

A New Future for the Island – Eco-Gozo

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Introduction

The vision to have the island of Gozo transformed into an ecological island is an ambitious but achievable one. The eco-island concept is intended to achieve sustainable development goals by promoting a holistic approach to development, taking into account economical, social and environmental concerns.

This approach aims to achieve:

- a better quality of life
- a society exerting less pressure on the environment
- a wholesome natural and cultural environment
- more sustainable jobs

- a caring society for all
- more quality investment
- an enhancement of the island's identity

A Change in Mentality

This is by no means an easy task, yet it may be achieved through the right strategy and above all through synergy and cooperation among all stakeholders involved. First and foremost, this requires a change in mentality involving the Public Sector, the Local Councils, NGOs, the business community, together with the inhabitants and visitors to the island. This poses a fundamental challenge to the concept itself, because, from now on, all actions and decisions in relation to the island have to be taken and maintained within the eco-island perspective.



Prof. Lino Briguglio, director of the University of Malta, Gozo Centre, attends a meeting at the Ministry for Gozo as part of the consultation process connected with the Eco-Goza Vision 2015.



Gozo's beauty: A typical topography of Gozo with the Citadel in the background.

The Process has Begun

The Government has given prominence to this concept in its electoral programme, which in turn was based on its Vision 2015 for the Maltese Islands. At first glance this might seem an over-ambitious target. Will Gozo become a model for other regional and island communities?

When one considers what has happened during recent years one may conclude that perhaps this is not a totally new idea but one which has been fostered through projects and initiatives already implemented under the co-ordination of the Ministry for Gozo. The construction of a new Waste Water Treatment Plant in Gozo, the closure of the sewage outfall at San Blas, the closure of the Qortin dump which is being converted into a family park, the introduction of domestic waste separation, the removal of the incinerator at the Gozo General Hospital and the improvement of the incinerator at the Gozo abattoir can all be considered as attempts to foster sustainable development and as the first steps taken to achieve this ambitious target. To these one may add the courses organised through the

collaboration of the University Gozo Centre some of which focused on good agricultural practices, animal breeding, viticulture, water management and soil conservation.

The Role of Education

Education plays a fundamental role in the success of the eco-island strategy. This does not only refer to classroom education, but will involve educational programmes intended to reach all sectors of society and to usher in the required change in mentality. An example of this approach is the recent experience of the introduction of domestic waste separation. Children went home and explained to their parents and grandparents what they had been told at school about waste separation. An informative publicity campaign complemented school education through the local media. This resulted in an unprecedented success in promoting awareness about the need of waste management. This is the model which may be emulated in the endeavours to foster awareness amongst the general public, but most of all those living on the island, in order that they may



A water catchment area on the way from Rabat to Marsalforn.

appreciate that their contribution is indispensable for the success of the eco-island project.

Launching of a Public Consultation

The Ministry for Gozo is entrusted with the responsibility of this extensive project which will involve all spheres of Gozitan society. The Ministry is seeking to involve the opinion of all those concerned before the appropriate strategy is drafted. Thus a public consultation process has been launched recently where Government and non-Government entities as well as the general public, have been invited to submit their views and ideas regarding this project. Community ownership of their vision is important to ensure the success of the project.

The Ministry for Gozo has widened this consultation by meeting various established NGO's and public entities prior to establishing the final strategy to be adopted. Civil society has an essential role to play in promoting this idea. Environmental groups are of major importance in this regard and will be involved throughout the

whole process. These entities possess invaluable tools and expertise, that are extremely relevant and crucial for the success of Gozo as an eco-island.

Balancing Environmental and Socio-Economic Concerns

Success in this initiative depends on many factors, first amongst them that the stakeholders understand its aims and objectives. All stakeholders will benefit if the quality of life on Gozo is improved, if Gozo provides a healthy natural environment, if the island attracts more tourism and investment. It is thus in everyone's interest to collectively promote and contribute towards steering the eco-Gozo vision on the way to success. Eco-Gozo will surely require large investment to support substantial projects, but its success is critically dependent on each and everyone's contribution.

The eco-Gozo vision aims to see Gozo being transformed into an ecological island within the upcoming seven years. Gozo is beautiful and has unique natural, cultural and social resources that



The Waste Water Treatment plant which is one of the most significant environment-friendly projects realised in Gozo. It has been operating since 2007.

make the island distinct. Through the eco-Gozo project it is envisioned that all these qualities are maintained and enhanced while promoting economic development aspects, keeping the vital balance with the natural and cultural characteristics of the island. This vision aims most of all to render Gozo an attractive tourist destination and a magnet for investment conducive to sustainable development.

It has been very encouraging to note that the concept itself has so far been well-received and this inspires confidence in this ambitious journey which promises a greener and a healthier future for Gozo.

The Hon. Minister Giovanna Debono has been holding the post of Minister for Gozo since September 1998.