

## **Social change through cultural enterprise in Malta: a critical assessment of a nascent field**

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### **Abstract**

This article adopts a cultural policy perspective to address diversity and sustainable development in the context of cultural enterprise in Malta, where projects and scholarly research supported by European funded programmes in the promotion and protection of diversity in local and regional environments are at an early stage. This article first argues that engaging in a critical assessment of the field is timely because of the growing importance that matters of diversity and sustainability are having in the light of the cultural-driven and -led models employed that are having significant impact on human and natural ecosystems; this is particularly due to a booming population that is becoming more diversified, a greater economic activity especially related to tourism and travel and the consistent rise in the demand of creative products and services. In this light, references to the research conducted by the project Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture (AMASS) will support this argument. It then argues that cultural operators and educators who are drawn to this area of interest and whose work consists of evaluating the scene and proposing novel ways of collaboration and research contribute towards building sustainable models of operation. The methodology applied is based on a pertinent literature review and observations made directly in the field of practice.

**Keywords:** cultural enterprise, cultural tourism, European collaboration, higher education, social enterprise

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the current millennium, the notion of social enterprise was not highly featured in European debate. Since then, discussion about its significance to social wellbeing and the exploration of ways whereby European society could enable its informed practice has grown steadily (Defourny, Nyssens, 2008). Up to fairly recent times, the concepts of social entrepreneur,

social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, for instance, have been used interchangeably. However, to clarify, social entrepreneurship may be considered as the process through which social entrepreneurs create social enterprises (Hulgård et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, over the past years, growing research has elaborated a variety of definitions of, and approaches towards, such concepts. Among the many descriptions, one may refer directly to the importance of the local and entrepreneurial dimensions of social enterprise that are rooted in the experiences and practice of communities that generate wealth and wellbeing by adopting sustainable approaches towards their territory. The drive towards approaching traditional knowledge and aspects of intangible heritage in ways that open up their interpretation in innovative ways is of particular interest to the cultural sector, including cultural tourism, and will be focused on in the second half of the article in relation to Malta and Gozo. Therefore, this article follows research that suggests that social entrepreneurship may embody processes undertaken to discover, define and exploit opportunities aimed at enhancing social wealth by either creating novel ventures or managing existing organisations in innovative ways (Zahra et al., 2009).

The Maltese context provides many opportunities for assessing the dynamics of social change stemming from cultural enterprise. The territory enjoys a long history of voluntary activity that has enabled social economics to deliver community-oriented goals. The traditional role of religious organisations, particularly those related to the Catholic Church, have over time been supplemented, further supported, and at times even replaced by not-for-profit, civil society and voluntary sector practice that are secular in inspiration and perspective. It has been estimated that between 32 and 62 social enterprises in Malta meet the EU operational definition. A social enterprise is defined as:

an operator in the social economy the main objective of which is to have a social impact rather than make a profit for their owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion and uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives. (European Commission, 2021)

It is managed in an open and responsible manner and, in particular, involves employees, consumers and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities. The majority address social inclusion, the environment, local development and

animal welfare. However, recent developments in society have nurtured innovative practice in the fields of community work, fair trade, waste management and energy, the integration of people with disabilities in employment and diversification in the cooperatives sector from fishing and agriculture to include sports and education (Caruana & Nogales, 2020, p.10). One area with further potential for development in the field of social enterprise is the cultural one. Indeed, this sphere of interest has attracted the research-oriented lense into the participation of particular groups in cultural programmes of the University of Malta in the shape of the Horizon 2020, EU-funded project 'Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture' (AMASS). This article will explore this field of practice with particular reference to its links to the tourism sector.

### **Cultural enterprise in Malta**

On the 4th and the 5th of November 2019, the University of Malta hosted an EMES International Research Network workshop on the power of social enterprise in culture. EMES takes its name from the French title of its first research project *L'EMergence de l'Entreprise Sociale en Europe* (The emergence of social enterprises in Europe) completed between 1996 and 2000. In so doing it considered how social entrepreneurs have sought to achieve their aims of social access, inclusion and solidarity through or together with partners in the cultural sector. Interestingly, this workshop was the first of its kind in Malta to address this thematic aspect of cultural participation. However, what has motivated this article to be written is the fact that it is not the only such instance. Furthermore, it will be argued that further developments in this field are worth following and call for an extended analysis such as the one provided here.

Therefore, the article considers a number of actions that aim at encouraging and supporting local and international citizens in Malta, including migrants, who have become a sizeable and culturally significant sector of society, to address social change through enterprise and sustainable means of living. In the light of this approach, this article takes into consideration the multiple nature of references to diversity as including the demographic and social aspects of humanity and interaction among people, however within natural and urban environments that are contexts of diversity in and of themselves. Thus, diversity is considered as inherent to human society as well as its context. This angle on diversity follows current practice adopted by international organisations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organisation (UNESCO) and expressed in recent publications like *Culture | 2030 Indicators* (UNESCO, 2019).

