

# Adult Education in Malta: Challenges and Prospects

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Adult education in the context of lifelong learning

The current widespread doxa of lifelong and lifewide learning has caught up in several countries, especially European ones, and gives prominence to adult education to the extent that the terms lifelong learning and adult education are often erroneously used interchangeably. In this paper, I shall take a look at the situation concerning adult continuing education in one of the world's smallest countries that is also one of the most recent EU members. This is the Republic of Malta, the country where I was born and bred and where I have carried out most of my adult education work. Malta has not been immune to the above discourse both when promoted by UNESCO as 'lifelong education,' with little effect on policy making in this country, as elsewhere, and particularly in more recent years. These years were characterised by the build up to this country's joining the EU and its initial years as a member state.

### 1.2. From UNESCO to the EU

Nowadays there is a widespread preference, in Malta, for the more fashionable term 'lifelong learning,' as used first by the OECD and later the EU, and with an ideological underpinning and conceptualisation that differs from UNESCO's 'Lifelong Education' (Wain, 2004; Borg & Mayo, 2006; Field, 2009). One reason for this could be that the term is attractive

for funding (especially EU funding) purposes. Given this preliminary scenario, I seek to outline major aspects of current provision of adult education in Malta, indicate some of the barriers to participation and identify some of the challenges faced. First, however, I outline the socio-economic context which gives rise to these challenges and provide a more in depth exposition of the ideological-historical context that has been shaping this area. As with most countries, adult education in Malta has a history. This history has been documented elsewhere (Wain & Mayo, 1992; Baldacchino & Mayo, 1997; Mayo, 2007) and predates, by a very long time, the emergence of lifelong learning as an all embracing concept for Maltese education.

## **2. Socio-economic context**

### **2.1 General characteristics**

The islands constituting the Maltese archipelago that together form the Republic of Malta have a long history of foreign domination and colonisation. Malta achieved its formal independence from Britain in 1964, became a republic in 1974, witnessed the closure of the British military bases in 1979 and joined the EU in 2004. Typical of small states (Bacchus, 2008, p. 143), its economy is a tertiary one, largely dependent on tourism and other services. Like other countries in Southern Europe, it has been experiencing the transition from having been a country of emigration to one of immigration. Malta is very much a frontier island with respect to North Africa and especially Libya from where many migrants (many from Sub-Saharan Africa) attempt to cross over to Europe in search of a better life.

As far as education goes, mass public provision was introduced after the Compulsory Education Ordinance of 1946 (Zammit Mangion, 1992). There were schools before this period but they were not available to everyone. State-sponsored adult education had existed well before then and can be traced as far back as 1850 (Wain & Mayo, 1992).

The country has a dominant belief system, namely that of Roman Catholicism, with the Catholic Church and some of its priests and connected organisations, having been important players in the field of adult education. (Mayo, 2007)

## **2.2. Population**

Malta is densely populated. It has an area of 316 sq.km. The population stood at 413,609 in 2008. Over a century, the population of the Maltese archipelago doubled. 50.2 per cent of this population is female. This figure comprises both Maltese and non-Maltese citizens residing in Malta. The total Maltese population stood at 395,472, implying that the remaining 4.4 % consists of non-Maltese citizens. U'18 children and youth constitute 21 % of the population while 65+adults constitute 14 %. In 2007, there was a population increase of 3,319 persons or 0.8 per cent, with Malta's population density now being 1309 persons per square kilometre. (NSO, 2009a, p. V1). Quite relevant to adult education is the fact that projections indicate that the number of persons in the 65+ age bracket is expected to increase to 20 % in 2025 and to 24 % in 2050, thus underlining the fact that, as with the rest of Europe, there is an increasingly aging population.

