



*Research Article*

## Public opinion and protest efficacy: A study on the proposed yacht marina in Marsaskala, Malta

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**Abstract.** Public opinion data regarding environmental concerns are central to a better understanding of the effects of social movements in sensitising environmental issues, and at times changing political decisions. In August 2021, Transport Malta issued an expression of interest for the design, construction and operation of a 700-berth yacht marina in the bay of Marsaskala, a fast-growing locality in the south east of the Maltese Islands. A social movement made up of residents, non-residents, an environmental NGO and local stakeholders organised a number of protests following the publication of the marina plans. The aim of this article is to identify underlying factors causing individuals' concerns on the proposed development. It explores the environmental movement surrounding this concern and analyses survey data on public opinion. It does so to better understand the extent of specific areas of impact that the proposed marina would have on the community of Marsaskala. Specifically, it focuses on how this would impinge on the everyday life of citizens. Results point to the social, environmental and economic impacts that this development would have, particularly on the community infrastructure of the locality of Marsaskala. Discussion focuses on how the ongoing impact on public opinion and protest, not only on mobilising public opinion but impacting political decisions.

**Keywords:** Social movement, environmental movement, yacht marina, protest, Marsaskala, Malta

### 1 Introduction

Studies on the impact of social movements have predominantly focused on protest efficacy, public opinion, or both (Agnone, 2007). Some scholars have theorized on the effects of these movements, particularly environmental movements, on public policy, referring to the impact of sensitising issues and changing political decisions

(Rootes, 1999). It has been argued that dramatic events like protests can at times affect policy changes by leveraging elite concessions (Barkan, 1984; Morris, 1993).

Malta, a small island state in the Mediterranean Sea, has seen a fluctuating salience of environmental issues in recent years. During the last decade, Malta has been experiencing a very rapid rate of economic growth. Significant job creation and foreign revenue have followed in the wake of various projects, and new economic niches. This interest has accelerated pressure on the finite natural environment to 'give way' to progress and modernisation. This economic expansion has also been accompanied by a growing environmental concern, as citizens try to resist and fight back against the erosion of their quality of life.

Lately, the locality of Marsaskala in Malta has been the centre of debate, with a number of organised protests by civil society, strongly opposing the proposed development of a yacht marina. 'No to marina' banners hanging from residents' balconies demonstrate how forcefully the opposition is to the proposed call for expression, issued by Transport Malta for the design, construction and operation of a 700-berth yacht marina proposed for Marsaskala Bay.

The objective of this article is to shed light on the environmental movement, spawned and organized by civil society, on the proposed yacht marina in Marsaskala. The aim of this research is to identify underlying factors causing individuals' concerns on the proposed development. This article draws from sociological research to develop a baseline of the current situation and profiles the affected citizens, by conducting an online survey with residents of Marsaskala as well as non-residents, between the 14 to 21 November 2021. The survey steered around the issues of awareness and opinion on the expression of interest for a yacht marina as well as its presumed impact on the urban, environment and social fabric of the Marsaskala community. Additionally, this survey aimed at obtain-

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ing knowledge on the implications on the everyday life of non/residents including in terms of community, well-being and personal lives.

This article raises some concerns emphasised by respondents on how the proposed development would obliterate the fundamental characteristics of this fishing village. They referred to how it would compromise spaces and areas that are currently used by the public for relaxation, as well as threaten the livelihood of fishers whose boats navigate in the Bay. It was also argued that it would increase vehicular traffic into the area and compound an already serious traffic and parking situation. Additionally, it would destroy the locality's current aesthetic and cultural appeal to tourists and visitors as well as eliminate a unique public good for the benefit of the few who could afford making use of the marina.

### 1.1 The impact of environmental movement and public opinion in Malta

Various studies examine the political impact of social movements by focusing on protest efficacy (Barkan, 1984; Morris, 1993), particularly the importance of protest accompanied by social movement advocacy and a favourable political context (Andrews, 2001). While many social movement scholars stress the importance in influencing public policy, however some claim that this is not sufficient because scholars of social movements do not take public opinion into account in their modelling (Burstein, 2003; Burstein & Linton, 2002). Burstein (2003) considers the impact of public opinion on public policy by referring to its impact and the extent to which such an impact may be negated or diluted by interest groups, social movement organizations, political parties and elites (Burstein, 2003). In the analysis of the outcome of social movement actions, discussion dwells not only to establish whether movements create social change, but also how such movements generate political change (Andrews, 2001).

