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# THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN MALTA AND GOZO

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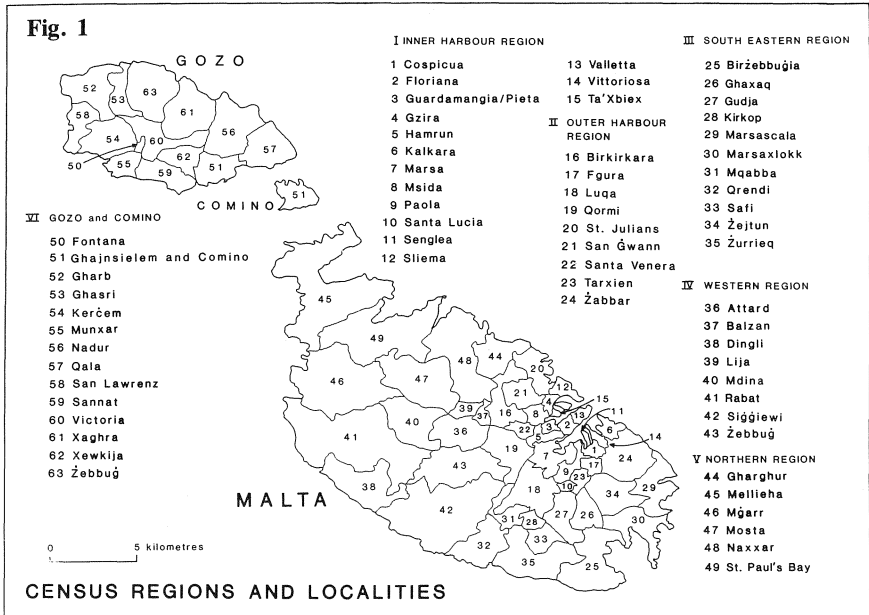
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VARIATIONS in well-being have attracted a great deal of research during the last twenty years.<sup>1</sup> The use of indicators of prosperity, employment structure, and the demographic and social conditions of populations has resulted in a greater awareness of regional and local variations in the quality of life. Most research has focused on the United States, Britain, and other European countries and occasionally, the results have generated much public interest, such as a recent study of the quality of life in British cities by members of the Geography Department at Glasgow University.<sup>2</sup>

In Malta, many of the elements which make up a satisfactory quality of life: opportunities for school leavers, employment, access to services such as health care and adequate transportation and protection of the environment are frequently discussed. Certainly, editorials and letters in the daily and weekly press regularly feature these and other socially relevant issues. While problems like the frequency and reliability of bus services and environmental conflicts concern particular localities, others such as unemployment are usually discussed in national terms. A further difficulty for the researcher has been a lack of appropriate statistics. Although Malta has an efficient statistical service with many annual publications, most data are at the national rather than locality level, making comparison between different communities virtually impossible.

Fortunately, however, the Census of Population and Housing taken in November 1985 produced a major source of demographic, socio-economic, and housing data which was classified into 51 localities in Malta and a further 13 in Gozo (*Fig. 1*). The present author was privileged to co-operate with staff of the Central Office of Statistics in the computer-mapping of data which resulted in the publication of a Census Atlas in February 1987.<sup>3</sup> A brief glance at the spatial pattern in the

1. For example P. L. Knox, *Social well-being: A spatial perspective* (London 1975); M. B. Cottam, P. L. Knox, and P. H. Hirsch, *The Highlands in transition: Current aspects of social geography in a peripheral area*, North Sea Oil Panel Occasional Paper No. 6, Social Science Research Council (London 1981).
2. R. J. Rogerson, A. M. Findlay, and A. S. Morris, 'The geography of quality of life', *Occasional Paper 22*, Department of Geography, University of Glasgow, 1987.
3. Department of Geography, University of Keele, and Central Office of Statistics, *Census '85: Vol. III - A computer-drawn demographic atlas of Malta and Gozo* (Malta 1987). Census data were collected separately for Guardamangia and Pietà and were subsequently amalgamated before the results were published. The two localities have been treated as separate units in this article.



maps reveals that many of the distributions overlap with one another. For example, higher rates of illiteracy, lower levels of educational attainment, and relatively high proportions of pensioners are characteristic of Gozo while high income, levels correlating with above-average employment in the professions, and a high level of residential mobility typify Attard and St Julians. It was felt therefore that an aggregate measure that incorporated a wide range of diagnostic variables would provide a useful picture of the quality of life in each community.

