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**Community Participation in destination development in the Maltese Islands.**

**Dr. JosAnn Cutajar (University of Malta)**

**Introduction**

Peck and Shear Lepie (1989, 203) argue that the amount of community involvement and control (power) over development affects “the amount and distribution of payoffs and tradeoffs associated with increased tourism”. This paper is going to analyse the extent of civil society participation in the destination development of the Maltese Islands, and the forms it takes. It will also see how the format adopted for this participation, is affecting the relationship between the communities and entities involved.

Peck and Shear Lepie therefore believe that community involvement and control over development is associated with the amount and distribution of payoffs and tradeoffs over development. This paper insists in the involvement of social groups in destination development so that the trade offs will be equitably distributed, and not rest among the major stakeholders

Shaw and Williams (2003) on the other hand maintain that compatibility between host and guests depends on the culture, economic status, race and nationality and number of tourists involved.

Some of these issues will be analysed in this paper. Compatibility however is also based on the active involvement of the community in the development of this sector. The question remains how actively civil society is involved in the formulation and implementation of development policies and projects linked with tourism in the Maltese Islands.

Peck & Shear Lopic (1989, 204) argue that community involvement depends on power, power as derived from the extent of ownership of the land that is developed, the source of financing involved, the input from local people and the relation of local traditions to the development projects. The focus of this short discussion is going to be mainly on the input various social groups have with regards to tourism development, how it arises and with what effect on the tourism industry in the Maltese Islands. In this discussion, the host is not taken as a homogeneous entity, because as the discussion will demonstrate, varying sections of the Maltese community hold different attitudes towards tourism, sometimes simultaneously.

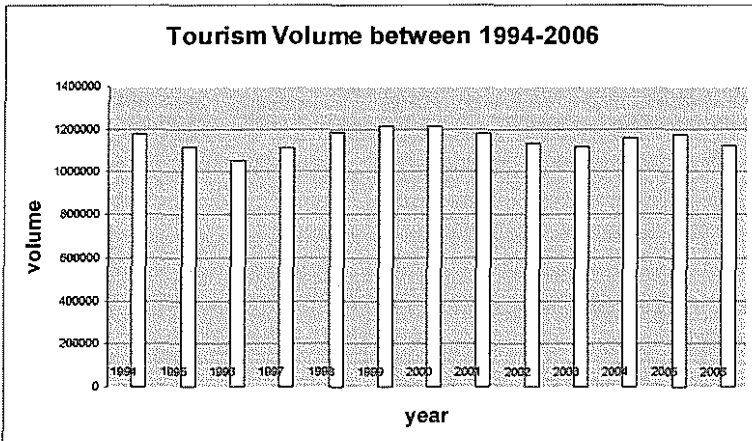
#### **Destination Development in the Maltese Islands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The tourism industry in the Maltese Islands is one of the three main economic sectors, including manufacturing and financial services (Noordam & Smith, 2002, pp. 4-5). Scarce resources available in small island states like Malta do not lead to a diversified economy, hence this economic dependence on this sector (Briguglio et al., 2002, p. 17). Noordam & Smid maintain that tourism is the most important sector of the Maltese economy. In 2002 it contributed 14 per cent to the Maltese GDP, and when taxes, subsidies and export were taken into account, the sector was said to contribute 25 per cent of the GNP. In 2001, gross earnings exceeded EUR 625 million. This therefore demonstrates that this industry plays a major role in output growth, job creation and foreign exchange generation.

In recent years, tourism has witnessed a slower growth rate when compared to previous decades (refer to Chart 1). The Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), the national machinery entrusted by government to come up with a plan of improving economic performance in a sustainable manner, has decided to reposition Malta as a cultural and business (conferences) destination. Current government policies are also geared at bringing about market diversification by penetrating new markets (Noordam & Smid, 2002, p. 17). Strategies have also been adopted to

increase added value. These including an internal and external branding campaign based on the promotion of three core values, namely hospitality, heritage and diversity (refer to section on branding found in Malta Authority website).

Chart 1



Source: Adaptation of data derived from [http://www.mta.com.mt/index.pl/tourism\\_departures](http://www.mta.com.mt/index.pl/tourism_departures) (accessed 12th September 2007).