The actions considered by this article strive to challenge conventional thinking in Malta that considers many public and private spaces as dispensable, or as a means to an end. This can be witnessed from the overtly instrumental and utilitarian engagement of people of all walks of life within natural as well as urban spaces. Spaces are too often considered for short-term and immediate gratification and exploitation, with little consideration for wide-spread and long-term repercussions on society. Therefore, green spaces are considered as vacant opportunities for rapid incremental construction and development, which short-changes any vision for progress. The term 'progress' will be assessed in the coming section. A recent example in Malta at the time of writing refers to the appropriation of public space for private use in the capital Valletta, prompting Prof. Keith Sciberras at the University of Malta to note that the 'unabashed commercialisation of Valletta is now almost complete' (Times of Malta, 2021).

Therefore, this article pays most of its attention to the context in Malta and Gozo, the two small yet main and populated islands that make up the Maltese archipelago, a member state of the European Union (EU) since 2004. Particular attention will be paid to the impact of cultural tourism as an area of potential social change through social enterprise practice. Furthermore, all this will be situated in an international context. The international dimension is mostly addressed with reference to policy frameworks that position culture and tourism in a way that prioritises sustainable approaches to the sector. Moreover, Maltese trends in policy and practice are assessed through close analysis of international policy and strategy documents as well as statistics related to data at the local level.

The article does this in five main sections. The rest of this first section will establish a working definition of the terms 'progress' and 'development' in order to guide the following analysis and discussion. The second section focuses on one of the main socio-economic activities in Malta that is attracting more and more attention, namely that of cultural tourism. The third sector situates the discussion on research into cultural action and policy in the smaller of the two Maltese islands, namely Gozo. The fourth section shifts the discussion to consider other aspects of cultural entrepreneurship, including interaction with sustainable development. It does this by contextualising the

analysis in the Inner Harbour Area, a space that offers a significant contrast to Gozo. The fifth and concluding section sharpens its focus on the role education and research have to play, offering recommendations for future policy making and action.

### **A definition of 'progress'**

The tension between 'development' and 'progress' has been expressed by a great deal of cultural thinkers and operators. This is because many aspire to reflect, critically engage with and implement progressive and socially motivating processes through their engagement with diversity in the cultural field.

A process that engages with building a vision *of* the future within a European and Mediterranean context, which is the one Malta is situated in, can lead to one that builds a vision *for* the improvement of society on the bases of equity, participation, engagement and justice. Images and metaphors used in the elaboration of a construct may lead to a deep understanding of what type of change is being experienced and envisaged. For instance, the British researcher, based at the University of Naples, Iain Chambers (2008, p. 52) refers to 20th century Italian left-inspired politically engaged figures Antonio Gramsci and Pier Paolo Pasolini in the way they distinguish between what constitutes real development from actions and trends that are a waste or detrimental to society. In doing so he recalls Pasolini's efforts to separate 'progress' from 'development' and 'uncouple them and set them in a critical relationship which strips them of their purely instrumental and economical logic.'

Writing in 1975, Pasolini (1999) notes the two terms were key elements in discourse at his time of writing. He attempts to awaken public consciousness to the relationship between individuals and groups by inviting the public to consider whether these terms were synonymous of each other. Alternatively, if they were not, whether they described different moments of the same phenomenon. Furthermore, if not that either, whether they described separate phenomena which however came together. Finally, if none of these were the case, whether they described 'opposite' phenomena that only seemingly and fleetingly coincided and reached out one to the other. Pasolini is adamant that one needs to clarify both terms in order to understand everyday reality and life.

Although the use of terminology varies, and at times even clashes, these concerns are shared by a number of other thinkers and writers, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, which is sometimes perceived as the catalyst for the head-long rush into economic development in a way that is detached from other social, environmental and cultural realities. Kirkpatrick Sale (1999) is one such contemporary writer who critiques the compromising stance in favour of 'progress'. He refers to other writers who, already in the early decades of the twentieth century, and hence contemporaneously to Gramsci, expressed similar concerns.

One such writer is e.e. cummings who calls progress a 'comfortable disease' of modern 'manunkind'. Sale notes that at any time since the triumph of capitalism only a minority of the global population may be said to be really living in comfort, and that comfort, continuously threatened, is achieved at considerable expense. Another writer worth invoking is Leopold Kohr, the Austrian economist. Sale argues that his seminal work, *The Breakdown of Nations*, published in 1957 and arranged with a foreword by Sale himself in 1978, is an essential tool for understanding the failures of political progress in the last half-millennium.

