

[Home](#) > [Debate](#) > [Blogs & Opinions](#) > Caring society, care of the self

Caring society, care of the self

Michael Briguglio

Thursday, 7 January 2021, 07:37

Last update: about 5 months ago

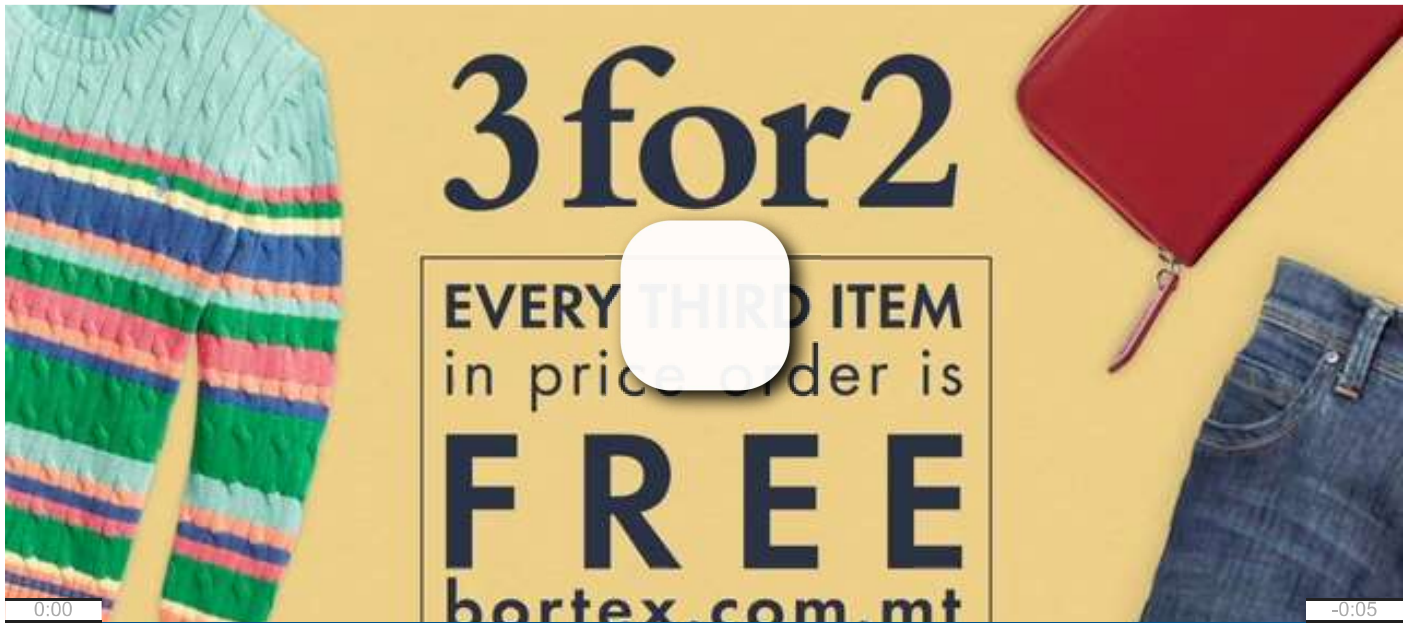


Various situations, from the global to the national and from the social to the personal, point towards the intersection of various factors in the challenges we face.

Covid-19 and the state of the environment are just two out of many examples where we witness how economy, healthcare, ecology, lifestyle, culture, the social and the political influence each other open our everyday lives.

Designed and developed by Deloitte Digital

Independent Online. ©2021. Standard Publications Ltd. Registered Office: Standard House, Birkirkara Hill, St. Julian's, STJ 1149, Malta.



Over the years in Malta, we have had various voices who have spoken up about the need for more holistic policy making. As a developed small island EU member state,

we succeeded in some areas and require improvements in others. In this article I will focus on two very recent examples from the academic and civil society spheres.

The first is the launch of the Wellbeing Index Project by the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society in collaboration with the University of Malta. This project will serve as a repository of information which will provide evidence on wellbeing to policymakers and politicians.

The project, which will be led by economist Dr Marie Briguglio (my sister), will go beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measurement of society's wellbeing. This is not to say that GDP is not an important measurement, for example in areas such as income and employment. But this should be complemented by other data which, for example, show how different persons and groups are impacted differently in such fields.

Besides, society requires benchmarks of wellbeing in areas such as physical and mental health, family and social interaction, levels of education and skills, expression and engagement, and environmental quality and open spaces.

This project is expected to produce its first results during this year and will comprise of a compilation of indicators and researchers' and stakeholders' input.

It is pertinent to note that the University of Malta and other educational institutions regularly produce worthy evidence in various policy fields which deserve attention beyond the immediate academic sphere. Such scholarly knowledge ranges from dissertations to peer-reviewed articles.

I believe that it would also make sense if national institutions such as Parliament, Ministries, and the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development increase investment in the field of open knowledge production. This is an area where so many experts can assist the world of politics

[Terms of Use](#) [Advertising Rates](#) [Contact Us](#) [Privacy Policy](#)

Designed and developed by Deloitte Digital

Independent Online. ©2021. Standard Publications Ltd. Registered Office: Standard House, Birkirkara Hill, St. Julian's, STJ 1149, Malta.

Malta Independent focused on the proposals of environmental NGOs (ENGOS) for 2021. One ENGO, Fimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar (FAA) referred to the need for “independent social impact and carrying capacity studies to assess localities’ ability to cope with more building in terms of population density, transport and utilities.”

It beggars belief that Malta does not yet have a national policy to mainstream social impact assessment (SIA) in policy making. For example, in the field of planning, the requirement for social impact assessment is at the discretion of the Planning Authority. Besides, there are no standard guidelines regarding the composition and implementation of such assessments.

Back in May 2019, just before the European Parliamentary and local council elections, the Planning Authority had proposed the setting up of standard procedures for SIAs to become a requirement as part of the planning system.

I, for one, had sent my proposals to the PA (they can be read through this link: <https://mikes-beat.blogspot.com/2019/05/feedback-re-social-impact-assessment.html>

), but two and a half years later, there seems to have been no progress in the field. Hence the relevance of the statement by FAA referred to above. Indeed, it is imperative that Malta’s decision-making processes in planning and other areas evaluate social impacts and evidence-based recommendations as a continuous and deliberative form of policymaking.

On the other hand, beyond the broad fields of economy, environment, society and so forth, it is also important to highlight the importance of care of the self (as dubbed by Michel Foucault) on an individual level.

One consequence of Covid-19 is that we have become more aware of the silent battles that different people face in their everyday lives: Loneliness amid the urban context, mental health, parental alienation, hidden poverty, addiction, and other challenges faced by people from different backgrounds. These go beyond the facades often presented in the social media.

I believe that we need to invest more in the care of the self. For example, it is important to realize that there are things in our lives which we cannot change. At the same time, however, we can react to such things in different ways, and this can have a huge impact on our personal wellbeing. Sometimes we are equipped to deal with such challenges, but at other times we may need the assistance of persons, from professionals to significant others, who can help us face our demons. Sometimes we may also realize that it is better to ride the wave than smash yourself against it.

On the other hand, there are aspects in our personal lives which can change. Sometimes, a lot of courage is required to choose the right thing and help bring about change.

But maybe providence chooses the bravest among us to face the strongest challenges. Happy new year to the readers and staff of the *The Malta Independent*.

Dr Michael Briguglio is a Sociologist and Senior Lecturer at the University of Malta

open