**Table 1 – Results: Hazard ratios for the impact of job-finding rate of Gozitans**

|                      | Hazard   | S.E.    |
|----------------------|----------|---------|
| Foreign              | 1.279*** | (0.064) |
| Gozitan              | 0.871*** | (0.032) |
| TOB Effect # Foreign | 0.641**  | (0.125) |
| TOB Effect # Gozitan | 1.234**  | (0.110) |
| Observations         | 36568    |         |

Origin baseline category = Maltese

Standard errors in parentheses ( \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ )

In the second part of the study (Table 2), the cox regressions show that once Gozitan beneficiaries manage to find a job, their chance of experiencing a job-termination and re-entering benefits is 22.4% less than the probability of Maltese individuals. Thus, although the first part of the study shows that Gozitans on benefits find it more difficult to move into employment, these results show that once in employment Gozitans exhibit better job-tenure rates even before the Tapering of Benefits scheme is in place.

Nonetheless, once the TOB scheme is introduced into the equation, the probability of Gozitans losing their jobs drops even further, meaning that the TOB scheme continues to enhance the job-tenure rate of Gozitans. Moreover, this reduction in probability of job-termination as a result of the TOB is significantly more powerful for

Gozitans – when compared to Maltese counterparts – as explained by the lower than 1 hazard ratio in Table 2. On the other hand, foreigners continue to exhibit high job-termination rates, even after the TOB scheme is in place.

**Table 2 – Results: Hazard ratios for the impact of job tenure of Gozitans**

|                      | Hazard   | S.E.    |
|----------------------|----------|---------|
|                      | (1)      |         |
| Foreign              | 1.443*** | (0.110) |
| Gozitan              | 0.776*** | (0.046) |
| TOB Effect # Foreign | 2.154**  | (0.804) |
| TOB Effect # Gozitan | 0.699*   | (0.139) |
| Observations         | 6805     |         |

Origin baseline category = Maltese

Standard errors in parentheses ( \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ )

## Conclusion

Based on survival models and Cox proportional hazard models, the main conclusion of the article is that without the Tapering of Benefits scheme, Gozitans have a 12.9% lower probability of finding a job, when compared to their Maltese counterparts. However, once the TOB scheme is in place, Gozitan workers experience a great improvement from the scheme, not only in terms of job-finding rates but also in terms of their job duration.

Hence, the TOB scheme appears to have improved the incentive for Gozitans to seek employment, even if such employment is located in Malta. In this view, future policy targeted at Gozitans should consider this finding and continue its pursuit in overcoming the specific obstacles faced by Gozitans in finding employment. Note however

that much has already been done, such as the setting up of the Gozo Innovation Hub, the introduction of tax incentives for businesses, as well as the Gozo Teleworking Scheme, amongst various others.

In light of these results, given that the aim of the *TOB* scheme was to bring Gozitan jobseekers closer to the labour market by eliminating, or at least diluting, the poverty trap and lead to stable employment, the scheme can be considered very successful. However, the discussion and policy implications highlight the importance that such a measure must not be maintained on a stand-alone basis to achieve the fully intended target of overcoming the poverty trap for the society at large. Policy should aim to provide a more holistic approach, hence achieving the intended targets for all sections of society which, in turn, reduces their benefit dependency and improves the overall outlook of the Gozitan labour market, and consequently, the Maltese economy at large.

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# **What's in a Footprint? A Question of Island Magic**

**Prof. Maria Frendo**

**Abstract:**

This paper first looks at small islands from a literary point of view, using episodes of shipwreck from works such as Homer's *The Odyssey*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters*, as a starting-point. The footprint in the sand that Crusoe is perplexed by becomes the point of reference for the main argument, whereby the paper looks how this footprint, which cannot be either explained nor negotiated, symbolically stands for those few geniuses that the island of Gozo has produced. An overview on the work of men of letters such as Ninu Cremona, Guzé Aquilina, poets such as Ġorġ Pisani and Mary Meilak, and musicians Mgr Gużepi Farrugia u Joseph Vella is then presented, concluding on how these magical footprints in the sand are what makes the island of Gozo such a wonderful place with a rich legacy.

**Keywords:**

Islands, Footprint, Homer, Shakespeare, Defoe, Tennyson, Genius.

