



L-Università ta' Malta  
Doctoral School

# Annual Doctoral Symposium

30 April 2021  
Online

Programme &  
Abstracts

- 17:00 – 17:05 **Welcome address**  
*Prof. Alfred J. Vella, Rector*
- 17:05 – 17:35 **Keynote address**  
**Everyone runs a business**  
*Prof. Russell Smith, Centre for Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation (CEBI), University of Malta, Malta*
- 17:45 **Parallel Sessions**  
*See pages 4 – 11 for abstracts*
- Session 1**  
*Chair: Prof. Mark Anthony Falzon, Chair Faculty Doctoral Committee (Faculty of Arts)*
- 18:00 – 18:20  **The Berninesque impact on regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta: The stone-carved tradition**  
*Dr Christina Cassar Meli, Prof. Keith Sciberras*
- 18:20 – 18:40  **Modernity, change, and continuity, 1964-1987: Re-visiting post-colonial Malta from the perspective of women**  
*Simone Azzopardi*
- 18:40 – 19:00  **'What you see is (not only) what you get' - how aviation transformed Malta during the Second World War**  
*Anthony Burgess*
- 19:00 – 19:20  **Grassroots museums: How curators of micro museums interpret and present their local community "Mediterranean Historical Imaginary"**  
*John Vella*
- 19:20 – 19:40  **Liberal peacebuilding and its critics: Introducing a feminist perspective to the debate**  
*Esther M. Beckley*
- Session 2**  
*Chair: Prof. Ian Thornton, Chair Faculty Doctoral Committee (Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences)*
- 18:00 – 18:20  **Advocating a 'Multi-faceted' and 'Middle-Up' approach as a means to instigating green infrastructure planning: The case of Malta**  
*Perit Sarah Scheiber*
- 18:20 – 18:40  **Urban transformations in a Mediterranean island-state**  
*Andrea Pace, Prof. Maria Attard*
- 18:40 – 19:00  **Argumentation and social re-presentation: A study in coalitional psychology**  
*Luke J. Buhagiar*
- 19:00 – 19:20  **Voices unheard**  
*Enver Ethemer*

19:20 – 19:40

- ⊗ **Acoustic analysis of English pronunciation errors by Palestinian EFL learners**  
*Montaser Motia Ujvari*

**Session 3**

*Chair: Dr Roberta Sammut, Chair Faculty Doctoral Committee  
(Faculty of Health Sciences)*

18:00 – 18:20

- ⊗ **Investigating DDT metabolites residues in breast and colon cancer serum using micro-extraction techniques and GC-MS analysis**  
*Maryam Elmabrok, Prof. Emmanuel Sinagra, Dr Mark Anthony Caruana*

18:20 – 18:40

- ⊗ **The perinatal outcomes and experiences of sub-Saharan African and Eastern European migrant women: A multi-method study in the Maltese context**  
*Christie Hili*

18:40 – 19:00

- ⊗ **Professional identity in medical humanitarianism**  
*Christine Cassar*

19:00 – 19:20

- ⊗ **From overtourism to undertourism: Small island states and the COVID-19 pandemic**  
*Luca Nguyen*

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Professor Russell Smith,  
Centre for Entrepreneurship  
and Business Incubation  
(CEBI), University of Malta,  
Malta

## Everyone runs a business

*Obtaining a PhD is not easy. And neither should it be. It identifies the holder as having made a significant contribution, to a body of academic knowledge, all to the satisfaction of academic experts in the field. That takes years of dedicated study and experimental work. Towards the end of that period of intensive work, many doctoral students begin to question their future and suffer from the Quo Vadis syndrome. The choice often appears simple: either pursue an academic career or not. But this is the trap of the 'single pursuit' illusion ... the idea that only one option at a time is possible.*

*In this address, Prof. Smith argues that everyone in the world of work actually runs a business by selling their know-how. In other words, they are the business. But this requires the doctoral student to step back and look at themselves from a new perspective. Will you sell your know-how to one customer and become an employee? Or will you sell it to multiple customers and become an employer? It is all a matter of assessing the true risk and not the conventional perception of risk ...*

# SESSION 1

## **The Berninesque impact on regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta: The stone-carved tradition**

Dr Christina Cassar Meli, Prof. Keith Sciberras, Department of Art and Art History,  
Faculty of Arts