Malta's environmental movement, ranging from environmental NGOs to grass-roots activists, has a direct or indirect outcome usually by mobilizing public opinion. This can result in a significant impact on local society, including procedural (increased democratisation such as access to decision making structures), substantive (impact of the material result), structural (changes in political structures and institutions) and sensitisation effects (changes in the political agenda and in public attitudes) (Briguglio, 2015; Carter, 2001; Giugni, 1995; Rootes, 1999, 2007; Van der Heijden, 1999). Such impacts can raise consciousness amongst the public and/or policy elites. Malta's environmental movement has resulted in a number of partial or full victories of various environmental issues, including the

valid contribution of civil society in Malta in the 'bird hunting in spring' national referendum held in 2015 (Briguglio, 2015; Verissimo & Campbell, 2015). Another case in point was the withdrawal of plans for a private hotel complex at Munxar, St Thomas Bay, also in Marsaskala, following social and political mobilisation (Boissevain, 2001).

Additionally, an exemplary case of the impact of environmental social movements is the activism of Front Harsien ODZ, a Maltese citizens' environmental movement working actively to protect an Outside Development Zone (ODZ) land in Żonqor in Marsaskala. This land was to be utilised as a site for a private American University of Malta (AUM) (Briguglio, 2018). This plan was followed by various press conferences and protests, with one such event attended by thousands of citizens in Valletta, Malta's capital city. Consequently, this activism (both physical and digital) resulted in a partial victory in August 2015, when the Malta Prime Minister at that time announced revisions in the planned development, reducing the area of impact by 80 per cent to eighteen thousand square metres (Briguglio, 2018). Moreover, taking also into account the failures to meet contractual demands by the developer, the current Prime Minister announced in mid-February 2022—during the run-up to a general election—that the government was renegotiating a land concession concerning the AUM and that the Żonqor land would be returned to the people (Arena & Xuereb, 2022). This would result in a complete victory for environmental NGOs and residents who protested tirelessly against the development. This case illustrates how protests against land concessions concerning the AUM and the Żonqor land would appear to have proved useful in view of the political decision in mid-February 2022 to renegotiate the land and return it to public use.

### 1.2 The locality of Marsaskala

The locality of Marsaskala (Figure 1), also known as Wied il-Għajn, is situated in the south east of Malta and very close to the towns of Żejtun (2.5km away) and Żabbar (2.2km away). This settlement, with a long narrow inlet known as Marsaskala Creek, was originally a fishing village but it is now more regarded as a tourist destination (Hopkins, 2014; Young, 1983). Marsaskala bay is sheltered to the north by Ras iż-Żonqor and to the south by the headland of Ras il-Gżira. Marsaskala is largely bordered by a promenade, with low shelving rock ledges cut with salt pans.

In this settlement, there has been substantial population growth in the last two decades: from 5,419 in 2001 (National Statistics Office, 2001) to 13,726 in 2018 (Cammilleri, 2018).

The population influx has resulted in physical expansion

of the urban footprint in multiple zonal locations in the settlement (Johnston, R. J. et al., 2000), resulting in four zonal areas in Marsaskala: Bellavista, Żonqor, Siberia and St Thomas Bay zones (Seychell, 2010). It is worth noting that in this model of zonal locations in Marsaskala there are missing references to the old part of the town. One reason for this is because this part of the town is relatively small and has become completely subsumed by the other areas.

### 1.3 Proposal for a yacht marina

The 2006 local plan for Marsaskala shows that the bay has already been earmarked for a yacht marina or a maritime-related development, and thus planning policy groundwork for the project is already in place (Galea, 2021).

It warrants to mention that in 1997, a study commissioned by the MMA (Malta Maritime Authority) and MEPA (Malta Environment and Planning Authority) entitled 'Yachting Development in Malta' did not recommend Marsaskala as one of the potential sites for the development of a yacht marina in view of the considerable breakwater costs and being an exposed site (Deloitte and Touche, 1997). This report recommended that Marsaskala should be "ruled out" as a possible site for developing a marina and ranked it at the 11th place amongst the various locations considered. Additionally, this report has been useful in the preparation of a more recent document entitled the 'Development of Yachting Facilities in Malta' (Malta Maritime Authority, 2009), with the scope of identifying potential sites suitable for all weather marinas and others that could be considered for establishing temporary and seasonal marinas.

In August 2021, Transport Malta issued an expression for interest for the design, construction, financing, operation and maintenance of a yacht marina in Marsaskala with an estimated procurement value of around €183 million across 50 years (Galea, 2021). According to the project brief in Transport Malta's questionnaire, the concession to develop a yachting centre would make Marsaskala and the southern region area '...more appealing to the tourist industry' (ibid.).

Preliminary designs of the marina by Transport Malta show land reclamation in three areas, amounting to 16,000 square metres across parts of the Marsaskala bay as well as the bay completely dotted with berth spots (Figure 2). The plan also shows the required dredging; a construction practice which would result in substantial damage to the bay's underwater habitat, as well as an adjoining saline marsh (a Natura 2000 site).