## **2.3. Immigration**

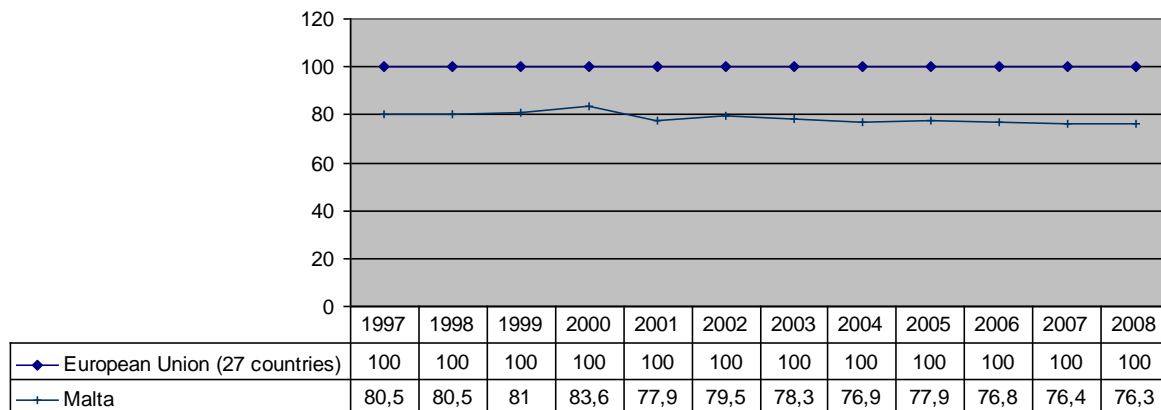
As with the rest of the Mediterranean, immigration is an important issue. There were 9,033 immigrants in 2008 of whom 5,173 (57 %) were male. 13% of these were returned migrants (therefore having Maltese citizenship). Half of the immigrants were EU citizens from another country, while 37 per cent were third-country nationals. With 6,597 having emigrated during 2008, the net migration figure for that year was 2,436. (NSO, 2009a, p. X1). Of course, these statistics are partial in that they do not account for the perceived large numbers of 'illegal immigrants' or '*klandestini*' (clandestine immigrants) as they are called here.

## 2.4. Production

According to provisional estimates, the GDP per capita in 2009 stood at €5.7 billion.

**Figure 1** GDP per capita in purchasing power standards (EU-27=100). Source Eurostat

**GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) (EU-27 = 100)**



As indicated by Darmanin (2009, pp. 177), there has been a growing structural deficit in public finances, that decreased in 2006, only to rise by over 300% in 2008. There was no private sector surplus to offset this deficit (Darmanin, 2009, pp.177-178). There has been a growth in private sector employment and especially in part-time jobs while manufacturing jobs have been lost. Manufacturing was for several years one of the pillars of the Maltese economy but, like most micro-states, Malta is 'suffering the pinch' in this area. It is difficult to attract outsourcing since this requires labour intensive work (Mayo, Pace & Zammit, 2008, p. 235). Globalisation and mobility of capital have rendered this traditionally important sector of the economy a non-viable option. (Mayo, Pace & Zammit, 2008, p. 235). In the first half of 2009, "gross value added at basic prices dropped by 0.7 per cent when compared to the previous corresponding period. This mainly reflected drops in the manufacturing sector and to a lesser extent in the wholesale and retail trade and hotels and restaurants sectors." (MFEI, 2009, p. 5). The Economic Survey

provided by the Ministry of Finance, the Economy and Investment (MFEI) indicates that, in the same period, a negative performance was registered in the manufacturing sector. This applies to nearly all activities. (MFEI, 2009, p. 5). The manufacturing industry's turn over dropped significantly by 21.6 per cent and this was underpinned by a substantial decrease of 27.6 per cent in exports (MFEI, 2009, p.6) Tourism has been the traditional mainstay of the economy from the 60s onward and even here the economic crises endured by the countries that provide Malta with its greatest tourist market, Britain and Germany, had a negative impact on the industry.

According to the 2009 Economic survey, "During January-September 2009, tourist departures decreased by 10.4 per cent over the previous comparable period, to 936,342 visitors. Gross foreign exchange earnings from tourism registered a decline of 10.3 per cent during the first half of 2009, to €227.8 million." (MFEI, 2009, p.7) This underlines the situation concerning open economies such as that of Malta.

