

Tourism in coastal resorts and historic areas:

With a focus on Malta's tourism

Proceedings of an international webinar

Edited by Marie Avellino and John Ebejer

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Introduction

The publication is a record of the verbal presentations made during a webinar on *Tourism in coastal resorts and historic areas: With a focus on Malta's tourism*. The event was held in January 2021. The presentations provide some useful and interesting insights on many topics that are debated in tourism academic literature. The views of the speakers are based on many years work experience in tourism and/or significant amount of research. The presentations as reproduced in this publication are not meant to be formal academic papers. They are however of interest to anyone doing research on tourism resorts, historic areas, destination management, tourism impacts, small islands, climate change and other related topics.

There were nine presentations in total. In the first presentation, **Prof. Andrew Smith** spoke on the current situation and possible futures of UK's seaside resorts. He makes a case for them to be developed as centres of wellbeing, considering the health benefits to people, mental health in particular, when visiting blue spaces. He noted how, during the pandemic, many British people chose to holiday in UK's seaside towns instead of their usual trip to a Mediterranean resort. Moving on to Malta's coastal resorts, Andrew Smith notes that their competitive advantage is relatively problematic due to a lack of beach resources compounded by the poor quality of the built environment within these resorts. These problems are exacerbated by the fact that we've got an ever growing number of competitors in the Mediterranean.

Mr. Leslie Vella focused on, what he describes as, Malta's 'dual nature destination'. During the peak, Malta is an island with a city, with tourists coming for the coast while engaging in urban tourism activities. In the off-peak Malta becomes a city on an island, with people engaging in cultural and urban activities, with the marine environment acting as a backdrop. Being a small island, there are several coastal towns in Malta that have become tourism resorts. He noted how they have evolved over time and how different resorts are at different stages of their tourism life cycle.

Being about coastal tourism, it was inevitable that climate change was mentioned in several presentations. Leslie Vella in particular expressed concern that climate change will have a profound effect on Malta's receptive capacity. It will impact coastal tourism resorts and the already-limited sandy beaches.

Prof. Tom Sewlyn spoke about material and symbolic conflict in coastal areas and explained how these have brought about a deterioration of coastal environments.

In the context of integrated coastal zone management, **Dr. Javier García Sanabria** highlighted the complexity of reconciling environmental conservation with the pressures of tourism development. In relation to tourism management of coastal areas, he highlighted the need for long term vision – something that is difficult to achieve in practice because of the political context with short 4 to 5 year cycles.

Dr. Marie Avellino emphasised the importance of training of personnel involved in tourism and culture activities, especially those located in environmentally sensitive coastal areas and spoke about a specific project that seeks to enhance training.

Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino advocated caution for post-Covid tourism as destinations seek to cope with the pent-up demand for travel. He argued that the traditional tourism destinations will need to prepare themselves for this influx of tourists and where necessary take measure to mitigate the negative effects of overtourism.

Mr. Brian Smith of Heritage Europe spoke about historic areas in towns and cities and expressed concern on how the covid-19 pandemic will impact the long term vitality and viability of these areas. He noted the important role that cultural tourism could potential play in the revival of historic urban areas. He noted that coordinated action based on a long term vision is required. The process necessitates action focused on the destination, on sustainable businesses and on sustainable products.

Prof. Alex Torpiano talked about the impacts of tourism on historic areas and also on their residents. He questioned the sustainability of having thousands for cruise ship passengers disembarking at a historic area such as Valletta or Dubrovnik. He argued that they are unable to experience the authentic historic area in just a few hours so the visit becomes just a show. With a growing trend of cities to open the relatively unfamiliar historic areas to tourism, more needs to be done to mitigate the negative impacts to avoid losing the very characteristics that make these areas so interesting to tourists.

Prof. João Rafael Santos highlighted the importance for a city destination to have the right mobility infrastructure and attractive public spaces. He referred to Lisbon to illustrate this.

The event included two debates held virtually online, one on coastal tourism resorts and another one on tourism in historic areas. Reports of these two debates are included in this publication.

The proceedings have been compiled and edited by Dr. John Ebejer and Dr. Marie Avellino, who were also the moderators of the event.

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Short Biographies of Contributors

Marie Avellino is the Director of the Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture at the University of Malta which offers programmes ranging from undergraduate to PhD level. Her research interests include social anthropology; cultural heritage research; tourism and cultural identities; intercultural competencies for management and visitor experience management. Her EU-Funded Projects experience includes Lead Researcher and Project Manager. Currently she is managing two 2018-2021 Erasmus + Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships with the Project Title “Boosting blue Entrepreneurs' competences toward an environmental care ecosystem”(BLUESPROUT) and the 2019-2021 Skills for promotion, valorisation, exploitation, mediation and interpretation of European Cultural Heritage (EUHeritage).

Godfrey Baldacchino is professor of sociology and chair of the board of the Institute of Tourism, Travel and Culture at the University of Malta (2017-2021). He is also an Island Studies Teaching Fellow at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), Canada; and former Canada Research Chair in Island Studies (2003-2013) at the same university. He is founding Executive Editor of *Island Studies Journal* (ISSN:1715-2593), now indexed in Web of Science, and founding Executive Editor of *Small States & Territories*(ISSN: 2616-8006) (both on-line, open access journals). His publications include *Global Tourism and Informal Labour Relations* (1997) and *Archipelago Tourism: Practices and Policies* (2015).

John Ebejer is Senior Lecturer at the University of Malta. He authored several peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, mostly on urban tourism and historic areas. He authored the book *‘Tourism in European Cities: Architecture, Urban Spaces, and City Attractions’*. Before academia, he worked for many years as an architect, urban planner and tourism consultant. He holds a Masters degree in urban planning from the University of Sheffield and a Doctorate in tourism from the University of Westminster.

Javier García Sanabria's expertise is related to Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and tourism management. He is one of the founders of the ICZM Iberoamerican network, IBERMAR, currently composed of 15 countries. Dr. Sanabria has published several articles and books on international and national journals. Currently he is a lecturer at the University of Cadiz, giving lessons in the undergraduate degree of tourism and in five Masters degrees. He is also the coordinator of the Formation Commission of the INDESS research Institute.

João Rafael Santos is an architect and Assistant Professor of architectural, urbanism and urban design of Master and PhD levels at FA-U Lisboa (Lisbon School of Architecture / Faculdade de Arquitetura, Universidade de Lisboa). He is coordinator of URBinLAB research group at CIAUD - Research Centre for Architecture, Urban Planning and Design. His research interests include urban and territorial design and spatial planning, especially in the field of metropolitan studies with a focus on the relationship of infrastructure with public space and socio-spatial development, with several publications and presentations at international conferences. He won several awards including 2016 he has been awarded the Metr poles Ci ncia Prize in 2016; TU Lisbon's/Caixa Geral de Dep sitos Junior Researchers Prize in 2011; the Honorable Mention for TU Lisbon's/Caixa Geral de Dep sitos Junior Researchers Prize in 2010, and the European Europe First Prize in 2006 (as co-author).

Tom Selwyn is a professorial research associate at SOAS, University of London, awarded an Emeritus Professorial Research Fellowship by the Leverhulme Foundation in 2014. He is widely published in the field of the anthropology of tourism/pilgrimage/cultural heritage with regional interests in the Mediterranean in general and the eastern Mediterranean in particular. He has directed major EC research and development projects in the Mediterranean region, focusing on Palestine and Bosnia in partnership with networks of European universities, including the University of Malta. He co-convenes the SOAS summer school in travel, tourism, and pilgrimage and, since 2020, the Xenia lecture series.

Andrew Smith is Professor of Urban Experiences at the University of Westminster. He has a background in geography and his research focuses on cities, especially the role of tourism and events in urban regeneration. He has written and edited several books on these themes, including a recent volume dedicated to London's visitor economy. Andrew works in a School of Architecture and Cities, and currently leads the University's Research Community dedicated to Sustainable Cities and Urban Environments. Andrew has a particular interest in Malta: since 2004 he has led 14 annual study visits to the Maltese Islands as part of a module dedicated to Tourism and the Mediterranean, and he has published several papers on Maltese planning and development issues.

Brian Smith was City Planning Officer of Norwich, UK 1985 – 1998 and a founder member and past Chair of the English Historic Towns Forum. Brian was appointed Secretary General of Heritage Europe in 1999 by the Council of Europe. The network now represents over 1000 historic towns and cities in 32 European countries developing and sharing good practice in sustainable city management within historic areas. Brian is also a founder member of the European Heritage Alliance 3.3 and was joint editor of the Alliance commissioned research report, “Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe”. Brian has also been a member of the Horizon

2020 Expert Group on Cultural Heritage and was co-author of its report, “Getting Cultural Heritage to Work for Europe”. Current priorities focus on the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and the opportunities for Europe’s historic towns to provide leadership in developing a more sustainable and resilient future for historic areas.

Alex Torpiano is currently Dean of the Faculty for the Built Environment, University of Malta; he has served as Head of the Department of Architecture and Urban Design, 2016-2020, Head of the Department of Building and Civil Engineering, 1988-1999 and 2007-2011, as Head of the Department of Civil and Structural Engineering, 2011-2016, and as Director of the Institute for Masonry and Construction Research, 1994 – 2009. He is a Member of Senate, and of Council of the University of Malta, as well as Board Member in the Institute of Sustainable Energy, and of Climate Change and Sustainable Development. He has served as President of the Chamber of Architects and Civil Engineers, 1994-1996, 2017-2019, and as Chairman of the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee, 1995-1996, 2000-2001. He is currently Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa.

Leslie Vella graduated from University of Malta in business management in 1988. During his 37-year career with the Malta Tourism Authority he has occupied various senior management positions and is presently Deputy CEO and Chief Officer Strategic Development, also managing the setup for executing Malta’s Airline Route Development Strategy. He has been active on the international front as Chair of the European Travel Commission’s Market Intelligence Group (1997-2014) and served as its Vice President (2016-2017). In 1999, he co-authored “The Economic Impact of Tourism in Malta”, and more recently he was the main drafter of “Malta’s National Tourism Policy” for the 2015-2020 period and more recently Malta’s Tourism Strategy to 2030.

Back to the future? Revisiting the origins of coastal resorts to envision their futures.

Andrew Smith

I am from the University of Westminster and we have a really good long-standing relationship with both Malta and the University of Malta so it is really nice that we can continue that relationship today, even if remotely. I was hoping to come out to Malta for this event so it is a shame that I can't be there in person. In this short presentation I will talk a little bit about UK resorts to start with. I will talk about their current situation and their possible futures. But then I would like to broaden the conversation to incorporate some more Mediterranean related issues because I'm aware that a lot of the audience today are based in the Mediterranean and are particularly interested in Mediterranean coastal resorts. If my presentation has an argument, it is really about the quality of built environments and the need to improve the quality of that built environment in mature coastal resorts, to promote a broader based regeneration of those resorts, rather than just merely propping up tourism markets.

Starting with the UK, tourism activity has been very seriously affected by the current crisis. There were real concerns about the way in which this crisis may have a particularly pronounced effect on UK coastal resorts, mainly because they are so reliant on tourism. Tourism is one of the industries most affected by the current crisis and also because of some of their other characteristics. As you may know, UK's small coastal towns, have a large proportion of elderly residents – thirty per cent of residents of small UK coastal towns are over the ages of 65. They are deemed to be perhaps particularly vulnerable to the current problems.