**Author's Bio-Note:**

Maria Frendo read for her Ph.D in English Literature and Music at the University of Durham. She is Associate Professor at the University of Malta and a member of the editorial board of *CounterText*, a Literary Studies Journal published with *Edinburgh University Press*. Maria is also a Fellow of the London College of Music and of Trinity College of Music, London, in classical singing and pianoforte performing respectively. She is the co-curator of the *Joseph Vella Music Archive* at Il-Ħaġar Musem, Victoria, Gozo, and assistant Artistic Director of the *Victoria International Arts Festival*. Her interest in the interface between literature and music has led to several publications on the subject.

## What's in a Footprint?

### A Question of Island Magic

*'Islands work exceeding miracles on earth.'*<sup>i</sup>  
*'Could any good thing come out of Nazareth?'*<sup>ii</sup>

Tracing the histories of island geniuses who seemingly emerge from nowhere, given the insularity and at times even isolation in which they are born and bred, compels the writer to think with tender emotion and a dose of wit, to think of crossings taken and passages lost, of failed ideals and bewildering achievements, of reckless optimism in the face of insurmountable barriers. In short, the voyage embraces that most Mediterranean of experiences: the islander's life.

Islands tend to be self-referential, self-centred, even mean or small minded. This is a point made, among others, by both Andrea Levy and Bill Bryson, in their titles for books on Britain, *Small Island* and *Notes from a Small Island*, respectively. An island is also much more than a geographical entity: 'no man is an island', John Donne tells us. One possible meaning for this wonderful line is that an island can be a state of mind, or one can suddenly be marooned by an

unexpected turn of events. So, islands can lurk in many shapes and situations, even in the heart of a city. One can unaccountably feel isolated in a crowd, like a small island with the tide washing in.

Perhaps no stories speak more to islanders like myself than the trials and tribulations of Odysseus, of Prospero or Robinson Crusoe, or of Tennyson's lotos-eaters, all victims of shipwrecks. Speeches in *The Iliad* are hurled to and fro like weapons, but in the *Odyssey* they are the ingredients of strangely placid, laid-back conversations that surprise the reader only occasionally and then, for the most part, through the accidents and limitations of the oral technique. They are random, disconnected and arbitrary. That's what shipwreck does to you; it precludes logic and order, throwing everything out of countenance and giving free rein to the imagination. It lands Odysseus in the arms of the siren, who captivates him with the beauty of her song.

On the other hand, Prospero is a renegade to duty, and he is punished for this abdication to his role as the rightful Duke of Milan by being tossed on the rough seas and shipwrecked on a desert island. There, Prospero's world turns upside down, and regeneration occurs only when

This rough magic  
I here abjure, and, when I have required  
Some heavenly music, which even now I do,  
To work mine end upon their senses that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it seven fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.<sup>iii</sup>

Like the lotos-eaters, Prospero recognises the negations of

common truths and the affirmations of uncommon doubts. The possibilities are endless, so is their music.

Crusoe, on the other hand, is a capricious adventurer who, disobeying the wishes of his parents to pursue law studies, sets out on a voyage which results in shipwreck. A second voyage ends up with him being captured by pirates, and managing to escape in a small boat accompanied by a boy, Xury, he is rescued by a captain of a Portuguese ship off the west coast of Africa. And on the story goes, with the attendant despairs and hopes, both of which set off a creative trigger in Crusoe which enables him to transform potential catastrophe into moments of possibility.

While these island texts have inevitably elicited many postcolonial readings, it is the unfurling magic that attracts me, the island poetry and the island music, the white beaches and 'strange noises', that bewildering footprint in the sand. In short, it is the inexplicable and the mysterious, the unfathomable and the arcane, the mythical and the iconic, the singular particularities and multiple possibilities that are the hallmarks of small islands. These texts produce protagonists that seek to free art from the limitations of the possible.

What is there about islands that privileges the freshness of instinct, the trained leaps of imagination, where the unspoken and the unspeakable coalesce in the utopia of sacrament? With only the appearance of a paradox, the constricted space of an island gives the creative dweller a feeling of expansion, of a kind of psychedelic multiplicity not unlike the sudden illumination in Rimbaud (putting to the side the notion of the hellish that comes with his poetry). In short, what is it about islands that brings forth genius? As they say, the devil is in the detail, and the detail here is the footprint.