The designed layout of the yacht marina shows a substantial increase in the current berthing capacity to a minimum of at least 700 berths in the marina pertaining to the

project, while the concessionaire would also be expected to host and provide for a re-organisation of the current 567 berth holders. With the exclusion of these current berth holders, the marina would be organised with 20% dedicated to vessels between 1 and 12 metres in length, 50% dedicated to vessels of between 13 and 23 metres in length, 25% to vessels of 24 to 36 metres in length, and the remaining 5% to vessels larger than 36 metres in length (ibid.).

A number of protests were organised and attended by various residents, fishers, festa enthusiasts, local organisations and environmental NGOs. Predominantly the protests were organised by Marsaskala residents and Moviment Graffiti, a local left-wing NGO active against exploitation of people and the environment ([movimentgraffiti.org](http://movimentgraffiti.org)). Moviment Graffiti activist Andre Callus confirmed that a total of six press conferences and protests were organised in relation to the yacht marina. In the most recent activity, on Saturday 12 February 2022, protesters demanded electoral candidates for the imminent general election to unequivocally state their position on the proposed development. Meanwhile, and again in view of the coming election, Marsaskala residents have started placing yellow notices on their doorbells, warning party politicians to stay away unless they planned to oppose the marina proposal development (Figure 3).

In this context, Deputy Prime Minister Chris Fearnley declared that he opposes the proposed Marsaskala marina project. He told the Times of Malta:

*I believe that the part of Marsaskala which is underdeveloped and where residents can enjoy swimming, recreation and fishing should remain undeveloped and residents should continue enjoying Marsaskala Bay as is.* (Arena & Xuereb, 2022)

In addition, on 22 February, Prime Minister Robert Abela announced the 'instant dismissal' of the proposed marina project, stating:

*The locality deserves better. We heard the concerns of the people. We listened, and we learned.* (Barbara, 2022)

## 2 Methodology

The research methodology for this study was designed to identify the social implications of the development in question. A quantitative research design was used to use statistical data and conduct a systematic investigation study (Watson, 2015). In essence, this research method was used due to its ability to acquire a larger sample size, and thus increasing the likelihood of achieving statistical