A particularly striking image is used by Kohr to illustrate the state of affairs he feared was taking shape:

Suppose we are on a progress-train [...] running full speed ahead in the approved manner, fueled by the rapacious growth and resource depletion and cheered on by highly rewarded economists. What if we then discover that we are headed for a precipitous fall to a certain disaster just a few miles ahead when the tracks end at an uncrossable gulf? Do we take advice of the economists to put more fuel into the engines so that we go at an ever-faster rate, presumably hoping that we build up a head of steam so powerful that it can land us safely on the other side of the gulf; or do we reach for the brakes and come to a screeching if somewhat tumble-around halt as quickly as possible? Progress is the myth that assures us that full-speed-ahead is never wrong. Ecology is the discipline that teaches us that it is disaster. (Sale, 1999)

## **Tensions inherent to the management of cultural tourism in Malta**

This section situates the theoretical reflection elaborated in the previous section in the practical and challenging field of cultural tourism in Malta. It does this by assessing the import of international policy and practice in cultural tourism to recent local trends. The realisation of the importance of the connections between the environment, heritage and tourism in the development of cultural products and services of value to communities that contribute towards and benefit from cultural tourism is steadily growing.

The research area addressing social enterprise and tourism, while still in its nascent phase, is nevertheless present. Social entrepreneurship is increasingly being considered as an 'important vehicle for sustainable development of destinations' by acknowledging that tourism enterprises play a 'critical role in delivering desired community development outcomes' in developing their products and services (Matošević Radić, 2020, p. 6-7).

The cultural element has been recognised as an important and vital aspect in the wellbeing of all stakeholders and participants in tourism and travel on a global level. It has been observed that since the 1980s, the interaction between culture and tourism, on the basis of a growing recognition of the value of sustainability and heritage, has attracted growing attention in academia as well as that of the industry and practice (McKercher & Du Cross, 2015).

The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) *Strategic Priorities 2016-2022* (2015) that call for local and regional authorities to become more proactive in setting agendas, provides a good sounding board for the assessment pursued here. The aims of the strategic priorities for local and regional government are of significance to stakeholders in Malta and Gozo. They highlight how far a study of its long-term perspective may influence the implementation of international agendas in relation to issues influencing cultural tourism actors in Malta.

Together with an assessment of the value of these priorities to the Maltese context, the following sub- section takes into consideration the importance of the Council of Europe 2005 Faro Convention. In so doing, it introduces the value of acknowledging the importance of intangible heritage to this type of discussion which will be expanded upon later.

## **Local practice in an international context**

The UCLG Strategic Priorities 2016-2022 urge local and regional authorities to become more proactive in setting cultural tourism agendas. The organisation calls on local and regional government to gain more respect as stakeholders in the international arena, so that their experience may inspire the definition and implementation of global agendas on issues influencing the lives of communities. Furthermore, it supports local partners through international networks and sharing of best practice.

This international setting is reflected in Maltese cultural and tourism policy and strategy. Although the consultation process on the upcoming cultural policy is still ongoing, the current one in effect does recognise the role of local engagement in the setting of cultural policy to take centre stage in cultural development and sustainability (Parliamentary Secretariat for Tourism, the Environment and Culture, 2011).

The values and tools for action identified by the UCLG in its present policy cycle stress the following areas: i. closeness between decision makers and the community; ii. decentralisation of the structure that develops and asserts the directional framework to guide cultural action; and iii. political leadership that is visionary and able to listen and discern the implementation of long-term and inclusive actions. A key element that can be found in current international cultural policies and strategies tries to strengthen the bases on which local action is informed is that of internationalisation.

Over the past decades many activities related to cultural and tourism policy were previously implemented by the environmental camp. This is already true of the 1980s, with a growing awareness, particularly at UNESCO, that global environmental action aiming at sustainable development benefitted when it focused on the role of people within their environment, in ways that were soon followed and paralleled in cultural discourse. The Millennium Development Goals, the renewed goals aiming for more sustainability, namely the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, are all signs of this convergence between ecological concerns and those addressing local and regional actions within the artistic and creative realms.

Furthermore, the Faro Convention has been one of the main international frameworks that supports relations between local and international best

practice. It has stressed the important aspects of heritage as it addresses human rights and democracy. The Convention promotes a broad concept of heritage and its relationship to communities worldwide. The Convention supports the idea that objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. Rather, these are important because of the significance and uses that people attach to them and the values they represent. It may be argued that the value of our heritage lies in what it means to communities. Whether the heritage is tangible or intangible, what communities feel is of value is that something special that people invest in the structure, site or monument, on the one hand, and the ritual, celebration or festivity, on the other. If we suffer the loss of one or the other, this matters intrinsically, i.e., in the value it carries in and of itself, as well as in the lives of the people and the communities that shared a bond with that outward sign of culture and civilisation (Brusasco, 2018).