*This research analyses the impact of the Berninesque tradition on regional Maltese sculpture through an evaluation of the links and channels of influence between Rome and Malta, in particular the influence on the local tradition of early eighteenth-century scalpellini. Their production is analysed within the context of Roman Baroque sculpture and its spread. Stylistic parallelisms with another regional centre of production, Sicily, particularly Palermo and the towns of the Val di Noto, underlines this international framework. The study is merited primarily because of the Italian artistic context which impacted the artistic scene in Malta. Seventeenth-century Roman works constituted the primary sources for eighteenth-century Maltese scalpellini. The socio-political scene, influenced by the Order of St John and the more vernacular parish setting, focused its major attention on Rome for spiritual and political guidance, swiftly resulting in the dissemination of artistic ideas.*

*This tradition manifested itself in sculpture in parish and countryside churches, particularly in the form of altar reredoses. Although the quality of Maltese regional sculpture ranges from satisfactory to more vernacular expressions when compared to Roman Baroque works, the results of this stylistic analysis are striking in the assimilation of motifs, poses, gestures, and figurative similarities with Berninesque works of art.*

*This paper, based primarily on extensive archival and stylistic research, proposes and analyses important data which sheds light on regional eighteenth-century sculpture as the product of the Roman Baroque, yet doused in Maltese regional stylistic characteristics. These stylistic influences ultimately brought Malta's churches up to date with the seventeenth-century style predominant in Rome.*

## **Modernity, change, and continuity, 1964-1987: Re-visiting post-colonial Malta from the perspective of women**

Simone Azzopardi, Department of History, Faculty of Arts

*Decolonisation in the Maltese case was not 'a terrain of illusions of liberation and myths of freedom' (Ndlovu-Gatheni 2013). Malta saw the translation of independence into liberty, which meant that decolonisation did not essentially plunge Malta into a vacuum, resisting Western (or Eastern, for that matter) influences. This context ensured that the process of change and modernisation underway throughout the British period will prevail still, gaining and/or losing steam, advancing and/or retarding in different ways on multiple levels of Maltese society. Protagonists in this transition were the general Maltese, both actors and receptors of the multi-layered changes unfolding throughout the immediate post-colonial decades of the sixties, seventies and eighties. The transformations society experienced as Malta's contact with the global saw the gradual but evident unravelling of the 'local' in terms of roles and traditions, culture and attitudes, consumption and production are particularly condensed in the experience of Maltese women. The alignment of the feminist with the post-colonial is very apt in further underlining the outstanding case that Malta presents. Maltese women present a solid case-study for the analysis of social emancipation laced with doses of globalisation, of the extent of liberation, of the chasm between tradition and modernity, and of the peculiarity of an island nation-state in flux. In this presentation, I will establish the context for this subject and outline the areas of analysis which this research will address.*

## **'What you see is (not only) what you get' - how aviation transformed Malta during the Second World War**

Anthony Burgess, Department of Classics and Archaeology, Faculty of Arts

*The story of Malta during the Second World War and its ordeal at the hands of German and Italian aircraft, is one that will be familiar to many at this symposium. The principal role played by aviation in the Second Siege naturally ensures that it figures prominently in the numerous books and articles that have been written on Malta, and these have focused on the very direct impact the aviation made in the form of bombing raids, aircraft crashing to earth and other physical manifestations, such as airfields. In this presentation, I will be examining some of the less obvious ways in which aviation affected—and continues to affect—the physical and cognitive landscape of Malta, including in the lead up to its unasked-for involvement in the Second World War and aftermath.*

## **Grassroots museums: How curators of micro museums interpret and present their local community "Mediterranean Historical Imaginary"**

John Vella, Mediterranean Institute

*The research studied twenty-three micro museums located in Mediterranean islands. It discussed ways curators of grassroots micro museums interpret and present their communities and the Mediterranean historical imaginary. It also intended to find out how this context*

impacts on the museum model and philosophy adopted by curators. In conjunction with an ethnographic approach including visual methodology, a critical social theory approach was adopted because it incorporates some issues embraced by Sociomuseology. Led by semi-structured interviews with curators and visual observation at Maltese and Sicilian micro museums, the study collected data on display layouts and how they linked to community representation. A written questionnaire was sent to curators in other Mediterranean islands. Two types of grassroots micro museums emerged: independent and private. Overall curators envisioned the micro museum as an effective place for pedagogy, socialising, information dissemination, entertainment, a means of expressing an identity, safeguarding heritage and knowledge of communities. Curators of grassroots micro museums adopted bottom-up practices promoting needs and interests of the represented community, engaging them through activities, giving them space and voicing their concerns inside and outside the museum to bring about social change. They care about presenting 'authenticity' and consistency but found it hard to describe the Mediterranean through their museology. Curatorial roles and practices at grassroots micro museums tend to be wider than those of traditional curators, carrying many more responsibilities. A Mediterranean model and philosophy of museology and curatorial practices however did emerge. Curators of grassroots micro museums tended to adopt a social activist role to promote the welfare of their communities.