That was exacerbated by the fact that the health and transport infrastructure in some of these small coastal towns, particularly the more peripheral ones, would actually increase the risk of greater mortality rates. Some of UK's most disadvantaged areas are actually seaside towns and coastal resorts. On almost every indicator of deprivation, apart from crime, UK coastal towns are substantially more deprived than the average UK settlement. That's a worrying picture and there were great concerns about how UK resorts would be able to withstand the crisis but there are

reasons to be positive in that it does seem, at the moment, that there are actually lower mortality rates in UK coastal towns than other parts of the UK.

We've seen a great appetite of people to go visit the coast during the crisis because many who live in towns and cities are desperate to get to the coast. Last summer, when the UK population was allowed to internal travel to some extent, and there was a surge in demand for domestic visits to the coast.

This sort of resurgence of the domestic market may go on for some time and it may actually prove to be relatively positive for the tourism sector in some of these areas. I suppose one thing I would like to emphasise today is this idea that the crisis has reminded us about the importance of health and wellbeing, and perhaps also about the restorative elements of the coast. This may be something that may actually be a reason to be optimistic about the future.

In the last 10 months I have left my local neighborhood just twice and both times my family and I visited the coast. This is an illustration that, even in my own personal experience, when we had the chance to leave the city we wanted to visit the coast. We visited Scarborough in Yorkshire and Broadstairs in Kent.

Another argument I wanted to make today is this idea that the future of UK resorts could be best understood by perhaps thinking about their origins. And for the past year or two I have had the privilege of supervising the doctoral research of one of the UK's most eminent, seaside historians. He is Allan Brodie (now Dr. Allan Brodie!) and his work reminded me about the origins of UK resorts in the 18th century. In some ways the reasons that people first visited the coast were for these restorative/medicinal health-related reasons. These resorts were not built on virgin land but they were the extensions of existing ports and coastal settlements. Their main markets were from local relatively local towns and cities.

I think therefore there is some value in considering whether all those elements actually could be part of the recovery of UK coastal resorts - trying to focus more on their role as centres of wellbeing. We know there are great benefits to people's health, mental health in particular, when visiting blue spaces. There is value in maybe thinking of seaside towns as towns rather than as resorts. Tourism should no longer be perceived as merely a main function (i.e. resorts) but it

should be considered as an integral part of the life of a viable settlement (i.e. seaside town). This could be something that helps reshape the UK domestic tourism sector.

This idea of thinking about markets and audiences from relatively local conurbations might be interesting too. With the whole new promotion of remote working, for example, there is a potential to attract residents who can work from home. I know there is a potential market there. And also in the context of climate emergency and the problems of the sustainability of air travel, the resurgence of a domestic market might actually work in the favour of some UK seaside towns who can attract domestic audiences without causing unnecessary environmental sort of issues.

We could think of English and UK resorts being first-generation resorts. Then there are resorts in the Mediterranean which can be seen as second-generation resorts. These are now obviously relatively well-established given that there are 60 to 70 years' worth of development in some of these places.

There is a vast amount of literature written about the way in which that development happened. Professor Selwyn already talked about the very problematic way in which coastlines have been exploited, the poor planning and the poor infrastructure provision. Also problematic was the sheer volume of urban development on the Mediterranean coastline and the poor quality of the built environment which is relatively standardized and not particularly based on vernacular styles and traditions, but a very generic form of urbanism.

These problems are exacerbated by the fact that we've got an ever growing number of competitors in the Mediterranean. There are huge swathes of North Africa and eastern Mediterranean coastlines which are also developing tourism resorts. We have further competition from other more established countries. So that combination of circumstances is leading to some real problems. In Malta these problems are perhaps more acute because the competitive advantage of Malta in terms of coastal resorts is relatively problematic due to a lack of beach resources. Malta has a relative lack of sand and this is a competitive disadvantage compared to most Mediterranean areas. From my perspective, being fairly familiar with Malta, I'm aware of some of the identity issues facing Maltese resorts. From an external perspective, Malta is almost

seen as a resort in itself - the whole island is perceived as a resort, with the individual coastal resorts within Malta being poorly understood.

I don't think tourists often know whether they're in our Qawra, Bugibba or St Paul's Bay; or whether in Sliema; or whether they've crossed over into a different part of Malta. That sort of generic amorphous sort of built environment on the Maltese coast provides some issues in terms of the identity of the Maltese built environment. Obviously Golden Bay, parts of Gozo and possibly other parts of Malta do have a more distinctive identity and have a real strong appeal, but the eastern Northern coastlines are relatively indistinguishable from one another. Malta has this problem because some mass resorts in the Mediterranean have had some success of reducing their seasonality problem by attracting domestic demand in the offseason. For example, Spain and Italy have the capacity to generate huge demand from local markets and for seaside resorts in the shoulder and off seasons. Malta does not have that sort of capacity because of its size and its island status. That means it is very reliant on air travel and international airlines for its tourism markets. That introduces a further complication in its control on the way it plans the future of its tourism.

In the Mediterranean, key issues are the lack of incentives to regenerate existing resorts and the way in which the built environment has sprawled, not only along coastlines but also into the hinterland. A lot of new development, rather than rebuilding what already exists, exacerbates the problems and fails to address some of the problems in the core resource.

To conclude I want to try and bring things together and say that actually I think some of the issues in UK resorts and Mediterranean resorts are quite similar.

A series of reports on UK resorts have concluded that often complex problems remain unresolved because the poor quality of the built environment and the dilapidated public realm act as disincentives for investment in these places. And I think the same could be applied to the Mediterranean's mass resorts where there are not enough incentives to refurbish, rebuild, regenerate the most mature resorts. We need to think about how mass-market hotels can be restored, not necessarily by having a change to their grade, but rather by improving their quality and provide a better experience. They should contribute to the built environment rather than detract from it.

I think there is a really strong market - and there will be even after the pandemic - for good quality mass tourism resorts. Mass tourism has been much derided but actually there are some benefits, even in terms of sustainability, of concentrating tourists in particular areas and providing robust infrastructure to host them. The key thing is really about these incentives to improve the built environment and in Malta's resorts you have tried a few really interesting things. You have improved promenades and you have invested in the public realm. You have provided subsidized loans, for example, to hoteliers to refurbish their properties.

You have introduced a tourist tax which was meant to try and ring fence funds for the upgrading of coastal resorts. So, there are some interesting things happening around that but again there is more work needed to try and think about how we incentivize the regeneration of established resorts. One thing to think about to think about is the aquatic territory itself – maybe this could be used more imaginatively. Apart from the built environment, resorts include blue space that may be useful in terms of wellness, or maybe even for more mundane things like transport. Making better use of the marine resources may be a means of improving the situation.

We need to start thinking about a broader based regeneration of these places rather than thinking of them as just tourism resorts. Increasingly these are urban conurbations and we need to apply practices from urbanism and urban regeneration to these areas. As I said right at the start, there may be the potential to return to the origins of seaside resorts by thinking about refocusing on wellness, health and wellbeing - by refocusing on the idea that these places are multifunctional towns. We need to think about other aspects of their original makeup which was obviously more focused on a nearby domestic audience.

What future for tourism resorts in Malta?

Leslie Vella

I find a lot of encouragement and solace from the fact that a lot of what has been discussed so far in this webinar is very much in line with the way I see things. One comment I would like to make in reaction to what has been said so far. One of the biggest pressures which resorts and coastal resorts face, in today's world, is what I call the religion or the mantra of growth. As it becomes a dogma, it becomes something that if you go against it, you are seen to be blaspheming.

This fixation with growth is actually embedded in the way the tourism performances of countries and destinations are evaluated internationally - by being benchmarked. This has a very huge impact on the way that resorts and destinations are developing. So much so that even if we look at the language, if you grow, it is positive terminology, but if you stabilise, if you stop growing, we go into linguistic terms such as stagnation, decline, falling, loss of market share, etc.

So the very fact that you stop growing, the very fact that you stop expanding and seeking to extract constantly increasing volumes is actually expressed in the most negative of manners. This is why perhaps politicians and planners are very much afraid of facing this reality. They keep going for growth after growth after growth, which then has an impact on the receptive capacity of a destination. This then leads to the problems which are being talked about in this webinar.

I will consider the concept of tourism resorts from the Maltese perspective. For an island destination, the coast is a very important element. For tourists island destinations immediately bring to mind memories and associations with the sea. So people who travel to an island destination expect to experience the coast. Effectively the main element of the tourism receptive capacity is the coast. In the earlier stages of development of our tourism industry - in the 50s, 60s and early 70s - there were attempts to develop hotels inland. Examples include the Verdala in Rabat, the Corinthia in Attard and the university residence in Lija (formerly a hotel).

They did not really make it because fundamentally they were not on the coast - because when people from Germany, from the UK or from one of the big inland urban centres, travel to an island, they want to be near the sea, not as far away from it as possible.

Having said that, recent trends in the accommodation sector such as Airbnb have changed that. Many have ridden on the accommodation bandwagon by providing tourism accommodation services across the entire territory. We have seen accommodation move out from the traditional resorts into the towns and villages and into the internal urban areas. So it is not uncommon now – before the pandemic hit - to see a couple of tourists pulling a suitcase on wheels behind them in areas which traditionally would have been labeled as totally residential and not in any way attractive to tourists.

However, in spite of this, the fact remains that most of our receptive capacity remains coastal, especially the larger establishments and the hotels. And, obviously, the coast in a Mediterranean setting may enjoy this perception of being warm and gentler and more climatically friendly than the northern destinations which supply most of its tourists and which possess seasonal weather patterns, where there is a winter, there is a spring, there is an autumn and there is a summer. So, obviously, Mediterranean coastal resorts need to adapt to different weather patterns. This is not the Canary Islands, this is not the Caribbean, where you have almost one flat equatorial season, all year round. So the relationship between the resort and these changes by season, and the summer, when you can actually swim in the sea, but as it gets colder and the weather does not remain so gentle and the relationship with the sea changes, means some of the smaller destinations perhaps outside of Malta close down for the winter.

But most coastal resorts within Malta at least have learned that to operate all year round they need to adapt. And in this I like to take a parallel from the animal world. Animals, who want to remain active in all four seasons change their plumage, change their fur cover and what have you, to be able to cope with different seasons. And the same with birds. If animals are not bothered, if it does not make sense for them to do so, they just hibernate, they close down. And so likewise coastal destinations adapt to the different seasonality, or else close down completely.

In this case, Malta has an advantage because of what I like to describe as a dual nature destination. It is an island, but it is also a cosmopolitan destination with a cosmopolitan setting.

And I like to describe it thus: during the peak, Malta is an island with a city, so fundamentally people come for the insular, for the coastal destination, but they have got the urban dimension thrown in as an add-on. In the off-peak Malta then becomes a city on an island. And so, you are not coming primarily to swim or to enjoy maritime activities, you are coming for the urban dimension, but with the insular setting, with the sea as a background.