Crusoe's world is filled with dreams, prophecies and remarkable portents in the form of earthquakes, storms, and the seemingly remarkable single footprint that sends him scurrying to his cave out of 'Snare of the Fear of Man'.<sup>iv</sup> Also, at the same time that the footprint makes Crusoe believe, at first, that the Devil may have landed on his island, he approaches its appearance as a scientist might, measuring it, comparing it to his own foot, and looking about for evidence of the presence that might have produced it. Also, he wonders where the other footprint is, perhaps that's his biggest worry, a footprint present through being absent. His responses resemble a cross between a scientist attempting to ascertain the truth through experiment, and a poet more entranced by what's absent than what's present.

Island literature specialises in powerful scenes that cannot be readily explained either rationally or scientifically, only imaginatively. It is the footprint, not only the literal one imprinted on the sand which causes Crusoe so much existential angst as to its provenance, but also the absent, metaphorical one that becomes the measure of all things great or small. The footprint is the island's natural rhythm that cannot be captured by the industrial, cosmopolitan city, a rhythm that makes the inspired dweller a singer of songs and a maker of poems.

In this, Caliban reminds us that his island is a world of un-profaned magic, a living nature, in which reality has not yet quite been separated from dream, nor waking from sleeping, a bit like Keats's nightingale there:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs give delight and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments



Will hum about my ears, and sometimes voices,  
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again. And then, in dreaming,  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked,  
I cried to dream again.<sup>v</sup>

This liminal space between sleeping and waking is also evocative of Tennyson's *Lotus-eaters*, in yet another shipwreck, lying on a beach in 'a land in which it seemed always afternoon', where even 'the poppy hangs in sleep':

There is sweet music here that softer falls  
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,  
...  
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,  
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;<sup>vi</sup>

Again, it is music that shipwreck brings; it is always about the music. It is there, on that threshold between dream and reality that magic strikes, that the inspiration trembles with impossibility and the nightingale sings. It is there that the genius awakes.

### **Of Linguists, Poets, and Musicians**

Poetry, Painting and Music, the three powers in Man conversing with Paradise, which the flood did not sweep away.<sup>vii</sup>

For me, the 'land where it seems always afternoon' is also Gozo and while fiction of shipwrecks is full of creative protagonists, the history of our island is also enriched with the occasional appearance of

genius. Gozo has had its Odysseuses, its Prosperos and its Crusoes; it has had its dreamers.

My language? Heavens!  
I am the best of them that speak this speech  
Were I but where 'tis spoken.<sup>viii</sup>

Ferdinand's lines in *The Tempest* are a useful text for this paper and not merely because, in this age of global travel and debates about a *lingua franca*, his surprised joy at hearing his own language spoken on a desert island strikes a familiar chord. Transposed into the third person singular and the past tense, these lines could very well serve to record the received opinion of another kind of traveller: one who has explored the realms of Shakespeare's language, which is, of course, also the language of Ferdinand. Shakespeare as an artist in language, like Dante before him, is a natural genius nurtured by the state of his native speech, when and where it was spoken.

Native speech. That is the clue. 'Ay, is it not a language I speak'?<sup>ix</sup> Ninu Cremona (1880 – 1972)<sup>x</sup> was one of the foremost promulgators of the Maltese language at a time when, ironically, the political tension was pulling in two different directions, namely, those who advocated for the primacy of the English Language and those in favour of the Italian Language, with the native Maltese language nowhere to be seen or, rather, heard in the course of the argument. So, while the debate over the language question was raging in Malta, a Gozitan scholar came up with the solution. Rather than exacerbating the quibble over whether English or Italian should be the official language of the Maltese islands, Cremona hit bull's eye by flying the banner for the native Maltese language.

Born in Victoria to an upper middle-class family did not preclude

Cremona from mixing with the ordinary life of the ordinary citizen. A man of quiet disposition, Is-Sur Nin, as he was fondly known, championed the sovereignty of the Maltese language and he was the first linguist on the Maltese islands to propose a series of orthographic rules that eventually became standardised as the norm. Aided by Gianni Vassallo, he set a system of paradigms and rules for the writing of Maltese which were then published in the seminal *Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija* in 1924.