### Levels of living index

Thirty-four variables were chosen (*Table 1*) and the index was calculated by summing the ranked scores on the variables. For each variable, rank 1 was given to the best locality, rank 2 to the second best, and so on.

The index was derived using the formula:

$$I = 100. \sum \left( \frac{R}{N.C} \right)$$

where I is the index value

R is the individual rank-score

N is the number of diagnostic variables

and C is the number of cases.

**Table 1 The indicants of level of living for localities in Malta and Gozo***Housing*

- (1) Shared dwellings
- (2) Vacant dwellings
- (3) One person households
- (4) Five and more person households
- (5) Owner-occupied dwellings
- (6) Rental value Lm 0–50
- (7) Rental value Lm 150 and over
- (8) Occupied dwellings without a bathroom
- (9) Plots issued under the Government home ownership schemes and building development areas, 1976–1985<sup>(a)</sup>
- (10) Detached/semi-detached housing

*Education*

- (11) Adults who have never attended school
- (12) Adults with primary school education only
- (13) University graduates or equivalent
- (14) Illiterate persons aged 10–49
- (15) Illiterate persons aged 50 and over

*Employment*

- (16) Professional and managerial workers
- (17) Unskilled workers
- (18) Persons receiving social assistance
- (19) Gainfully employed population
- (20) Female activity rate
- (21) Persons receiving a pension

*Affluence*

- (22) Low incomes (Lm 31–45)
- (23) High incomes (Lm 60 and over)
- (24) Telephone ownership
- (25) Households with cooker, refrigerator, washing machine, television set, and car

*Social stability*

- (26) Divorced/separated population

*Demographic structure*

- (27) Age group 0–14
- (28) Age group 60 and over
- (29) Population change 1967–1985
- (30) Emigration 1976–1985
- (30) Emigration 1976–1985<sup>(b)</sup>
- (31) Households with no change of residence during the last ten years
- (32) Single persons
- (33) Widowed persons

*Urbanism*

- (34) Persons per square kilometre

Source: Unless otherwise indicated, Central Office of Statistics, *Census '85 Vols. I–III* (Malta 1986–7).

(a) Housing Authority, *Annual Reports 1979–1986*, Malta.

(b) Central Office of Statistics, *Demographic Reviews*, (Malta 1976–85).

