

# Landscape: An Overview of the South Gozo Fault Area

Mariella Xuereb



As emphasis on sustainable development has escalated in recent decades, so has the need to incorporate landscape considerations into decision-making processes. At its simplest sense, landscape refers to “the surface of the earth, or a part thereof” or “all the visible features of an area of land”. Landscapes are important for a variety of reasons,

inspiration and their contribution to national identity and local distinctiveness. Nevertheless, they provide a

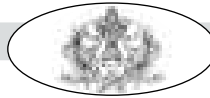
wide variety of ecosystem services, including food, water, climate regulation, visual enjoyment and spiritual fulfillment. Throughout the years, landscapes have shaped town and city characters and have endowed them with a diverse character which can be utilized for a multitude of purposes. The Council of Europe’s Guidelines for the Implementation of the European Convention Landscape reject the notion of landscapes as an “asset”, in favor of the view of landscapes as a “precondition for individual and social well-being”.



namely because of aesthetics and beauty, the sense of identity and place they provide to their inhabitants, the provision of a cultural record which hints at the way people lived on the land and harnessed their resources and also because they serve as habitats for a diversity of plant and animal species. Moreover, they link culture with nature and bridge past with present and are a living representation of the amalgam between the natural world, human society and people’s needs. Well-maintained and highly valued landscapes are critical to human well being and to an economically stable society. They offer tangible and intangible benefits and are of significant importance to human beings, since it is them who create and value landscape. Landscapes are significantly treasured for their intrinsic value, artistic

Landscape character and value assessments have a great potential in providing the basis for preparation of landscape management strategies, guiding land use change in positive and sustainable ways, informing the siting, spacing and design conditions for particular forms of





development, identifying areas of significant ecological or cultural importance and finally in contributing to landscape capacity studies and environmental impact assessments.

The South Gozo Fault area provides an interesting, even picturesque, coastal landscape which stretches from Ras il-Qala on the east coast of Gozo, to Mgarr x-Xini on the southeastern littoral. In general terms, the landscape enjoys spectacular open views of the Gozo-Comino Channel. This region is characterized by a wide variety of landscape features, both natural and human. These include steep terraced slopes which are either abandoned or used for agricultural purposes, planted woodlands, important geomorphologic features including sheer cliffs, caves, shore platforms, pebble beaches, bays and inlets, and near-shore islets, together with exposed layers of Upper Coralline Limestone, Blue Clay and traces of Upper Globigerina Limestone.

This landscape is influenced by the dynamics of both existing and proposed development projects, in that they have the potential to affect the landscape's character and value. Starting from Ras il-Qala, it is worth mentioning the proposed development plan for Hondoq ir-Rummien by which developers seek to transform the bay into a yacht marina and a holiday resort incorporating a five-star hotel, restaurants and numerous household units, amongst others. A development permit has still not been issued for this particular project and the decision remains in abeyance.

Numerous development projects have also been incorporated within the Mgarr Harbour area, which in recent decades has seen the construction of residential units, restaurants, entertainment facilities, large-scale five-star hotel developments and the recent construction of a ferry terminal.

Another prominent category of landscape features dominating the South Gozo Fault area is cultural heritage. One cannot talk about Mgarr Harbour without mentioning Fort Chambray. After several attempts of revival and abandonment, the fort was eventually privatized and today serves as a luxurious holiday complex. Some of its historic fortifications and structures are or will eventually be

restored, while other structures will be demolished to make way for further development. Also, the 'Mgarr ix-Xini' Tower and St. Anthony's Battery constitute other important historical elements of the landscape. Another predominant development project which has occupied a large part of the South Gozo Fault landscape is the sewage treatment plant at Ras-il-Hobz, developed with the intent of producing second class water.

*"Change brought about by development is almost unavoidable. Such change should be planned and designed in a manner which respects the character of a particular area. Landscapes are not meant to be fossilised; they must however be respected".*

Dublin's Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2000)

