



**L-Università
ta' Malta**

The National Natural History Museum, Malta and the Gozo
Nature Museum: a comparative study on their potential and
performance

by

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, Pian Pauline, declare that this dissertation is my original work, gathered and utilized especially to fulfil the purposes and objectives of this study, and has not been previously submitted to any other university for a higher degree. I also declare that the publications cited in this work have been personally consulted.


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Abstract

The research project attempts to assess the visitor attraction potential and performance of two local Museums. The main objective is to find the reasons behind low participation in museum visits and define its parameters to address potential weaknesses. The researcher intends to provide recommendations to museums willing to improve their cultural tourism product to be more relevant to the public and increase their annual number of visitors.

In this respect, the study focuses on two museums with much in common, even though one is located in Malta and the other in Gozo, both are managed by Heritage Malta. The project is guided by research questions that facilitate the appreciation of the dialectic between Heritage Malta's senior officers, visitors and tourism professionals. The data collected from visitors on-site provide rich insights into the visitor profiles, their needs and expectations while visiting a natural history museum. Additionally, these data permit the evaluation of the museums' quality standards through visitor satisfaction. Complimentarily, the data compiled by the interviews of Heritage Malta's senior officers and a tourism professional define the current views and challenges to selling these museums as visitor attractions.

This dissertation raises awareness about the interest shown by all visitor profiles. It also presents opportunities as well as indications as how museums address shortcomings to make them more attractive. Museums willing to evolve according to stakeholders' needs, diversify and adapt their offers to visitors' various profiles will ensure their relevance and secure a future as public institutions and as visitor attractions.

Keywords: Visitor Attractions, Museums, Natural History, Cultural tourism product, Quality standards, Malta, Gozo, Cultural consumers.

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List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AR	Augmented Reality
FREC	Faculty Research Ethics Committee
GNM	Gozo Nature Museum
HM	Heritage Malta
ICOM	International Council of Museums
MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
MCST	Malta Council for Science and Technology
NNHM	National Natural History Museum
NSO	National Statistics Office
UNWTO	World Tourism Organisation
UREC	University Research Ethics Committee
VA	Visitor Attraction
VR	Virtual Reality

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Since the end of the second World War, tourism has become an increasingly important pillar of the Archipelago's economy. The industry reached its climax in 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic representing 15% of Malta's Gross Domestic Product and over two billion euros.¹ Like other similar Mediterranean destinations, the attractiveness of Malta is mainly seasonal, creating unsustainable resources and flow management during peak season and precarious periodic employment. Therefore, to overcome these issues, local authorities aim to extend the tourist season by diversifying the tourism products and capitalising on all environmental and socio-cultural aspects of the Maltese islands, developing various types of segment markets, also known as niche tourism. Cultural tourism is one of them and will be an essential aspect of this dissertation.

Endowed with a rich historical and multicultural background coming from its strategic location in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, it is anticipated that Maltese natural and cultural heritage are valuable assets in developing the country as a cultural destination. In fact, cultural tourism products are made from heritage assets and play a vital role in protecting and rediscovering them. It has the power to combat the extinction of tangible and intangible heritage by conserving, protecting and reviving traditions by making them accessible to the general public. In this respect, the cultural sector in Malta benefited from substantial investments (local and EU funded) to ensure accessibility, preservation and conservation of its cultural assets, which plays a vital role in increasing the island's attractiveness to tourists.²

On another note, UNWTO suggests that Cultural tourism is a motor to stimulate the local economy, create employment and tax revenues, and develop infrastructures. These two facets issued from the development of Cultural tourism, and although both are beneficial for the country's economy, they often clash. The reason is that when managed as a tourism product, the primary need of the cultural destination is to attract visitors and

¹https://www.statista.com/topics/7091/travel-and-tourism-in-malta/#topicHeader__wrapper

²https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/expost2013/wp9_case_study_malta_en.pdf

generate income taking the risk of losing its initial nature. As a result, conserving heritage is not always the main priority when facing infrastructure developments and often ends up on the local newspaper headlines dividing public opinion.

Furthermore, Cultural tourism has tremendously advanced and complexified in the past decades, blurring the line between Tourism and Culture and bringing its share of challenges and opportunities to the sector. Initially aiming to educate people passively, visitors contemplated cultural heritage mostly in museums and heritage sites. Today's tourists are involved and interested in cultural experiences; they seek to engage with the attractions forming part of a destination and request a higher quality and value for money (UNWTO, 2010). According to the UNWTO General Assembly of 2017, Cultural tourism's newest definition implies

"A type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions." ³

The notion of quality within cultural attractions is vast and encompasses various interlinked fields such as promotion, innovation, cultural safeguarding, sustainable development, and urban regeneration. It became a competitive aspect of the tourist experience on the same level as price. In addition, the tourists' satisfaction is influenced by intangible components such as safety and security, accessibility, cleanliness, and hospitality (UNWTO, 2010). Therefore, for cultural tourism to thrive, a balanced approach within the environment, local community and tourist satisfaction must be maintained. Nonetheless, many Cultural tourism attractions suffer from mismanagement strategies that negatively impact the visitor experience and the perceived quality of a destination. Therefore, policy frameworks with goals and visions on tourism's long-term benefits on a

³ <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-culture>

destination are crucial ingredients to offer qualitative products. Consequently, to stay competitive cultural destinations must integrate heritage and tourism goals within their management and marketing strategies and focus on quality performances. Additionally, tourism attractions must be continuously audited and improved in an ethical approach to reach quality goals. For instance, according to UNWTO, inclusive management systems and innovative cultural tourism experiences produce top-quality and long-term Cultural tourism products.⁴ Overall, all the industry stakeholders are concerned, from the National tourism strategy development of a whole destination to the individual service provider within the territory. In fact, one of the fundamental objectives of the Malta Tourism Strategy 2015-2020 and the current strategy is to "raise the level of Quality across the entire tourism value chain". (Malta's Tourism Strategy for the years 2021 - 2030: pp. 10-11).