The Faro Convention may be described as a framework tool. This means it draws up an agreed space for the main issues, objectives and areas of intervention for state parties to address. State parties are free and empowered to decide on the most convenient means to implement the Convention according to their legal or institutional frameworks, practice and experience. In comparison to other conventions, the structure of a framework convention does not impose specific obligations for action. It suggests, but it does not bind.

On the basis of a more sensitive definition of heritage and heritage communities and the principle of shared responsibility, the Faro Convention looks for creative ways of assessing and addressing heritage assets with the involvement of active civil society. Through its heritage-led work, the Convention supports local stakeholders and the Council of Europe's institutional knowledge and experience to be shared and brought together around concrete actions, setting examples for innovative society models.

Taking the lead from the Faro Convention principles and criteria, civic initiatives are then in a position to enable both institutions and communities to shape decision-making processes and to manage their development processes. This process enables the contribution of heritage to the social and economic dynamics of the communities within the fields of culture and tourism.

## **Applying theory to practice**

One of the main interests of organisations addressing or practising cultural tourism in Malta is the applicability of local and international experience to the contexts of cities, towns and villages in the Maltese islands. Indeed, the role of institutions addressing cultural tourism and applying theory to practice, such as that of the Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture at the University of Malta, includes dealing with this timely challenge.

The global trends observed above have applied to Maltese policy work. In particular, the Arts Council Malta strategy for cultural development for 2016-2020 is the most clear, recent and still valid example of such an approach (2016). Ongoing initiatives taken to strengthen local and regional action aim to address current challenges stemming from the detachment between the theory and practice. They do this by supporting more proximity between operators in different fields of action, encouraging real decentralisation in the management of power by stakeholders in ways irrespective of financial or political influence, and advising political leadership that is able to listen and be capable of honest rather than opportunistic assessment and vision.

Recalling recent developments in global trends in the management of cultural resources at local level, local and regional authorities in Malta seem to express a belief in being enabled to administer more of the tools in hand and generate new ways of interaction within their own and other communities, both in Malta and internationally. They may also be perceived to relate to cultural tourism in ways that may benefit them on the basis of their own perspective and understanding of their ways of living, main needs and priorities.

## **Trends in Malta and Gozo**

An analysis of quantitative data sourced from the Malta Tourism Authority for 2005-2017 points towards what seems to be a growing awareness of the community-oriented and sustainable administration of heritage sites and other tangible as well as intangible resources. Findings suggest that many localities have maintained their share of visitors to Malta by increasing numbers in proportion to the overall increase, circa by 100%, of inbound tourism to Malta.

The stability of percentages of tourism attraction, calculated on the basis of actual visits, across many localities, is indicative of overall positive trends. With the occasional increase and decrease, notably in areas still not overcome by

urban construction, and most tellingly in the Three Cities known collectively as Cottonera (from 27.8% in 2005 to 35.8% in 2017) and areas in the still relatively green island of Gozo (for instance the Citadel from 80.5% to 86.8% between 2015 and 2017), findings suggest that local and regional authorities are managing to balance urban development and transportation stresses on their territories, in ways that are directly and indirectly related to the two-fold increase in tourism over more than a decade, with the development of a model that has worked so far.

Research into recent trends highlights the way urbanistically-complex centres of tourist attraction have interpreted their resources in ways that try to prioritise sustainability. It is not surprising to note that tourism visits to Valletta, the capital city, tapered at 89.7% in 2017, on the eve of the European capital of culture; Mdina and Rabat maintain a standard trend of 69% by the same year; while the highly urbanised and densely populated Sliema, St Julians, St Paul's Bay in the north and even Marsaxlokk and Marsascala in the south seem to lose percentage attraction in spite of the traditional presentation travel agencies and commercial enterprises still assign to them according to the image of one-time fishing villages evoking maritime traditions now overtaken by misguided building sprees and dead-end transportation planning.

Therefore, two main questions policy makers and strategists at this moment of cultural tourism policy-making are: i. where does one go from here, and ii. what comes next with regard to investing in plans for implementation in the near future?

### **A call for further research that is both local and international**

In order to address these questions, the necessary resources addressing the key areas of research need to be identified and procured. An approach that is sensitive to the territory in question stands to be more incisive in any policies it may inform if a number of conditions are met. These include: i. identifying significant resources dedicated to key stakeholders; ii. consulting with cultural tourism operators and researchers as well as students of this and related areas, and iii. seeking long-term and innovative approaches towards addressing the pressing challenges various localities and regions face in Malta.

The environmental degradation across the island is tied with the cultural stasis that faces a number of areas. Competing priorities, short-term financial gain and unsustainable development that is often part of its instrumental use for

financial and gain need time and resources to be assessed outside of easy frameworks that compromise research, cloud judgement and negatively influence a vision for the future.

