

Cultural Tourism Development in Gozo: Lessons from Malta

Jeremy Boissevain

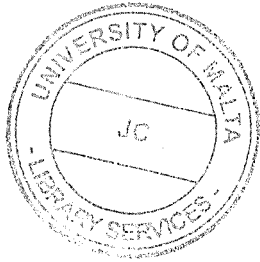
*Med-Campus EUROMED Sustainable Tourism Network
University of Malta*

Throughout the Western World cultural tourism is increasing. In contrast to sun, sea and sand tourists, cultural tourists are interested in monuments, natural environment and customs that are different from those with which they are familiar.

This trend is also reflected in Malta and Gozo. Compared to tourists in 1991, summer visitors in 1993 were more interested in cultural events, village *festas*, light entertainment, water sports and sea cruises (See Table 1).

**Table 1. Use Made of Maltese Tourist Products/Facilities:
Percentage Change 1991-1993**

	<i>Increase %</i>
Cultural Events	31
Village <i>Festas</i>	22
Tourist Information Office	17
Water Sports	15
Car Hire	14
Light Entertainment	14
Sea Cruises	13
Diving	88



Source: Boissevain 1993

Gozo has always been a destination for cultural tourists. In 1993 roughly 700,000 foreigners and some 400,000 Maltese visited the

island.¹ Most were day trippers, but increasing numbers of foreign holiday makers were spending more time on Gozo. Thus the total visitor traffic to Gozo exceeds that to Malta. Because of the overall growth of cultural tourism, the proportion of tourists visiting Gozo in future will probably grow faster than the rate of increase for the Maltese islands as a whole. This means that it is important to look more closely at the impact of cultural tourists. Is cultural tourism sustainable?

SUSTAINABILITY AND TOURISM

Economic and social development must be able to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (cf Bruntland 1987). In short, it must be sustainable. Tourism development should therefore also aim for sustainability. By sustainable tourism is meant tourism that respects the culture and the physical and human environment of the host society, benefits locals and involves them in decision making. In short:

If tourism is to be truly beneficial to all concerned – owners of the industry, employees, tourists and 'hosts' – and sustainable in the long-term, it must be ensured that the resources are not over-consumed, that natural and human environments are protected, that tourism is integrated with other activities, that it provides real benefits to the local communities – often the bases of the tourism enterprise – that local people are involved and included in tourism planning and implementation, and that cultures and peoples are respected (Eber 1992, p. 2).

Whereas seaside tourists are content to remain in settlements by the sea, the growing stream of cultural tourists wish to explore local culture. This often brings them into private, backstage areas where they impinge on local customs and lives. Cultural tourists, it would seem, appear to pose more of a threat to sustainability than

1. Estimates kindly supplied by Tony Ellul of the Secretariat for Tourism and Leslie Vella of NTOM.

seaside tourists. But is this so? Does cultural tourism endanger the possibility of sustainable tourism?

CULTURAL TOURISM AND MDINA

We recently carried out research on the impact of cultural tourism on Mdina, Malta (Boissevain, 1993 and Boissevain and Sammut, 1994). In 1993 some 750,000 tourists visited the town. Mdina has some characteristics in common with the combination of Victoria and your Cittadella as the object of the attention of hundreds of thousands of day trippers who spend from 20 minutes to an hour or so there sightseeing and shopping. Hence I thought it would be informative to share some of our findings with you. Perhaps you will find some parallels.

We found that the constant exposure to growing numbers of tourists and the effects this has on their lives and surroundings is creating a more negative attitude to tourism among a growing segment of Mdina's residents. Increasingly they feel that they are being asked to sacrifice their privacy and the tranquillity of their small, intimate town for the national good, without receiving any compensation from either government or tour operators.

Many complain that tourists constantly peer and sometimes even sneak, uninvited, into their houses; that they leave a mess behind; that they block the narrow roads when residents try to drive home; that they are often indecently dressed; and that encroaching commercial interests are changing the character of the town.

Mdina's residents are beginning to have enough of tourists. While all those we spoke to were proud that their town was so popular, they felt alienated by the behaviour of the public and the government's neglect of such basic problems as street lighting and policing.