To reduce the scope of the dissertation, we will apply the points discussed above to only one aspect of cultural attractions, such as museums. In this respect, when managed as a tourism product, the primary need of museums is to attract visitors and generate income. Consequently, the museum's success is measured by its frequentation, based on the quality of the cultural experience they offer. However, when looking closer at the findings of official surveys carried out to investigate the parameters of visitors' behaviour in perceiving and consuming cultural attractions; the researcher understands that there is a paradox between the perceived importance of cultural heritage for European citizens (which represents the most significant influx of Tourists in Malta) and the actual participation rate in cultural activities, particularly museum visits. Eurobarometer's survey on Cultural Heritage (2017), commissioned by the European Commission,⁵ indicates that *"the majority think cultural heritage is important to them personally as well as to their community, region, country and the EU as a whole and take pride in cultural heritage and agree it can improve quality of life and a sense of belonging to Europe"*. (TNS, 2013, p.4). Nevertheless, and despite these conclusions, Eurobarometer's surveys on Cultural access and participation (2007; 2013) commissioned by the DG EAC⁶ show that when looking at

⁴ <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-culture>

⁵ Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture.

⁶ Education and Culture Directorate-General of the European Commission

the attitudes of European towards cultural activities and particularly museum visits: *"37%⁷ of respondents visited a museum or gallery in the year preceding the survey which represents -4 points less than in 2007."*⁸ Locally, surveys on cultural participation and engagement conducted since 2000 by the National Statistics Office, Valletta 2018 Foundation, and Malta Arts Council (2021) corroborate these findings as the most recent survey affirms that *"12 months prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 31%⁹ of local respondents visited a museum at least once."* Additionally, the Eurobarometer survey on cultural access and participation (2013) also points out some of the main barriers to visiting museums: *"Lack of interest"* for 35% of respondents, *"lack of time"* for 32 %, followed by *"Limited choice or poor quality"* for 10% and *"too expensive"* for 8%." (TNS, 2013, pp.7-37).

1.2 Motivation and personnel involvement

As a Tourism student and fervent visitor of museums, the researcher found the Statistical findings interesting and thought this phenomenon deserved further investigation to examine some aspects causing low attractivity in museums. Locally, the researcher observed a few museums considered "unsuccessful" due to their low number of yearly visitors and was interested in comprehending why. In this respect, the dissertation became an attempt to assess the visitor attraction potential and performance of two local Museums in a comparative analysis. The researcher intends to provide recommendations to museums willing to improve their tourism product to be more relevant to the public and increase the annual number of visitors.

Much information about quality standards in museums, visitor experiences and tourist satisfaction are available. However, local case studies are scarcer. Locally, Sheridan (2021) conducted a research project on access, experience and participation from the Millennial standpoint. She explores the expectation of this particular public when visiting local museums. While she focuses on one segment of visitors, both research projects are complementary as they seek to understand visitors' expectations to assist museums in increasing their attraction potential.

⁷ Within this percentage: 23% visited 1 to 2 times a year, 8% visited 3 to 5 times and 6% visited more than 5 times.

⁸ In the survey conducted in 2007, 41% visited a museum or gallery once or more in the year preceding the survey.

⁹ Including 5% visited a museum more than 4 times a year, 10% visited 2 to 3 times and 16% visited 1 time.

The researcher's interest in museums as a cultural tourism product grew after attending the Muze X-Shaping Museum Futures conference held in Malta in 2021, where the panel consisting of museums professionals and academics discussed the latest initiative in the field in terms of technology, accessibility and experiences to rethink the Museum of the future.

1.3 Aim and objectives of the dissertation

This research project seeks to assess the visitor attraction potential and performance of the National Natural History Museum (NNHM) using a comparative analysis with the Gozo Nature Museum (GNM) and a mixed-method approach. This project explores the dialectic between the museum, visitors and tourism professionals by defining visitors' expectations during the visit and acknowledging the needs and challenges encountered by the other stakeholders forming part of the museum product. In a bigger picture, the project pursues grasping the needs and priorities of the sectors by providing an outline of the main challenges and opportunities facing museums by assessing their relative effectiveness. The finality of the study is to provide valid, practical data and recommendations to the museums under study to reach a higher number of paying visitors and enhance the visitor experience (Debattista & Vella, 2017).

The study is guided by research questions that will facilitate the appreciation of the dialectic between the Heritage Malta senior officers, visitors and tourism professionals.

The research questions investigated in the course of the research are:

1. To understand the visitor profile and analyse their expectations while visiting a natural history museum
2. To evaluating the museum's quality standards through visitor satisfaction.
3. To analyse tourism professionals' needs and challenges to sell the Museum to visitors as a tourism product.