Table 2 Levels of living in the Census regions and localities

	Index Value	Rank		Index Value	Rank
<b>INNER HARBOUR</b>					
Cospicua	67.0	55	Dingli	42.0	21
Floriana	65.3	51	Lija	30.7	11
Guardamangia	39.6	19	Mdina	52.6	38
Gzira	48.3	30	Rabat	53.8	40
Hamrun	62.4	47	Siggiewi	42.7	23
Kalkara	51.5	37	Żebbuġ	42.6	22
Marsa	69.3	58			
Msida	43.0	24	<b>NORTHERN</b>		
Paola	54.4	42	Gharghur	39.3	18
Pietà	44.6	25	Mellieħa	44.7	26
Santa Lucia	19.0	1	Mġarr	50.5	34
Senglea	74.2	63	Mosta	30.3	10
Sliema	51.2	35	Naxxar	26.9	6
Valletta	72.6	61	St Paul's Bay	38.6	17
Vittoriosa	60.7	46			
Ta' Xbiex	24.2	5	<b>GOZO</b>		
			Fontana	62.8	49
<b>OUTER HARBOUR</b>					
Birkirkara	38.5	16	Għajnsielem <sup>(b)</sup>	63.1	50
Fgura	23.7	4	Għarb	69.0	57
Luqa <sup>(a)</sup>	58.1	44	Għasri	66.9	54
Qormi	48.0	29	Kerċem	66.0	52
San Ġwann	20.7	2	Munxar	69.7	59
St Julians	28.4	8	Nadur	70.1	60
Santa Venera	33.1	12	Qala	74.6	64
Tarxien	34.9	13	San Lawrenz	60.1	45
Żabbar	47.6	28	Sannat	56.7	43
			Victoria	51.3	36
			Xagħra	68.7	56
<b>SOUTH EASTERN</b>					
Birzebbuga	49.7	33	Xewkija	73.0	62
Għaxaq	48.7	32	Żebbuġ	66.0	52
Gudja	41.2	20			
Kirkop	48.4	31			
Marsascala	28.6	9			
Marsaxlokk	37.9	15	<i>Sources:</i> Central Office of Statistics, <i>Census</i>		
Mqabba	53.8	40	<i>'85, Vols. I-III (Malta</i>		
Qrendi	62.6	48	<i>1986-87); Idem., Demographic</i>		
Safi	36.4	14	<i>Reviews (Malta, 1976-85);</i>		
Żejtun	53.4	39	<i>Housing Authority, Annual Reports</i>		
Żurrieq	45.1	27	<i>(Malta 1979-86).</i>		
			<i>Notes (a)</i> The Has-Serħ home for the elderly		
<b>WESTERN</b>					
Attard	23.0	3	is located in Luqa. This has		
Balzan	27.5	7	depressed the locality's ranking		
			considerably.		
			(b) includes Comino.		

Individual ranks were summed so that low index values are indicative of a high level of living. The index values reflect a surprisingly wide range, from a value of 19.0 for Santa Lucia (the best) to 74.6 for Qala (the worst). Moreover, the variation within each of the regions of Malta is considerable while values for Gozo, though more uniform, tend towards the poor end of the scale (*Table 2*).

In general the spatial pattern of values confirms many of the well-known features of Malta's social geography (*Fig. 2*). The oldest urban areas, which have very high population densities, have some of the worst living standards. Valletta, The Three Cities (Cospicua, Senglea, Vittoriosa), and adjacent working-class residential areas such as Marsa are all close to being least well-off. Paradoxically, the quality of life of those who live in the capital fails to match the availability of shops, cafes, and restaurants, its museums, administrative offices, and historic buildings which make Valletta such an attractive place during working hours. Overall levels of living gradually improve away from the commercial and industrial areas and conditions are markedly better in Msida and Guardamangia, for example.