Cremona's interest in the Maltese language was not, however, restricted to questions of grammar and orthography, but also extended to creative writing. In fact, it is safe to say that he gave the country its first instance of dramatic writing with the famed *Il-Fidwa tal-Bdiewa* (written in 1913, first published in 1936). This poetic drama is the first of its kind in the Maltese language, based on the classical Greek drama of Aeschylus and Euripides, focusing on the inevitable dialectic between good and evil. Cremona continued consolidating the primacy of the Maltese language by contributing scholarly articles to local literary journals. His visionary acumen also anticipated linguistic cross-fertilisation, as it were, as the way forward. One could not stem progress, and in the interwar period Malta was becoming more important to the war cause, both geographically and politically. For Cremona, language is made by the people for the people and not some exclusive domain to which only the privileged few have access. He believed that Maltese, as any other language, starts from the spoken word, in social, familial, and cultural contexts, and that is the starting point from the which the journey towards further development starts. He was an uncommon man working for the common good, taking the pulse of everyday, ordinary life and seeing where that was heading. Not for him the ivory tower; Cremona ventured on the open sea of thought.

The aim of this paper is not to argue that Ninu Cremona was the best of them that spoke that speech, but to voyage, however briefly, over turbulent seas that will show how he and another fellow Gozitan linguist, Gužè Aquilina, thought of the arts of language, how they used them, such as they found them, and how they developed those arts within the cultural and political contexts of their time. However, because this is much-travelled ground, mapped variously, and especially in recent years, by language historians and theorists and by literary critics of many schools, Ferdinand's lines above have to be pressed into service yet once more: to yield a reminder of how easily, in the process of analysis, 'his language' will revert to 'my language'. Structures of critical belief are bound to form what we hear or read, and the critic of the Maltese language is apt, like Ferdinand, to find his own identity and affirm his status in the language he uses.

Gužè Aquilina (1911 – 1997), hailing from the tiny, then idyllic hamlet of Munxar in Gozo, was a linguist, lexicographer, and writer. Apart from gaining a degree in languages, Aquilina also graduated as a lawyer from the then Royal University of Malta and furthered doctoral studies in London. His formidable intellect saw him lecturing in legal terminology as well as becoming the first Professor of Maltese and Oriental Studies at the R.U.M. During his tenure, he worked tirelessly to promote the Maltese language not only through his inestimable teaching but also through scholarly writing and research. Current professors at the University of Malta recall Aquilina as a wonderfully inspiring lecturer and mentor, down-to-earth, generous with his time and wisdom, and uncompromising on principles. A renowned author of countless works on language and comparative linguistics, he always centred his research on historicity and historical development, tracing the genealogies of language and identifying patterns that would eventually lead to the establishing of grammatical/lexicographical rules. His contribution to the discipline of diachronic linguistics set the benchmark for further study in the discipline and established him an unparalleled pioneer in the field.

For Aquilina, whose verbal imagination was nothing short of prolific, it matters, too, that this imagination could exercise itself in a climate of a preoccupation with language, as it was with Cremona. It was a particularly fruitful climate in that it could sustain, as was the case on so many other questions at the turn of the twentieth century, apparently contradictory beliefs. On the origins, nature, or value of language Aquilina would have been, as Keats would have said, 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts'.<sup>xi</sup> One cannot forget the political side to the language question, with the war waging between the language of the colonialists and the language of the elite. It is out of such fruitful ambivalence that Aquilina's use of language springs, and conforming Cremona's position on the matter, established Maltese as the *lingua franca* not only by force of argument but by the power of the spoken and written word. Rhetoric, at which he was an undoubted expert, especially given his legal training, teaches not only the control of structures but also of an audience. What is perhaps more unique than most in Aquilina's studies of the Maltese language is the progressive marriage of verbal and structural rhetoric. He never forgot that language is based on the spoken word, 'and every tongue brings in a several tale',<sup>xii</sup> the tale of the man in the street and the woman at the kitchen table. This is the language that Aquilina wanted to standardise.

To be understood is as important as being able to speak, which is not the same thing. Language is not speech unless it communicates and so, finding directions by indirections, Aquilina saw that Maltese functions as the language which makes life lively and creative, as the instrument both of feeling and of knowledge. It is essential to life, and yet it has to be learnt as an art. In a sense, Mowbray, in *Richard II* speaks clearly for the ordinary man and woman in Malta at the turn of the 20th century when he says that man is in exile when he is not allowed to speak his language. He

describes the loss of his tongue as 'an unstrung viol or a harp':

Or like a cunning instrument cas'd up  
Or, being open, put into his hands  
That knows no touch to tune the harmony –

and then the image changes to one of imprisonment:

And dull, unfeeling, barren ignorance  
Is made my gaoler to attend on me.<sup>xiii</sup>

What Cremona and Aquilina did is untie the fetters that chained the Maltese language to the whims of the few. They recognised the language of the common man, the one spoken in the fields and the village piazza, in the homes, the taverns, and the markets, the tongue that produced the poetry of the ordinary men, 'each in his narrow cell for ever laid, | the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep'.<sup>xiv</sup>

Poetry: 'the very word is like a bell'<sup>xv</sup> reminding me of where it all started for civilisations. The tendency is to look for that flicker of light at the end of the tunnel. Poetry does the opposite; it is the tunnel at the end of the light. It reveals by obscuring and the miracle of light is renewed eternally in the imaginative soul. This renewal is largely a question of grace.