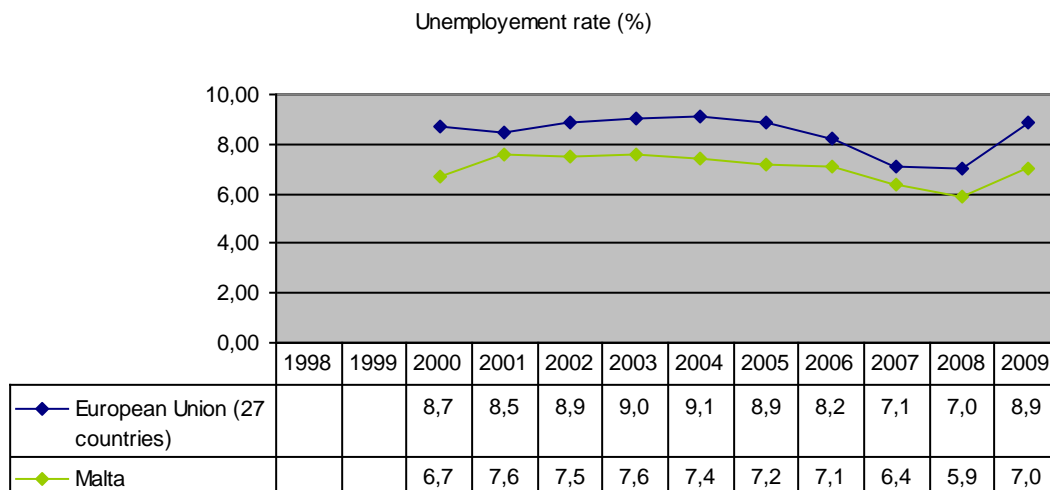
## **2.5. Unemployment**

In February 2010 the number of registered unemployed was 7,852. 6082 are men while 1770 are female. This marks an increase of 751 persons (10.6%) when compared to the number recorded in February 2009. (NSO, 2010b, p. 1). The activity rates for July-September 2009 indicate that the percentage of men stood at 76.9 % while that of women stood at 40.7 % (NSO, 2010c, p. 2). In September 2009, the unemployment rate for men was 5.6% while that for women stood at 3.5% (NSO, 2010b, p. 1).

Part-time employment as a primary job increased by 1,038 or 3.8 per cent to 28,171 (MFEI, 2009, p. 6). In 2007, the number of men employed part-time as a primary job was 10,151. In October 2009, this figure increased to 11, 449 which constitutes 10.52% of the total number of men employed in a primary job (including those gainfully occupied). There is a significant difference when it comes to women. In 2007, the number of women who

held a primary part-time job was 15, 127. In October 2009, this figure rose to 16,503. However the difference between men and women becomes more significant when we see this number as a percentage of the total amount of women employed in their primary job (those in gainful employment and those working part-time). The percentage here is 26.38%. The number of female part-time employees continues to be on the increase (Darmanin, 2006, p. 80).

**Figure 2** Unemployment rate yearly average, Source Eurostat



The biggest shift in the economy has been from manufacturing towards service industry with special emphasis placed on knowledge intensive work (Bacchus, 2008, p.139) especially in the areas of ICT and in such other sectors as aviation and pharmaceuticals (Darmanin, 2009, p. 178). The challenge for small states like Malta these days is to compete on higher value added, strong work ethic and reduced transport costs as well as engaging in strong and serious attempts to discover niche markets for indigenous industries regarding history, culture, agriculture, food processing, wine and certain crafts.(Mayo, Pace & Zammit, 2008, p. 235).

### 3. Ideological-Historical context

### **3.1. Language battles**

Adult education's first documented landmarks in Malta occurred during the period of British colonial rule and often reflected a struggle between the demands of an Anglicisation project and the struggle for resistance by the traditional local elite. The latter promoted *Italianita`* (an affinity with the culture of neighbouring Italy) and the continuation of the Italian language as the language of Maltese society's traditional established institutions such as the university, the law courts etc.

The 'language question' involved the struggle for supremacy of either the English or Italian language with Maltese being regarded as the 'kitchen language'. English gradually supplanted Italian as the key language in Malta and Gozo, notably in administration, education, commerce etc. Maltese eventually established itself as one of the two most important languages. It still suffers from occupying a somewhat subordinate status in various leading institutions in the country. Given the open nature of its economy and its small size, Malta requires a language of international currency and English fits this purpose. (Mayo, 1997)

### **3.2. From mercantilist to industrialisation policy**

Independence in 1964 brought with it a new sense of identity and the development of a tourist industry. A laissez-faire *mercantilist* policy developed in the 60s by the Nationalist Party, which traditionally derived support from the clerico-professional classes and the class of importers, among others, gave way to sixteen years of socialist policies under the Labour government of the 70s and mid-eighties. Here the shift in economic policy was from mercantilist capitalism to *industrial* capitalism. (Vella, 2009) This was followed by twenty almost uninterrupted years of Nationalist rule.

### **3.3 Pro-Europe and liberalisation of the economy**

The Nationalist administration favoured EU membership and a liberalisation of the economy, tempered at first by a residue of Labour's welfare policies but which gradually led to a more neoliberal string of policies, coupled with the affirmation of traditional conservative values. Privatisation has become an important feature of the economy.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.4 Catholic Church**

Throughout the aforementioned periods, there has been a long surviving hegemonic force in Maltese society which has also been an important player in the adult education field: the Roman Catholic Church. That it makes its presence felt in most aspects of Maltese life is typical of countries characterised by a dominant belief system. Malta is a non-secular state with Roman Catholicism being recognised as the official religion of the Maltese islands in the country's Constitution. State-church relations have been controversial throughout Malta's history, not least in the recent introduction of divorce legislation.