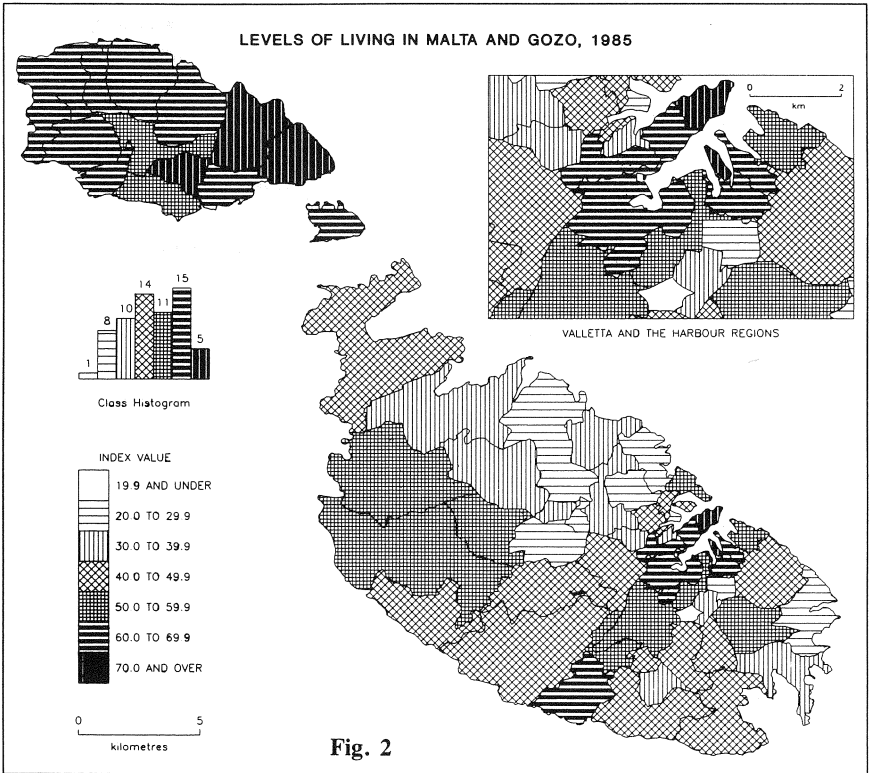


Fig. 2

However, the best values correlate with new private sector and government housing areas such as Fgura and the new towns of San Gwann and Santa Lucia. Such communities are characterized by younger, better-educated populations with high rates of economic activity spread over a wide range of occupations. In addition, these localities scored well on housing quality and domestic amenities.

Beyond the Harbour Regions, variations in levels of living are less extreme. The best localities lie on the fringe of the built-up area. Attard and Balzan have always been prestigious neighbourhoods combining convenience for commuting and an attractive position near the Presidential Palace and the road to Mdina–Rabat. Development in these areas has largely reflected the efforts of private builders. On the other hand, Naxxar, and more particularly Mosta, have witnessed massive government housing schemes which have transformed these once separate communities into extensions of suburbia. Most of the localities which are less well-off tend to be found in the South-East which, apart from the fast growing coastal settlements of Marsascala and Marsaxlokk, have sizeable commuter populations working in the industrial zone and proportionately greater numbers of labourers, such as the quarry workers of Mqabba and Qrendi.

Finally, the index shows that Gozo has proportionately more deprived localities than any other region. Here, higher unemployment rates, a more limited range of employment opportunities, an ageing population and a tradition of emigration all contribute to poorer scores. The index suggests that the residents of Nadur, Xewkija, and Qala, though small in number, are just as deprived as much larger urban communities like Valletta and Senglea.

On a regional basis, Table 3 provides a summary of the results. This confirms

**Table 3 Levels of living in the Census regions**

	Average Index Value	Average Rank
Inner Harbour	52.9	37.4
Outer Harbour	37.0	17.3
South Eastern	46.0	28.0
Western	39.4	20.6
Northern	38.4	18.5
Gozo and Comino	65.6	52.8
Malta	44.6	26.8
Malta, Gozo, and Comino	49.2	32.5

*Sources:* Central Office of Statistics, *Census '85 Vols I–III* (Malta 1986–7); *Ibid.*, *Demographic Reviews* (Malta 1976–85); Housing Authority, *Annual Reports* (Malta 1979–85).

that the problem localities occur mainly in the Inner Harbour and Gozo Regions with South-Eastern Malta being about average. Better than average conditions characterize the Outer Harbour, western, and northern divisions of Malta. Such basic inequalities have long historical and economic roots and it is difficult to see how public policy in the short-term can fundamentally change the general pattern of well-being. Recent announcements to extend the industrial estate at Xewkija, to provide home ownership scheme plots at Qala, and maintain better communications between Gozo and Malta, though welcome, will not by themselves radically alter the position of these communities. By the same token, urban residential renewal in Valletta, together with the facelift planned for the capital, are unlikely to satisfy the aspirations of inner-city populations for more attractive and less cramped living conditions. It seems likely that Inner Harbour areas and Gozo will continue to be depopulated and the fringe of the built-up area will house the more affluent sections of the population.

### Acknowledgements

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