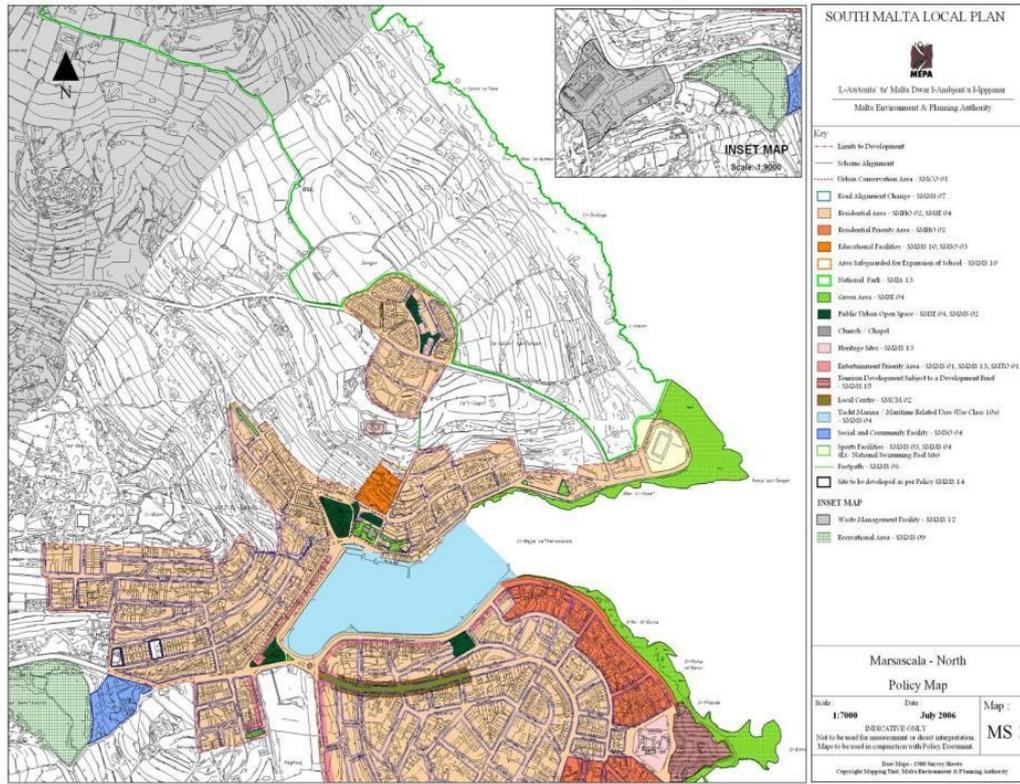


Figure 1: Local Plan, Marsaskala, 2006, MEPA. Source: The Malta Independent

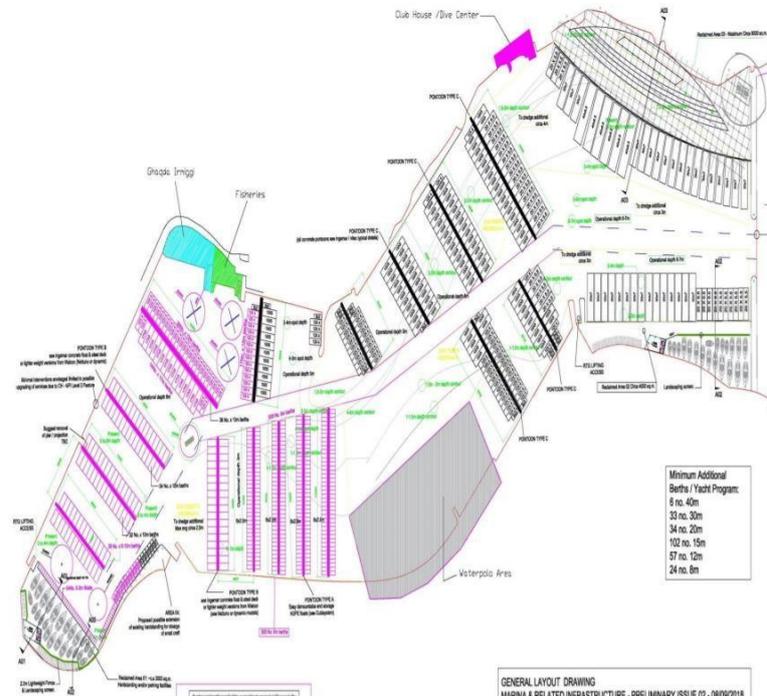


Figure 2: Preliminary design of Yacht Marina in Marsaskala, Transport Malta Expression for Interest. Source: The Malta Independent



**Figure 3:** Affixed notices to doors of private residents advising electoral candidates not to knock on their door if they are in favour of the marina plans (Photo source: Moviment Graffiti)

generalisation. The research population of the study was generally Marsaskala residents (67%) or citizens who have close links with the town, either as part-time/summer residents (7%) or as visitors (23%) (Figure 1).

The survey questionnaire, designed and distributed in both English and Maltese versions, was exported from Google Forms onto Microsoft Excel, to conduct the quantitative data analysis. The survey questionnaire was composed of closed-ended questions but also presented respondents the possibility to write their opinion in the comment section. The questions asked in the survey were purposely written to obtain information on the factors causing individuals' concerns of the proposed development. Reference to literature and reports outlining the effects of yacht marinas on surrounding environments and communities was done to inform the design of the questionnaire. Additionally, an exploration of speeches during protests as well as actions by the environmental movements, including the 'no to marina' banners, helped to further inform the survey design.

The recruitment of respondents, sourcing participants aged 18+ irrespective of nationality, was done by posting the survey on the social media platforms of various groups and organisations related to Marsaskala, and including the Marsaskala Local Council Facebook page.

With the total resident population of Marsaskala standing at 13,726 in 2018, the sample of 733 full-time residents who responded to the survey within seven days, yield-

ed an overall margin of error <sup>1</sup> of  $\pm 3.55\%$ . The total research population stood at 1,105.

To ensure that each respondent's right to confidentiality and autonomy was respected, ethical guidelines were followed and implemented during the construction and dissemination of the survey.

### 3 Perceptions on impact

In general, the popular concern was of both disappointment and anger about the marina proposal. This partly explains the strong respondent turnout in such a short time, as well as the willingness with which no less than 319 respondents took the opportunity to submit comments in the survey.

#### 3.1 Demographics

More females (54%) than males answered the online survey (Figure 4). The majority of respondents were within the age bracket of 30-59 years (61%). Despite the general tendency of an older age cohort not being technologically proficient to answer online surveys, in this survey the 60+ age group (25%) were more keen and willing to fill in the survey compared to young adults (18-29 age cohort) (14%).

It is worth noting that a high percentage (67%) of survey respondents had tertiary level of education, thus the sampling contained an over-representation of highly

<sup>1</sup>The Margin of Error (MOE) is calculated according to the formula:

$$MOE = z * \sqrt{p * (1 - p) / \sqrt{(N - 1) * n / (N - n)}};$$

Where:  $z = 1.96$  for a confidence level ( $\alpha$ ) of 95%,  $p =$  proportion (expressed as a decimal).

educated participants. Thus, the sample in terms of level of education, does not represent the general population in Marsaskala. An explanation of this over-representativeness is that persons with higher level of education had greater interest in the proposed project and/or they were more technologically proficient compared to persons with lower level of education.