As observed above, the UCLG points out how local and regional authorities that address cultural tourism can benefit from the development of networking at local, regional and international levels that may stimulate new ways of addressing challenges that are shared across various territories. Such challenges consist of, among others, overdevelopment, climate change, drought, lacking public transport and mutual social exclusion among different sub-communities within larger ones.

Such networks may support local authorities by building on the relatively successful model of town twinning and local festivals that has allowed localities to build links with other communities, locally and internationally, particularly for travel, promotional and tourism purposes. While such actions characterised the first two decades of the existence of local councils in Malta and Gozo, as well as the first decade of EU membership, such networks may help exceed the establishment of safe and somewhat stale practice. They may encourage the investment of resources in the development of research centres, monitoring structures, advocacy groups and traditional and digital communication means that enable commonalities to be shared, challenges to be addressed, common positive outcomes to be celebrated and action taken on a wider scale than is common practice.

In order to outline practical outcomes, key actions may consist of: i. documenting members' practice; ii. supporting pilot projects; iii. identifying fund-raising opportunities to support members; iv. supporting decentralised cooperation activities developed by members; v. promoting the development of programmes supporting UCLG members in localisation.

### *The role of joint up research in European projects supporting cultural entrepreneurship*

The role of combining resources in the field of research is important in informing policy and action. The AMASS project has shone a light on a number of Maltese local projects that provide interesting examples of cultural entrepreneurship. Based on the EU-wide definition of Small & Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), a small number of these initiatives supporting cultural

entrepreneurship do so in the guise of micro-enterprises (European Commission, 2015).

One such example is The Windrose Project, run for a number of years by the Rubberbodies Collective, nurtured by the artistic vision of Jimmy Grima who together with his creative colleagues garnered the support of four coastal communities in Malta and Gozo that have attracted various degrees of touristic attention in order to engage with the people of the localities in mutually beneficial contexts. In so doing they attracted the financial support of the European Capital of Culture held in Malta in 2018, that of the national creativity centre Spazju Kreattiv, and gave something back by leaving a legacy that includes permanent artistic creations that now act as landmarks. A second example may be provided by the work of artist Kristina Borg who regularly works with small, diverse communities in order to shine a light on issues that are pertinent to particular aspects of their everyday lives. Arts Council Malta funds are attracted to support such ventures that manage to engage with the commercial communities involved thereby bringing about sustainable steps towards social regeneration. A third and final practical example is provided by Culture Venture, a micro-enterprise founded and led by Toni Attard, that through a varied and sustained approach at applied research on a local community level (e.g. with people with a disability through the Opening Doors project, as studied by AMASS) or a global policy level (e.g. through consultancy) manages to engage and remunerate cultural professionals and other creatives.

Shifting further the focus onto research projects within an academic setting, an example of how research to practice may boost the sectors of professionalisation and academic research in cultural tourism may be made in relation to a recent collaboration between the University of Granada in Spain, the Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre in Portugal and the Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture at the University of Malta which have been optimally placed to disseminate their collaborative vision by using their educational means and expertise to enable the formation of appropriate and forward-looking policies and strategies.

As witnessed by their local influence as well as their international networks including European universities and higher education institutions, Mediterranean higher education institutes and EU training programmes, the partners of the Erasmus+ project called 3Economy+ have the capacity and

responsibility to invest in highly qualified people, their own networks and professional communities, and support them in the development of their research and policy tools.

As demonstrated at the level of European engagement through this and similar collaborative initiatives, the partners engage with the cultural tourism sector through a number of key formative contexts. These include those provided by the provision of blended learning and higher education experience applied to economics, marketing and tourism targeting operators, managers as well as local and regional authorities.

The importance of investing in research and training capabilities by higher education institutions that address the needs of economics, marketing and cultural tourism can hardly be overstated. A virtuous cycle may be established by public and private investment in this area of training and capacity building. For instance, a key contribution to the improvement of cultural tourism practice through the further linking of local and European experience lies in the identification of areas of key skills and related skills gaps. This is particularly true of research, policy drafting, project application and implementation phases. The significance to developing the appropriate skills in funding application and procurement is not to be diminished.

The application of research outcomes and training programmes to operators and professionals in cultural tourism allows beneficiaries to assess current and forthcoming economic and social contexts in relation to their contribution towards the sector, including cultural heritage tourism, on an international level. Joint up action may have a significant impact on parties involved in processes that engage with assessment, informing policy and its implementation. The creation of round table discussions, formats that enable the exchange of best practice such as workshops and placements, analogue and digital mapping of existing resources, and models that support the envisaging of possible future scenarios may all be components that breathe further oxygen into the various work engaged in on local and national levels by linking them to each other on an international sphere.

### **Gozo: a micro lab for research into sustainable cultural tourism**

This section will conclude by looking in detail at how the European and local levels are already closely linked but well able to tighten relations between them. This will be done with reference to the island of Gozo.