The types of changes envisaged by the MTA as essential in the repositioning and regaining of a good competitive price for the Maltese Islands in the international tourism market, involve the use of a number of strategies. To improve the socio-economic profile of tourists, service provision has to improve, especially that of accommodation. This policy has brought about the decrease in the number of tourist complexes, guest houses and hostels and the upgrading/building of existent hotels to 4/5 star quality (Noordam & Smid, 2002, p. 7). One should however point out that although the number of hotels decreased between 1990 and 2001, the average number of beds has hardly changed (Noordam & Smid, 2002, p. 10). In 2006, only a 2 per cent decrease was in fact noted in the available number of beds (refer to Collective Accommodation section in MTA website).

Not all hotel and restaurant owners have the necessary capital needed to invest in upgrading their services. Noordam & Smid (2002, p. 7) note that apart from large hotel chains, tour operators and Air Malta, the Maltese tourism sector depends mainly on the services/products provided by small enterprises. Around 20,000 small enterprises are involved directly or indirectly within this sector. With regards to the refurbishment/building of 4/5 star hotels, a small number of hotel construction and refurbishment projects occurred through the help of an injection of external capital. For this to happen, the Maltese government endorsed a policy to allow minority foreign share ownership. This had to take place since Malta has policies and legislation to prevent foreign investors from buying huge tracts of land, when land is so scarce in the Maltese Islands (Noordam & Smid, 2002, p. 12).

Apostolopoulos (2001) maintains that tourist demand is often induced by tourist agencies through marketing techniques and images constructed of destinations on offer. In a bid to counteract the lack of interest some tour operators have recently shown in Malta, the MTA has been involved in advertising the new value proposition on an international basis. A past dependence on large holiday tour operators had been replaced by a shift towards more specialised tour operators since the former had not promoted Malta to the satisfaction of the stakeholders concerned (Noordam & Smid, 2002, p.22). Noordam and Smid insist that dependence on large tour operators would not be amenable for tourism in this destination.

Attempts to attract cultural tourism involved a concerted effort to restore some of Malta's cultural heritage through state, private and/or voluntary organisation partnerships. Infrastructural improvement with regards to electricity, water supply, drainage and roads has also been deemed necessary (Briguglio et al., 2002) as necessary for the attraction of value added tourism. These changes are being undertaken with the help of state and EU structural funding. The development of tourism in Malta therefore rests on the intervention and interaction of national and international corporate actors, governmental and non-governmental agencies, albeit not to the same extent.

Stakeholders within and without the Maltese Islands, as well as events, have had an impact on the direction the development of tourism is taking in the Maltese Islands. External influences on

the direction of development in this sector include the threat of international terrorism, natural disasters, health scares, rise in oil price, exchange rate fluctuations, economic and political uncertainties and a competitive market (Economic Division, Ministry of Finance, 2006, p. 123). Malta's accession into the European Union and the myriad directives and policies related with this move, as well as Malta's ratification and/or implementation of various international conventions, also had an impact on the choices made to develop this destination. On the national level, feedback and consultation between the state and key stakeholders within the private sector as well as the Church, political parties and trade unions is ongoing, albeit not at the rate these key actors see fit. This paper however is going to focus on the role played by the 'anonymous' mass of the electorate in destination development, whether it is proactive and reactive, and the reasons behind this.

The Maltese state has been very much involved in the development of the tourism industry for the last fifty years or so, prior to independence from Britain in 1964. The first five year economic development plan (1959-1964) set out to develop this industry in Malta when dependence on a fortress economy was no longer feasible, and economic diversification of the economy was important for the economic and political survival of Malta as a political entity (Inguanez, 1994). The government of the time promoted tourism because of the ease of entry into the market, the rapidity of development and the high ratio of labour to capital involved in this sector (Shaw & Williams, 2000, p. 133). This plan, and the national economic goals set out in subsequent years, mean that the Maltese state is directly involved in identifying goals, means and resources for the promotion of the tourist industry. This dependence on the state's 'interference' in the fashioning of this destination's economic development derives from its colonial past.