Out of the total research population who were full-time residents, 56% have been living in Marsaskala for over 20 years, 15% has been living there for 1–5 years, 12% for 6–10 years, 14% for 11–15 years and 3% for 16–20 years (Figure 5).

An overwhelming majority of 93% (N=1,023) were against the proposed yacht marina in Marsaskala Bay, with only 5% stating that they are in favour of this proposal (Table 1). The majority of respondents felt a sense of belonging to Marsaskala, including those who were not full-time residents but frequent visitors. They strongly agreed (82%) that the proposed development would spoil the characteristics of Marsaskala and would have adverse effects on their wellbeing. In effect, some respondents expressed feelings of anger for proposing to ruin 'their' public/private space while expressing a sense of belonging to their hometown. Typical remarks in the comment section refer to this feeling of intrusion:

*Leave my home town alone! Leave us continue to enjoy swimming in clean (minus the fish farm slime) sea water* (30–59 years-old female, full-time resident for 20+ years).

*Please leave our beautiful bay alone, its natural beauty should be preserved for future generations. Residents are entitled to use the bay for recreation, not just rich visitors* (60+ years-old female, full-time resident for 11–15 years).

Respondents were asked on their degree of agreement or disagreement of the effects of the proposed project on specific areas. The strongest concern was expressed in relation to environmental issues, with 86% strongly agreeing that it would lead to lower water quality, worsen levels of pollution, and negatively impact on swimming, diving and other aquatic sports in the Bay (Table 1).

### 3.2 Environmental Impact

Negative environmental impacts were amongst the greatest concerns for respondents. 82% strongly agreed that it would spoil the locality's character; 80% strongly agreed that the proposed project would result in more land and sea traffic; and 77% strongly agreed that it would have an undesirable visible impact.

Respondents referred to how the proposed project would lead to adverse environmental effects in Marsaskala,

including at il-Magħluq saline marshland. Some respondents (N=3) commented on this:

*A Marina would strangle Marsaskala Creek: the bay and its marine life, the Saline Ecosystem of il-Magħluq, and the quality of life of all Marsaskala residents. Shame to those who seek to foist this monster on us citizens!* (60+ years-old male, full-time resident for 20+ years).

*If this is done, Marsaskala would not exist apart from peripherally. The place where activities for locals are held won't be able to take place because the land would be taken up. It would have an environmental impact especially at Il-Magħluq [saline ponds] and the unique species of fish at this place...[Original in Maltese]* (30–59 years-old male, full-time resident for the last 11–15 years).

Additionally, respondents felt that the proposed development would stifle and throttle the only significant open space left in this fast-growing locality. It is worth noting that the population of Marsaskala grew by 12% between 2015 and 2018 (Camilleri, 2018). For some respondents, the remaining quaint and picturesque characteristics of Marsaskala would be lost with the completion of this proposed project.

*Marsaskala is one of the last remaining picturesque villages in Malta... Let's not ruin it for the sake of the greed of a few wealthy people* (30–59 years-old female, full-time resident for the last 6–10 years).

*It will seriously reduce the level of peace, tranquillity and enjoyment that all residents and visitors presently enjoy, when visiting the waterfront all around this beautiful bay...* (60+ years-old, male, full-time resident for the last 6–10 years).

*...Marsaskala is up till now a more authentic place, bringing more valuable tourists than the central area as they usually regularly come back, are attached to the place. Building a marina would make of Marsaskala yet another neighbourhood for rich people, with no soul and no seaside opportunities for locals and tourists looking for peaceful experiences* (30–59 years-old, female, full-time resident for the last 1–5 years).

Another environmental concern mentioned was related to traffic congestion and lack of parking spaces. The locality is already congested and the proposed project would contribute to the existing gridlock:

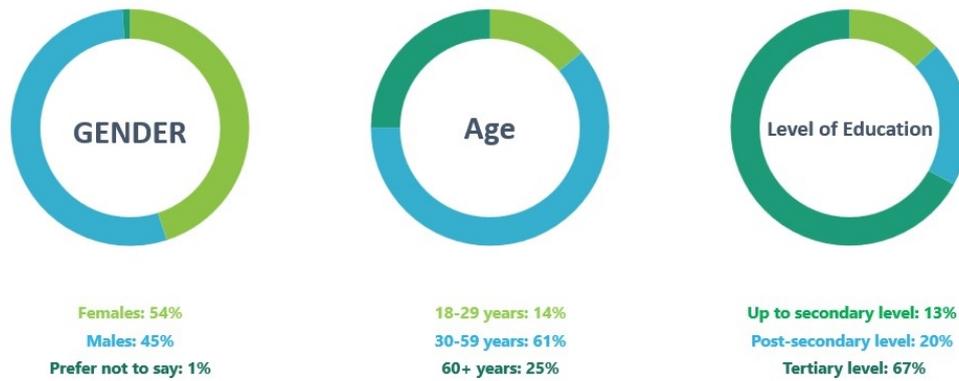


Figure 4: Demographics

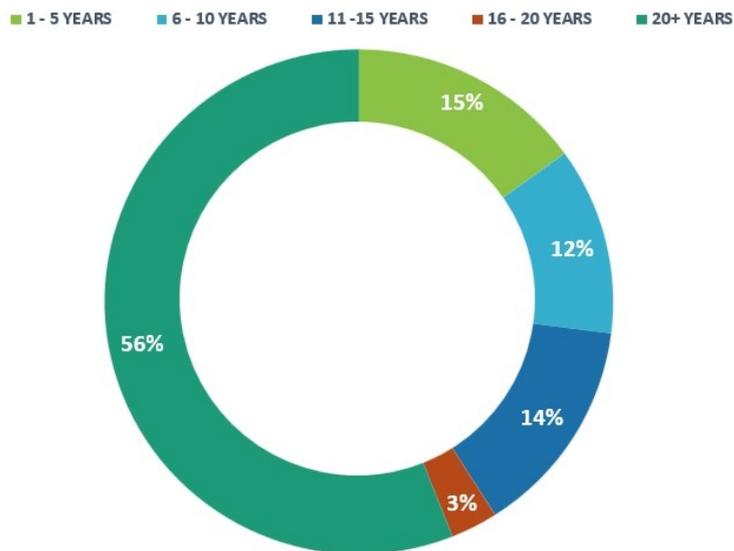


Figure 5: Number of years living in Marsaskala for full-time residents

How, in your opinion, would this proposed yacht marina development impact the locality of Marsaskala?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent/ Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spoil the character	82%	7%	5%	4%	2%
Improve economic activity	7%	15%	25%	24%	29%
Increase in high-end tourism	5%	10%	23%	27%	35%
Negative visible impact	77%	11%	4%	4%	4%
Negative environment impact (pollution)	86%	5%	4%	2%	3%
More land & sea traffic problems	80%	11%	5%	3%	1%
Loss and deterioration in the quality of life	78%	12%	5%	2%	3%
Lower water quality in Marsaskala Bay	86%	7%	3%	3%	1%
No impact at all	3%	3%	13%	8%	73%
Direct impact to me, my family and/or my friends	62%	18%	11%	4%	5%

Table 1: Impact on specific areas

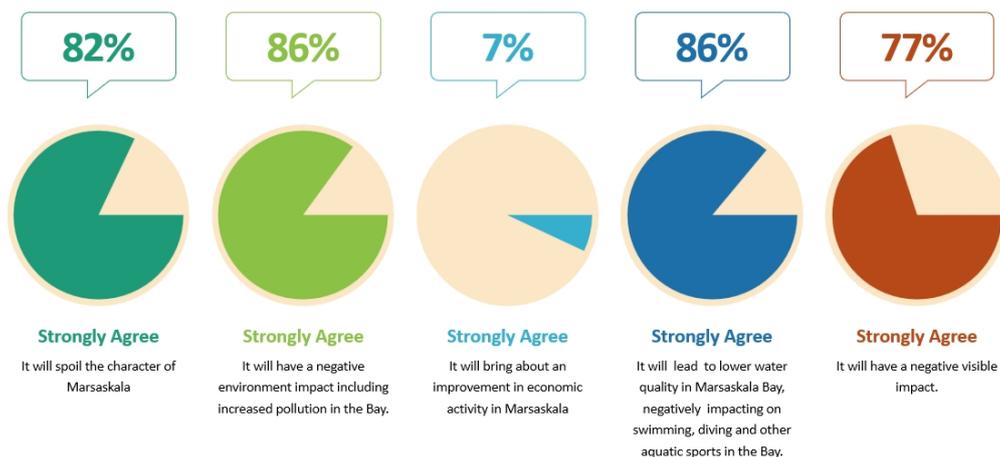


Figure 6: Strong agreement to specific areas

*Another negative impact to the residents is the traffic and the parking issues which already exist and which will surely increase with this project (30–59 years-old, female, full-time resident for 20+ years).*

Such environmental concerns flagged out by participants emphasise the need for detailed scientific reports in such proposals, including assessment on pollution resulting from the construction and operation of the proposed development, as well as its general environmental impact both on/in the sea and land. An assessment of the impact on protected and/or sensitive habitats and species in the sea by means of a benthic survey is required in such applications, as well as an assessment of archaeological investigations or discoveries made within the last ten years in the effected area.

While a number of respondents simply wrote 'No to marina' (13%) in the comment section, others had harsher comments related to greed and capitalist voracity. Some respondents elaborated on their disapproval and referred to fears on how the proposed development would impact, not just the bay, but directly their way of life as residents and visitors. Others claimed that it would directly impact their mental health.