The first research question is investigated with an exit survey, which questions a sample of museum visitors on-site. The questionnaire is replicable and identical to both

museums. It is designed to analyse the public profile and the audiences' expectations by exploring, how tourists and visitors from different origins and part of various market segments, respond to the Museum's visit. In this respect, it includes questions related to information on the profile of visitors, their needs and expectations. Additionally, observation within the museums will assist in examining how tourists and visitors engage with the museum product.

The second research question aims to evaluate the museums' performance and quality standards through visitor satisfaction. These data are also collected via the exit survey with questions inspired by Visit England's Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme. Data collected from the questionnaire will be translated into scores to reflect the visitor experience and estimate the quality standards of the services proposed by the museums. Overall, the Post-visit questionnaire will help the researcher to define both establishments' strengths and weaknesses from the visitor's perspective and assess the museums as a cultural tourism product.

Finally, the scores and questionnaire's data findings are brought to the attention of tourism professionals to understand their needs and challenges in selling the Museum to visitors as a tourism product. This research question will assist us in comprehending the museums' various stakeholders' realities and challenges. In this respect, the researcher will conduct in-depth interviews with Heritage Malta's senior officers and a tourism professional. Some of the questions forming part of the interview were about collecting comments and explanations based on the exit-survey findings to define the challenges faced by the institution in implementing some of the visitor's needs, expectations and suggestions.

This study goes beyond previous surveys and findings by assessing the Visitor attraction potential of the two museums as part of our case study and considering the perspective of all stakeholders forming part of the Museum as a Cultural tourism product. Furthermore, academic research in the field of Tourism has yet to be conducted at the National Natural History Museum.

1.4 Significance of the research

This project comes into a context where both the Natural History Museum in Mdina and the Gozo Nature Museum will undertake dramatic changes in the near future, such as a restructuring and a possible relocation. The Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST) and KCA London have been working with the NNHM curatorial team on the "Esploranatura" project. This research project launched in 2018, aiming to expand the current Science Centre Esplora with a new natural history museum called Esploranatura, still needs to materialise. On another note, the collection of the Gozo Nature Museum will relocate to the future Gozo Museum, an undertaking launched by Heritage Malta and the Ministry for Gozo to establish a new comprehensive museum. National funds will finance this project.

The researcher learned this when pitching the research project; however, it only reinforced the purpose of the study and became a real opportunity to contribute theoretically to these two local enterprises. The insights from this dissertation will benefit all stakeholders involved in the museum product by finding some elements of answers toward a common interest: increasing cultural participation, appreciation and engagement. The in-depth analysis of the needs, expectations and challenges faced by paying visitors, tourism professionals, and Heritage Malta will prevent us from giving biased recommendations and strengthen the study's validity. Moreover, monitoring and suggesting different approaches and initiatives to the current museum's management strategy and product might theoretically modernise the museum. Turn it into a local hub where new ways to increase paying visitors could be explored to conserve our past, present and future heritage. Overall, this research contributes to preserving Malta's cultural heritage by helping the National Natural History Museum evolve together with stakeholders' needs.

1.5 Dissertation outline

Five consecutive chapters structure the dissertation. Chapter 1 introduces this research project and underlines the responsibility of local museums toward contributing to Malta as a cultural destination for residents and tourists alike. The background of museums as successful cultural tourism products was broached. This chapter outlines the aims,

objectives and significance of the research. The researcher expresses the motivations behind the project, and the research questions are described and examined.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature, identifying theoretical concepts that help understand the museum's mechanics as a visitor attraction and how its success relies on quality standards. The important objective of this review is to verify a model of relations between the quality of products, visitor satisfaction and the success of a cultural attraction. It also introduces the two museums forming part of the comparative analysis.

In Chapter 3, the researcher discusses the research methodology, thoroughly examines the choice of a mixed design study with comparative analysis, and explains the tools utilised to gather the primary data.

Chapter 4 explores the correlations between product quality, visitor satisfaction and the success of a cultural attraction and consolidates the concepts identified in Chapter 2. In this chapter, the researcher scrutinises with considerable length the primary data gathered for the two case studies; trends are aligned with responses from exit surveys and in-depth interviews; and crucial insights are provided to answer the project's research questions.

The final chapter 5 sought to explore the potential and performance of the National Natural History Museum and the Gozo Nature Museum by understanding and giving some answers to the local situation. The researcher considered three essential elements to finding the reasons behind low participation in museum visits such as having an in-depth understanding of the visitor's profiles and expectations, evaluating the museum's quality standards through satisfaction, and finally, analysing the tourism professionals' needs and challenges to market the museum as a cultural tourism product. This chapter presents the dissertation's conclusions and recommendations to stimulate cultural participation and visitor engagement.

Chapter 2 - Literature review

2.1 Overview

This study attempts to verify a model of relations between the quality of products, visitor satisfaction and the success of a cultural attraction such as a museum. Therefore, this chapter begins with an in-depth literature review of theoretical concepts such as Visitor Attractions and Quality Standards. The conceptual introduction of these concepts is valuable to the research project as they will shape the dissertation's backbone. The dissertation's scope is to contribute to understanding the mechanics of the museum as a visitor attraction and how its success relies on quality standards. In this respect, the main definitions will be introduced in this chapter, such as what a museum is in today's society and how its success is defined. Like many concepts in the field of Tourism and Culture: Museum and Cultural participation are constructs with intricate social implications. These concepts are considered multidisciplinary because catering for visitors' needs involves numerous sectors and industries (Gunn, 1994). Therefore, for the benefit of the research project, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of all their aspects. Finally, this chapter will introduce the two local museums forming part of the comparative analysis: the National Natural History Museum and the Gozo Nature Museum.