Measuring 67 square kilometres of surface area, at a distance of about 7 kilometres from Malta and with a local population of circa 35,000, since EU membership Gozo has tried to make the most of novel tourism-oriented opportunities. Some initiatives have been more successful than others. Below are four reflections that are worth drawing special attention to:

i. Gozo abounds in heritage assets. This is one of the strong points of the island, together with the fact that when compared to cultural heritage management in Malta, Gozitan heritage assets enjoy a relatively better social context within which to function significantly in terms of the value assigned to them as intangible cultural heritage as defined by the Faro Convention. The island has the comparative advantage over Malta of still being able to offer a relatively high level of wellbeing and quality of life for its citizens. This also contributes towards attracting internal tourists, namely Maltese residents, international workers in Malta who seek Gozo for its calm and quiet, as well as day trippers and other tourists. It may be noted how in general Gozitans do not want to replicate the overdeveloped environment endemic in Malta in their own island.

ii. Gozo seems to enjoy another comparative advantage, intimately related to the first point made above. This is the natural geographic identity which marks Gozo from Malta and distinguishes many levels of cultural life on the island. The geography of the island predates any formal or informal regional boundaries defining governance, giving Gozo a natural sense of identity and belonging that has nurtured a close, roots-inspired, bottom-up approach to cultural, religious and popular life. A Ministry for Gozo has been in place since the end of the 1980s, with great consistency and stability afforded by the size of the jurisdiction, only later supported by the formation of local councils (1993) and regional ones.

iii. A clear priority for Gozitan efforts towards assessing and supporting the development of strategic priorities in the culture-led regeneration of the island is contemporary culture with regard to tourism and its largely unexplored appeal to visitors. While the management of natural and heritage assets seem stable and religious and carnival activities are relatively locally owned by active communities including band music and crafts related to the production of marches, passion plays and processions, the contemporary aspect is still largely untapped. This in spite of the fact that a good number of

contemporary artists are from and reside in Gozo. Arguably, this micro-reality can help sustain the development of other strategic areas for development.

iv. Finally, a key goal for the nurturing of a forward-looking cultural ecosystem that cherishes the local as well as the international is provided by preparations for the European Capital of Culture in a decade's time. All players need to be considered together by a strategy aiming to support and guide the development of the sector. Therefore, the ministry, the regional council, the local councils and the culturally active communities, be they artists, other creatives, schools, parishes, clubs and community centres, need to be addressed, involved and encouraged to keep working together.

v. As has been documented widely, culture is not neutral and its political connotations and uses have to be acknowledged, assessed and addressed (Bennett, 2018). As has been debated with regard to the example of Gozo, future local and regional action that addresses cultural tourism would stand to gain if revisited and informed through a strategic approach that is both in tune with current, and foreseeable, scenarios of development, and optimistic and visionary in its approach towards the development, adoption and adaptation of international models that may enable local and regional approaches to respond and interact with today's challenging societal make-ups.

### **Cultural enterprise in the Inner Harbour Area**

This section considers another dimension of cultural enterprise with local parameters that aims to develop capacities rooted in and imported into particular localities and thrives on community participation, particularly where a diverse population is concerned. This section argues that on a tangible level, any number of interventions, actions and deliverables are to be closely knit to the role of the community therein, be it autochthonous or migrant. In this case, particular reference will be made to a human and natural environment that is radically different from that previously discussed, namely Gozo. In fact, the Inner Harbour Area, and the locality of the relatively new and increasingly populated town of Hamrun, on the suburbs of Valletta, displays different challenges, attracts people for business and residential requirements that are more urban, and therefore invite alternative cultural approaches to their social life. The key deliverables mentioned above may be directly recognisable in these main areas of interest:

i. The communities that are directly influenced and impacted by both adverse and positive cultural and environmental change they themselves should, and could, be part of, in terms of ownership of plans and project implementation. The local residents and their extended families, as in the case of Hamrun, a little distance away from Valletta and within the Inner Harbour Area, included a few thousand people that are part of the social fabric of the town that is undergoing a period of renewed cultural, economic and social revival that is accompanied by rapid change.

ii. The local communities that traditionally inhabit the area of and around Hamrun have been intermingling and exchanging local identities and traditions, as well as current changing practice in living, business, family rearing and children upbringing with a mix of European and extra-European new Maltese citizens that are contributing in various ways to the liveability of the locality. Culture, sports, business development, voluntary activities, cleanliness, religious life are all aspects that are witnessing a sort of revival, that should be, and would benefit from, being accompanied by a greater environmental sensitivity.