### 3.3 Impact on wellbeing and everyday life

Respondents expressed their views on how the environmental consequences of the proposed project would have a direct impact on their own wellbeing. A majority of 78% strongly agreed that the proposed development would lead to an overall loss and deterioration in the quality of life of Marsaskala residents. Respondents felt that this development would have a direct impact on them or their family and/or friends (62% strongly agreed and 18% agreed).

The most prominent open-space in Marsaskala is the promenade utilised for recreational walking, swimming and fishing. In general, respondents feared that the marina would have adverse effects on their general well-being and physical activity, particularly impacting on their recreational swimming and walking activities. This was elaborated in the comment section, with a number of respondents, not all full-time residents of Marsaskala, emphasising their fears of adverse impacts to their physical activity:

*It will totally destroy our beautiful bay, and will stop us from swimming as the sea will be polluted with oil & fuel spills and sewage from the yachts (60+ years-old, female, visitor to Marsaskala).*

*The bay should remain intact. No marinas and no breakwaters. The bay in Marsaskala is our*

*piazza and so many things revolve around it. From a simple walk, to a swim, to fishing, to business, to feast enthusiasts, etc... (18–29 years-old female, full time resident for the last 1–5 years).*

*What we really need is for Marsaskala to remain the quiet place it is great for a lovely jog along the promenade and a lovely swim. We are already shrinking bays everywhere else. Stop this development (30–59 years-old, female, full-time resident for the last 6–10 years).*

### 3.4 Impact on local fishers

Some respondents (N=5) commented on the way the proposed development would directly impact the livelihood of some fishers who moor their small boats in the bay but cannot afford the fees of a marina:

*The project is out of keeping and environmentally unfriendly to the Sea and the ocean life in the bay and its immediate environs. The rubbish that was disturbed in the bay during the last few weeks of storms illustrates the amount of debris and detritus that has been churned up from the seabed. It will harm the fishermen and their catches and also prevent swimming, water polo etc., Being available to the local population. It is money driven to satisfy a few (60+ years-old, female, part-time resident).*

*My father had a small boat moored in the port, which he used on Sundays just to relax and go fishing in peace since I remember. I thank God he passed away before he witnessed this. But I know there are other locals like him, and once you are a pensioner, you cannot afford the exorbitant fees of a private marina (30–59 years-old, female, full-time resident for 20+ years).*

### 3.5 Economic Impacts

Some of the respondents (5%) who agreed with the Marina development spoke of the economic spinoffs that may accrue to the locality. Others admitted that they have a marine craft which they would like to berth in the Bay.

One respondent noted the economic spin offs as beneficial to local restaurants, however others commented that this would lead to an inflation in restaurant prices.

*Property in Marsaskala will be upgraded (60+ years-old, female, full-time resident for 11–15 years).*

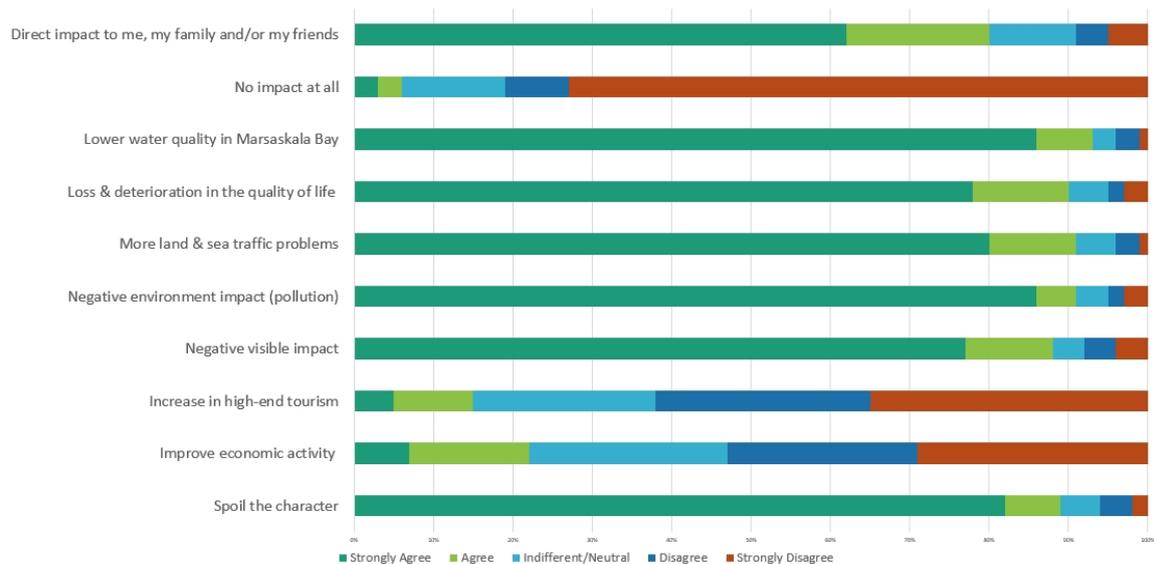


Figure 7: Perceptions on specific areas.