Shakespeare's dramatic and historical vocabulary for poetry, and his presentation of characters as poet-figures are 'such stuff as dreams are made on', as Prospero puts it at the end of *The Tempest*. The Bard's conversation about poetry and the poet-figure does not occur in a historical vacuum but responds to a larger conversation about poetry, literacy and orality coming out of classical Greece and Rome, migrating to the Middle Ages and entering Renaissance England. One such conversation occurs when the court clown Touchstone in *As You Like It*, also visiting the Forest of Arden, tries

to woo the country girl Audrey:

Touchstone: Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical.

Audrey: I do not know what 'poetical' is. Is it honest in deed and  
in word? Is it a true thing?

Touchstone: No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most feigning.

Touchstone the court jester is the touchstone of my argument. If the tone of this conversation is playful and flirtatious, the terms are aesthetically serious, confirming that Shakespeare imagines poetry as both a language ('word') and an action ('deed'), and showing the author to enter a historical debate about the nature of poetry and the new medium it serves, namely, theatre, as the climactic word 'feigning' perhaps hints.

So, besides 'feigning' or perhaps because of it, 'poetry is nearer to vital truth than history'.<sup>xvi</sup> It ripples on the surface of Shakespeare's islands filling the air with music that speaks to the soul.

The greatest poet figures there, Theseus and Prospero, speak the kind of music that is only possible through the magic of the island they inhabit. So does Gozo's own Ġorġ Pisani (1909 – 1999), whose poetry of lyric affirmation sings like the nightingale's voice.

Born in Victoria, Gozo, Pisani's education in the classics must have triggered that 'spontaneous overflow'<sup>xvii</sup> of unbounded feeling in the young man. With experience on the editorial staff of *The Times of Malta*, Pisani cultivated the rigour and discipline that so marks his own writing, a feeling for precision that, however, does not curb his inspiration. He was also the first ever teacher of the Maltese language at the Lyceum in Gozo, a post that he also held later in Malta. A major theme that runs like a leitmotif through Pisani's poetic output is his deep love of Gozo, both its prehistoric temples

of Ġgantija (which is the subject of one of his most beautiful poems) as well as its historic places. His collection *Il-Waltz tad-Dellijiet* can be categorised as one of the earliest, if not the first, sonnet cycle in Maltese, touching on memory and reminiscence among other topics. Of all poets that the Maltese islands have produced, Pisani is rightly accredited with being the 'poet of youth' not only because of his concern with young age especially in his early poetry, but because even his mature poetry throbs with the freshness of youth that never seems to wane or wither. Like Shakespeare's Prospero, Pisani is not only a poet but a poet-figure.

When someone's subject is literature, more specifically poetry, clarity beyond a certain point becomes falsification. When a genre such as poetry is, of its own nature, in its very essence, vague, clarity should consist in recognising the vagueness and in checking (that is, stopping) analysis and division at the prudent point. In dealing with poetry, one looks at resemblances which are neither purely natural and unconscious, nor purely conscious and deliberate. Poetry works by indirections, as intimated earlier in the paper. What it wants to say is more often than not left unsaid: one needs to engage with the gaps and the absences. This is the fascination with Pisani's work: his syntax and choice of words affirm his superiority in the genre. A man educated in the classics, one can trace the source for the delight in ideas, the dialectical subtlety, the intensity with which themes are dealt with, the lyricism of expression.

This is something that Pisani is known for. The quickness of his imagination is seen in the invention, the fertility of his reason in his fancy, and the accuracy of his understanding in his expression. He has freedom and originality of rhythm, precision and dignity of language. He is a master of the simple everyday word in the right place, and he charges it with concentrated meaning. His is the common style



which he elevates to uncommon heights. Reading *Ġgantija*, one can see that the images with their direct meaning, in a very remarkable way, cancel each other out so that at the end an exact suggestion is obtained which is not even partially present in any of the images taken alone. Such is his power of metonymy. Here, one gets an extension, and no vague one, beyond the bound of thought. There is a refinement and subdivision of a simple emotion by infusing it into a turn of thought of some difficulty. Sensibility is never replaced by sentiment, and Pisani's poetry never degenerates into a diversity of noises. It remains unified, complex, forever regenerating itself.