The state's direct involvement in the development of tourism is not restricted solely to planning, policy making and regulation: it is also actively involved in the national tourism promotion of Malta in foreign and domestic markets with a view of stimulating demand. Indirect involvement in the development of tourism is evident in infrastructural upgrading, subsidies/grants to private capital or NGOs and the facilitation of cultural and sporting events. All these measures have been adopted in a bid to enhance the experience of visitors. The underlying feeling for the

Maltese is that more priority is given to policies and projects in/directly linked with tourism, while their needs and interests come second. This occurs when in the end, they might be paying for these changes to take place.

The state, through the MTA is also involved in the regulation and control of the production and delivery of services and goods related to tourism and leisure. Regulations are necessary when it comes to control the location, quality and appearance of facilities and the impact that these have on tourists, landscape and environment. The objective of the Maltese state at this moment in time is sustainable tourism provision. Monitoring, regulation and planning are necessary since tourism has developed in such a way that it has impacted negatively on the living experiences of local communities and consumers, Lack of effective developmental control in the past, has had negative effects on the long term interests of the industry itself. Sustainable tourism aims at improving the quality of the natural environment, the living standards of the local community while taking into consideration environmental and social costs. Shaw & Williams (2000, p. 304) maintain that tourism development, when well managed, need not lead to environmental degradation, the alienation of tourists, or members of the host communities. Growth, when managed properly, will help reduce the tensions and frictions between the tourism industry, visitors, environment and communities. Uncontrolled growth, in Malta's case, has led to the "overcrowding of beaches, traffic congestion and noise pollution, increased demand for land on which to build hotels and tourist facilities, as well as increased production of solid and liquid waste (Briguglio et al., 2002, p. 14).

Competing interests are involved in the development of tourism, needs that can result in friction and tension. The state has the role of acting as an arbitrator between competing interests (Shaw & Williams, 2000, p. 137), and coming up with ways to resolve these tensions and conflict. My concern in this paper is on particular local agents of governance and their interaction with the state in its implementation and promotion of policies and projects. Shaw and Williams (2000, p. 132) argue that agents of governance are bodies that manage or regulate tourism, namely firms, employees, trade unions, national, regional and local states as well as non-state institutions. The focus in this paper is on the involvement of non-state organisations and the general public. Shaw and Williams regard governance mechanisms as relatively weak in tourism since conflicting

interests may lead to low levels of networking among firms and between them as well as public and voluntary sectors. Governance regimes tend to stem from social relations that are constituted in and constitute particular places, and this effects how effective they are.

### Tourism in the Maltese Islands

Table 1 – Rate of Tourists per Population

Year	Tourists	Total population	Ratio (Host: Guest)
2006	1124233	405577 <sup>(1)</sup>	1: 2.77
2005	1170610	404346 <sup>(2)</sup>	1: 2.90
2004	1127409	402668	1: 2.80

Adaptation of data found in NSO News Release No. 114/2007, p.2. <sup>(1)</sup>, Demographic Review 2005 (2006), pp. v, 4. <sup>(2)</sup>.

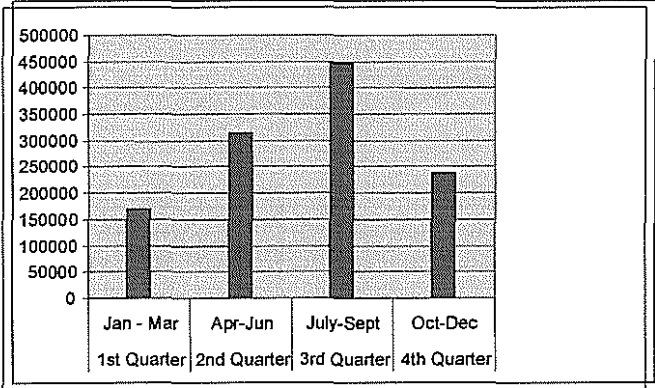
The total number of tourists in 2004-2006 amounted to over a million per year (refer to Table 1). As it is the number of incoming tourists per year amounts to around 2.5 times the population. Tourists arriving in the Maltese Islands add up to about 7 per cent of the Maltese population in any given year (Briguglio et al., 2002, p. 14). One should also add that the Maltese Islands have the highest incidence of density in Europe with 1282 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (National Statistics Office (NSO), 2006, p. v). The Maltese community and their visitors have to share an area of 316km<sup>2</sup> - 252.8 km of which are coastline (refer to Visit Malta website). The population density reaches unsustainable capacity during the high season (June to September), when the bulk of the tourists arrive in the Maltese Islands.