2.2 The Visitor Attractions concepts

2.2.1 Defining Visitor Attractions

Defining Visitor Attractions (VAs) takes work, and scholars argue about the benefits of clearly defining this concept. The lack of a set definition impacts the methodology and framework of research in the field, leading scholars to "discuss" VAs within a tourism product rather than on its own. (Leask, 2010). Some believe that a definition would help data comparison and the formulation of management practices; others disagree. For instance, Sharpley (2009) asserts that considering and defining VAs as a whole is too broad in scope and unattainable. Indeed, VAs are diverse and can encompass global tourism destinations, individual products, experiences and places.

Nevertheless, some tentative definition exists:

Hu and Wall's (2005, p.615) define VAs as *"a permanent resource, either natural or human-made, which is developed and managed for the primary purpose of attracting visitors."*

The British national tourism agency: VisitEngland (2014, p.3) describes VAs as:

"An attraction where it is feasible to charge admission for the sole purpose of sightseeing. The attraction must be a permanently established excursion destination, a primary purpose of which is to allow access for entertainment, interest, or education [...]. It must be open to the public, without prior booking, for published periods each year, and should be capable of attracting day visitors, tourists, and local residents."

According to Leask (2016), VAs as individual sites are categorised into eight visitor attractions types (Table 1). One can observe that the main distinction lies between tourist attractions and cultural attractions. Built heritage attractions, including cultural and natural heritage sites, constitute the main field research focus and cover various VA types. This research project focuses on VAs publications related to museums and galleries to comply with the research's purpose. Leask (2016) observed common characteristics and general principles between these types of VAs, which also apply to Museums:

- The core objective of the VA is to enable and manage visitors' access to a natural or built resource.
- To offer an experience or product designed for appreciation, conservation, education, interpretation and/or entertainment purposes and upon an entrance fee or not.
- To develop visitor engagement and interaction.
- The resource is permanent, bound to a place and managed by an organisation.

Table 1: Visitor Attractions types. (Source: Leask, A., 2016.)

Visitor Attractions types
Theme parks or amusement parks – water parks, amusements, themes
Museums and galleries – art, cultural, historical, collection-based, virtual, open air museums
Natural – gardens, national parks, forests
Animals – safari, farms, zoos, aquariums
Visitor centres – cultural, industrial, transport
Religious sites
Heritage – castles, forts, historic houses, visitor centres, monuments, industrial, dark, archaeological, military, music
Various types

Overall, visitor attractions are essential for the tourism industry to thrive, making a destination attractive to tourists (Gunn, 1994; Pearce, 1998; Benckendorff and Pearce, 2003). Tourism would not exist without attractions (Gunn, 1988; Mill and Morrison, 1985; Leiper, 1990). As part of a tourism product, visitor attractions aim to stimulate visitors' interest in the destination and provide visitor satisfaction to attract visitors (Gunn, 1994).

2.2.2 Visitor Attraction Management concept

Behind every Visitor Attraction lies four management concepts: Visitor Management, Product Management, Resource Management, and Site Management. Issues or weaknesses of a site ensue from inadequate strategies in one or more of these areas and related sub-themes. (Connel and Page, 2009; Leask, 2010). The scope of the dissertation focuses on the Visitor management of local museums, where a sub-theme related to visitor demand (Expectations) and experience (Satisfaction) will be discussed.

Overall, these sites are dependent on funding and sensitive to consumers' demands. As a result, success lies in providing various visitor-oriented products in line with visitors' expectations, enhancing visitor engagement (Taplin and Moore, 2015). Additionally, providing a relevant type of interpretation in accordance to visitor segments is necessary to achieve successful VA demand management. Alternatively, their demise is primarily due to unsuited management strategies and approaches to managing the resource toward visitor experience. (Weidenfeld and Leask, 2013).

In the Museum and Galleries sector, factors in a site's failure mainly translate into difficulties in generating revenue and appealing to new audiences, leading to low cultural

participation and visitor engagement. Scholars anticipate various complications that might prove challenging for sites, including museums but necessary for their thriving. One example is to adapt to the varying types of visitors' needs, such as Millennials; the increasing ageing populations; cultural diversity; or health issues such as obesity or dementia. (Terry, Paternall, Davis and Anstey, 2015). But also, to adapt to changes in visitor demands and preferences.