### **3.5 Meanings attached to adult education**

Adult Education means different things to different people in Malta. It was traditionally associated with adult literacy and basic education in the late 19th and first half of the 20th century at a time when there was no mass public education. It was linked, for the most part, with emigration and involved literacy especially in English. The main purpose was to assist emigrants in settling in former British colonies of settlement such as the USA, Canada and Australia. Vocational education, often with a strong agricultural bias, was also instrumental in this regard (these receiving countries preferred country to city dwellers). Adult education was also associated with religious instruction and with social

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. the Drydocks which once employed up to 5000 workers has recently been privatised with none of the remaining workers taken on by the new private company.



development. Social development was initially often promoted by institutions that followed the social teachings of the Catholic Church.

### **3.6 Politics of adult education**

This was in keeping with the international trend for Catholic organisations to control the social arena lest it fell into the hands of communist-oriented agencies (Mayo, 2007, p. 17). However sporadic socialist initiatives were also to be found in the early part of the 20th century, particularly through the efforts of Manwel Dimech (Zammit Marmara, 1997). Socialist and labour oriented adult education made its mark in the 80s with the emergence of NGOs connected with the Labour Party and the General Workers' Union. Prior to that we saw the emergence of an academy connected with Christian Democratic politics, strongly linked to the Nationalist Party. Other initiatives such as the Centre for Labour Studies emerged in the early 80s primarily because of the experiments in self-management introduced in a number of firms including the Dockyard. Links between local adult education providers and German foundations (*stiftungs*) and other agencies began to occur especially with regard to adult education providers connected with the Church, unions or the main political parties. (Caruana and Mayo, 2002, p. 62) Trade unions also refined their provisions in adult education, establishing foundations.

### **3.7 EU impact and 'employability oriented' adult education**

Following Malta's EU accession, agencies and individuals began to compete for Grundtvig and Leonardo funding. Other adult education initiatives began to emerge, relying for the most part on ESF funding. The early 90s also saw the establishment of the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), and the last decade saw the re-emergence of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) that also attaches importance to adult vocational education.

### **3.8 University continuing education**

In this regard, MCAST complements the University of Malta which traces its origins to 1592. This university has, for years been providing different kinds of university continuing education (Mayo, 2003). Its monopoly is however being challenged not only by MCAST but by private institutes serving as franchise agencies for foreign universities, especially recognised and established UK universities. The latter's available programmes are in such areas as Management, ICT, Training, Communications and Education (Mayo, 2007; Darmanin, 2009). The university is now about to embark on a project of evening courses in the liberal arts and sciences. It was decided at the University's November 2010 Senate meeting,<sup>2</sup> that the University is to introduce a number of evening courses to be taken for credit by members of the general public. Participants can limit themselves to any amount of courses. It is possible, however, that participants can gradually (without any stipulated time frame) accumulate enough credits to obtain a certificate, diploma and a degree (Liberal Arts and Sciences). It seems likely that these courses will be provided on a cost recovery basis although no decisions have as yet been taken in this regard.

### **3.9 Adult Education as contested terrain**

One area which has been expanding since the 70s is that of teaching English to foreigners including foreign adults. The country has surpassed England as the most favoured destination for German students (Domas, 2004, p. 10). One of these schools belongs to the University while many of the schools are privately run, including those run by the GWU and the teachers' union.

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<sup>2</sup> Minutes of November 2010 University of Malta Senate meeting. A committee was appointed by Senate for this purpose.

The private sector is very much involved in commercially oriented adult education, and the University itself has had a commercial company of this type offering market oriented adult education. In sum, while the struggle for a more emancipatory adult education features in the work of some NGOs, social movement activists (see Vincent Caruana, in Borg and Mayo, 2007) and in writings and talks by educationists (see, for instance, Wain, 2004, Borg and Mayo, 2006), the dominant form of adult education in Malta, as elsewhere, is that of adult education for 'employability.' The dominant EU discourse, concerning new basic skills, focusing on ICT and a variety of narrowly defined competences, is very influential in this regard. It drives the country's policy, not least through its funding mechanisms on which the country's adult education agencies seem to be heavily dependent.

#### **4. Legal, Structural, Financial Frameworks**

##### **4.1 Legal Framework**

There is no legislation covering adult education in Malta. In fact the Education Act of 1988, recently amended, pays lip service to adult education. Adult Education is mentioned when outlining the Directorate for Educational Services' functions. Chapter 327 stipulates that the Directorate is to "promote, support, coordinate and ensure lifelong learning services and initiatives, including educational and cultural services within the community, e-learning and distance learning, adult education, evening classes, and other initiatives related to complementary education..." (Government Gazette, 2006, p. A 583).