iii. The urban distribution of Hamrun precludes natural green spaces and the maritime zone lies outside its confines. However, the paucity of open, natural spaces is a prime reason for the *raison d'être* of this project. Therefore, the revisioning of habitation and public buildings as platforms for outdoor green spaces, for instance, in the shape of rooftop gardens and areas for the generation of naturally-fuelled energy, may impact society positively in terms of economic regeneration, community ownership and pride and the identification and management of common, shared public/private goals with long-term outcomes for future generations.

iv. Recent activity initiated by civil society organisations and supported by local authorities addresses the linking of cultural, environmental and economic priorities in relation to local and wider European perceptions of sustainable development. The European Commission Circular Economy Action Plan is instrumental for achieving sustainable production and consumption tied in particular to Sustainable Development Goal 12.

v. Players on the ground aim to put into practice the Circular Economy Action Plan aims for the smart combination of legislative, financial and support initiatives, emphasising ground-level progress and stakeholder engagement,

while creating the right framework for sustainable investments. Efforts are addressing the 2030 Agenda, since it empowers public authorities and stakeholders to address, identify, support and accelerate the transitional processes that are inherent to the circular economy. As has been widely documented and supported at EU level, the circular model promoted by the project aims to secure jobs at the local level, promote innovation in thinking and practice, create competitive advantage for businesses at local and EU levels, and protect the environment through sustainable practice.

Recent efforts seem to aim to encourage a transition to a circular and more solidary economy where: i. the value of products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible, and ii. the generation of waste is minimised, and then, reintegrated into the natural and human ecosystem as much as possible. These criteria form part of an essential contribution to the EU's efforts to develop a sustainable, resource efficient and solidary economy that thrives, rather than stigmatises, difference and diversity.

### **Main challenges in the local context**

This challenge is particularly acute in Malta. As noted in the *Environmental Implementation Review 2019* for Malta, the Circular Economy Action Plan emphasises the need to move towards a life-cycle-driven circular economy, reusing resources as much as possible and, for instance, bringing residual waste close to zero. Malta has been urged to begin by developing and providing access to innovative financial instruments and funding for eco-innovation and the creative industries (European Commission, 2019). Malta introduced new relevant policy frameworks as a follow-up to its ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2016. For instance, the low-carbon development 2050 strategy announced by the government in 2017 identified the circular economy as key area of action for the decade to come. The Maltese government indicated it will promote a transition towards a more circular economy, particularly for waste management. However, Malta does not have a national circular economy strategy or roadmap, and comprehensive action is needed to support circularity and solidarity through a research-based approach to managing diverse communities of people within urban contexts under strain.

The circular economy process advocated by this article and visible, albeit in a small way, on a local level, can help protect the business communities against scarcity of resources and volatile prices. It can do this by helping to create new

business opportunities and innovative, more efficient ways of producing and consuming goods and services, including creative ones. It aims to contribute to the creation of local jobs at all skills levels and opportunities for social integration and cohesion, which are issues of particular social importance in a locality like Hamrun in the light of social factors mentioned earlier.

Such projects aim at maximising their contribution to the transition to a circular economy by saving energy and thus helping avoid the irreversible damages caused by using up resources at an excessive rate. It has been noted how public support has yet to turn into strong engagement by the private sector and civil society. It has also been noted that industrial symbiosis is weak among Maltese SMEs, as well as design or future plans to design products that are easier to maintain, repair or reuse.

### **Actively promoting social engagement**

One of the key priority actions recommended by the European Commission with regard to Malta for 2019 and future years has been the strengthening of the policy framework to speed up the transition towards the circular economy and make incentives for SME resource efficiency more effective. Actions supported by national and local authorities need to address the necessity to plan and implement areas of activity that are achievable, reaching out to various levels of governance, engaging the different stakeholders and communities, and promoting transition and sustainability of creative and diverse models.

Indeed, the Circular Economy Action Plan is both a policy as well as a strategic instrument with high replicability: its focus on cooperation and comprehensive action, covering the entire product's cycle, makes it suitable for different political and economic contexts. Such actions should aim to address the different complexities within the Maltese scenario, and facilitate cooperation and collaboration at local, national and European levels.

### **Conclusion**

This article has argued that one of the most important elements in one's education is gaining experience and gaining the opportunity to apply it. Experience of a direct kind, through exposure to a work environment and learning by looking, and especially doing, is a great asset to a young student charting their career paths in particular areas of interest to them. However, in

many contemporary societies, and equivalent work spaces, a great deal of flexibility is encountered and called for by individuals, and groups, taking part in social structures, be they addressing paid work, student experiences such as internships, voluntary work or other forms of social collaboration.

Thanks to its adherence to AMASS, the University of Malta research team supported the implementation of five creative research projects supporting a vision for the growing significance of socially engaged arts and long-term learning processes through the kind of practice advocated for in this article. It is also worth noting that the team based its recommendations for policy action on the feedback sought from participants and other stakeholders.