## **Liberal peacebuilding and its critics: Introducing a feminist perspective to the debate**

Esther M. Beckley, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Arts

*This paper analyses extant literature on gender and liberal peacebuilding debates and presents a solid case that justifies the need for further research in this field. It finds that Feminists perspectives on peacebuilding are classified into two – the problem-solvers and the critical scholars. While the problem solvers who are more policy-oriented have highlighted the continuous marginalisation of females in peacebuilding projects and the need for increased recognition of this group, Critical scholars who are more theoretical in their approach have explained how this continuous marginalisation is intricately linked to the liberal approach that guides contemporary peacebuilding. These critical scholars have called for the need to recognise and utilise local feminist approaches in peacebuilding. Despite the validity of the two arguments, there is a disconnection between theory and practice when it comes to the analysis of gender and peacebuilding which is a major gap in the field. This is regardless of the valuable contribution that such a merger could bring to the critical understanding of gender and peacebuilding. To bridge this chasm, this paper argues that the critical scholars' argument is taken as a point of departure for further research to find out how local feminist knowledge and approaches have been used in peacebuilding. This way, empirical findings will be used to buttress and enrich existing theoretical arguments and vice-versa.*

# SESSION 2

## **Advocating a 'Multi-faceted' and 'Middle-Up' approach as a means to instigating green infrastructure planning: The case of Malta**

Perit Sarah Scheiber, Department of Spatial Planning and Infrastructure, Faculty for the Built Environment

*In Malta, both the National Environmental Policy (NEP) and the Strategic Plan for Environment and Development (SPED) identify the need to move towards sustainable development. Factors such as traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, air and noise pollution, have reduced the amenity and quality of life. This has led to the gradual erosion of the degree of social integration within communities. Additionally, the low provision of urban green spaces does not encourage healthy lifestyles.*

*The research thus aimed to investigate the planning and design of urban open spaces in Malta and use the outcomes to develop proposals for improving their contribution to sustainable development. Internationally, the concept of planning for green infrastructure (GI) is being recognised as one of the more relevant planning approaches in moving towards sustainable and resilient urban areas.*

*An attempt is made to understand the potential role which spatial planning systems and governance can play in transforming urban open spaces such that they can function as green infrastructure. Three main themes emerge with respect to the barriers: socio-cultural tendencies; lack of resources; and inadequacies in planning and governance systems. These barriers and their implications will be discussed.*

*Ultimately the importance and need for good governance or co-governance emerges. International best-practice presents various forms of governance. Can these however provide a response to the barriers which the case of Malta experiences? The research concludes by advocating a 'multi-faceted' approach together with collaborations of a 'middle-up' nature as a means of instigating change in contexts such as Malta's.*

## **Urban transformations in a Mediterranean island-state**

Andrea Pace, Prof. Maria Attard, Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts

*Urbanisation is a key driver of land consumption around the world. According to Liu et al. (2010) urban growth can take different forms and be classified as infilling, edge-expansion and outlying development. These have also shown that growth trends can follow cyclical patterns. In Malta, the densest Mediterranean island, land is scarce hence a very valuable resource. Understanding urban development phenomena is therefore crucial for better planning and management. This study will present a comprehensive model of urbanisation of the islands based on the Theory of Diffusion and Coalescence (Dietzel, Herold, Hemphill & Clarke 2005a; Dietzel, Oguz, Hemphill, Clarke & Gazulis 2005b). The novelty of this study is in the approach, and whilst much of the research so far used remotely sensed data to analyse urban development, we propose the use of richer and fine grained development planning application data. Logistic regression will be used to examine the determinants of the different urban growth forms: infilling, edge-expansion and outlying development. This research will identify any interrelationships between multiple variables and urban growth. The established determinants can be used to simulate future urban growth patterns under different socio-economic scenarios. The research will contribute to the creation of the first urban growth model for Malta. This is relevant to support further research into the islands' urban development and the development of research in urban geography and planning in island states and the Mediterranean.*