##### **4.2 Structural Framework**

There is no national strategy for adult education in Malta. Around 2003-2004, a consultative document for a national lifelong learning strategy was produced. For some reason or other, it was not placed in the public domain.

The major players in this area have traditionally included the State, with respect to general education and labour market training, often through two different ministries (education and social policy) but more recently combined under one ministry, that of Education. The State provides its own adult education programmes through its Directorate for Educational Services. It has also been linked with such state-funded agencies as the ETC and the Foundation for Educational Services (FES), the latter having been incorporated into one of the directorates within the Ministry of Education. The other important player in the field is the Catholic Church through its own provision at national and parish levels as well as through its larger network of NGOs. The rest of adult education is provided by state funded academic institutions especially Higher Education institutions such as the University of Malta and MCAST, the private institutions (they constitute a private Higher Education market - see Darmanin, 2009), private (for profit) ICT and language schools, cultural centres connected with a foreign country (e.g. Alliance Française, Circolo Cultural Hispano Maltés) and, of course, NGOs.

#### **4.3 Financial framework**

The State through its annual budget allocations provides funding for services rendered by state institutions in the areas of general adult education, health promotion and vocational education. The EU through its various actions and other sources, notably the ESF, is increasingly becoming a key provider of funds for adult education. Corporations such as the ETC benefit from ESF funding (Mayo, 2007, p. 35). Other agencies such as the FES have been tapping ESF funds. It was through these funds that the FES sought to

implement the provision in the NMC document regarding the development of schools as community learning centres. Funding for this project was subsequently and inexplicably stopped. (Mayo, 2007, p. 29)

Other agencies such as the German SDP-oriented Freidrich Ebert Stiftung have, among other things, funded projects carried out by a university based labour studies centre and a prominent NGO and the General Workers' Union; FES has since closed its Malta offices. Maltese adult education agencies have little else on which to draw. (Mayo, 2007). And yet it is agencies such as these that uphold the view of adult education as a public and not a consumption good.

Viewing education as a 'consumer positional good' is very much the case with the emerging private higher education market which caters for adult learners by offering a variety not found in the public university where the number of evening undergraduate courses on offer to adults are very limited (Mayo, 2007; Mayo et al, 2008; Darmanin, 2009). The proposed liberal arts and science units for evening students augurs well for the future of education as a public good and as a university service to the public sphere. The idea of education as a consumer good applies to the booming HRD, ICT and the English language (to foreigners) industries.

## **5. Barriers to and Opportunities for Participation:**

### **Options for the Future**

#### **5.1 Access to Higher Education for Adults**

Barriers for adult participation in adult education still exist, despite the efforts of government through the creation of a regulatory qualifications framework (the Malta Qualifications Framework) and other incentives such as the provision of scholarships for those doing Master's degrees on a part-time basis, often with foreign institutions and the

introduction of the maturity clause for entry to University first degree courses. Let us stick to the context of access to Higher Education (HE) for adults first.

The first point to be made in the HE context concerns the much discussed ‘stipends system’ which was introduced by the Nationalist Government in 1987 to replace the former wage linked to the ‘Worker-Student’ scheme in university education (full time students and employees could work for five and a half months and study for five and a half months, with a salary being received throughout the whole year) (Baldacchino, 1999). The stipend system of funding, which applies across the board in HE including students enrolled in private institutions studying for foreign degrees (the state’s major contribution to consolidating an HE market), clearly discriminates against students on the basis of age. Those enrolled in full-time courses, over the age of 30, are excluded from the funding. This measure also fails to take into consideration the needs of people at different ages to continue their studies. The measure often adversely affects persons, usually women, who interrupt their studies because of family concerns, particularly caring for children in their early years. Needless to say, single parents are the hardest hit in these circumstances. This situation alone provides a strong case for the introduction of means testing with regard to student funding. (Mayo, 2007, p. 63).

The **University of Malta** would be the first institution I would consider separately in this subsection for a number of reasons, including its potential to offer a range of adult education courses and also because, for many years, between the late 70s and late 80s, it was the only institution of higher education on the island. Apart from funding, the issue of alternative entry qualifications also needs to be considered.