2.2.3 Museums as a type of Visitor Attractions

From a tourism standpoint, museums are significant attractions for the cultural tourism niche and contribute to local economies providing job opportunities and income growth (Kotler and Kotler, 2001). According to (Jansen-Verbeke and Rekom, 1995; Plaza, 2000), they can enhance or regenerate urban and rural destinations by helping to build a cultural appeal and play an essential role in defining holidays itineraries and tourism promotion strategies of a destination (Johanson and Olsen, 2010; Prideaux and Kininmont, 1999). As a result, their performance and keeping visitors satisfied are crucial variables of their functioning. To attract visitors, they can no longer rely only on their status as a "public institution" but must adapt their "product" to public expectations. (Black, 2005, p.266). Alternatively, from a socio-educational standpoint, museums have significant educational power; they influence and shape visitors' ideas, beliefs, values, and, to a bigger extent, society members. In this respect, they are not neutral initiatives and often have their political agenda (Smith, 2006). For this reason, in the dominant discourse, Heritage was considered a static entity to be preserved and managed. Museums were the place to display the past through well-thought narratives and selected objects. This status for museums contrasts with the perspective that Heritage is a meaning-making approach where visitors experience the significance of the past in the present. (Smith, 2006, p. 3). Therefore, for museums to stay relevant to their visitors, they must answer to the needs and expectations of the various profiles forming part of the community (Ames, 2003; Kreps 2003).

Hudson explains that the museum concept has never been static over the centuries but constantly evolving with society's needs (Hudson, 1987, p.1). From the Ancient Greek concept of a museum, Renaissance galleries, and cabinets of curiosity reserved for high society and scholars to the 21st-century museum as an agent of change and societal actor, we can observe a considerable evolution in the definition of museums. Nowadays is no exception; ICOM¹⁰ called the Committee for Museum Definition, Prospect and Potential to revise the latest published definition of a museum. According to them, the current definition does not fully reflect the purposes, functions and perceptions of 21st-century museums.

"A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment." (ICOM, 2007).

Some values of today's museums are not depicted, such as cultural democracy, co-production, and equal exchange between institutions and the public. As a result, the definition is incomplete. Macdonald argues that in the past decades, the scholastic sphere recognised museums as multiple and complex institutions requiring multidisciplinary expertise to be fully apprehended. This multiplicity and complexity make the modern "museum" really difficult to reduce to one single definition. (Macdonald, 2011, p.1).

Nevertheless, ICOM approved the new definition after months of discussions and workshops between museum professionals, at the ICOM General Conference in August 2022, Prague as follow:

"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible Heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive; museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of

¹⁰ International Council Of Museums.

communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing." (ICOM, 2022).

The major changes from the initial definition include terms such as inclusivity, community participation and sustainability and officially recognise their importance within the role of today's museum.

Even though there is a general understanding of the definition of museums, there is a considerable variety of theories among scholars about the social responsibilities of museums. Until recently, the museum institution was based on the traditional model that emerged in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The focus of these establishments was mainly on the scholarly perspective of the collection, its conservation and all kinds of research related to it. Preserving tangible or intangible Heritage and presenting the past passively through a narrative has been the traditional museum practice for centuries (Leon and Rosenzweig, 1989). However, this management approach was challenged in the 70s when the core principles of the museum shifted: *"From being about something to being for someone"* (Weil, 1999). *"Museums are both about something and for someone, unified by an active sense of purpose"* Hudson (1987). Overall, the visitor became the centre of attention. Museums adopted a humanistic and conceptual approach to educate through objects introducing commercialism and entertainment. This concept is called 'New museology' (Vergo, 1989). Presently, some professionals in the fields and museum thinkers talk about "the museum of the future", where the museum becomes an actor for societal changes. According to Murawski (2021), museums should function as agents of positive change. He explains that on top of being a place that exhibits and preserves our Heritage, museums are also living institutions that favour connection, dialogue, care and healing. The museum of the future is human-centered, shaping a set of values reflecting commitments such as inclusion, human rights, accessibility and justice. It is a place to discuss our sensitive realities and learn from them (Murawski, 2021, p.5). Furthermore, he sees the museum as something other than a physical institution. However, he advances that the museum is: the staff, the visitors, and the community, and they are inseparable. Only the synergy of both the physical space and people make a museum.

Overall, challenges faced by museums increased in the last decades, forcing them to reinvent themselves to keep existing. The cutbacks in public funding allocated to culture pressure museums to perform and seek greater management efficiency and effectiveness to augment their revenue. Furthermore, the cultural models' shift towards experiential services pushes museums to focus on consumer orientation by understanding visitors' demands and expectations (Camarero, Garrido and Vicente, 2015, p.228). According to Wu (2012), today's tourism market is highly competitive, with consumers increasingly informed, critical and demanding unique and customised products. This new paradigm is an economy of experience where satisfying visitors' needs also means triggering memorable emotions. Pine and Gilmore's "experience economy," that includes education, estheticism, entertainment and escapism, is a well-established theory. However, the concept of experience in the cultural tourism product is exponentially growing, exceeding the service sector. (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

"When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. However, when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages, as in a theatrical play, to engage him personally" (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.2).

The experience economy's leading component for museums to stay competitive is innovation, which permits to vary and renew experiences in an increasingly global market (Darmer, 2008, pp. 1-12). Innovation is also used to increase the impact of the narrative on visitors, sparking conflicting opinions, with some academics fearing the Disneyfication of culture endangering the museum's cultural mission. Gil & Ritchies (2009) suggest interpretation as a key feature of the museum experience. Bulger (2011) adds that meaningful relationships between museums and community members encourage heritage experiences. According to Bulger, the museum should engage with the community, and the narratives serve a variety of visitors through continuous developments (Bulger, 2011, pp.136-137).