### *Flexibility in making connections*

The 'liquid' nature of our age, to borrow a term from the late Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2000), which he applied to our modernity to signify the changeable and changing nature of our social and technological contexts, spur us on to resist narrow foci on particular skills, and engage in what may be described as a diffused approach to education, training and work. Therefore, the development of crosscurricular skills, which are the subject of this article, are fundamental to engage with work environments we do not only inherit, but create through cooperation, collaboration and co-working.

A key contributing factor to this highly volatile environment, which is in constant flux, is the globalised and interconnected nature of our world. Malta may be described as a microcosm of this larger reality. International economic and financial interests and investments have made society, and industry in general, highly diversified in cultural terms, complex and inter-disciplinary. High levels of mobility, economic and political migration, global transfers of money, transnational political agreements that enable and encourage cross-border collaboration and investment and global activities that range from business interests to activism, for instance, with regard to climate change, engage young people in multiple ways. The rapid rate of technological change only adds to the need to keep up and stay on one's toes. As noted, this is characteristic of our contemporary age. As argued by David Harvey (1990) about our postmodern era, roughly dated to the early 1970s, at least at the time mostly applicable to the Western world, tradition struggles to keep up with novelty and changing working methods. People are under pressure to remember, save and value anything from the past they may feel is worthwhile preserving and applying to the present, and the future.

The term crosscurricular is itself a challenging term because it refers to a description of past ways of educating oneself, while hinting at current and future approaches. Curricula are rarely the structured, immobile and rigid learning paths that may have featured in education institutions' agendas and prospecti years ago. Today, in the light of higher education organisations' constant forays into competitive markets providing traditional, online and blended learning educational programmes, universities and other institutions are regularly adapting to dynamic work environments and market requirements by altering and improving their education programmes to respond, as quickly and efficiently as possible, to economic and financial demands.

A great deal of effort, and many resources, and nowadays dedicated to professionalising the different stages young people go through in developing their educational path and gaining the necessary skills with which to adapt to changing work environments. Particular skills in areas of high sensitivity, be they in micro-economic aspects, macro-economic assessments, digital marketing for particular demands and needs by clients and the various areas of tourism at a time when sustainability, cultural sensitivity and personalised itineraries are paramount, are necessary. Crosscurricular approaches cannot cut corners and prefer low-level, generalised education that camouflages itself as diverse and wide. A balance still needs to be struck between highly specialised competence in particular areas of knowledge and practice, and a wide perspective on the changing, wide-ranging demands of today's markets.

#### *Education for creative citizenship*

One other important challenge of crosscurricular developments relates to resisting the temptation to focusing on technical issues that are disconnected from the human element. The 'what' still needs to be accompanied by the inquiring and investigative thrust into the value of why technical matters are to be tackled through particular solutions. It is easy, tempting and relatively common practice to focus crosscurricular education on generating a plethora of solutions to technical problems that however are disconnected from deep, long-term repercussions on human as well as environmental wellbeing.

The European Commission (2018) reflects on the great significance that a crosscurricular approach may bring to the formation of new European citizens within the changing landscape in and around Europe through one of the more

dynamic areas of value, namely culture that is applied to societal relations. In 'A New European Agenda for Culture', we read that:

Culture promotes active citizenship, common values, inclusion and intercultural dialogue within Europe and across the globe. It brings people together, including newly arrived refugees and other migrants, and helps us feel part of communities. Culture and creative industries also have the power to improve lives, transform communities, generate jobs and growth, and create spill over effects in other economic sectors.

In addressing the value of a creative approach to crosscurricular education in European territories, it is important to develop an awareness of the multiple components that are necessary to engage with education and skill development through an educational path that encourages curiosity, application of practical examples and the motivational factor on personal and group bases. Following a tryptic approach such as that develop by Amabile (1998), ongoing and proposed research projects should shadow and foreshadow developments in the dynamic way a blended type of education may support young people, researchers and academics in going beyond standard practice and seeking innovative ways at improving skills and exploring new frontiers.

### **Afterword**

Between March and September 2018, the Goethe Institut of Brussels, acting on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture, facilitated the Structured Dialogue process that brought together policy makers and cultural operators in the field of culture with others selected to represent sectors that were not culture-specific. These included the elderly, people with a physical disability, efforts towards combatting racism and anti-terrorism. While this type of Structured Dialogue was a first in itself, this article chooses to end with this reflection because what was also remarkable was that for the first time a Maltese cultural association, namely Inizjamed, and represented by the author, took part in the process. Developments in the field of social change through cultural enterprise were happening concurrently in mainland Europe and various of its peripheries, including Malta, and particularly thanks to its civil society and cultural operators that sought collaboration across sectors on a European dimension. In spite of the challenges they face, cultural managers and policy makers in Malta are showing they are engaging in practice that is promising and worth following in the future.

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