As Noordam and Smid (2002, p. 16) point out, tourism has had a negative impact on the Maltese environment, which due to its scarce resources, renders it difficult to address the increased demands for clear water, air and land. Tension and conflict are more likely to arise when accessibility to public owned assets is curtailed. This for example arises in relation to access to beaches. The concession of tracts of beach space to private enterprises has led to a number of Maltese to write letters of protest on local newspapers. At the same time, tourism is providing the Maltese with access to cultural events aimed at attracting a culture-oriented tourist, events which would not have made it to Malta due to its limited market capacity.

The need to control this onslaught of visitors has led to an attempt by the MTA to increase the number of more independent, less seasonal and more segment-driven travel (MTA, 2006, p. 43). The need to achieve a more even spread in tourist arrival throughout the year stems from the fact that 36 per cent of all tourist arrivals in 2005 were concentrated in the July-September period, 45 per cent of arrivals in the shoulder months (March to June and October) and only 19 per cent in winter (November to December) (refer to Chart 2).

The main tourist source markets for this period were the United Kingdom, Italy, France, the Netherlands and Germany (refer to Chart 3)). The five nationality groups accounted for 73 per cent of total tourist inflow during 1998 (Mangion & Vella, 2000, p. 6). In fact, NSO data demonstrates that for 2005-7, 86.7 per cent of inbound visitors to Malta derive from EU member states (NSO, 2007, News Release 141/2007, p.1).

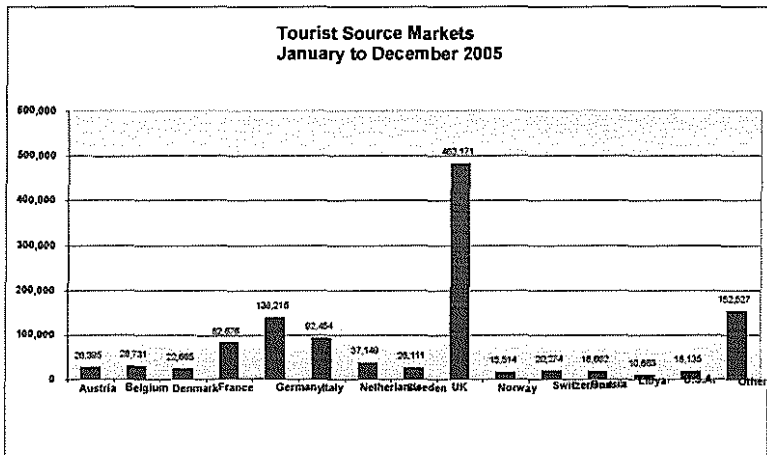
Chart 2 - Tourist Arrival by season – January-December 2005



Source: [http://www.mta.com\\_mt/index.pl/tourism\\_departures](http://www.mta.com_mt/index.pl/tourism_departures)

Chart 3





Source: [http://www.mta.com.mt/index.pl/tourism\\_departures](http://www.mta.com.mt/index.pl/tourism_departures).

The majority of tourists visit the Maltese Islands for the purpose of having a holiday, although there has been an increase in business and professional types of visits. Others reasons why tourists visit Malta include English language learning, meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions, as well as sports including diving and water sports.

On the whole, the majority of tourists who visit the Maltese Islands opt for a package tour, although there are indications that the number of independent tourists is on the increase (refer to Table 3). Mangion & Vella (2000, p. 14) point out that when tourists use the service of tour operators to book a visit to Malta, a good percentage of the money spent prior to departure remains in the country of source, and does not reach Malta. Only 71.7 per cent of tourists' pre-visit expenditure might be injected into the Malta economy. The MTA believes that ICT has caused an increase in the number of non-package tourists. This type of tourist as well as tourists who come for professional and business reasons are more likely to stay in 5 Star Hotels. These types of tourists tend to stay for shorter time periods, but demand recreational resources which tax land resources – for example golf courses.