2.2.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the museum's environment evolved and became increasingly challenging since a museum's objective to present itself as a tourism product often conflicts with its primary socio-educative missions. The shift toward visitor experience means that museums adapt their products to customers' demands and expectations beyond the traditional focus on collections, information and education. Today's museum must also generate experience using participatory practices, innovation and engaging content. Furthermore, museums must offer a high-quality experience in an ever more competitive environment to attract and retain visitors (Reussner, 2003, pp. 95-108). The Quality of a product is measured by its performance and level of visitor satisfaction.

2.3 Visitor Attractions and quality standards

This section will determine the key components of excellence and the drivers needed to improve museum quality. Current debates in the field will also be considered. Generally, the cultural traveller's first motivation is discovering and learning about a destination's cultural Heritage (UNWTO). Nevertheless, nowadays, cultural tourism converts towards experiences for the traveller to reach a meaningful and deeper understanding of the destination's culture (Cros and McKercher, 2014). Overall, in literature, one observes a gap in measuring museum success and no set of measures are clearly defined to assess if museums are fulfilling their missions (Babbidge, 2005). Evaluating excellence in the cultural sector has been a long-lasting dilemma (Bunting, 2010). Data collection on visitor numbers and participation are good indicators of museum success. The collections and their effective use are essential features of museum excellence. (Wilkinson, 2005; Cross and Wilkinson, 2007). The curator intervenes in generating knowledge through research, often collaborating with universities and students. Another aspect of their role is extending the collection through new purchases and, most importantly, effectively handling the collections to provide high-quality cultural experiences with public-oriented narratives (Cross and Wilkinson, 2007). It is often argued that museums should put more effort into actively using their extensive collections, which often lie behind closed doors. Initiatives to enhance the collection's access to the public include collaborations between

museums by sharing collections with loans and temporary exhibitions. Product diversification by developing collections is another recurrent theme (Wilkinson, 2005).

Measuring Quality helps improve the visitor experience and attract non-users. Non-users are often attracted by the development of targeted initiatives and offer for specific visitor profiles such as people with disability, minority ethnic backgrounds and people from lower socio-economic groups. (Smithies, 2011, p.22). Emphasising services for children are also a way to increase visitor numbers or use cross-marketing between museums to encourage people to visit other museums. (Smithies, 2011, p.24).

2.3.1 Service quality

Higher levels of education; high exposure to leisure activities; reduced budget for leisure; increased competition are among the reasons that dramatically increased expectations from consumers of leisure experience (Godbey, 1989, p.61). As a result, many scholars believe increasing service quality is paramount to keeping an attraction viable (Godbey, 1989, p.61). Low pricing as a preferred competitive tool moves on to offering a superior quality of service as a differential advantage. Even though there is a general understanding of the importance of service quality, defining what it is not as straightforward as "quality seems to be a highly personal matter" (Wager, 1966).

2.3.2 Visitor expectation

Manning (1986) suggests that service quality is when the service or product meets the visitors' needs. This construct evolves on the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm, which states that expectations, predictions or anticipations are the baselines of disconfirmation judgements. For instance, if the service offered performs as expected or exceeds expectations, the individual's expectations are confirmed or positively disconfirmed. However, if the service performs more poorly than expected, in that case, the visitor's expectation is negatively disconfirmed, and the individual's perception of the quality of the attraction is low. Nevertheless, if expectation were the only criterion to measure the quality of service, lowering visitors' expectations would be efficient for reaching a good

rating, which is not the case. Attractions also need to consider what the public desires and needs. MacKay and Crompton (1988) *"defines service quality as the relationship between what customers desire from a service and what they perceive that they receive."* Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) conducted extensive research on service quality in the business and marketing field, which was later adapted to the leisure field by MacKay and Crompton (1988). According to Parasuraman et al., there are five dimensions to Service Quality: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy.

2.3.3 Visitor satisfaction

It seems logical to assume that the success of museums relies on visitor satisfaction (Middleton, 1996; Prentice, 1993; Nowacki, 2009); however, no empirical studies support this theory. Brown (1984) advances with the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum that visiting attractions under specific conditions creates an experience that helps benefit the visitor. Moscardo (1999) believes that the state of mindfulness of visitors during the visit is the key factor to their satisfaction. He explains that mindfulness or level of knowledge is impacted by two groups of factors in a museum: the exhibition factors (innovation, interpretation, variety of exhibition and media) and the visitor's factors (fatigue and interest). Exhibition factors also have a direct influence on visitor factors. Additionally, Quality is a factor that indirectly affects satisfaction through gained benefits and perception (Jensen, 2004; Manning, 1986).

On a local level, VAs is not defined within publications from National Authorities in the fields of Tourism and Culture, or even National Statistics.

Nevertheless, Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) discusses VAs within the appraisal report from the previous national strategy's results (2015-2020). A report indicating an overall increase and diversification of visitor attractions on the Archipelago mainly issued from public and private investment. And a trend toward experiential offers over traditional cultural display sites and museums. The report also highlights that MTA does not include these attractions within the overall Tourism Strategy, which results in the absence of quality standards within Visitor Attractions. (Malta's Tourism Strategy for the years 2021 - 2030: p10-11). This is because VAs are considered Cultural and Heritage sites that fall

under the responsibility of another ministry and are managed by the national agency for museums, conservation practice and cultural Heritage.

Furthermore, as part of the Alternative Strategic visions developed from the Destination PESTEL and SWOT Analysis findings conducted for the local Tourism Industry, one stand-out about VAs: REVIEW strategy.