I will spend some time on climate change. It is obviously a worrying phenomenon, according to most, in a general way, which will not happen somewhere far in the future, but we are all agreeing that some action has to be taken. I was reading on the news portals, they have moved the clock a few seconds forward and we all know what seconds closer to midnight might mean in terms of global catastrophe, as things stand.

Climate change obviously has an impact in an island setting and in a coastal resort setting. Malta is a sedimentary rock archipelago that does not rise that much above sea level. There are cliffs on the West. Along the north-eastern coast, however, the entire coastal area of land is only a few metres above sea level. These are very exposed to sea level surges and North-Easterly strong storms. Climate change, combined with sea level rises and an extreme weather conditions can have a huge impact along the exposed north east coast. This raises concern about Malta's tourism infrastructure and attractions, most of which are located along this coast. This includes places like Sliema, St Julian's, Qawra, Xemxija, Mellieħa.

Climate change can have a very profound impact on Malta's receptive capacity, especially for the coastal destinations and also for sandy beaches. Malta's sandy beaches are already limited. Imagine what a bit of sea level rise would do to most of them, if not all. Moreover our sea-based facilities and attractions such as harbours and yacht marinas and coastal indentations are all under threat.

Consider a combination of sea level rise and an increased incidence of bad weather events. Some of you might remember the big North-Easterly of a few years ago, when all the fish escaped from the fish farms and people were picking fish from the streets in Xemxija and St Paul's Bay. Because they were literally taken from fish farms and brought to land, and for people to collect from the coastal roads.

I would like to move on to the subject of resort life cycles. My understanding is that Maltese coastal resorts have all had different origins. Marsascala, for example, started life as a fishing village. It then evolved, first, into a tourism resort, and eventually into a residential area in which tourism has a minor secondary role. They lost the one big hotel that they had, the Jerma Palace. Tourism is now almost non-existent in Marsaskala.

Other resorts originated as domestic tourism resorts places - Bugibba and Marsalforn for example. Eventually, they went into international tourism but, as they expanded, they started to attract full blown residential accommodation. Apartments originally built for tourism, made way to foreign workers, living in crowded flats, turning them into low budget population centers, with social problems typical of migrant communities.

Some resorts, such as St. Julians, originated as coastal towns but was then converted into tourism and entertainment. There are others like Mellieħa that began as a traditional rural village but became a place for second homes, and then eventually a tourism locality. I remember a paper that was presented by the first mayor of Mellieħa in the early 90s, where he asked the question, ‘Mellieħa, is it a village for tourism or is it a tourism village?’, and eventually it became a tourism village, rather than a village which attracts tourism. We have seen most of old Mellieħa being demolished either for the domestic second home market or for tourism. It is now a location which is completely different from what it was a couple of decades ago.

Mellieħa Bay and Xlendi originated as unpopulated coastal stretches with no urban development whatsoever. They are now are intensively developed and continue to be developed.

Some other areas within the Maltese context have been very late comers to tourism – places where tourism has come in response to regeneration. Examples include the Three Cities (Isla, Birgu and Bormla), Valletta and other Urban Conservation Areas (UCAs) in various towns and villages. This however raises other issues such as gentrification. On the surface, it looks so beautiful and so pleasant that tourism and other activities have come into these previously dilapidated places but it might also be leading to gentrification as previously affordable properties are becoming unaffordable. The original population is being shifted out, to the old tourism resorts like Bugibba and Qawra which less people want to visit as tourists.

Coastal resorts, and also some towns, have different tourism life cycles. All these resorts face are at very different phases of their life cycles.

There is a lack of overall vision, which has led to a lot of haphazard planning, which in turn leads to a very confused identity for these localities. The clear distinction that this is residential, this is tourism, this is second home, etc. is being lost, and we have all these overlapping types of multiuse in these places. It is a confused identity also when we look at them from a local council perspective. Local councils receive funding from central government on the basis of the resident population. There are however localities that have a highly fluctuating population because of migrant workers and tourists. These councils do not receive additional funding to collect their waste, for instance, and hence the confused identity. We have ended up end up with a variety of mixed-use resorts, which are constantly subject to short-term speculation.

Whatever is fashionable goes. Let us build blocks of flats, build office blocks, let us build accommodation, let us build accommodation to house migrant workers, etc. And since there is this constant redevelopment and rethinking without an overall plan it precludes them from ever taking a break and always be in a state of work in progress. Cranes and tower cranes are all over the place. They have become an almost permanent part of the landscape. They remove one crane and another two are setup within days. So this is also one other factor which is influencing the life cycle development. If we go back when I started working in tourism 30 to 40 years ago, there were 100 stakeholders who constituted 90% of the industry. Now there is this proliferation of smaller tourism operators, many times faceless. The concept of knowing who your stakeholders are, and the stakeholders working together, has disappeared. This is leading to further fragmentation in management and development.

In conclusion, I would say that coastal resorts in an island setting continue to play a primary role in tourism development. I have mentioned that they face threats, due to climate change, due to overdevelopment, due to the lack of overall master planning for regeneration. To avoid short-term speculation by developers there needs to be master planning, which understands the whole set of inter-relationships, the dynamics, within the community and the destination. Otherwise we end up in the usual situation - doing well-meaning things but with unacceptable results, and that's because we fail to understand.

Other important components which will make them fail are the multiple layers of overlapping responsibilities, different ministries, different authorities, local councils etc. This contributes to further fragmentation. And sometimes conflicting prioritisation and allotment. These are things that we need to continue to be aware of.

In conclusion, the coast remains important, but the coast faces all these pressures and issues. What is needed are more planning, more coordination and an imaginative approach to prevent the worsening of problems that have been allowed to build up over the decades.

Coasts as Sites of Material and Symbolic Conflict.

Tom Selwyn

I start my presentation with a quote “The environment ... is a collective good that serves as a new medium for rearranging social relations between groups, thus rearranging relations of power and restructuring forms of social inequality in an emerging European society.”

This is from a book that the late Jeremy Boissevain and I edited together - *Contesting the Foreshore*. It is from a passage that Jeremy used to introduce his own chapter. And as Jeremy was very keen on talking about buildings on the Maltese coast, which he described in various ways, which we could summarize as being abusive buildings. He never missed an opportunity to draw attention to the fact that in his view the Maltese coast had been decimated a lot by private investment and the building of inappropriate buildings.

The title of my talk, which is to do with material and symbolic conflict, follows a lot of what Jeremy's work was about. I am going to show something which has a connection with Malta because we, like you in Malta, were invaded, as you remember, in our case in 1066. In your case, it was a few years later. The case study I am going to present briefly is about southern England and about the coastal area that was invaded.

So the material conflict on the coast has a number of layers and aspects of which we could mention three. The first is war between nations. It is not only the war between England and France or England and the Normans but much later wars, as we will see later on, including right up to the present. So that is one aspect. Another aspect is conflict between classes. As England is a very traditional society which is still bound up in class relations - upper, middle, working class - even if you look briefly at the coast, you can see how this is activated.

A third aspect would be colonial memories and colonial adventures and colonial wars. So, looking at the British southern coast brings to mind all these conflicts and actually these conflicts are very much comparable to the kind of conflicts that Jeremy talked about in the case of Malta.

As far as symbolic conflict is concerned, one can see these conflicts that I have mentioned between nations, classes and the rest of the world.

In certain aspects, you can see it certainly in the way that leisure is pitted against consumerism. Consumerism, I suppose you could say, is a form of pleasure, but it is a pleasure which is definitely run by a section of the population, rather than all of it. And the thing about the coast is surely that one principle that we need to have is, precisely, that it is common land and therefore it must be regularly regulated and managed, as being common.

A second symbolic conflict that one sees very easily, and very well in Malta, is the conflict between 'heritage and history'. We will be thinking about ways in which tourism can engage with an interesting history, rather than just being served up heritage dishes by the same kind of people that perhaps built the abusive buildings in the past. There is a great interest in Maltese history - of the history that the tourist knows, and also that she knows and wants to impart. And all of that, thirdly, would lead us towards looking at the sea, as a site of symbolic conflict in all sorts of ways.

Editorial note: Prof. Selwyn dedicated a substantial part of his presentation to a commentary on images that reflect different forms of environment-related conflicts.

The various images I have shown in relation to material and symbolic conflict are applicable to Malta, Majorca and Mediterranean islands. Tourism has brought virtual destruction of the environment. In Malta's case, we had the Hilton debacle and other instances of harmful coast developments.

After the fall of the Franco regime in Spain, authorities in Catalunya introduced a very good system of local authorities where people who lived on the coast and worked on the coast, including tourism, could actually work together with architects and others to plan their activities in an efficient, and a good way, rather than a destructive way. So, the three key terms that I would take from this particular thought is democracy, of course, history, and looking after the environment.

Coastal tourism: managing complexity in a scenario of uncertainty

Javier García Sanabria

In this presentation on integrated coastal zone management, I will talk about the complexity of tourism management, about coastal aspects of management and about the tourism sector. I will also share some ideas about the future of tourism in the coastal areas.

Coastal zones are provide a highly complex scenario. And this is because there are three dimensions (triple singularity) – physical and natural; social and economic; and jurisdiction and administration. Physical environments are dynamic and full of diversity and, at the same time, they are fragile zones. We have to take care of these places carefully because they are the resources we are going to use for tourism development.

In coastal zones we have the concentration of the population with so many people are living there. Coastal settlements, such as in Spain, have multiple uses and are host to a wide diversity of human activities. These are dynamic places as the social and economic issues in coastal zones are continuously evolving and changing. The complexity of management of coastal areas is made more difficult because of responsibilities shared amongst different jurisdictions and administrations. Sometimes in the coastal zones it is difficult to figure out who is responsible and for what. Usually what we have is a situation where many institutions and administrations are responsible for the same area. Sometimes you really do not know who to turn to deal with an issue – it could be quite a mess. It is because of these three interrelated dimensions that coastal zone management is so complex.

What is complexity? What is this about? For example, a simple issue would be, for example, baking a cake. You have a recipe; you have five or six steps; you follow them carefully, use the right ingredients, and you're fine. You get a good result no matter if you are in Japan or in Italy. If you make no mistake, you have a cake. A complicated issue has many more steps and many more pieces. If you follow them really carefully, then you have a good result.

Let's consider a more complicated issue like, for example, sending a rocket to the moon. This is really complicated issue. But this is still complicated, not complex, because you have instructions; you have steps. It is easy to make a mistake because there is a long list of instructions for sending a rocket to the moon. But if you follow them carefully then you will have success.

And what about the complex issues. What are they? They are issues for which you do not have any result and you do not have any instructions; you only have approaches. That is the bad news. You do not have a methodology that works in every situation. It is that which gives you no guarantee of success.

When you are managing the coastal zones, there are so many issues, so many inter-relations and so many variables. You cannot have the guarantee of success. Nor do you have any methodology to follow carefully, step by step. What you have are some approaches that you can use for the integrated management of these places. But success is not guaranteed. Indeed because of multiple variables, it is impossible to achieve the same result in different scenarios.

So how can we deal with these issues? What you have to do is to manage them with adaptive management. You have to constantly adapt to changes; in the physical places, in the social realm, in the economic realm and also in the institutions. Where there are changes you have to adapt to them; you adapt because you cannot avoid them. One example is climate change. Adaptive management is not easy.