The majority of tourists visiting Malta between 2005 and 2007 were more likely to stay in 4 Star hotels followed by 5 Star hotels (refer to Table 3). The average length of stay tended to be around 9 nights in all, with tourists opting for 4 Star Hotels and private accommodation staying longer than in other forms of accommodation (NSO, 2007, News Release 141/2007, p. 1). The Malta Tourism Authority's (MTA, 2006, p. 42) Annual Report and Financial Statements 2005 maintains that non-package visitors tend to have shorter, more frequent holiday trips. This report adds (MTA, 2006, p. 43) that the "shift from package to non-package expenditure is considered beneficial to the Maltese economy, as it involves bigger injections and fewer leakages, due to more tourist expenditure reaching Maltese suppliers rather than foreign operators".

This sector is also a net generator of employment and hence economic well-being for the Maltese. Direct employment in accommodation and catering sectors catered for 8 per cent of the total population in 2000 (Briguglio et al., 2002, p. 16). The Economic Survey October 2006 (Economics Policy Division, Ministry of Finance, 2006, p. 133) calculates that hotels and restaurants employed full-time 6.6 per cent of the gainfully occupied population in 2006. In January-March 2007 full time and part time employment in this sector stood at 7.8 per cent of the gainfully-occupied population (NSO, 207, News Release 111/2007, p. 5, Table 7). Employment figures in the private market sector related to hotels and restaurants amounted to 14 per cent of the gainfully employed population in 2006 (Economics Policy Division, Ministry of Finance, 2006, p. 133).

**Table 3 – Profile of Tourists in January to July 2005-7**

	2005	2006	2007
<b>Markets</b>			
EU	537,845	521,813	552,973
Non-EU	81,469	81,721	86,529
<b>Purpose of visit</b>			
Holiday	522,479	498,619	542,540
Business & professional	54,015	61,619	56,564
Other	42,820	43,296	50,398
<b>Organisation of Stay</b>			
Package	422,012 (68%)	412,272 (68%)	360,054 (55%)
Non-package	197,301	191,262	289,448
<b>Average Length of Stay</b>	9.3	9.5	8.6
<b>Type of Accommodation</b>			
Private (rented, staying with Friends/relatives, owner-	105,340	108,709	126,169

Occupied)			
Collective	513,974	494,825	523,333

Adaptation of NSO, 2007, News Release 141/2007, pp. 5, 7.

This short description of tourism in the Maltese Islands demonstrates a number of things. It demonstrates that although tourism is essential for the Maltese economy, this sector is benefiting different social groups differently. The scarcity of resources and population density also demonstrate that the tourism industry needs to be managed effectively and in sympathy with indigenous resources, or it will lead to the alienation of tourists and members of the host communities, as it is. For sustainable development to be attained, this philosophy needs to be embraced by planners, developers, consumers and host communities. The various social groups first have to come to collective decision on how to render mass tourism sustainable. The concern in this paper is that unsustainable development is leading to a reduction in the quality of life for both residents and tourists.

#### **Tourism and managed growth**

Tourism, as we have seen, involves the participation of a complex network of public and private interests. For the MTA, these consist of government, tour operators, airlines, local councils, non-governmental organisations and associations, the private sector, academic institutions, international and local media, the Church, the public and the tourists themselves (MTA, 2002, p. 39). Although the MTA mentions the general public, development projects tend to be presented to the public as a given, rather than discussed prior to its formulation. The only non-state organisation consistently involved in this process is the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (now called Institute of Hospitality) as it has a permanent representation on the MTA board.

Bull, Hoose and Weed (2003, p. 235) maintain that when community development is being undertaken, small local interest groups as well as large national organisations such as political parties, trade unions, and environmental groups need to be involved in all stages of the project. Private entities and state acknowledged NGOs are more likely to be consulted. Consultation with non-state organisations means that not all interests are taken into consideration. Taking the Institute of Hospitality as an example, this for sure does not represent the 20,000 SME

enterprises involved in the tourism industry. The majority do not have the inclination to become members and participate in meetings due to time constraints, among other factors. These entrepreneurs can therefore voice their concerns and promote their interests when the authorities concerned go to the public, and not when the latter invite the public to policy/project launches. The authorities do not seem to have the motivation and/or skills to involve ad hoc groups in decision-making, regulation and implementation of projects/services.