With regard to honours degree courses, there has also been a traditional reluctance to make these degrees accessible to those who cannot afford to undertake full-time studies. Only BA General degrees were made available in the evening (the university's traditionally major contribution to adult education for employees) and these degrees preclude people from furthering their studies at the University for a Higher degree unless a qualifying course is undertaken. Happily, B.A. Honours evening degree courses in three areas Theology, Youth Studies and Work and Human Resources are now available. One hopes that these are the first of many programmes offered in the evening at Honours degree level to adults who cannot afford full time studies. (Mayo, 2003, 2007)

**MCAST** (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology) was established in 2000 and certainly created possibilities, through its adult education programmes, to enhance the level of participation in formal education. This institution had existed from the 60s till the late seventies and was turned into a new university in 1978 eventually being incorporated into the established University of Malta. It was always the intention of the Labour government of the period to bring MCAST and university together since the latter provided courses which the government felt should become part of a modern university (management, engineering, education, public administration, accountancy) to prevent the university from being simply an appendage to the traditional professions. This left a void in Maltese higher education in that there was no institution providing qualifications at a level lower than that offered at university. MCAST was re-established in 2001 to fill in this void.

It provides numerous evening training programmes in various skills and anyone over 16 years of age can register for these programmes.. The motivations for attending evening courses are various. Evening courses provided by MCAST are taken up for

participants' continuing professional development. Others follow such courses for vocational reorientation. There are those who enrol to develop the sort of skills that are an alternative to those employed in their daily work. The last type of course participants engages in a form of adult education for 'relaxation' within a technical and vocational context.

Courses are also tailor-made to the needs of enterprises and firms in upgrading their personnel's skills e.g. technicians, welders, hairdressers. They provide the funding for these courses, availing themselves of MCAST's considerable economies of scale and ability to tap into the required teaching expertise. There is a 'Training for Industry' programme that includes programmes of re-skilling. There are market-driven 'mass courses' in a variety of areas, including 'interior design' that attracts around 80-100 applicants each term. (Mayo, 2007)

Together with the University and the private institutions MCAST is helping to raise the number of people with a postsecondary and tertiary level education. The number was very low around 1987 but, with a series of incentives such as a student annual stipend, more students are attending these institutions with attendance at University reaching the 9,970 mark in 2008 (Darmanin 2009, p. 180).

## **5.2 Unions and Paid Educational leave**

It is heartening to see that education constitutes an important element in the set up, of the larger unions. There are however barriers arising through the traditional inability of unions to press for paid educational leave in their negotiations with employers, although the current political climate in this period of hegemonic Neoliberal globalisation had put the unions on the back-foot in this regard. They are more likely to press for opportunities for retooling of labour skills and vocational reorientation courses in an age when people are



working beyond 60. This is because of the demographic factors underlined earlier, which point to an aging population. (Finsden & Formosa, 2011) There is also the alarming prospect of pensions becoming an individual rather than a social responsibility. This will lead many to continue seeking work in old age. The emphasis in their education, during that period, would likely continue to be on 'employability'. They become further victims in a process whereby a 'jobs crisis' is transformed into a 'skills crisis' (Marshall, 1997), especially in an age when there is a global scramble for few middle class jobs (the market value of which is lowered through the massive presence of a qualified labour pool from places such as China and India) which will leave so many qualified and experienced people disappointed, including youngsters, let alone older adults (Brown, Lauder & Aspin, 2010).

### **5.3 older adults**

Private old people's homes are mushrooming as elderly persons constitute a lucrative market. And yet these homes provide barriers to learning in the context of lifelong adult education, since they employ only nurses, health assistants and the occasional visiting doctor while cultural animators or adult educators are nowhere to be seen. Malta needs to ensure that a cadre of trained people is provided in the area of Educating Older Adults (Finsden & Formosa, 2011) so that these people can be employed at old people's homes to have a salutary effect on the lives of their residents. The residents would thus be viewed as active and not passive beings, active citizens at a period in their life when access to citizenship learning and action is generally denied to them. (Mayo, 2007, p. 57)

### **5.4 Local Councils, Schools and Community Learning**

Other barriers exist at the local level. There is the failure of local councils to give pride of place to adult community education in their activities. Admittedly some have provided the odd course in ICT in their community or the odd literacy course in concert with an NGO, but little else. Local councils can, for instance, play a prominent part, in concert with other players, including other State agencies (especially at national level), in developing the local School as a Community Learning Centre (SCLC) and in the fostering of a community education culture. The idea of developing schools as community learning centres is enshrined in the 1999 policy document for a National Minimum Curriculum and has been retained in the 2011 consultative documents for a National Curriculum Framework. As indicated earlier, however, the only means of finance for such a project was sought through the ESF which restricts provision to employability projects and also proved to be intermittent. Once the funding was not renewed the project grinded to a halt. Yet the concept of SCLS remains on the agenda. It makes sense on three levels: *educational* (the community as a learning resource), *democratic* (public institutions are public resources born out of public taxes) and also *economic* (the cost per capita of duplicating resources in small states is much higher than in larger states , Mayo, Pace & Zammit, 2008). This seems to be a way for certain small states to develop a cost-effective, resource maximising educational infrastructure.