For politicians the vision is different. They see complexity as a combination of certainty on the one hand and social agreement on the other. Certainty means that we know how to deal with the problem; we have instructions, we have the technical capacity. For a politician, a simple issue is when an issue is close to technical certainty and we know how to deal with the problem. Simple is also about being close to social agreement that means the politician will not lose votes if he or she dedicates public funds to solve the issue and informs the public accordingly. For example dedicating money for the covid vaccine was a simple issue because there was agreement that it is necessary. There are also socially complicated issues. We know how to deal with them but we do not have the agreement to do what is needed to address them.

Coastal zones are zones of complexity – zones with wicked problems. We do not have exactly how to manage these zones – we do not have a formula that we can follow. So we have to work with public participation with academia, with universities and research organisations.

The marine coastal zone is subject to natural changes and anthropogenic changes. We have not one activity but a lot of activities taking place in this coastal area. Each of these activities introduce a driver, and also a pressure. And some of this pressure can lead to a chain of events that can be understood by society as impacts. These impacts deserve a response from our political administration – a response that either addresses the driver or the impact. Usually administrations take actions to address to the impacts.

So this is what we have: every pressure of every sector can produce change in the state of the marine area or the coastal area in which these pressures are taking place. The problem is that our responses only see the specific pressures that are being exerted on the marine environment. They do not look at the whole system that is normally complicated and difficult to figure out. That is why we need coastal governance or Integrated Coastal Zone Management.

One example of this complexity is our coastal zones. Let's take as an example changes that happened in the sea floor in the Canary Islands. In the 1980s we had a really good ecosystem with a lot of algae. Today the sea floor has become a stone surface because the sea urchins ate all the alga. So why has this happened? There was a boom of sea urchins brought about by two pressures. The first is over fishing and the fish that used to eat the sea urchins are now depleted. The other pressure is climate change with slight increases in sea temperature making the sea urchins more productive. Here we have the combination of more reproduction and less predators in this changing ecosystem in the Canary Islands. This now means that the place is no longer attractive for diving.

I can mention many locations along the southern coast of Spain that have been subject to radical changes along the coast since the 1970s. Apart from Cadiz, itself I can mention Puerto de Santa Maria and Valdelagrana both in Cadiz province and Estuario Rio Guadiaro, which is close to Malaga. They are totally different now mainly because of tourism activity. Then there is Puerto Banus near Malaga which was previously an agricultural and fishing. These activities are no longer present. Everything is changed everything, even the natural environment where much of

the ecology has been disrupted. We now have to take action to restore many much of the ecosystem. Our coastal zones are in crisis. We have altered much of the natural processes. We have lost some ecosystems that were available to everyone.

Along the coast with limited space, there is conflict between economic activities that are competing for the space and resources. The outcome of this is a deterioration of the quality of life. There is complexity in the coastal zone. Tourism has three dimensions: the first is the territorial dimension, since tourism has of course an impact on natural and coastal resources of the territory. The second is the social dimension, since tourism has also an impact on culture and on human behaviour. The third is the economic dimension since tourism has an impact on the economy; the tourism activity generates jobs, new businesses and so on. So, the complexity in tourism management is the outcome of the combination of these three dimensions that evolve separately but have a lot of interlinked good relations.

The Spanish tourism sector did not suffer as much as expected in the 2008 economic crisis. That's because of the social dimension. The Arab Spring rising led to the international tourist flows to Egypt and Turkey to be redirected to Spain. So it is really complex to predict what is going to happen to tourism after a crisis and the same can be said about the pandemic.

All countries across the world are facing an economic crisis because of the pandemic. For example, the number of foreign tourists to Spain fell almost 80% in 2020 compared to 2018. This had huge consequences as globally Spain is the second country receiving international tourism. We had a sharp increase in unemployment – much worse than it has ever been. The future is very uncertain with a situation that is made more complex because it involves both the economy and public health. So on the economic dimension, and also on the social dimension of tourism, what we need at the moment is to practice adaptive management.

We have to adapt to the changes that we are experiencing if businesses and the people are to benefit from this crisis. At the moment, domestic tourism is providing the needed support to many tourism businesses. It is expected to be a key driver of recovery in the short and the medium term, that is something that is happening all over the world. It is really too early to say (in January 2021) what the long-term implication of international decreases will be for tourism. What is for certain is that our return to business as usual is highly unlikely.

We have to innovate. We have to evolve. Post-COVID people are more savvy with digital technology and that makes tourists different to what they were pre-COVID. They will have higher expectations in relation to the information before travel that is made available online. Because of COVID they will expect greater security. Destinations will need to invest more on these.

There is an opportunity as tourism is really high on the global policy agenda. This is a good thing and it is something that we can take advantage of. Now it is really important to have an integrated tourism policy approach to support recovery. That is really important because providing policy clarity and taking some steps to limit the uncertainty will be crucial for this recovery. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to move towards fairer, more sustainable and resilient models of tourism development. This crisis provides us with this opportunity.

We need to change our mindset to take the advantage of the situation. We need to strive for a policy of long-term tourism alliance. Policy cycles are normally for four years because that is the term of office of our elected representatives. We need to change this tourism model to a long-term cycle. To produce results, 12 to 16 years of a consistent policy approach is needed. It is difficult to obtain the support of one political party for a longer term policy approach because it might only be in power for four years. If we are going to break this bigger cycle then we need an alliance policy, involving alliances with political parties that are in opposition.

We also need to work on a strategic approach to develop this policy. For example, we have to cleverly allocate the competence into the proper institutions and organisations to develop these policies. We need people to participate in developing and also in formulating this policy because these are the ones that are going to be administered by this policy. We need also proper tools to develop this policy to achieve these goals. After we have the policy, we develop the policy with the tools and then we need resources to apply those tools. These include economic resources, human resources, education on sustainability, information and knowledge. Of course, we also need to monitor. We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking as before. We cannot continue working sectorally. We have to work in an integrated way in the coastal zones, with the tourism sector fully involved in this chain.

Boosting Blue Entrepreneurs' Competences Toward an Environmental Care Ecosystem

Dr. Marie Avellino

BLUESPROUT – This is the name of the project about which I will be speaking. It stands for Boosting Blue Entrepreneurs' Competencies Toward an Environmental Care System. It is an EU co-funded project which I am managing on behalf of the Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture of the University of Malta. The lead partner is the Maltese Italian Chamber of Commerce, and the other partners are Varna Economic Development Agency (Bulgaria), Cooperation Bancaire Pour L'Europe (Belgium), Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação (Portugal) and The Hive (Italy).

Firstly, here is some background to this project. We know that Europe is a maritime continent, with a very large stretch of coastal area. Spanning from the Arctic to the Mediterranean, over the millennia this has been the site for various economic activities and also a place for enjoyment. In the past stretches of coast where also sites of conflict. Coastal and maritime tourism is the largest maritime activity in Europe and closely linked to many other parts of the economy. Employing around 3 million people, the sector is by far the biggest employer in the blue economy (accounting for 54 % of jobs in the established blue economy sectors): it is not insignificant. It is a growth generator as it is able to generate more economic activities.

In this project we have decided to focus on entrepreneurs, and, more specifically, on the provision of skills and competences so that they can invest and even grow the potential for what we call the Blue Tourism Economy. The blue economy means anything to do with the sea or coast. We will focus mostly on the tourism aspect, something which concerns us and especially my colleagues at the University of Malta. With reference to the economic activity, we noted that many of the small- and medium-sized enterprises that make up the sector struggle with a variety of challenges and cannot adequately exploit this potential alone. Moreover such goals cannot be carried out by a single state, it requires the help and expertise of different EU member states. So far the actions engaged by single states have proved inadequate to deal with this mismatch between academia and the labour market. Nowadays it is not possible to think of maritime trade

only in the proximity of a state's national coast: to be better, to do better, to achieve more, member states need to exchange knowledge, background, technology and experience. The market itself demands for a professional figure able to deal with different environments, not only at a local level but, especially, at a transnational level.

A healthy environment and high-quality services will make coastal areas more appealing for marine and nautical tourism activities, sports and green tourism. It is achievable if there is a holistic approach. Therefore, specific strategies drawing on innovative and attractive policies and products must be put forward to capture the potential of marine tourists in the low season. The ideal way to do this is to capture the entrepreneurial spirit of the small and medium size businesses, who do not always have the necessary competences. In order to reduce this gap, our project aims to train both new and already active professionals in the field towards a more "blue oriented" management system which applies the best sustainability practices.

One such way to improve the product in a sustainable and financially beneficial way is to address how touristic blue economic experiences are offered to tourists. It is often noted that, at tourist sites, the promotional and marketing material is not as effective as it could be. The same can be said of site interpretation. Such failings undermine the coastal tourism site's potential to attract visitors. Here are two examples of poor quality interpretation. This is something that unfortunately happens at many tourism sites. Another problem is related to maps and overcrowded presentation panels. Do the producers ever wonder if visitors will actually read that or actually people learn from it?



There are many instances where entrepreneurs come up brilliant ideas and when they come to apply them, they might not have the ability or skills to do so. This is something to be taken advantage of, especially in the post-Covid period. These will be the tourism blue growth opportunities. One needs to have an adequately educated workforce, one that is able to use the latest technology and skills, which will also enable them to develop more modern technologies and ways of doing business.

The consortium partners, from different parts of Europe, collected data through interviews and questionnaires with stakeholders and would-be entrepreneurs. We also mapped the European Coastal Tourism Best Practices, Networks, and Initiatives. Our research has shown that the overall tourism sector, and the marine one in particular, is afflicted by a skill shortage (which in turn puts at real risk the long term and secure employment in the sector). On the other hand, we have extensive resources at our fingertips with BLUESPROUT especially as a tourism resource. To take the maximum advantage of the tourism blue growth opportunities requires an adequately and educated workforce that will have the ability and knowledge to use and apply latest technologies and tools, thus filling in a number of gaps.

In order to reduce this gap, our project aims to train both new and already active professionals in the field towards a more “blue oriented” management system which applies the best sustainability practices. The Consortium believes that the overall tourism’s sector, the marine one in particular, is afflicted by skills shortage. This will benefit the workforce with newly skilled people capable of proposing new sustainable tourism packages and services - a workforce that will encourage a more sustainable tourist behaviour. Professionals should necessarily have an innovative approach to take advantage of new opportunities, valorising at the same time the peculiarity resources of a territory to satisfy the new touristic demand. For that reason the project aims to focus its intervention on improving services and developing a touristic product perceived as sustainable and environmental-friendly.

So, we are very much concerned about this and this is the reason that we joined this consortium. So, we realised that there is a skills gap. Because you tend to find entrepreneurs having brilliant ideas and then when they come to apply them, they might not have the ability to do so. So, we do know that there is something to take advantage of, what we would think even the post-Covid

period will provide, and we will be able to call them blue growth opportunities. You have to have an adequately educated workforce, and that they are also able to use the latest technology and skills that are available, and even to create more modern technologies and ways of doing business themselves. So, this is what we did with our results from the data collection from the consortium partners, from different parts of Europe, so that we see what we need to address, what skills they require. And we found a number of interesting things so this is what we have done, as the University of Malta.