REVIEW strategy is based on "*increasing visitor satisfaction, minimising social and environmental impacts and maximising economic returns.*" Following the EU Green Deal guidelines, Malta's Vision 2050 and representing Malta as a Global Climate Friendly Travel Centre. (Malta's Tourism Strategy for the years 2021 - 2030: p.35).

As discussed above, no quality standards exist locally regarding publicly managed local VAs. It is somewhat surprising when one considers one of the fundamental objectives of the Malta Tourism Strategy 2015-2020: "*raise the level of Quality across the entire tourism value chain.*" (Malta's Tourism Strategy for the years 2021 - 2030: p.10-11). This rule is still present in the Tourism Strategy 2021-2030.

The Quality of tourism products is closely linked to customer satisfaction and is considered to be reached once a service or product satisfies or exceeds customer expectations. Furthermore, being in good standing with tourists profits the site, benefiting from free advertising and word of mouth. On the contrary, dissatisfied tourists can significantly harm the place's reputation, especially with global online platforms like TripAdvisor. Every attraction needs to consider issues and find adapted solutions to crowd management, site management, and interpretation to reach customer satisfaction. Moreover, accessibility and mobility are among European tourism's objectives, known as tourism for all. Tourist destinations must cater for disabled people's accessibility needs, as well as persons with limited mobility, including families with young children and the elderly (UNWTO, 2010). This segment represents a significant potential market and testifies to the Quality of a destination. For instance, nowadays, it is frowned upon, especially in Europe, to come across cultural sites such as museums with no accessibility to minorities and people with limited mobility. In this respect, technology fills a gap and is also used to create an experience that someone would not access otherwise.

2.4 Introduction of the Museums under study

2.4.1 The National Museum of Natural History

The National Museum of Natural History in Mdina is part of the six main National Museums of Malta:

- Museum of Fine Arts
- National Museum of Archaeology
- National War Museum
- The Palace Armoury, housing the National Collections of Arms
- Malta's Maritime Museum

All the museums are housed in Baroque landmarks built by the knights and within Valletta, except for the Natural History Museum in Mdina and the Maritime Museum in Birgu.

The Palazzo Vilhena in Mdina hosts the National Museum of Natural History. It presents the diversity of the Maltese ecosystem via the displays of a rich collection made of over a million artefacts. The collection contains geological specimens, fossils, mollusks, paleontology, minerals, insects and reptiles... Many palaces were built during the rule of the Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (1530-1798). The Vilhena palace was one of them, initially replacing the medieval University of Mdina and the Magisterial Palace of Justice. With the independence of Malta in 1964, the national museums of Fine Arts, Archeology and Natural History progressively opened their doors as individual museums. Before these inaugurations, the National Collection of Natural history was a section gathered since 1922 within the Museum's Department in the Auberge d'Italie in Merchants Street, Valletta (Delia, 2011). The Museum Department, directed by Dr Themistocles Zammit, had three sections: the Natural History section curated by Giuseppe Despott (1878- 1936), the Mineralogy section curated by Lewis Mizzi (1847-1935) and the Arts section curated by Vincenzo Bonello (1891-1969), (Delia, 2011). It is interesting to note the importance and weight given to the National Natural History Collection at the time, two of the three sections from the Museum Department. This observation shows a great interest in Natural History. In this respect, in 1865, to conserve

monuments and promote the Natural Sciences and local Archaeology, the 'Society of Archaeology, History and Natural Sciences of Malta was set up. (National Library of Malta, MS 588).

2.4.2 The Gozo Nature Museum

The Natural History Museum opened its doors in the 1980s and recently changed its name to Gozo Nature Museum. The museum is accommodated within three connected households from the 1600s. These buildings were used as an inn for visitors and shelters during World War II. In the coming months, the Gozo Nature Museum and Archeology Museum will close as a new visitor attraction will be launched on the island of Gozo. A multidisciplinary regional museum and cultural centre in which a section on local ecosystems and biodiversity will be dedicated, amongst many others.

Heritage Malta divides the admission sales into two categories: "paying" visitors who pay the full admission fee to access HM museums and "non-paying" visitors who visit HM museums and enter as complimentary through HM's different collaborations and initiatives. Such collaboration includes school visits, combined tickets, memberships, and HM passports. Regarding the GNM, the museum has no full admission fee but only combined tickets. For the NNHM, the full admission fee is 2.50€ for children, 3.50€ for students and seniors, and 5.00€ for adults.

However, when a visitor buys the combined tickets from the GNM or the NNHM, it is counted as a "paying visitor". In contrast, if visitors buy the combined tickets somewhere else and access the museum free of charge, then they will be considered "non-paying" visitors.

Citadella visitor centre and museums combo tickets are 2.50€ for children, 3.50€ for students and seniors, and 5€ for adults. They include access to the Gozo Museum of Archaeology, Gran Castello Historic House, Gozo Nature Museum, Old Prison, and Citadel Visitor Centre.

The Mdina/Rabat combo tickets are €7.00 for children, 9.00€ for students and seniors and €13.00 for adults, and include three Heritage Malta sites: the Domvs Romana, the National Museum of Natural History, and St Paul's Catacombs.

Multi-pass sites tickets include access to all HM sites except the Hypogeum & Valletta Underground, 25€ for children, 38€ for students and seniors, and 50€ per adult.