These feelings are exacerbated when the town becomes the venue for special events – such as weddings, exhibitions, concerts, theatre productions and, particularly, re-invented historical pageants such

as the Mdina '93 festival. Such events attract large, mostly local, crowds, in addition to the daily hordes of tourists.

The Mdina '93 festival in some senses was an experiment that may well serve as a model to be repeated in other historical venues. It was an extravaganza that included flower displays, historical re-enactment, animated guided tours, museum exhibitions, folkloric skits, street theatre, puppet shows and a programme of evening concerts. The festival took place from nine in the morning until midnight and lasted a week. The tours and skits were repeated up to ten times daily. The festival attracted tens of thousands of visitors, most of whom were Maltese.

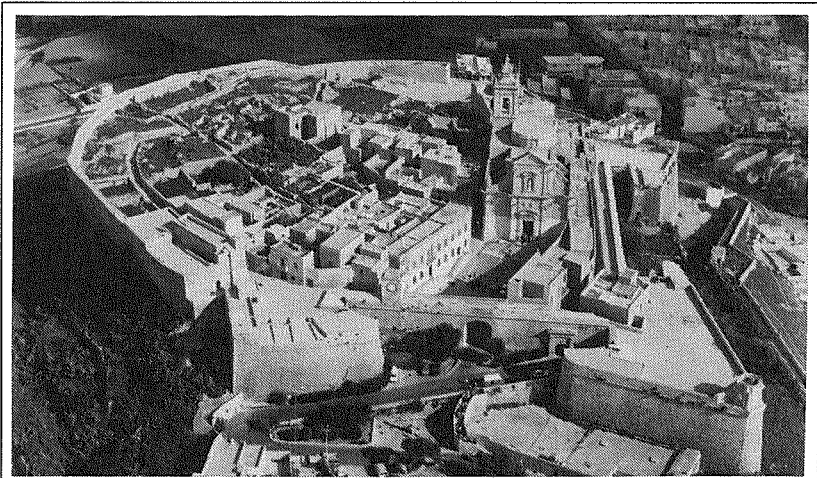
Mdina residents were obviously affected by the events. Two-thirds considered that their needs had not been taken into consideration. They complained of lack of secured parking, noise, crowding, dirt, rudeness and invasion of privacy. At times they felt imprisoned by the crowds. There was a general feeling that they had sacrificed a great deal, but had received nothing in return. One woman summed up the attitude in an emotional outburst:

We are used as carpets! ... The residents have a right to live. We want to live. When we air our views, outsiders tell us that Mdina is not ours but it belongs to the Maltese population. But we live here! We have a right to our city, *pajjiżna*.

Our conclusion was that at present tourism in Mdina is not sustainable and can not become sustainable unless measures are taken.

ANOTHER LOOK AT CULTURAL TOURISM

Mdina is perhaps an extreme case of the impact of cultural tourism: less than 300 inhabitants of a small, non-commercial walled town invaded by well over 750,000 curious foreign visitors a year. But roughly as many visit the Cittadella annually, in addition to the hordes of Maltese trippers. Furthermore, plans are being mooted to develop other walled cities in Malta as tourist attractions. We might, therefore, reflect on what can be learned from the Mdina experience.



An aerial view of the Cittadella

Our research suggests that there are at least four negative structural characteristics of cultural tourism.

The first is the loss of privacy as tourists in search of other cultures cross thresholds and boundaries (sometimes, but not always, hidden) to penetrate authentic backstage areas. Other anthropologists have recently reported tourists invading domestic back regions. Such episodes will multiply as cultural tourism is marketed to the masses.

The second is the destruction by excessive tourist attention of the culture visitors come to examine. It does this by transforming natives into entrepreneurs, by destroying traditional tranquillity and physical environment, and by pricing the local population out of the area, thus transforming the attraction into a museum. This is occurring in the historical centres of Prague and Weimar. "Sustaining the resource base on which tourism depends must be the central focus of... sustainable tourism" (McKercher 1993, p.131).

The third is the hostility locals develop to tourism when they realize that they are being exploited: by a government so dependent on tourism that it commoditizes their way of life, customs and immediate surroundings; by tour operators who push them about to ac-

commodate their clients; by tourists who, partly through ignorance, flout local mores and prevent residents from going about their daily business if it disturbs their image of authenticity.