## **Argumentation and social re-presentation: A study in coalitional psychology**

Luke J. Buhagiar, Department of Psychology, Faculty for Social Wellbeing

*Intergroup relations remain highly contested. Groups socially re-present relevant social objects in such a way as to advance their own project. My PhD research consists of three studies focusing on Arab-Maltese relations. Study 1 involved interviews with Arabs in Malta on their views for/against integration. Arguments for and against integration varied widely. Overall, many participants were for some form of integration, in different manners, seeing it as a difficult but necessary outcome. Study 2 brought together the findings of Study 1, and those from a previous inquiry by Sammut et al. (2018), in order to develop two scales for studying Arab-Maltese intergroup relations, using a novel expert-based scaling procedure. One scale asked participants for their views on integration (tapping groups' social re-presentation for/against integration). The other scale asked participants what they think that the other group thinks of integration (tapping groups' alternative re-presentation of their outgroup's project). Study 3 involved a survey (involving both scales, and other measures) with Maltese and Arab persons living in Malta. Multiple regression analyses showed that alternative re-presentation of the outgroup's project significantly predicts ingroup social re-presentation for/against integration. This research improves our understanding of conflict prevention.*

## Voices unheard

Enver Ethemer, Department of Gender and Sexualities, Faculty for Social Wellbeing

*They are there yet almost nonexistent. They are seen yet they remain invisible, they cherish proudly their identity on an ecstatic Pride march yet they disguise it in thick walled rooms rest of the time. They are there, yet they are actually not.*

*The small anecdote that I have just scribbled as I sat on a rainy day to draft this proposal translates the dominant feeling I had to endure when I returned to the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC) in 2010 from the UK. It was a period accompanied by a heart-wrenching practice of figuring out how to re-adjust into a something through acting as someone that I am not. Having lived in the UK for about six years, return to TRNC inevitably involved a total mind shift where I had to play a parody of re-configuring a new identity. I sat around the table with mom and dad as someone else, wearing one of the multiple masks I had devised to guard my homosexual identity. Each day I played the "the different other" so as to cause no shame to my family, avoid stigmatisation or discrediting honour in the eyes of the society. Tacit "panopticon-like" controlling mechanism of the social ecosystem in TRNC draws a bitter line between existence and nonexistence – you are there but you are not. You are just a travesty of fluid identities that you are not "Just yourself".*

*This paper aims to examine the path of development and progress of LGBTI rights in relation to gender and sexuality in TRNC vis-à-vis the socio-political, legal and cultural context within which it is promoted or subdued. More specifically the thesis aims to examine the predominant context and discourse of nationhood, national identity as well as the process, norms, institutions and how the mechanism of Europeanisations, in the period following 2004, when the re-unification of the island was in prospect, have impacted them vis-à-vis the local dynamics of gender, sexuality, nationhood within the specific context of LGBTI rights.*

## Acoustic analysis of English pronunciation errors by Palestinian EFL learners

Montaser Motia Ujvari, Institute of Linguistics and Language Technology

*This project aims at investigating English pronunciation errors committed by Palestinian EFL learners and the sources of these errors. This study draws upon the interlanguage hypothesis which claims that the interlanguage system of L2 learners reflect patterns that function independently of the speaker's L1 and L2, but have features of both. In addition, this project aims at investigating the effect of explicit phonetic instruction on pronunciation of English sounds by Palestinian EFL learners. Between 20 and 30 Palestinian university students with different proficiency levels in English, namely, beginner, intermediate, and advanced, are expected to participate in three studies. The first study aims at investigating the acoustic properties of Arabic sounds which Palestinian EFL learners are expected to transfer to English. The second study aims at investigating the acoustic properties of English sounds which are expected to raise difficulties and see if their mispronunciation of these sounds is attributed to transfer from L1 or to developmental factors. The third study aims at investigating the acoustic properties of English sounds after the participants have studied a course in phonetics to see whether explicit phonetic instruction improves the participants' pronunciation of the English sounds that were found to be problematic for them.*

# SESSION 3

## **Investigating DDT metabolites residues in breast and colon cancer serum using micro-extraction techniques and GC-MS analysis**

Maryam Elmabrok, Prof. Emmanuel Sinagra, Dr Mark Anthony Caruana, Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Science