This involvement is essential when different categories of users are using the same space or when the same space is being used for different activities. This could lead to conflict over the use of space/assets, which can be detrimental for both tourists' and residents' quality of experience. The authorities involved cannot ignore that lack of consultation can lead to economic and political repercussions. For example, lack of support for MTA has been voiced by a number of stakeholders who feel that they have been given the opportunity to participate in the ongoing debate. There have also been incidents where residents have shown hostility towards tourists in their capacity as service providers and citizens. This has reached a level where the MTA has decided to undertake an internal branding campaign in an attempt to convince the general public that the involvement of all is crucial in the marketing and delivery of the tourist product (refer to section on branding in MTA website). The Maltese once known for their hospitality, are no longer so. The cumulative impact of mass tourism and lack of ownership and control over the way it is managed has had its toll on certain segments of the Maltese population.

Conflict is more likely to occur in a small country like the Maltese Islands, where there is a relative shortage of land and other resources. This often results in competition with other potential users for the same space and/or service. In rural areas, resources earmarked for tourism/recreation purposes might conflict with primary production (these being agriculture, fishing and quarrying in the Maltese Islands), conservation or preservation of natural and built environments and transport or communication networks. In cities, the allocation of space to tourism/recreation might compete with housing, retailing, industry, administration and offices and commercial activity, distribution services and transport (Williams 2003, p. 157). In the following section, this topic will be discussed in more detail.

### User conflict

In 2005, tourism operators had insisted that if Malta wanted to be competitive and attract an extra 30,000 tourists, it needed a second golf course (Independent, 2007, May 18<sup>th</sup>). This kind of suggestion was in keeping with the governments' policy to attract up market tourism. This plan was challenged by a number of environmental groups (GAIA Foundation and Flimkien ghal Ambjent Ahjar among others) political parties and farmers' representatives. This decision was revoked two years later, when the Prime Minister deemed that the golf course promoted unsustainable development and instead suggested that the land be turned into a natural and historic park. Environmental groups and political parties (Alternattiva Demokratika and Labour Party), were pleased at this u-turn after campaigning and lobbying against such a development. Interestingly enough this press release maintains that the content in the reports commissioned by the government persuaded to decide otherwise.

Having said this though, there are other projects in the pipeline that are vehemently being opposed by environmental groups and the local community, and because of this opposition. These include the proposed golf course and villas at Ta' Cenc, the yacht marina and tourist village proposed for Hondoq ir-Rummien as well as the project envisaged for ir-Ramla l-Hamra. These projects would not only destroy the last remaining stretches of countryside available for farming as well as different types of recreation, but would lead to the prohibition of access to land and coast.

Other disputes over the conflicting use of the countryside have involved hunters and trappers whose activities have been challenged on a national and international level. The activities of Maltese hunters and trappers have often raised the ire of environmentally conscious holidaymakers. Thanks to negative publicity abroad, a number of these potential visitors boycotted the Maltese Islands when they heard/read about this pastime in their local newspapers. Inter/national groups promoting animal rights, environmental groups as well as the local rambblers' association campaigned and lobbied in Malta and abroad to put pressure on the Maltese government to curtail the activities of hunters/trappers. Using EU policies as a screen, the Maltese government has implemented policies in an attempt to restrict these hunting and trapping activities.

This is a case where an area used by different users led to social conflict. The 'terrorist' act that took place in Mnajdra Temples (World Heritage sites) epitomises this type of conflict. This temple was being affected negatively by unrestricted tourist and hunter/trappers' access to it, as well as quarrying, agricultural and commercial activities in the surrounding area. When action was taken towards limiting this access, vandals had broken in through the chain link enclosure and thrown paint on the temples.

Voluntary and interest groups, as this section has shown, are useful in promoting the demands of their members. They are useful when it comes to campaigning and lobbying when these sectional interests are at threat. As this section has demonstrated, they are useful when it comes to organising and controlling protest. Bull, Hoose and Weed (2003, p. 246) argue that when voluntary groups control and organise protests they act as a safety valves for the articulation of dissension. This is not always the case in the Maltese Islands, as the incidents discussed have shown. This dissension, in part, evolves from the fact that different segments of the public do not feel that they have any say in the decisions taken at government level. Their feeling of powerlessness is expressed in non-productive ways.