The fourth is the difficulty of charging admission fees to view towns and nature, so that some form of compensation can be given to those most directly affected. While a local authority can sell tickets to enter museums, theme parks and nature reserves, it does not charge tourists fees to wander about the old towns, quaint villages or countryside that also form part of the national heritage.

There is a fifth negative characteristic of cultural tourism. This is the arrogant, denigrating attitude of some visitors who derive satisfaction from looking down on others, from feeling that they and their own customs are vastly superior. In time, when the host community becomes aware of this attitude, it generates hostility.

This is not an imaginary scenario. I once overheard a Dutchman remark to his partner as they watched the Naxxar Good Friday procession leaving the church, "What a heathen event!"

Maltese sometimes also gave themselves airs when they went to Gozo. The hostility this created was sometimes startling. The 21 Gozitan VI Form Lyceum students who helped me with my research in 1978 all disliked Maltese trippers. This is what one wrote about them:

"They rate themselves as first class tourists, let alone they bring their lunch along with them. It is disgusting what they leave behind... pieces of bread floating on the sea, empty bottles and cans everywhere. They make the place their own and leave no space for anyone. There is also much reckless driving They behave badly because they think they are superior to the Gozitans. They ... play their radios and cassettes in full volume, shout and laugh with mouths wide open. They show absolutely no sign of any respect and education to the people of their sister island. They make fun of everything and everybody" (Boissevain 1979, p. 87).

At the Ta' Ċenc seminar "Tourism in Gozo" I was assured that the

behaviour and attitudes of Maltese trippers have changed since then. I hope so, but only further research can show if this is the case.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM

Can anything be done to further sustainable cultural tourism to Gozo and to avoid or correct situations like those described for Mdina? We believe it can.

To make a beginning, we recommend the following:

1. In future the organization of special tourist festivals held in local communities should include official representatives of the residents in the preliminary stages of decision making. If residents are adequately informed months prior to the events, they will get accustomed to them. Views and comments of the residents should be taken seriously.
2. A method must be developed to fund the restoration of private buildings in areas of particular interest to tourists. All visitors to Mdina or the Cittadella and local and foreign visitors to festivals such as Mdina '93, could be charged a modest entrance fee (for example, a 10c fee would annually earn Mdina and the Cittadella Lm75,000 each, while 25c would yield Lm187,500; nationals could be exempted upon presentation of an I.D. Card). This 'contribution' could be collected at the entrance and would serve to build a 'Restoration Fund'. Mdina and the Cittadella are part of our history. Building repair is costly and it is unfair to expect residents at their own expense to restore the towns for the enjoyment of tourists and all of Malta. Maltese and foreigners could thus work together towards the upkeep of Mdina and the Cittadella. Local Councils could administer the funds. Such entrance fees are increasingly being collected abroad. For example, Cambridge colleges, traditionally open to the public, have now begun to charge tourists to enter the grounds.
3. Tourist authorities and local communities should see that a cultural awareness campaign is carried out. Volunteers, workers, visitors and commercial tourist guides must be made aware that the built-up areas visited are inhabited. Residents have a right to their normal daily lives. Outsiders visiting are the guests of

- the community and they should behave as such. The media and brochures should be used to bring home the message that minimal interference with the daily lives of the residents would be greatly appreciated. As part of this campaign, a leaflet setting out the local do's and don'ts of decent dress and respect for privacy should be distributed to all tourists *en route* or upon arrival.
4. Periodic studies should be made of the 'use' made of such localities and residents' attitudes to signal and resolve problems. These should be conducted by trained researchers. The problems that loom are too complex to be understood and resolved on the basis of casual surveys.
 5. The Ministry of Tourism should immediately take steps to attempt to resolve residents' complaints in localities heavily frequented by tourists.
 6. Lastly, and most obviously, Local Councils, together with the Ministry of Tourism and the Planning Authority, must swiftly decide upon the long-term policy for the sustainable touristic and commercial development of communities favoured by tourists.

This policy should be based on proper planning and social and physical environmental impact studies. Until this policy is in place, no further commercial permits should be issued and all enterprises operating without proper permits should be closed.

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