

# Training Workshop for Chambers of Commerce on Small Islands

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## Introduction

INSULEUR, the Network of the Island Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the European Union in collaboration with the Gozo Business Chamber and the Islands and Small States Institute organised the 1st Executive Training Programme which was held at the University Gozo Centre on the 12th and 13th June 2008. INSULEUR is a non-profit association which operates at the European level to enhance economic and social development of the EU islands through close cooperation of island Chamber of Commerce and industry.

The Programme aimed to promote the sustainable development of European island regions. The themes of the workshop included “Management of Sustainable Development with Special Reference to Islands”, “Economic Vulnerability and Resilience with Reference to Islands”, “Sustainable Tourism and Islands”, “Environment and Islands: with Emphasis to Climate Change” and “Energy and Islands: Alternative Energy Resources”.

The objective of the Executive Training Programme was to help participants to familiarise themselves with issues of insular development and to offer them the necessary instruments to support their organisations to achieve a double mission: (a) to take an active part in the European Union and National Policy Plans for the development of the insular areas of the European Union and; (b) to contribute to the development of the insular regions under their jurisdiction.

The Workshop was inaugurated by the Hon. Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo who welcomed all the participants whilst expressing her appreciation of the endeavours of the organisers as well as for the confidence shown in the island of Gozo by the Board of Directors of INSULEUR. Minister Debono described briefly some of the unique characteristics and the charms of the island of Gozo and how Government has continuously been addressing Gozo’s regional needs.

Introductory speeches were delivered by Mr George Assonitis, from the Technical Committee of INSULEUR, Professor Lino Briguglio, Director of the Islands and



The opening session of the INSULEUR Training Workshop.

Small States Institute and Mr Joe Grech, President of the Gozo Business Chamber.

Mr Joe Grech said that Island regions do appreciate and welcome the fact that the European Regional Development Fund – Cohesion Fund 2007–2013 is meant to cover and offset the structural handicaps which are accelerating the under-performance of the Islands' economy.

He proposed that the network of Chambers of Commerce in small EU islands should create a vision, a strategic plan whereby contacts will be established with each and every EU structure so that, instead of derogations and temporary measures, the EU Commission will provide permanent solutions that address the Islands' permanent structural handicaps.



The Hon. Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo, delivering her speech. Also present are (left to right) Mr Joe Grech, Professor Lino Briguglio and Mr George Assonitis.

## Sustainable Development

The focus of the training workshop was sustainable development. In his presentation of the subject, Professor Briguglio said that the ultimate aim of sustainable development is to improve the quality of life of the current generation without compromising that of future generations.

He emphasised that sustainable development cannot be compatible with economic stagnation and retardation – the word “development” itself suggests improvements, including material ones. Thus while environmental and social concerns should feature prominently in sustainable development goals, economic development should be given due importance. This holistic approach requires a long-term view of development, rather than one based on short term economic gains.

Sustainable development assigns major importance to the integrity of nature and biodiversity, as well as to the eradication of poverty, the removal of social injustice and other factors that work against human welfare of current and future generations. He explained that small islands face particular problems in pursuing sustainable development goals due, amongst other things, to limited resources, a relatively large coastal zone and relatively high population density.

In another presentation on Climate Change, Professor Briguglio explained that small islands like Gozo will be disproportionately affected in the sense that their green house gas emissions from the island are negligible but even with half a metre sea level rise they will be extensively harmed through the loss of their beaches. This will have a very high negative repercussion on the Gozitan economy.

Mr Julian Zarb when referring to sustainable tourism explained that tourism depends heavily on the environment in the sense that coastal areas and congenial climate serve as major attractions for tourists. At the same time tourism activities have major impacts on the environment. Very often tourism structures cause irreversible damage to the coastal areas. For this reason tourism authorities need to adopt sound environmental governance if they want to derive long term benefits from tourism. Mr Zarb also referred to the social impact of tourism and the need for tourists to be sensitive to the culture of the host community.

## Economic Vulnerability and Resilience

Dr Gordon Cordina explained that small islands tend to be affected to a very high degree by economic factors outside their control. This reality is also true for Gozo given that the economic development of the island depends to a very high extent on conditions in Malta and in Europe in general. For this reason small islands need to adopt sound economic governance in order to enable them to withstand the harmful effects of external shocks.

## Other Presentations

Ms Nadia Farrugia, when discussing composite indices said that some realities are multi-faceted. She said that in order to take these many dimensions into account it is important to construct composite indices. In her presentation, she explained how such indices can be



Participants of the INSULEUR Training Workshop in the courtyard of the University Gozo Centre

constructed and what desirable criteria should underpin their construction.

Dr Joe Cilia referred to the various research initiatives being taken by the University of Malta including the following:

- Electric Drives (DC Motors, Induction Motors, Permanent Magnet Motors, Switched Reluctance Motors)
- Electric Boat Project
- Electric Car Project
- Battery energy storage – Motive and Standby
- Solar Grid Connected Systems
- Water Leakage Detection System
- Wind Generation Systems
- Energy Efficient Buildings

He said that the university is collaborating with other institutions of higher education including Nottingham University, Sheffield University and Valencia Polytechnic in carrying out this research.

In their presentation, Mr. Evangelos Douloufakis and Mr. George Assonitis explained some technicalities relating to the presentation and submission of a project proposal. They said that the presentation stage must be thorough and coherent with the objective of the project. It should also be carefully structured. They also

discussed the desirable properties at the submission stage and based their explanation on the submission of an actual proposal entitled INNOVA.

### Conclusion

The training workshop attracted representatives from different chambers of commerce in small European islands. It proved to be very successful in that it elicited considerable discussion on the themes of the presentations. It also initiated a series of INSULEUR workshops on specific themes of major interest to small islands.

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