If Pisani's is the voice of the nightingale, that of Mary Meilak (1905 – 1975) belongs to the lark. Also born in Victoria, Gozo, at a time when culturally or politically woman had virtually no voice, hers was heard echoing across the islands' coast far and wide. Displaying inordinate talents at writing from a very young age, and with a natural humour that made hers a unique tone, her first poem in Maltese was 'Faxx Nemel' which was published under a pseudonym in *Pronostku Malti*. To date credited with being the only Gozitan female poet of note, Meilak published profusely – poetry just oozed out of her imagination and her rhyming abilities were second to none. She became one of the very first women to sit on the committee of the *Akkademja tal-Malti* in 1937. Hers was a natural talent that knew no bounds and her humorous take on life's seriousness coloured her verses with piquant imagery and wonderful conceits. She had the unique ability to transform poetry as music, song as lyric poetry – such is the singable quality of her lines.

The reference to music brings me, last but not least, to two Gozitan musicians who not only established themselves foremost in their discipline but were visionaries who were well ahead of their time. I am referring to Mgr Giuseppe Farrugia, known as Tal-Vers (1852 – 1925)

and Joseph Vella (1942 – 2018), both born and bred in Victoria, Gozo. Both were men of culture of the highest order: men whose musical and artistic output have turned out to be of inestimable value to our Maltese culture. Rather than dwell for any length on biographical details (as with the previous personalities discussed in this paper, that can be got from other sources), the aim is to draw attention once again to their contribution towards the island culture into which they were born, and how this resonated with the wider cultural milieu of Europe. Entirely different personalities, these two geniuses shared a common aim: to enrich the Basilica of St George, the foster parent of these extremely talented musicians, with their wonderful music.

Mgr Farrugia's education at the Gozo Seminary is summed up in one telling phrase: 'Ottimo in tutto e sempre il primo' ('Excellent in everything and always first in class'). Getting the best tuition from Jesuit scholars in languages, design, and music, three disciplines at which he became a master, formed the foundations on which the young Farrugia's expertise was built. Mgr Farrugia never ventured beyond the shores of Gozo but the best tutors came to him in the form of the Jesuit scholars. By profession, he was a teacher of subjects as diverse as Philosophy, Latin, English Literature and Moral Theology. We know him as a composer, pianist, designer, architect, a man of letters with interests in physics and astrology. Our very eminent poet Ġorġ Pisani says 'Ftit kien hawn Prelati Ġhawdxin wara de Soldanis li għamlu għeġ lil Ġhawdex bil-għerf u l-pinna tagħhom daqs 'Tal-Vers'" ('Few were the Gozitan priests who, after de Soldanis, honoured Gozo with their wisdom and their writings as "Tal-Vers".) Equally at home as an artist as well as a scientist, his exacting nature, meticulous attention to detail, his obsession with precision were legendary, together with his intolerance of mediocrity.

Foremost in anything he gave his mind to, perhaps what has endured beyond even his own expectations is the rich catalogue

of musical compositions that he wrote to be performed during the Feast of St George in Victoria. The Vespers (1897) and Tantum Ergo (1901), are decades ahead of what was being produced in his time. The avantgarde harmonic progressions, the rigorous adherence to structure, the cultivated melodies: one could easily date these works sixty or more years later than they were actually composed.

We know that all artists exhibit something of both an original and a derivative (that is, inherited) nature. What varies is the balance between the two. For the genuine artist, derivation is the servant of originality while for the lesser artist, derivation is the master. The main difference between the music of 'Tal-Vers' and that of his contemporaries is the way in which he shows the greatest capacity for changing an idea and yet remaining itself. In his music, the diversions, the descents have a significance of feeling which sophisticates and complicates, without destroying the original impulse. It is a music which speaks to the intellect. For Mgr Farrugia, as exemplified in these works, the purpose of art is beauty and beauty is style. Style must have been a supremely difficult achievement which could only have been won by knowledge, calculation and scrupulous toil against the resistances of language. This was emulated much later by a younger composer, Joseph Vella.