The project will target educators, trainers, teachers, and also, indirectly policymakers. We are developing a pilot training course that will be delivered, free of charge, and the material will form part of the Creative Commons. It will not target high-end professionals, it will be for people who have already started their business or want to start their business. This should encourage the creation of new businesses focused on blue economy (touristic businesses mainly) with a business model which integrates business competitiveness/growth and environmental protection. The project aims at filling the blue economy entrepreneurial skill gaps which have been identified through the data collected from the entrepreneurs themselves.

Besides all of this, as University of Malta, we will include an online study unit into our Bachelor's degree program. This will be for students interested to develop their skills and knowledge on Blue Tourism Enterprise.

Not only will this study unit address the skill gaps identified in the research carried out for the BLUESPROUT Project, but it will also address the aims and objectives identified in the Malta Tourism Strategy consultation document 2021-2030. Firstly, it will address the aim of in Integrating quality at all levels of the value chain. It will be reaching the objective for the support for continuous training, innovation and the introduction of new products that can ultimately deliver a qualitative and varied tourism experience. It will serve to increase the per capita spend whilst also addressing the human resources dimension. Moreover, the skills and competences gained by the students will allow them to present products and services that will enhance the visitor experience. And to conclude we envisage that there will be a stronger integration of Sustainable Development Goals and the EU Green Deal. All this augers well for an enhanced and holistic Blue Tourism Economy management system across Europe.

One never knows the worth of water until the well is dry

Godfrey Baldacchino

It is a pleasure to join you today, even if virtually, to share with you some ideas about a very important topic that of course, we are all, in a way, sleepwalking through. This is because this is a very serious time we are living in. We keep seeing that, saying that to each other and to ourselves. Without realizing the full effect of the situation that we are in. I think it will only be time that will eventually relieve us of the present. And from the vantage point of that time in our future, we will be able to look back and then better comprehend what exactly we have been through. Previous speakers have adopted two very different approaches, one very much looking at the configuration of institutions and strategies that can help support a sustainable city, and a sustainable living city. On the other hand, we've also had another presentation coming from a more kind of a planning perspective, looking at the way in which city planners in this case can reconfigure infrastructure mobility systems to provide a better, more authentic, more holistic perhaps, appreciation of what the city is: not just to the tourists, but also to its own local residents.

I want to complement previous presentations with a commentary that comes perhaps from the demand side of things, because they spoke primarily from a supply side perspective. They are focusing on this in a way that makes sense. These are things over which we have more control because they depend on the government, they depend on municipalities and they depend on businesses, all taking initiatives. They depend on community involvement as well: we must not forget that.

But at the end of the day, I think we are also missing a very important player in this conversation. And this is the tourist. Which brings me to the title of this brief presentation. One never knows the worth of water until the well is dry. I think the world is pretty dry right now when it comes to tourist experiences. Perhaps some of us are finding ourselves, thinking about the next time we plan to go abroad, planning our next holiday, although we cannot really plan in

the situation we are in. We know that vaccines are being rolled out, but they are being rolled out, administered and accepted at rates slower than was expected, and not evenly across the planet.

We have no idea, because this is a work in progress, how effective these vaccines would be. It is also very likely that protocols such as social distancing, basic hygiene and wearing masks, will persevere long into the future, past this year, perhaps.

There are so many questions we cannot answer, but certainly one of the questions perhaps that we can answer is that there is a growing frustration of immobility. That is how I would define it. Let me speak about myself. It has been years and years since I have spent so many months - not weeks, but months - being stranded in my own home, being stranded in my own country.

Some places are more islanded than others, such as places where there have been one or more cycles of lockdown. The home has become our world. We have only been allowed to leave our home for urgent necessities. Sometimes we have been obliged to secure certificates, documents, just in case we are stopped by the police, in certain countries, to justify why we have left our house. Certain other countries have had curfews, so one could not leave one's house at night. These are all experiences that militate against the globalization that we had taken for granted, until March 2020.

The idea of the nomad, the idea of the cosmopolitan citizen whose world is his or her oyster ... these and similar notions have suddenly been knocked down to the ground. Tourism, and also our egos, in a way have been knocked down from spectacular heights, even to abysmal lows, the result of which makes us thirst for mobility. Somebody coined the word staycation. I do not think it is very acceptable. But may provide the justification for domestic tourism, by acknowledging that, if you can't go abroad, at least play the tourist in your neighboring town or city or island.

I think many of us are craving for something more than that. So, one of the things that I would challenge this panel with is how are we going to brace ourselves for the barbarians at the gates. How we are going to brace ourselves for the mass exodus of individuals who are going to leave their country, almost irrespective of where they planned to go. The whole point is that we need to pick up sticks and go somewhere else to find our sanity, to rediscover our wellbeing, to play

tourist because that, I think, has become mainstream in our contemporary way of life. In Malta, we judge someone poor if they are unable to afford and take an annual holiday.

This really is the point I wanted to make. Let us think about the huge implications for urban centres who are going to be at the brunt of the reception of these tourism dynamics. Cities or places of agglomeration. There are places where products, material, people circulate, and tourists feature in the circulation. And tourists are also beneficial to cities because they allow their citizens, and their governments, to realize and appreciate what their assets are, and how certain other assets can be protected or preserved.

Let us, hopefully, be in a situation where we realize that so many people may be coming to visit us in the medium-term future: let us say that it is not going to be a short term but a medium-term phenomenon. We do well to ask ourselves what kind of measures can we take, and what kind of strategic actions can we adopt, in order to respond to visitors, protect assets and mainstream authenticity.

Towards Sustainable Cultural Tourism – a Unique Opportunity for Change Post Covid-19?

Brian Smith

In the first part of my presentation I will be talking about Heritage Europe. We have a long association with Malta. In fact, we had our inaugural meeting in Valletta back in 1999 with the participation of many Maltese towns, including obviously Valletta.

Heritage Europe was formed as the European Association of Historic Towns and Regions by the Council of Europe back in 1999 and its headquarters is Norwich an old mediaeval city within the UK. We are a network of historic cities and towns that now cover 32 countries in Europe and with over a thousand historic towns and cities. As can be seen from our website, we try to promote international cooperation and sharing of good practice. Part of that is identifying and developing good practice with our member cities and working on European projects, increasingly Horizon 2020 and hopefully the new Horizon Europe.

The question ‘What future for tourism and historic areas?’ is indeed timely given the devastating impact of Covid19 worldwide . I am really pleased to contribute to a conversation on the future of tourism and historic areas that has already started in many of my member cities, but really needs to gain momentum. To plan ahead is for that future is going to be the key to success as we get ready for when some sort of normality returns. My focus today is historic urban areas, in other words historic areas within towns and cities.

In spite the way the pandemic has ravaged the world, can we see, nevertheless, covid-19 as an opportunity? Could this be an opportunity to move towards more sustainable and resilient cultural tourism in our historic areas? Because of the pandemic, we have empty chairs in empty squares. But we also have a growing concern about the future of our historic centres. We see empty shops in many historic urban areas as the trends of online retailing have accelerated as a consequence of lockdowns. More people work from home and really quite like it at least in part. We are consequently seeing office buildings becoming empty in UK cities and elsewhere. So, we do really have to think strategically about the future of our towns and cities. Tourism is a key part of that.

This is not the first time that Heritage Europe has started to think about cultural tourism. About ten years ago, we put together an expert group and produced the guidelines, shown on the slide. Setting up expert groups is something we often do. The people on the expert groups are from the various sectors; from our member cities and from a wider field including academics, consultancies and advisors. I was contacted during lockdown by the World Heritage Organization and it was suggested to me that it was a good time to revisit those guidelines. The result was that Heritage Europe and the World Heritage Organization jointly published an article with updated guidelines for sustainable tourism. They also form part of a new book that has just been published called 'World Heritage, Place Making and Sustainable Tourism - Towards integrated approaches to Heritage Management'. For more information on these refer to the Heritage Europe website - www.historic-towns.org.

Tourism is a very complex and frequently fragmented ecosystem that requires government, especially local and regional government, to work hand in hand with all the stakeholders within that ecosystem. There is a desire in many historic towns and cities to take this opportunity to rebalance, to become more local and to see the value of cultural heritage-based tourism as part of this more general reimagining of historic areas.

When we talk about sustainable cultural tourism, what do we mean? We are really referring to an ecosystem that includes:

- Visitors - their needs aspirations and well-being,
- The tourism industry itself - the need for tourism businesses to be profitable and to have a long-term future.
- The community - respecting the values, needs and quality of life of local people,
- The environment - conserving the cultural and physical environments,
- The identity and sense of place.

It requires a recognition that there are a range of actions which need coordination if we are going to be successful, from individual decisions through to corporate.

Setting the context is self evidently important as a first step. We need to be clear about the social, economic, environmental drivers in the local area and factoring in the global impacts

particularly climate change, which really so important to all of us. There are some overarching principles that have to become mainstream in our thinking if we are to move towards a more sustainable tourism offer. For example; maintaining authenticity, conserving cultural heritage assets and responding to visitors needs. In the guidelines we recommend to cities and their stakeholders, across the ecosystem, to work together to come to a common understanding of the principles and where they are in relation to these principles at this point in time.

We move on to objectives and policies as part of this process. What we are doing here with our cities is asking questions not prescribing solutions. But the questions will enable everyone together in that ecosystem to come to a consensus around the strategy that should be followed.

So, setting the objectives and policies together is really around establishing a local vision and a strategy for moving forward. The processes that we suggest - the questions that we are asking - are around the mechanisms that are in place. We need to establish a degree of openness and honesty, and even some independent input, if we are going to get the right answers, leading to the right solutions.

Focus on the destination: The next stage in the process is probably the key part - delivery and action. There are three elements to this - the destination itself, sustainable businesses and sustainable products. From a place-based point of view the destination is clearly a critical consideration. We want to see markets to be developed in a manner that strives for more sustainability in cultural heritage terms and in a manner that promotes the local, wherever that is possible. We are looking for tourism management practices that balances demand and capacity. We are looking for interpretation to be carefully chosen to focus on distinctiveness; to focus on heritage and diversity.

And we want to see if authorities and areas will establish mechanisms to try to ensure that some economic benefit from tourism factors back into the heritage itself. I suppose the underlying point here is that historic cities are the main context within which most of us will experience cultural heritage as visitors. Consideration is to be given to sustainability as a key core contributor to this including sustainable transport initiatives around cycling, walking and public transport.

Focus on sustainable businesses: In line with sustainability objectives, we think a cultural tourism strategy should favor businesses that are rooted in the inherent strengths of the destination. Businesses should be favored that take conservation and community engagement seriously, in other words have a strong corporate social responsibility. And we want to encourage businesses based on marketing locally distinctive products to provide jobs, including obviously, for local people.

Focus on sustainable products: And lastly, following the theme, the products themselves should reinforce distinctiveness and identity. They should hopefully engage the local community in production, as well as in consumption. We would love to see tourism creatively reuse historic buildings – this is key to the sustainable identity of the place, and even contribute to the restoration and upkeep of the historic buildings. We should strive for businesses and products that have a small carbon footprint.