This incident also points to the need for resource managers to develop patterns of use that allow for the integration of activities which will minimise conflict between user groups (Williams 2003, p. 161). Lack of trained personnel and/or funds prevent this from taking place in the near future.

#### **Incompatibility of Economic Activities**

Different industrial activities enacted in the same area can also lead to incompatibility between tourism/recreation and other uses of land and sea. This incompatibility might emerge from the fact that the consultation format adopted when the project is being fashioned does not successfully incorporate the views and the ideas of the communities being affected. Those involved might express hostility towards the authorities concerned and developers. When Malta Environmental and Planning Authority (MEPA, 2005) confirmed its proposal to extend the Marsascala Sant' Antnin recycling plant in the South Malta Local Plan Public Consultation Draft, there were immediate reactions from the residents and business entrepreneurs in the area.

The residents believed that the proposed enlargement of the recycling plant in conjunction with the proliferation of fish farms found in the surrounding sea would destroy tourism in the area. The closing down of the only up-market hotel in the area in the same period did nothing to assuage this fear.

The Malta National Report on sustainable development (Briguglio et al., 2002, p. 51) insists that the revision of the Development Planning Act in 2001 promotes dialogue between the various actors involved in the development process since it has

enhanced possibilities for public participation in the decision-making process and allows access to planning and environmental information.

Planning and environmental information for those with the necessary literary/computer skills is available. Hansen (2007, *The Sunday Times of Malta*, September 2, p. 13) underlines however that this information can only be deciphered by “paid professionals and the dedicated NGOs that have the time to unravel” it. As to public participation in the decision-making process, this is another kettle of fish as will be demonstrated.

The hostile reaction of the community in this area and of others involved in similar situations, stems from the fact that community consultation is often perceived as a sham. Hansen (2007, *The Sunday Times of Malta*, September 2, p. 13) explains why this is so. For example, when individuals raise objections against any type of development, MEPA urges the developer to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment. Oddly enough, it is the developer who chooses and pays researchers to conduct them. Conflict of interest is not taken into consideration here!

Hansen also adds that MEPA is not fooling the public by bandying around the concept of ‘public consultation’. This reporter adds that MEPA officials themselves do not believe in this concept when the:

board deliberating and discussing the case [the enlargement of Ta’ Cenc tourist complex] had no microphones and there were times when we could not hear a word that was being said (Hansen, 2007, p. 13).

Maltese authorities and/or developers go through the motions of consultation exercises when a tourist or other projects are in the pipeline. EU policies promote this kind of democratic practice. Stakeholders in the Maltese Islands go through the motions: deep down they do not believe in the

efficacy of this exercise. Powerful lobby groups such as the church, the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA), trade unions and representatives of the two main political parties are often involved directly or indirectly in discussions linked with development. The needs and interests of less powerful groups/individuals are not taken into consideration. This top-down approach to policy making might be linked with Malta's colonial past. This colonial legacy has had a spill over effect on the political behaviour patterns adopted.

Boissevain (1996) contends that the community's perspectives need to be incorporated at the planning process. Developers/authorities need to consult them at this stage and give them the opportunity to come up and vote on alternative proposals recommended by all the stakeholders involved. This consultation will ensure that development goals and priorities are in harmony with those of residents. This is usually not the case in the Maltese Islands. Even when the authorities have conceded to a community's resistance to a particular developmental project, the project in question is proposed two or three years later down the line, and eventually given the green light with slight adjustments made to the original plan.

### **Conservation and Tourism**

Conservation and tourism are often viewed as incompatible concepts. In the Maltese case, tourism has been the necessary catalyst that forced the authorities to take action and start the management and monitoring of heritage sites. This is crucial for a tourism industry based on the promotion of cultural tourism. The promotion of cultural tourism came after decades of marketing the Maltese Islands as sun, sea and sand destinations. This change in strategy created the political commitment towards the protection of heritage monuments, sites and plans since these provide both cultural and economic resources. Prior to this, political decision makers were not geared towards the promotion of cultural conservation. It was therefore the prospective financial input from tourism that acted as an incentive for conservation works.