*Investigations were undertaken to analyse DDT and its metabolites in blood serum samples collected from cancer patients 39 and 13 control subjects in Eastern Libya (Benghazi Medical Centre, Department of Oncology). The analysis was carried out using a micro extraction adopted with micro-solid phase extraction (M-SPE) and coupled to gas chromatograph-mass spectrometer (GC/MS). The method was very sensitive and the Limit of detection (LOD) for low and high concentrations, was set at 0.15 ng/kg while the Limit of quantitation (LOQ) was 0.045 ng/kg.*

*The prevalent metabolites was p,p'-DDE 86.5% in all samples, it presented in 97.4% of cancer patients and 53.8% of the controls, whereas o,p'-DDE, p,p'-DDT and p,p'-DDD were found 38.5%, 28.8% and 17.3% respectively. Statistical analysis indicated clearly that the concentration of the metabolite p,p'DDE was highest in the breast cancer and colon cancer patients and there was a significant association between concentration of DDE and breast cancer, colon cancer over the controls. Another finding was that there was a significant correlation between total DDT metabolites levels and age, gender, lactation period, BMI, location but not related to either family history or occupation.*

## **The perinatal outcomes and experiences of sub-Saharan African and Eastern European migrant women: A multi-method study in the Maltese context**

Christie Hili, Department of Midwifery, Faculty of Health Sciences

*In Malta, Eastern European (EE) and sub-Saharan African (SSA) women are the two most common migrant populations contributing to the majority of foreign-born births. A critical literature review investigated the perinatal outcomes of these migrant groups. Findings of 37*

*studies showed that when compared to native participants, SSA women experience worse pregnancy outcomes. Contrarily, EE migrants had less antenatal complications than native participants.*

*Considering that locally the pregnancy outcomes of SSA and EE migrants have been scarcely researched, a retrospective analysis of 38,509 maternal and 39,208 infant data pertaining to Maltese, SSA and EE nationals was conducted using the national obstetrics database (2007-2016). In agreement with international research, both populations were found to have late access to prenatal care and less ultrasound scans.*

*In view of the significance of antenatal care in the prevention of adverse pregnancy outcomes, it was deemed vital to explore SSA and EE women's perceptions towards pregnancy and their experiences of using maternity services in the host country. A narrative synthesis of 15 qualitative studies identified factors hindering migrant women's access to maternity care, such as: difficulty navigating the healthcare system, cultural issues and communication challenges.*

*A dearth of research exploring SSA and EE women's experiences of using the local maternity services, particularly for the latter population, has been observed. These research gaps led to the subsequent phase of this project which aims to use interpretative phenomenological analysis as the methodology to study how SSA and EE women perceive and experience the perinatal period as migrant mothers in Malta.*

## **Professional identity in medical humanitarianism**

*Christine Cassar, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts*

*Medical humanitarianism is the delivery of health services, capacity building and systems strengthening in low resource settings, often by professionals trained and coming from the global north. Whilst the importance of improving health outcomes and global health is rarely disputed, the mechanisms by which these interventions take place form part of a wider and more complex global governance structure – of organizations and networks of medical professionals whose role it is to travel to different countries to set up, deliver and advise programmes on site.*

*This presentation first looks at literature bringing together our understanding of professional identity in health and aid work, and further engages with the challenges of studying a largely transient population held together by a shared technical knowledge. In the second part, the presentation delves into the impact of the Covid pandemic both in terms of the early effects seen in the sector itself, as well as in terms of new challenges in research approaches and the (in)ability to ethnographically observe and decode the everyday lives of aid workers, looking instead at alternative methodological approaches employed to study a population 'at a distance'.*

## **From overtourism to undertourism: Small island states and the COVID-19 pandemic**

Luca Nguyen, Island and Small States Institute

*The main objective of this study is to explore the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector in small island states and the response and resilience enacted to withstand the crisis.*

*Many small island states have jumped on the tourism bandwagon during the last two decades and this trend has proven so successful that in 2016 there were talks of "overtourism". However, the recent COVID-19 crisis created a health and socioeconomic shock that affected all the globe. Particularly hit are countries relying on tourism, including small island states. This vulnerability would confirm the traditional view that small islands are fragile and unable to deal with external shocks without international help. However, past global crises have shown that a number of small island states built resilience in front of these challenges. There is a debate whether this resilience is policy-driven and planned by the government (top-down) or it is due to the innate resourcefulness of the collective action of individuals, firms and the society (bottom-up).*

*This present study contributes to a growing research area on island tourism, investigating how global shocks affect small island states and how the response from the top-down and bottom-up resilience works and interacts to withstand such challenges.*



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