These principles and guidance relate to the visitor's experience. We need to understand the flow and the process of looking after visitor's experience from the pre visit right through to the after-visit contact. -The critical thing is that we want to see action in the shape of a coherent action plan. So, it is not all talk. The whole process can be enriching for all those involved but unless it leads to action it will not be satisfactory. What we are trying to achieve is to have the municipality to endorse the principles and to lead the process; for it to have the mechanisms in place that engage with the full range of stakeholders within the tourism ecosystem; and that we have a collective corporate and strategic position agreed.

We want to see an open and honest assessment with an agreed strategy, resources and timetable. For things to change there has to be implementation, but it is a dynamic process.

To conclude, Europe's cultural creative and tourism sector has been hit hard. The webinar title poses the question: What future for tourism in historic areas? The answer is historic areas do have a future that includes tourism. But there is a need for coherent strategies is on the way forward; they are urgent; and they need to cover that spectrum of social, economic, cultural and environmental considerations.

This presents a unique opportunity for those responsible for tourism to imagine a different world; to effect positive systemic change by rethinking our approach towards more local cultural tourism. Place-based European cultural heritage should be seen as the main resource. Of course solutions will be different in each place and responses will need to reflect those differences. So in Heritage Europe we place sustainability and resilience at the heart of the guidance, where tourism should not be perceived as a closed sector but rather as part of a system, which include urban heritage, culture and tourism. We do not ignore the broader environmental issues and the argument the travel is inherently unsustainable. We seek to show how actions towards more sustainable tourism can be taken locally in the context of that bigger picture.

We see the key leadership role in securing more sustainable cultural tourism as potentially falling anywhere across the ecosystem. But, in particular, we need to get municipalities leading – given their democratic mandate - to provide that platform for engagement. This is critical if we are going to rethink, inspire and coordinate a common vision. So, we need clear answers to the questions the guidelines pose, and a willingness to work together from all concerned and openness for innovative thinking.

We see historic urban areas as hubs of innovation and entrepreneurship, embracing new ideas. The guidelines presented here are designed to show how decision makers may assess their current approach and begin to scope, a clear plan of action for a more sustainable and resilient future. The pandemic presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to rise to that challenge and ensure the pandemic cloud can indeed, hopefully, have a silver lining.

The words of Marissa Nanincis artwork at the Guggenheim collection in Venice, perhaps, sums up where we are ‘Changing place, changing time, changing thoughts, changing future’. Thank you.

Post-pandemic tourism: an opportunity or a threat for Malta's historic areas?

Alex Torpiano

In my presentation I will look at the theme of future of tourism in historical areas. When we talk about a theme relating to the future, whether it is post pandemic or not, it's always difficult to determine the approach to take. We must make a distinction whether it is a prediction of what is going to happen, or a wish of what we wish would happen in the future.

I have divided my contribution into three parts. In the first part of the talk, I will on the future of tourism. I think the Covid pandemic has led many people to realize a number of things. First of all, that, that some regions, and at times whole countries, depend almost exclusively on tourism. When the tourism industry is effected by a crisis, such as a pandemic, these regions and countries find themselves in serious trouble. This can be quite a blow. This should open our eyes that too much dependency on tourism is not a good thing, because it can be wiped out in a relatively short time.

Climate change is another issue that needs to be considered when discussing the future of tourism because it may impinge on air travel. Being a small island at some distance from source markets, air travel is essential for Malta's tourism, probably much more than it is for other countries.

Air travel is a significant contributor to carbon emissions. In some studies, it has been rated at about two and a half percent of global emissions. Most of this is passenger transport and most of that is tourism.

In some countries, this proportion is even higher. Before the pandemic it was one of the highest and fastest growing activities in the area of emissions. Recently I was reading that the production of contrails (the trails of condensed water behind airplanes) can have an even greater impact on climate, than even the plane's carbon dioxide emissions. The aviation industry is working hard to have planes with reduced emissions, but certainly, at the moment, air travel is big contributor to climate change.

Cruise ships are another important form of travel for Malta. They have also been highlighted as major polluters of the marine environment as well as of the air. Conventionally cruise ships use a dirtier type of fuel with higher emissions than those produced by cars.

Here's a provocative argument to contemplate. I would argue that the contribution of cruise ships to the local economy is doubtful. The tourists arriving by cruise liners live and eat on the ships. They make use of some land transport services, possibly use guide facilities and maybe buy some souvenirs but in my view, in general terms, they do not really contribute that much to the local economy.

Malta's tourism is at a disadvantage when compared to mainland Europe, where the train is a viable form of transport, which is one of the cleaner modes of transport.

I think another important impact of modern tourism has been on the social and cultural life of the places that tourists want most explore and experience. The stories are well known. During the pandemic, the waters around Venice recovered, to the extent of having fish again, after a very long time. Just imagine, we are celebrating the fact that, in the sea, you could find fish! And now, the city is working very hard to bring back the residents of Venice. Again just imagine, we are celebrating the fact that the city is refilled with its own citizens, with its own residents. Many Venice people left the central part of the city because of the negative impacts of tourism: cost of living, overburdened public transport, and the entry of numerous tourism-related shops that pushed out shops serving residents daily needs.

Another point which is important to consider about contemporary tourism is the duration of the stay. I was reading somewhere that more than half of the 24 million annual visitors to Venice spend just one day in the city. To a certain extent, you find this also in Malta, because if you look at the itinerary of cruise liners and their trips around the Mediterranean, Malta is just one day. And that one day probably means one afternoon in Valletta. I have experienced Dubrovnik. The old city of Dubrovnik has been described as being destroyed by tourism, to the extent that, first of all, the authorities decided to limit the number of cruise liners, from seven to eight cruise liners per day, to two per day, which is clearly a harsh decision. What is even more shocking is that the mayor issued warnings to the residents to be careful when there were tourists around. This is like an announcement saying that tourists are bad for your health.

In other countries, and cities such as Amsterdam and Barcelona, there has been the same phenomenon - residents suffer residential homes changing into legal and illegal tourism accommodation. This leads to an increase in rental prices, and effectively makes homes unaffordable for young resident families. I have already mentioned the problem of shops, providing for the daily needs of residents, being replaced by tourism-oriented shops. Of course, there is the replacement of public space with outdoor cafes and restaurants. Then, there are public transport issues, and so on and so forth.

All of these cities are looking at the future of tourism in their cities, first of all, by reducing numbers, and by recovering the public realm for the residents. This is not a prediction but a wish – I think the future model of tourism in Malta therefore should change towards reduced numbers, and slower tourism, that is, discouraging one-day city visits in favour of longer stays.

The term destination management is being used nowadays, which represents the idea that you balance the needs of residents with those of the industry, and to possibly direct visitors away from the most popular places to other less well-known localities. This is an approach that should be applied to Malta as well.

The second part of the title is historic areas. Which are historic areas? Which are the parts of Malta and Gozo which we consider historic? ...

In the construction industry, the concept of touristic areas is embedded in certain construction regulations, in the sense that, during the summer months, in these areas, construction work is not allowed. The summer is traditionally conceived as the peak tourism months in these areas. And the reason for this prohibition is that it is presumed that construction activities will bother tourists. This is very interesting concept - it does not matter if the residents are bothered all the year round, but it does matter if we disturb tourists.

I mentioned the cruise liner visitors to Malta. In a single day, they have to visit, “Malta”, which of course generally means Valletta. And, even in Valletta, what do they really manage to see in that one day? Almost invariably they see St John’s Cathedral; perhaps the Upper Barrakka gardens? and the Malta Experience? What else? What else do they need to see of Malta?

If they have a longer stay, there are organized tours to Mdina and Birgu. Interestingly, in tourism literature many of these sites are promoted because they are linked to the TV series “Game of Thrones”. The message is ‘Come and see where the “Game of Thrones” was filmed’. There is very rarely any real emphasis on the historic value of the cities that we promote.

So, what do we understand by historical areas? Are our towns and villages historic areas? Do we need to widen the meaning of historic areas, and invite tourists to other parts of the island to disperse them? Or is it better to keep a narrow meaning of this definition, perhaps to protect these areas from the impact of tourism, and to make sure that they are not as affected by tourists, as the more popular, and more conventional tourist sites of Valletta and Mdina?

At the beginning of the tourism industry in the sixties, the primary selling point of Malta and Gozo was the sea and the sun. Of course, nowadays tourists are more discerning than that, and globally there is a growing interest in visiting a country because of its, let’s call it, “cultural heritage”; because of its distinctiveness. But this is not really a recent development. The 18th/19th century Grand Tour there was a bit of this concept. People who could afford it would visit different places in order to learn more about the culture of different countries. Of course, the Grand Tours were much slower events, back then, than weekend trips.

You can see that this interest in “cultural heritage” has impacted Malta. Valletta has reacted to this interest in cultural heritage by a flood of boutique hotels and a number of Airbnb’s, mostly housed in historic buildings, and in buildings that are architecturally interesting, but which had previously been abandoned. And, beyond Valletta, there is also an increasing number of small boutique hotels in many, what I would call “historic”, towns and villages; places like Birgu, Bormla, Rabat, Siggiewi, Mosta, Zebbug, Qala, Nadur, Xewkija and other locations. I think this development is good, especially for the longer stay tourist, because these do not work well for the short-term stay.

But could it be over done? In Malta unfortunately we suffer from this phenomenon - if something works, everybody wants to do it. So if boutique hotels were a good idea, now everybody has to have a boutique hotel. And so, every other house which has potentially historic interest is looked at in this light. For example, I was in Zebbug last week. In one small area of

Zebbug, there were about three applications for boutique hotels, in beautiful stately homes, which tourists would enjoy.

Are we suffering as much as Dubrovnik? Is this phenomenon affecting us well? In Valletta, the prices of houses for young couples has shot up because of boutique hotels and Airbnb accommodation. Therefore, to a certain extent, tourism facilities are pushing residential potential also in Valletta. There is also, of course, the other side of the coin. Many of these properties were probably large, abandoned, and too expensive for locals to buy, and refurbish them, without any assistance. So the big question is: should these transformations be prohibited? Or should their number be capped, at a certain stage? I think that the one has to keep a very careful eye on the impact of tourism-related investment in these areas. As I said before, investment is a good idea. It helps these properties, and it helps the localities in which these properties are found, otherwise they will remain abandoned and dilapidated, and that has an effect on the locality. There is no doubt that there is genuine interest of tourists in the historic areas beyond Valletta and Mdina, and the Victoria Cittadella. And, to a certain extent, this has had a very beneficial effect because it has spurred the local residents to appreciate the beauty and importance of what they have in their locality.

When one lives in a particular area, one sometimes take for granted a dilapidated house, and one do not appreciate its importance. I think that this type of investment has helped many localities to appreciate what they have; that which is beautiful, worth saving, and worth looking after. Of course, I am making a generic statement because, of course, over the years, there have been many who have appreciated our urban heritage without this prompting. I am Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa, which has been in existence for about 55 years, and over those years there have been people who recognized and appreciated the legacy we inherited.

I think that, here, there is there is one catch, which we need to think about. When you invest in an area, you actually change it. Now, the change could be beneficial. But, at a certain stage, the change could become counterproductive, in the sense that the characteristics that the tourist wanted to experience, have actually changed. It is almost as if you cannot really do anything, because as soon as you do something, that something changes.