Vella, who was a catalyst in reviving Mgr Farrugia's compositions and through whose efforts these works are still being performed during the yearly feast of St George in Victoria, was an inspired and inspiring polymath and, alongside the other personages discussed in this paper, one of Gozo's most illustrious citizens. A multi-faceted career saw him as Inspector of Music within the Education Department; the founder-member of the team that set up the Johann Strauss School of Music in Malta; the first academic who introduced music at tertiary level at St Michael's College; his pioneering work and

research of old Maltese music, earning him the title of 'Father of the Maltese Revival Movement'; Malta's leading composer and the one most performed internationally; a conductor who premiered large scale works in Malta. He was also the first Maltese composer to appreciate the immense riches of the Maltese language, setting Ġorġ Pisani's 'Il-Barri' to music in a secular cantata in 1961, followed by countless songs, as well as setting 4 of his 7 song cycles to Maltese texts. You name it, he was.

Joseph Vella never followed trends, he always set them. There is an honesty about his work that endows it with a permanent validity. His musical language, far from constructing enclosed aesthetic worlds, is invested with all the power of temporal process and historical engagement: one remembers *Lament op. 103* (written in 3 hours on the tragic news of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001), and *Charlie on my Mind op. 144* (inspired by yet another terrorist attack, this time on the Charlie Hebdo headquarters in Paris on 7 January 2015). The approach to language taken by Vella in his music inscribes the struggle to define and to locate the values that endow man's life with meaning, and to translate these values into temporal and historical reality.

With his bigger works, namely, his five symphonies, thirteen concertos and five oratorios, Joseph Vella strives to achieve what words alone cannot accomplish. He generally creates with contemplation in mind and lends the work a syntactic density and homogeneity that demands singular attention to its sonorous content. At the end of the day, what matters for Joseph Vella is the quality of the sound, the beauty that emerges from that. Basically, what he extracts from music is poetry's musical power of evocation.

Joseph Vella has 155 classified opus to his credit, apart from double that amount in unclassified works. For him, chamber music is the heart and soul of the musical experience. In that genre, he has written for every conceivable instrument, in every conceivable formation. Yet, his excellence as a composer is also manifested in his large-scale works, not least the *Concerto Grosso op. 143* for harp, harpsichord and pianoforte soli and orchestra. It doesn't get much more imaginative. Written for the *Malta Philharmonic Orchestra*, this work was however premiered at the *University of Delaware* when he was invited as a lecturer there in 2016. At this point, I should say that he was particularly proud, in his understated way, of his *Symphony no. 3 op. 105 'The Apocalypse Verses*, a magnificent work commissioned by then Archbishop of St George's Basilica, Mgr Joseph Farrugia, and the Basilica Chapter, to celebrate the 1,700<sup>th</sup> year from the martyrdom of Saint George, Patron Saint of Gozo. When Vella conceived of the structure for his *Symphony* (he was not partial to composing an Oratorio, which is generally the common practice for such occasions) he felt that the leitmotif running through the work could be that of the eventual triumph of good over evil, so well-illustrated and expressed in the story of the life and deeds of the Christian martyrs, particularly of Saint George; but not only that. For him, this idea also extended to modern-day heroes fighting injustice, abuse, suffering. With this in mind, he highlights and crystallises his intended notion of universality.

Pausing for a momentary reflection, Vella, as well as Mgr Farrugia, possess a capacity for assimilation with the consequent extent of range. The function of the music here is both to fix and make more conscious and precise emotions in which most people participate in their own experience, and to draw within the orbit of feeling and sense what had existed only in thought. It creates a unity of feeling out of various parts. Here, one does not have unity of action which is epic

or dramatic, but a unity of sound and sense, which is pure lyric. Vella and Farrugia do not only manifest immense technical skill which is necessary to make such musical discourse fly; they also demonstrate that great emotional intensity necessary to make it soar.

The range of Mro's vision reached its Olympian height in the stupendous donation of his life work to *Il-Ħaġar Museum* in that same fateful weekend when he joined the panoply of greats in Elysium. He was inordinately proud of what turned out to be a unique moment in time, a moment that defeated time in the validity of its purpose. Always generous to a fault, this was literally and metaphorically a culmination. He never rested on his laurels, however: no sooner were the events surrounding the inauguration of the Joseph Vella Music Archive over than he said that he couldn't wait to return 'in earnest' to finish working on a big project, his opera. He left the piano score of the first two Acts without finishing the third. He passed away a mere five hours after uttering these words. He died looking forward.