This is not to say that the pressures of mass tourism have not made an impact on heritage sites and buildings. The ICOMOS Heritage at Risk Report on Malta 2001-2 has underlined that visitor activity has had an unmitigated impact on the Neolithic temples of Mnajdra, Tarxien and Ggantija for example. These were the temples that fielded the bulk of local tourism. This was



due to the fact that prior to the setting up of the necessary legislative framework and the structures responsible for the administration of conservation, visitor access to these sites was uncontrolled. Physical abuse and mass consumption led to the deterioration of the sites. The authors of the ICOMOS report underline that tourist impact was not the only factor that led to the depletion of the effective value of the sites. Past conservation practices, disuse, neglect, encroachment of development around sites, nature and natural disasters as well as the absence of the appropriate management plans and strategies were to blame. The cumulative effect of all these factors has led to the depletion of these archaeological assets to such an extent that some sites have lost both their heritage potential and market values according to this report. This impact could well have a long term effect on the tourism industry, this report adds.

Tourism is also stimulating the revitalization of declining communities. This together with the restoration of heritage sites and buildings is being carried out through public/private partnerships. Private entities include NGOs such as Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Wirt Artna (Foundation of Maltese Patrimony), public entities and/or private enterprises. The voluntary sector is playing a major role in providing resources, facilities and expertise. Such entities play a crucial role in the rehabilitation and protection of key resources from damage and destruction

For the government, such voluntary organizations provide the physical resources and funding that the government would have had to provide. In return the government provides funds and grants to enable them to carry out these projects. When this occurs, these organizations are accountable for the way they utilize funding. So one can say they operate almost as an arm of government.

Bull, Hoose and Weed (2003, p. 246) maintain that voluntary organization act as a link between government and the wider population. Members from these organisations are also often chosen to act as advisers on committees and consulted during decision making processes because of their expertise and sometimes to act as community representatives. A cursory look at the website of Din l-Art Helwa (refer to Secretary General's Report, 2007 on Din l-Art Helwa website) attests to the fact that the committee was made up of politically and economically powerful individuals who could in no way represent the interests of the myriad social groups in the

community. Bull, Hoose and Weed (2003, p. 249) underline that a huge portion of the population are often not involved in decision making. This occurs for a number of reasons namely poor communicative skills among unprivileged socio-economic groups, the propensity of public authorities to rely on locally recognized groups, and the reluctance of local authorities to approach these socio-economic groups in environments they feel comfortable in while utilising more friendly methods and easy language for engagement.

### **Conclusion**

The Maltese have tended to rely on political/church leadership for the promotion of public interest in the political, economic and social field among other. Community development is tackled in a top-down manner, with a cursory commitment towards public consultation. Both the authorities and the general public need to learn how to conduct public consultation, and in communion with each other find out the most efficacious means needed for the efficacious conduction of such an exercise. Primarily though they have to believe in the importance of such an exercise.

This lack of democratic participation and involvement might be linked to lack of national pride. Policies and/or development projects drawn up by 'experts' involve less time (but perhaps not money!) than a long winded discussion with the myriad groups that are going to be affected by policies/projects proposed. Consultation and participation however leads to ownership over decisions and plans. Shared decision making helps create a sense of civic pride, and enable the community to perceive not only what they can achieve out of a project/policy, but also what they contribute towards its attainment.

This discussion has also shown the dire need for proactive management of resources and assets where tourism development is concerned. Shaw and Williams (2000, p. 304) maintain that tourism development, when well-managed, will not lead to environmental degradation. Environmental degradation can lead to the alienation of host communities and tourists. Literature on sustainable development argues that tourist behaviour, development processes, local communities and agencies linking these actors need to perceive its importance and adopt sustainable practices in their everyday behaviour. More emphasis is made on the need to inform

and educate visitors on sustainable tourism. This is because sustainable tourism is being used to sell tourist destinations/resorts. Less importance is given to the role played by local communities at grass roots level in the promotion of sustainable development. When the local community internalises the long-term feasibility of such a concept, they will become the promoters, regulators and leaders of such a project. The state should not be seen as the entity that comes up with strategic and proactive intervention. It should only act as the implementer of ideas and suggestions that derive from the grass roots. As it is nobody is as aware of what is of public interest as much as the public involved.

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