This leads me to my final point, which is to look at what should we do. We first have to ask: why should we have tourism in historic areas? Why might the tourist be interested in historic areas? There's a lot of literature about this question. I came across one definition of heritage tourism, which is: "Traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and peoples of the past". A key concept in this definition is authenticity. What does authenticity mean?

Is it possible for tourists on a day trip from a cruise liner to really experience the authentic Valletta, or what survives of it? Or is the visit to Valletta merely a show? Is this historic-heritage tourism merely an entertainment? I read somewhere that this type of tourists do not really spend much time in museums, which have been often considered as complimentary to the presentation and explanation of the significance of historic areas. So one wonders whether these visits to historic areas really have a pedagogic objective, whether people really want to learn more about the history and the culture of the place. Or is it, as I said before, a form of entertainment? One has taken a cruise trip; there is a stop in Malta; there is one day to go around - maybe stop at a few souvenir shops. Or is the visit something that the tourist *must* do, because they are guided by internet sites which direct which sites to visit in Malta and in Valletta. Is this the objective the tourist aspires to?

I would conclude my contribution by saying that, if it were a good idea to open the relatively unfamiliar historic areas to tourism, we must ensure that the negative impacts are mitigated – and this is to avoid losing the very characteristics that one might want to show to tourists.

I think the bottom line is that Malta and Gozo need to have a rational tourism plan. We need to have a consistent vision of what type of tourist we want in Malta and Gozo. The next 10-year plan for tourism in Malta was recently launched. I must admit I have not seen it - I do not know if it's readily available – but I know that it has emphasized that Malta will seek a greater quality in tourism. I would understand this to mean that we have now decided to move away from mass tourism, and that politicians will no longer pride themselves, simply, by quoting the crude number of tourist visits.

Unless we do this, we would not really achieving quality in tourism. Do we want a tourist industry which is focused on the unique treasures of the urban and rural Malta beyond Valletta

and Mdina? And, if we really want this, then the provision of boutique hotels, and the type of tourist tours that we see in Malta is not enough.

In my opinion, one of the most ironic images in Malta is the large mural which could be seen at Luqa airport on the hoarding covering construction work, (an image also found on MTA brochures), with photographs of the beautiful traditional doorways that we find in some of our historic urban areas. At the same time, Malta has development policies that encourage the destruction of these doorways. So the tourist could see them on the mural, but soon will not be able to see them in their real urban context. The same thing can be said of historic gardens, of historic landscapes and views.

We must therefore be consistent. It's not enough to have a tourism policy. We must have a policy – one that is sustainable, which considers climate change, tourist numbers, impacts on quality of life of residents, impacts on urban space. But at the same time, this tourism policy must be accompanied by other policies, particularly development planning policies, otherwise the desired quality tourism will not happen.

Today, we have been talking about the tourism industry, and focusing on how to attract the visitors to our island. We debate what can be done to make their visit more attractive. I would argue that whatever we do to attract visitors, it must be motivated first and foremost to be of benefit to our citizens.

In other words, if we improve the quality of life for our citizens, for our permanent residents, then automatically, we make the place more attractive to visitors, who can then partake of this quality of life. If there is something beautiful and historic to show off to visitors, then it must be something that also contributes to a higher quality of life for the residents. That should be the real objective of the industry, and should be the real objective of coordinated policies in favour of the future tourism industry in Malta.

Equating mobility, public space and tourism in Lisbon downtown

João Rafael Santos

It is really a pleasure and an honour to be part of this webinar. I am an architect and so I am mostly concerned in my research interests about the physical aspects of public space and their relationship with infrastructure, mobility and in the case of this webinar about the tourism. My presentation is a brief overview of an article I wrote that was published in the Journal of Public Space.

We can talk of two tourism models – the hyper tourism model in which attractions are devised in themed, enclaved spaces (mega malls, amusement parks, resorts, casino complexes and recreated/touristified heritage). We associate this with an American form of tourism (van den Berg et al, 2003). Then there is the territorialized model which is far more complex. The latter intermingles the visitors, the users and the residents. It is probably closer to what some authors call that European model, probably closer to our own practice.

There are conflicts and contradictions in the interface between tourism and the city; between global tourism and the local scale; issues of touristification, gentrification and commodification; the conflicting rationales of public investment and regulation of private-led development.

It also raises issues of development priorities; short term vs long term. Lisbon is a good test to address these issues, with a focus on the physical relationship between mobility and infrastructure. Lisbon is a ‘water city’, between the ocean and the river. The waterfront is the place mainly of heavy infrastructure both for the port, and for rail and roads mobility. The central area of the city, with its valuable historic heritage, is where many of these flows converge. It is a good place to understand these relationships that occur at different scales. Until the 1980s / 1990s, Lisbon had a rather disconnected mobility system as railroad stations were not connected with other modes. There was a very strong pressure from cars - this is something that our cities have all known during these times. And there has been a big investment in the late 90s to integrate these different transportation networks; rail, public transport, river boats and so on. This has also allowed for the first steps into the requalification of public space, mainly through the building of underground parking, which freed up space on the surface for urban piazzas.

This was the first generation of transformations that was then followed by the more robust and incremental development of a connected network of pedestrian-friendly spaces, not only along the riverfront but also with connections with the smaller streets and alleys that go up in the hills. Lisbon is a city of hills and also a city with a relationship to the water. So what happens in the urban areas on the hills is very reliant upon mobility, as the hilly terrain is a difficult space for mobility.

Improving these connections is needed, not only for the tourists, but mainly for the residents - for the people who live there, who have their businesses in these areas. Of course, all of these interventions enormously facilitated the space for the tourist movement. New spaces were opened; abandoned spaces that were kind of secret became accessible to the public. We could say that all of these improvements are very important for the city as a whole.

This was of course very good for tourism. And indeed, in the last decades we saw that how tourism changed dramatically. There were more visitors to Lisbon mostly by air but also, not so much but also importantly, the cruise ships.

Overnight stays and the Airbnb units have put pressure on the central historical districts of the city. In terms of the mobility, historical trams are very important features of Lisbon, and also the passenger lifts that facilitate the life of people. We have seen how these also become tourist attractions.

These raise conflicts, but also opportunities. We have introduced a range of new transportation services and possibilities. These have not been fully appropriated by the residents, but they open the door to something different and very interesting. Even in a recent project of a recently constructed cruise ship terminal, the roof of this terminal became a public space for people to see the city. So it is now also part of city and not just a functional place for tourists and for cruise ships. New services and routes of river cruises have been developed. Some old tram lines have been reopened. They serve the city as a whole.

To understand the interrelationships we can talk of a framework with three fields, namely, public space renewal, transportation infrastructure and the mobility services. Different elements of public space that have been renovated establish a relationship with each one of these fields. Each of these three fields can be seen from two perspectives. The first is concerned with the forms of territorialization, how space is shaped and morphologically characterized; how geographical

relationships between different components are mapped out. This is a more long-term perspective. The second is regards the relationship with tourism. What are the demands? What are the needs? What are innovations that emerge from these relationships? Then there is also the conflict that needs to be considered between tourism activities and local communities.

We are talking, perhaps on the long term structural changes but also on the very dynamic and conjectural relationships. To conclude, what are the main issues and contributes from Lisbon case? How can we understand the physical improvement in public space? Did it contribute or not to the social and economic change and to tourism in the city centre and in historic areas? I would say that, yes, it has facilitated and promoted tourism. At the same time tourism was also facilitated by the changes in the metropolitan mobility infrastructure. These were done for the people who use these public spaces to go from home to work but they were also relevant to tourism. The intermingling of the everyday life of residents with tourism activity may be seen as beneficial to tourism.

Mobility and public space are the common ground in this robust network of shared spaces.

The development of the urban structure in central Lisbon in the last 20 years has been able to deliver considerable improvements to the shared system of streets, plazas and transport interfaces, bringing together very diverse strata of urban users, including tourists, and linking multiple spaces and scales.

As a result of the covid pandemic, the tourism landscape has changed dramatically but the infrastructure (mobility + public space) will persist.

That is very important for the future – to have infrastructure that can serve different purposes. This is an interesting and potential way of understanding how tourism infrastructure and mobility can be equated for the future. Thank you all for your attention.

Debate held online:

What future for coastal tourism resorts?

Dr. Marie Avellino kicked off the discussion by pointing out that tourism development needs to be driven by a long term strategy of 15 or 20 years. This does not coincide with the political cycle which looks at a 4 to 5 year timespan, often even less. There is also consultation but this is carried out top-down with a document being produced behind closed doors and then the public is expected to comment. This is not real consultation. It needs to be bottom-up with input being given from different expertise.

Dr. Noel Buttigieg noted that many coastal destinations are victims of their own success with rapid increases in tourism numbers. Then we get knee jerk reactions in trying to deal with this rapid growth. Sometimes tourism activity becomes so overwhelming that the coastal resort loses its identity and becomes just another touristy place. Resorts are unable or unwilling to slow down tourism growth. From a tourism perspective, some people were actually thankful for pandemic as it made us stop and think.

Prof. Andrew Smith noted the remarkable growth of Malta's tourism over the years and argued that it's very difficult to reverse growth and to think about ways of sort of backtracking. At one time there was talk of a moratorium on new developments we're going to be seeing but this was seen to be not viable. The idea of not developing sites that were previously not built proved to be, in most instances, too difficult to implement. In some locations a more radical approach of degrowth is required, involving the removal of structures, recovering coastlines and restoring them to allow natural processes to occur.

Dr. Javier García Sanabria noted that a good example of degrowth is Benidor where the quality of the destination was declining. Companies operating in the resort came together and developed a joint strategy to change the destination. This included the demolition of some inappropriately located buildings. This can happen but the strategy has to be developed through a participatory process.

Prof. Andrew Jones pointed out how coastal environments have deteriorated and lost their quality due to commercialisation and also visually unpleasant developments. The commercialisation due to tourism is something that we see on a daily basis. Climate change is real but we do not see it day to day. It is a creeping issue that becomes more evident in the medium- to long-term. It is however something to which that we need to adapt. Storm surges and extreme weather are becoming more frequent as are the damages to property that they bring

to coastal areas. Extreme weather conditions also disrupt transport services including air travel and ferry services that are so vital to coastal and island resorts such as Malta. Climate change is an issue that is creeping up the global agenda including that of coastal communities.

Dr. John Ebejer: To follow up on the comment on climate change, Dr. Ebejer noted that it is an issue about which we will be talking much more once the pandemic is over. A difficulty of Mediterranean resorts is that they rely on air travel for the bulk of their tourism. On the one hand, we talk about the need to reduce our carbon footprint. Potentially one way of doing that is by putting some kind of constraint or fee on air travel. On the other hand, that would undermine resorts which are virtually only accessible by air, such as Malta and many other resorts in the Mediterranean. My question is this: How do we reconcile these two demands? If the EU seeks to take measures to reduce the carbon footprint of aviation, say, by imposing a tax, what stand should Mediterranean resorts take?