Nearing the close of my ruminations, one realises that it is the artist who presses a relentless kind of quest for intimacy of relationship with the various particular realities of experience, not with what Wordsworth calls 'light that never was on sea or land',<sup>xviii</sup> but with the concrete actualities of the world; with the unique historical event, with the unrepeatable personal encounters, and with all the rich singularity that belongs to things in their intractable specificity.

Within this context, the legacy left to us by Cremona, Aquilina, Pisani, Meilak, Farrugia and Vella is as profound as it is substantial. Their iconic presence in our cultural environment represents our 'termine fisso', to quote Dante. For us, they reassert artistic, historical, and conscious form, adding value to art, time, and consciousness,

placing these things into a pattern deduced from historical culture. Commemorating the past, it impregnates the present with meaning and celebrates the future. For many they are what Shakespeare calls a 'Muse of fire, that would ascend | The brightest heaven of invention',<sup>xix</sup> in short, they are a gift that keeps on giving.

In our time, when there are more social circles than we come by in Dante's inferno, when there are more philosophies – complete, incomplete, inchoate – then there were builders at Babel, when physical communication between nations is almost perfect and ideological communication sometimes all but extinct, when men seem more than ever prone to confuse wisdom with knowledge and knowledge with information, it is certainly more difficult to find a common denominator, but one can be found for, as mediocrity tends to uniformity, genius tends to unity.

'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.'<sup>xx</sup> One can extend this prophecy uttered by Shelley to include all artists. Driven by inspiration, the six Gozitans referred to here were geniuses, they were

The Mind, that Ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find;  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade.<sup>xxi</sup>

The true test of civilisation is not the size of its cities, of its economies or of its wealth. If that were the case, Malta, and even more so Gozo, would not be traceable even with a sophisticated radar. A nation is truly tried and tested in its civilisation in the kind of person the country turns out. In this, and much more, Gozo can be proud. In

diverse disciplines, from politics to law, language to poetry to music, Gozo has produced individuals that led the way for countless years and set paradigms that bigger countries can only hope to follow.

I do not think that Gozo has produced people of more outstanding calibre in the humanities than the six mentioned here. Cremona, Aquilina, Pisani, Meilak, Farrugia and Vella had one thing in common: they abhorred provinciality, by which they meant applying standards acquired within a limited area to the whole of human experience. This confounds the contingent with the essential, the ephemeral with the permanent. This attitude can also be attributed to Sir Arturo Mercieca and Prof. J.J. Cremona, two leading men of law whose imprint left an indelible mark on the legal system in Malta. There is also Anton Buttigieg, who gave us perhaps the most consoling line in Maltese poetry: 'U ma' Majsi Alla ħares ma kienetx il-poeżija' ('And with Majsi, thank God we also had poetry').

One of the disadvantages of being islanders is to plunge into the abyss of provincialism, something which the six geniuses discussed here, our Odysseuses, Prosperos, Crusoes, dreamers, would have hated, a provincialism of time, one for which history is merely the chronicle of human devices which have served their term and been scrapped, one for which the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the 'rude forefathers' hold no shares. Gozo would be much richer to remain inspired by her remarkable citizens: 'the communication | Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living'.<sup>xxii</sup> Let's continue listening to their poetry and their music. Theirs was work of inestimable value to our culture, one that gave Gozo an enviable identity.

Islands work like a miracle, of the beauty we can know. This is true not only of Ithaca, of desert islands and the lotos land, but



also of Gozo. Our island gently floats in the Mediterranean, itself a word that means the 'centre of the world'. Taken both literally and metaphorically, this centre is the pivot around which all else turns, that against which tired minds lean when all else fails: this is the contribution the island dwellers referred to in this paper have given our history. They have consolidated this centre, showing that greatness can come from small spaces. They had countless rivals but no equals, and being metaphorically shipwrecked on tiny Gozo did not present any obstacle to their fertile imaginations. What they did for Gozo will live in the memory as a symbol of random but steady, upward progress, with its glittering light, its shadowy water, a language with its packed abstract syntax uncoiling like the gently lapping Mediterranean waves, for the mind to drown in it and rise again like the dancing movement of the rising lotos. Our island geniuses left us footprints on the sands of timeless history. Responsible citizens would be proud to serve as Man/Girl Friday.

'A magna maxima.'<sup>xiii</sup> Something good does come out of Nazareth.

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