One must ensure that significant changes to the sites (not cosmetic ones) are made to make the environment one that attracts adult learners. People with low schooling achievement or school 'drop outs' are the ones most likely to resist efforts at attracting them towards adult learning. It is important therefore that the environment does not resemble 'traditional school classroom' but accommodates adults on their own terms. Furthermore,

people involved in running adults' after-school programmes must have a good grounding in either adult education or community learning. Ideally, participants in these programmes should be encouraged to teach courses in the area in which they are proficient (perhaps in tandem with an adult educator) to be both teachers and learners at the same time. A literacy learner who, for instance, works in the catering trade, can teach catering classes at the same time. The highly literate educator can, for example, take a computer literacy class.

This double role can boost the person's self-esteem, enabling the person to view the learning/teaching setting in a different light. One would avoid the stigma connected with adult literacy learning in a small community where the intimacy factor is strong.

The inspiration for developing a SCLC, a multipurpose community learning site, derives from the Caribbean, a region with a concentration of small island states. Didacus Jules was among the first to conceive of such an idea (Jules, 1994). In St. Lucia, for instance, Jules, then Permanent Secretary for Education, advocated a new architecture for the school as community infrastructure that combines school, community library, internet facilities, auditorium, etc. This idea was taken up in Trinidad and Tobago where Jules assisted with the new education strategy developed in this small island state. (Mayo, Pace & Zammit, 2008, p.230)<sup>34</sup>

The major stumbling block, as far as Malta is concerned, is financial. I wonder whether the budget for local councils ought to be increased with a substantial amount to be allocated and spent solely for community education. (Mayo, 2007, pp. 56-57) The programmes can be developed in connection with the SCLC in the specific locality. The

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<sup>4</sup> Information obtained through electronic communication from Dr Didacus Jules, Wednesday 22nd August 2007.

councils could also help set up child care facilities to ensure that both women and men can avail themselves of these opportunities. So would elderly persons who often serve as child minders in lieu of such facilities (this is common in a small state where distances are short and parents can avail themselves of much more trusted family members in this regard).

#### **5.5 Community and other museums as learning sites**

Local councils can also help set up community museums which can serve as learning spaces. (Mayo, 2007, p. 59; Chadwick & Stannet, 2000; Taylor & McKinley Parrish, 2010) One of the barriers to adult learning in museums and other cultural centres is the lack of personnel serving as educators in these contexts. We tend to equate teaching and learning only with established educational institutions. Furthermore, given the importance of tourism for the Maltese economy, there is the tendency to equate museums and other cultural sites with the tourist sector as if their sole function is economic (the portfolio for culture belongs to the Tourism Minister). These cultural sites should be developed as sites of learning, with appropriate accoutrements, for the public at large as a public good. On another note, the lack of provision of state of the art multimedia libraries in various localities, with well prepared librarians, is another stumbling block to adult participation in learning.

#### **5.6 Preparation of Adult Educators**

On a more positive note, the scramble for EU funds is leading to innovative ways of doing adult education in Malta. The University has been very much involved in the professional preparation of adult educators first at diploma level and more recently at MA level. This can provide the country with a cadre of well prepared adult educators both in the theoretical and practical aspects of adult education. They have been encouraged to use

their imagination in devising projects for their practicum and this can stand the country in good stead.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Differential access**

The degree of provision and diversification in adult education is steadily increasing in the islands of Malta and Gozo although there seems to be a greater concentration of provision on the larger island, Malta, with lack of similar and amount of provision on the other most substantially inhabited island.<sup>5</sup> There remains an access divide on many grounds: class, gender (given the way women are increasingly involved in part-time work as primary employment and their assuming primary responsibility for housework thus engaging in a double work shift), race/ethnicity (now that we have a strong immigrant population with specific needs) and ability (many sites of learning, including museums, are inaccessible to the mobility impaired).

### **6.2 Migration and Anti-Racist Education**

It is impossible to do justice to all these, admittedly variegated, social groupings. I will therefore focus on one of them –migrants, mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa. The issue of immigration represents a major challenge to the country as a whole and to its educational system including its adult education system (Borg & Mayo, 2006; Mayo, 2007).