Mr. Leslie Vella: In reply Mr. Vella noted that this is a very topical and sensitive issue, which unfortunately sometimes gets confused with other interests. There are many different forces and economic interests that come into play. There is the need to identify which economic activities, and not just aviation and tourism that contribute to carbon emissions and identify the respective economic benefits thereof. Other factors might be communities or countries pushing to limit tourism flow from one area to another and thereby keeping it for themselves. Mr. Vella drew a parallel from sustainability indicators which he argued are based on perspectives of the realities of people living in a different environment. And these are imposed on other communities and places, with a different culture. To be sustainable one needs to adapt and think of better ways how to do things. On carbon emission reduction, we need to look at other forms of trade. Taking extreme positions will kill tourism. The isolation of tourism and the demonisation of tourism is definitely not the way forward. There are many things that can be done like ensuring that airline fleets are the most modern with the least possible emissions. Like adapting to new technologies. Like moving away from carbon. The discussion needs to be much more honest and much less biased in a way that improves things, rather than restricts.

Dr. John Ebejer added that environmental sustainability is linked to economic sustainability. A tourism destination cannot be economically sustainable unless it has good transport links with the wider world, and in the case of Mediterranean resorts that includes connections by air. If action is taken that undermines air travel, economic viability is undermined and that in turn reduces the resorts ability to invest in the environment.

Prof. Andrew Jones observed that, for many destinations, an increase in staycations was one the key benefits of the pandemic. Of course this does not help places like Malta that is completely reliant on overseas tourism. But it certainly had positive impact on some places. New Zealand, for example, closed its borders so it no longer had Chinese and Asian tourists. But it actually had a significant increase in GDP thanks to domestic tourism.

Prof. Andrew Smith remarked that in staycations there is a value that's not just the economic value, but a value in domestic audiences of rediscovering and re-appreciating their own environments. This is happening in the pandemic, when people even in their own local community spend more time discovering their own places. There is a limit to staycations in Malta but still there is some level of domestic tourism, especially with reference to Gozo. Admittedly however that is not going to replace the value of international tourism.

Mr. Leslie Vella remarked that there is nothing wrong with staycation. There is nothing wrong with people perhaps travelling less and spending more time to discover places closer to home. Even in Malta, there are so many places that are still open to discovery. We should however be careful not to confuse two issues namely the desire for more sustainability in tourism and the effects of the pandemic on tourism. To explain, Mr. Vella used an interesting metaphor. An obese middle-aged man lost a lot of weight in a relatively short period of time. He met a friend who he had not seen for some time. The friend complimented him for having lost so much weight thinking that the extra weight was lost through exercise and special diets. Actually the man had lost weight because he had been through a terrible disease. When debating the benefits of staycation, we should not use the calamity of the pandemic as an excuse to justify a sudden shift in travel patterns. Using the sustainability argument and glorifying staycation on the basis of the pandemic is not an honest argument to be made. Tourism experts are pleased that the tourism industry has shrunk but this happened because it has emerged from a pandemic crisis and not because of the different, more sustainable, lifestyle that one hopes people are adopting.

Prof. Andrew Smith: Looking back on Malta's tourism growth, there were times when this was relatively limited or even flat. The argument from Maltese tourism stakeholder at the time was that this was something positive as it retained the numbers within the destination's carrying capacity of 1.5 million tourists. In more recent years there was a spike in tourist numbers and this was actually celebrated and seen as an incredible achievement. So, from an external perspective, Malta has a big problem with the idea of growth because it has allowed excessive growth of tourism. It is easy for a tourism destination to get 'addicted' to numbers. The idea of limiting tourism is problematic and it is difficult to do anything in practice.

Prof. Tom Selwyn: There is the need to strengthen local democracies and empower local councils to take actions for the benefit of their residents. What we have in Britain is a state which is entirely devoted to its own interests with Members of Parliament pursuing their own interests, without understanding the needs at the local level. Since the 1980s, the financial resources allocated to local authorities has been reduced by fifty per cent.

Mr. Christian Borg (Merrill Eco Tours) noted that local farmers also have a stake in coastal management as they take care of the fields in coastal areas. They maintain age old traditions as well as the traditional stepped fields landscape in some coastal areas.

Dr. Julian Zarb expressed regret that about the lack of implementation of the 2015 Blue Plan for the Mediterranean. He attributed this mainly to the short-termism of government policies. We need long-term visions and to remain focused if we are to get things done.

Dr. Karl Agius expressed concern about mega projects that are being talked about for Gozo such as the Malta-Gozo tunnel which will generate one million cubic metres of waste. Occasionally a proposal for a cruise liner terminal in Gozo is also talked about and debated. Dr. Agius also argued for the encouragement of a different form of coastal tourism – one that is based on protected areas and marine protected areas. Most protected areas in Malta and Gozo are along coastal shorelines and cliffs. In publications and website of the Malta Tourism Authority, nature is often referred to as a possibility to expand the brand of destination Malta.

Mr. Leslie Vella: For the phenomenon of tourism one needs a very multidisciplinary approach and a multi-layered approach. Anyone who tries to do something to tourism through unilateral action from one perspective is bound to fail. We need to bring in as many points of views as possible and that is why debates such as this are important.

Debate held online:

What future for tourism in historic areas?

Dr John Ebejer: There is keen competition between cities. Cities invest specifically to make their city better than their neighbours in the region and better than other cities across Europe. In the last 20 years, hundreds of cities across Europe have invested heavily in their historic areas and in their transport infrastructure. In Malta, we have not really understood that we are in competition especially on cultural and heritage tourism. In Malta, we are too reliant on sun and sea tourism. We have not given enough attention to our historic areas as a resource for tourism.

Dr. Dane Munro: There is something that we can call ‘touristic authenticity’. This means it is old, it is real and we do not have it in our home city. In Malta we have experienced a building boom in the last twenty years. I do not have anything against buildings, but I have something against ugly buildings. We are condemned lifelong to look at ugly things, which I do not think is a fair thing. So why can't we build something pretty? Is it so difficult to build something pretty, or is it easier to build something ugly? Tourism suffers from it. On boutique hotels, there is the good side and the bad side, and the ugly. The same goes for Airbnb. They all lead to gentrification, touristification and commoditization. On tours in old parts of Malta - in the authentic parts – tourists can read about them in books, of course, but it is a tourist guide who, on authenticity, gives the meat on the bone. If the guide has a good day then the tourist can get a very rich experience. But there are good days and days.

Prof. George Cassar: We are in the middle of a pandemic. For the future the fear isn't that we do not have tourism. The fear is that the situation will become more problematic because there is a lot of pent-up demand. Such a reaction can create greater impacts than what we had prior February 2020.

Prof. Andrew Jones: creating environmentally good places for people to visit is very important. We need to think about the public realm as a whole. Whether it is cultural tourism or otherwise, we need to make attractive places for people to visit. In Malta, it is a lesson that we have not learnt very well as other tourism destinations have done. In Malta there is little or investment in the public realm and in the creation of quality environments. It is likely that as tourism starts to grow again, tourists will become more discerning in where they choose to visit and therefore making attractive environments is very important.

Prof. Alex Torpiano: What cities such as Lisbon are doing, in reality, is to address the problems of the residents. A good place to live in for the residents is also attractive for tourists. There are many places in Malta that are historic (such as many village cores) but they are not attractive places to live in for their own residents. This is also the case in the tourism areas. In St. Julians, for example it's all very well to have five star hotels but when you step out of them you have an ugly environment. You cannot attract tourists of quality just by having good quality hotels. We

need the whole country to be improved. That means making it better for the residents first. Think of the resident, and then it will be attractive for tourists.

Dr John Ebejer: In Malta we do not give enough attention to the public realm. On the other hand many cities across Europe invest in their public spaces. They also invest in their public transport infrastructure. Cities invest primarily for their residents but, because they do so, they become more attractive and amenable for tourism. An issue related to the public realm is public transport and sustainable mobility. A city needs a comprehensive transport policy that addresses public transport as well as walking and cycling. The lack of a sustainable transport policy has significant environmental consequences, as is happening in Malta. Inadequate public transport brings about more cars on the roads, greater difficulty to go from one place to another, greater difficulty to find parking and more cars occupying public spaces. The degraded environment caused by more and more cars is an issue primarily for residents, but it also effects tourism. The issue of the quality of public spaces is linked to transport strategy. Unfortunately, in recent years there has been too much emphasis on widening arterial roads and virtually no investment on public transport infrastructure. Little or no effort went into making public transport more frequent and reliable to attract more people to use it.

Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino: Public spaces tend to be undervalued. If something is public, it belongs to everyone that effectively means it belongs to no one. The argument is often made that private goods belong to someone and that someone has the incentive to take care of it. If you leave a space public than it is abandoned and people which chuck rubbish into it. There might be a hidden agenda towards privatisation. How do we fight against this?

Dr John Ebejer: In reply Dr. Ebejer argued that what is needed is good governance. There needs to be the appropriate structures that manage and take care of these public spaces. Many other cities do this. They are able to because they have good governance and clearer lines of responsibility. Malta has a long history of poor management of public spaces. This is partly due to inadequate allocation of resources to it and partly because of lack of awareness about this issue, especially at the political level.

Mr. Brian Smith: Many cities are developing strategies of the way they interpret their place to get buy-in from locals. In dealing with the public realm, a city needs to be clear who makes the decisions. Because otherwise debates on the quality of public spaces will keep going round in circles. If the public realm is looked after, it attracts local buy-in and engagement with their sense of place. Residents get outside and enjoy the place that they live in and working.

Dr. Marie Avellino: Recent research demonstrates that the majority of residents do not want to have more tourists. So on the one hand you have the government, and also maybe businesses, wanting to increase numbers. On the other hand the general feeling amongst the Maltese public is that there should not be more tourists. The perception is that the overdevelopment that is

taking place, especially in some areas, is due to tourism, even if this might not actually be the case. This perception makes people take a negative stance towards tourism. On authenticity, Dr. Avellino pointed out that there is a lot of debate in tourism literature on the real meaning of authenticity. She argued that ultimately it is not the authenticity, real or perceived, that matters but the quality that is offered by a destination.

Ms. Isabella De Battista (Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association): Hotels and restaurants are required to maintain standards and they are subject to inspections by MTA officials, as it should be. But when you walk outside the standard is poor with lack of cleanliness and some pavements unsafe to walk on. Why is it so difficult for Malta to get things right? Another difficulty that MHRA faces is the frequent change of the minister responsible for tourism. We put a lot of effort into lobbying and every time we have a change in minister we have to start all over again.

Dr Julian Zarb: The pandemic provides an opportunity to rethink tourism but in doing so we need involve the local community to achieve an integrated approach.

Prof. Andrew Jones. On capital projects such as the city gate Malta does reasonably well in terms of creating public space. For tourism resort areas, however, such as Sliema, St Julian's and Bugibba, Malta seems to do badly in creating and maintaining public space. Whether it is a funding problem whether it is an organization problem I do not know but surely this is an issue that needs to be addressed. A strategic approach is more likely to be successful.

Prof. Alex Torpiano: we need to think about improving things for the residents rather than thinking for the tourist. The improvement for the tourist will happen once the authorities take action to improve the public realm for residents. We need to stop thinking about touristic areas because everywhere is a touristic area as every village and town in Malta could be of interest to tourists. In recent years a lot of money was spent on new roads but not a single cent went on changing the system that supplies electricity to houses. In our streets we still have those hanging wires hung onto facades. We take them for granted and we barely notice them but they uglify our streets and environments.