*It will decrease the value of property, cause more stress on the infrastructure, and increase population causing the village to decline to a sub-standard area (30–59 years-old, male, full-time resident for 20+ years).*

*I know friends of mine are leaving Marsaskala believing that their property will devalue if the marina gets built. One said property prices would increase (60+ years-old, male, full-time resident for 11–15 years).*

### 3.6 Required improvements

During protests, reference was made on the need for embellishment of the promenade. Comments of some participants were more directed on the current state of Marsaskala bay, which is occupied with a haphazard and unquantified arrangement of moorings, consisting of various anchoring arrangements, mooring lines and buoys. While the total majority of respondents disagreed with the proposed development, some respondents commented on the need for a reorganisation of the disorganised mooring area for small boats:

*The idea of a marina is good, but the size is too big; if it was downsized, you'd still have a marina and people can still swim (30–59 years-old, female, full-time resident for 20+ years).*

*I disagree with the project as proposed taking up almost the entire bay. However, a smaller marina which may take up only the inner part*

*of the bay may bring good organisation in the bay and a good visual impact (60+ years-old, female, full-time resident for 20+ years).*

Did required improvements in the bay only focus on the moorings. . . as many 'Skalin' also include the surrounding promenade when making reference to the bay. In various protests, protestors made reference to embellishment of the area, especially the promenade. Was any of this mentioned by the survey respondents?

## 4 Discussion

Protest can influence public policy and decisions. The Marsaskala marina plan is an example of how civil society mobilised and actively worked to voice its opposition to the marina plan. Salient findings of the survey were that an absolute majority of 93% (N=1,023) are against the proposed yacht marina in Marsaskala Bay. Also, the proposed yacht marina would have a direct negative impact on physical activity of residents, disrupting walking and swimming activities. This will lead to an overall loss and deterioration in the quality of life of residents and non-residents. Participants also outlined the adverse effects on the characteristics and environment of Marsaskala as well as the inflation in prices; for both catering establishments and residential property.

This paper outlined how residents, non-residents and environmental NGOs, forcefully protesting against the proposed yacht marina, aimed at having a sensitising impact by changing the political agenda on the development of a yacht marina in Marsaskala Bay. It is not only for

the 'no to marina' banners, hanging over in balconies of residential houses, and the numerous protestors attending the organised protests in Marsaskala, but also the high response rate to the survey in a relatively short period of time, which collectively highlight how strongly citizens felt about the proposed development.

In line with Rootes (1999) model on the impact of environmental movements, it is worth noting the direct impact of protests and voicing public opinion on political agenda. Equally relevant is the fact that amongst protesters were party-political figures such as one local councillor, who actively protested and a Members of Parliament who declared themselves to be against the project. The two-party system, dominated by the current party in government—the Labour Party, and the Nationalist Party, has its implications on the degree of involvement in protests as part of their political agenda to 'listen' to citizens. Also, protests happened during the run-up to a general election, and thus this intense political climate accentuated the need for politicians to be 'closer' to citizens and in touch with their concerns.

In the analysis of the outcome of social movements, discussion is steered not only towards establishing whether movements create change, but how movements generate political change (Andrews, 2001). The expressed public opinion survey referred to in this article, in which results were published on national media sources, coupled with the various numbers of protests organised to date, were successful in steering discussion amongst political elites against the marina plans. It can be argued that the survey results have served to strengthen the environmental movement itself by increasing the protesters' confidence in their fight against the proposed project.

With an imminent general election, protesters demanded electoral candidates to voice their opinion on the marina plan. In response to this, the Deputy Prime Minister voiced his opposition to the marina plans. Following this, the Prime Minister announced plans to 'listen to the people' and abolish the marina plan. This demonstrates the substantive effective impact these protests have had on decisive political decisions.

#### 4.1 Conclusion

This sociological research raises concerns, both on social and environmental aspects, emphasised forcefully by the majority of respondents. A number of objections were raised by respondents, especially for and by full-time residents, on the disruption in the social fabric of the locality.

Based on the survey, it is worth noting the power of civil society and their protest efficacy against the proposed development. This article outlined the essence of careful consideration for sustainable community develop-

ment that must remain central when assessing the implications of major infrastructure projects, rather than being given marginal consideration. The joint actions, through physical and digital protesting of civil society, proved to be effective in changing political decisions, particularly contextualised in the favourable political context of a general election.

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