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<sup>5</sup> Needless to say, more effort needs to be placed into bridging what I would call the channel divide in this regard, the channel being that between Malta and Gozo in which Comino is also situated. Efforts have been made in this regard through the setting up of a University centre in Gozo with teleconferencing facilities connecting this branch to the main campus and incentives offered to lecturers to cross over from Malta to give lectures in the various degree courses during the weekends starting on Friday evening, a major form of formal adult education provision for Gozitan employees. There is also an ETC and MCAST branch in Gozo. And there is provision of a religious nature offered by the Church and some of its NGOs while the State through its Gozo office also offers evening classes there. But the challenges for greater and equitable provision remain (see Cutajar, 1999).

One idea that was proposed (Mayo, 2007) is that of transforming the present detention or open centres into Immigrant Lifelong Learning Centres, with due focus on education for resettlement, given the situation concerning immigration in micro-nation states like Malta. In this respect, Malta's representatives in various fora, including the European Parliament, should continue to lobby for help, in this regard, among other European countries. The potentially receiving country should help in the financing and provision of resources for programmes at the centres that will equip migrants with the linguistic and other skills necessary for them to relocate. The programmes should target both those who desire to relocate and those who intend to stay in Malta. Intensive short in-service programmes in anti-racist education should be provided to personnel directly dealing with immigrants, including members of the police force, the army, the entertainment industry, the teaching profession, the broadcasting media and the judicial sector.

I would like to see such an educational programme, comprising a strong anti-racist education component, become a feature of all sectors of the educational system, given the appalling racism and xenophobia that has been witnessed throughout the country for quite some time (Borg & Mayo, 2006). It is heartening to note that the Reggie Miller Foundation's Director claims that his institution is taking immigration and racism seriously and that they feature in the Foundation's adult learning projects, including projects in collaboration with the Red Cross<sup>6</sup> and, I would add, having observed some of the activities, a number of Maltese NGOs.

### **6.3. Adult education and the Economy**

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<sup>6</sup> Taped interview with Michael Parnis, Reggie Miller Foundation Director, carried out July 11<sup>th</sup> 2006.

The other major concern also has great international resonance. Much of the present discourse regarding adult education, worldwide, centres around the economy, and this piece indicates that Malta is no exception. That there should be a link between adult education and the economy is understandable. I have mentioned the setting up of the ETC and the re-establishment of MCAST. We also need a lifelong learning guidance and counselling service in this area that would be accessible to different people at different places, (Sultana, 2003).

Furthermore, we have seen that, under the impact of globalisation, it is difficult for micro-states like Malta to attract outsourcing of manufacturing jobs that are labour-intensive and so efforts must be channelled in preparing adults through adult education programmes, in the direction of those 'quality' jobs that are knowledge-based, while the caveat mentioned earlier with respect to lesser availability of middle class jobs must be borne in mind and remains a constant worry.

It is worrying to see the dominant, all-pervasive discourse regarding adult education worldwide centring almost exclusively on the economy. This discourse is often neo-liberal in nature and projects the notion of the learner as someone whose citizenship is confined to being 'producer' and 'consumer.' It neglects the potential role of the citizen as *social actor*, and the role of adult learning as a vital activity within social movements, including labour movements. This is why the University's MA Adult Education programme incorporates a specialisation stream in 'Adult Training & Development,' that allows ample room for critical perspectives on the relationship between education and work, and is complemented by foundational courses that deal with the politics of adult education. There is more to adult learning than simply learning for 'employability' that does not necessarily

mean employment (Gelpi, 2002).

Furthermore, an increase in investment in adult education or all education for that matter, with economic returns in mind, without a corresponding reciprocal investment in the economic sector, perpetuates an 'education for export' that has been a characteristic of colonial and neo-colonial policies to date.

#### **6.4 A holistic approach to adult education**

All this points to the need for a national strategy for adult education within the context of lifelong education that is holistic. One wonders why the draft Lifelong learning strategy document was not placed in the public domain. Did it stray significantly from the narrow 'economism' of the Lisbon objectives?

In my view, these objectives are generally taken on board uncritically in this country. The EU's discourse, thus far, has, save for some social democratic trappings, reflected an excessively economic view of lifelong learning. This view sits comfortably with the dominant neoliberal scenario, one which shuns the collective dimensions of learning in favour of one underlined by the politics of 'responsibilisation' and which sees people as adapting to rather than problematising the world with a view to changing it. The major challenge for Malta as elsewhere is to strike a balance between the demands of employment and the demands for the development of a genuinely democratic public sphere with criticality and problem-posing at its core. This would have implications for the type of adult learning, some perhaps already in existence (e.g. blogging and other uses of digital technology), that need to be valorised and promoted.

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