Discover Gozo Family tickets include the visits of Ġgantija Temples, Ta' Kola Windmill, Cittadella Visitors' Centre, Gozo Old Prison, Gozo Museum of Archaeology, Gozo Nature Museum, Gozo Castello Historic House, 35€ for two adults and two children.

Family multi-pass tickets include access to all HM sites except the Hypogeum & Valletta Underground, 110€ for two adults and two children.

Heritage Malta passport scheme is an initiative to encourage local students from primary or secondary levels from independent or church schools to visit HM sites. They are given a card at school, valid until the end of Form 5. It provides unlimited and unrestricted access to all Heritage Malta sites and museums (except for Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum). The card is valid for the student and two accompanying adults. With every site visit, students collect a stamp for their passports, and the more stamps' students collect, the more benefits and gifts they receive from HM. The same scheme also exists for seniors.

Overall, the Passport Schemes attracted 33,876 visitors in 2021, with 16.10% utilised by the senior passport and 83.9% by students. (HM annual report 2021 p.143.) The NNHM attracted 2410 passport holders (in 2021 p.144). The National Museum of Natural History was among the most popular sites with students and senior passport holders. On the contrary, the Gozo Nature Museum was less popular with the holders of these schemes.

2.5 Conclusion

To conclude, museums must adapt their products to customers' demands and expectations beyond the traditional focus on collections, information and education. In a world where culture is progressively globalised, researching authentic experiences and

discovering the unique identity of the places they visit has become a significant trend for tourists and visitors alike. Overall, these experiential initiatives are beneficial to connecting people with their Heritage and raising awareness of cultural heritage preservation by improving cultural participation and satisfaction. Furthermore, museums must offer high-quality products in a competitive environment to attract and retain visitors. The Quality of a product is measured by its performance and level of Visitor satisfaction, which need to be assessed by VA regularly to improve potential mismanagements or weaknesses.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher establishes the study's conceptual framework employed to provide elements of answers to the research questions. The researcher reviews the mixed-design study approach chosen. This chapter thoroughly describes all the methods used throughout this research project and justifies how they complement each other within the study framework. Furthermore, the researcher explains each data collection procedure and the selection process for interviews and questionnaire samples. The concluding remarks of this chapter assure that the research procedure meets ethical considerations and discusses the study's limitations.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

Leask (2010) published two thorough critical reviews of the available research publications on the sector of VAs management before 2009 and the second between 2009-2014. She identified limitations, challenges, and evolution within academic research in both instances.

Firstly, the interdisciplinarity and broadness of the tourism field are disadvantages in the theorisation and methodological design processes. Laws and Scott (2015, p.48) identify Tourism "*as a field of study that is challenged to identify a theoretical core and disciplinary boundaries. [...], the scholarly body of tourism knowledge may be described as a mosaic of knowledge.*" Most of the conducted research projects are qualitative and rely on case studies (Leask, 2010). Consequently, leading authors in the field, such as (Benckendorff and Pearce, 2003; Hu and Wall, 2005; Richards, 2002), observed an overall need for theoretical ground and depth in research. Furthermore, Laws and Scott (2015, p.48) believe that the available academic research corpus does not represent the daily problems that tourism professionals are experiencing.

Leask (2010) calls for implementing "*robust methodology and research methods*" from scholars interested in the sector. This evolution is observed in the fields of museum and

visitor studies. Visitor attractions' environments are dynamic and affect their development and management strategies. Alternatively, it also influences the nature of academic research exploring trends in the field. Nevertheless, the abundance of publications and case studies guides in building an adequate framework for the study. Most research projects on VA's performance use quantitative methods such as SERVQUAL and HISTOQUAL. Even though these methods indicate the link between visitors' satisfaction and perceptions, some concepts the researcher wanted to explore, such as visitor profiles or needs, are not analysed with these methods. On another note, SWOT analysis is also used to measure visitor satisfaction.

3.2 Mixed method approach

After considering various research methods, a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative styles was adopted by the researcher. It was the most suitable method to achieve the study's objectives. According to Veil, (2018, p.2) Leisure and Tourism researches are *"an integral part of the social sciences field and seek to produce knowledge about human activity and understand the industry's social realities."* In this respect, they often involve quantitative data, such as numerical information, that mainly supports organisations in planning and making strategic business decisions (Neuman, 2003, p.20). For the dissertation, this approach involves obtaining a complete account and understanding of the museum's visitor satisfaction level and expectations assisting museums in enhancing their cultural product and cultural participation. Nevertheless, quantitative research focuses on variables independently of the study's context, limiting the study's insight significantly. As a result, the quantitative briefly glances at human behaviors' intricacy limiting the insights on a social level. (Cooper and Schindler, 2011, p.160).

In contrast, the qualitative style aims to delve further into social realities by closely studying a small sample of participants or a case study. (Neuman, 2003, p.16) Furthermore, it can address organisational problems and support business planning and decision-making (Cooper and Schindler, 2011, p.184). For the dissertation, this approach refers to thoroughly comprehending the museum's various stakeholders' realities and challenges.

In conclusion, the method corresponding to the complexity of the study is a mixed method approach combining qualitative and quantitative styles; thus, observing the phenomenon from various points of view enhances the validity of the research (Veil, 2018, p.25).

To analyse the elements that influence visitors' experience and, to a more significant extent, that contribute to museum attractiveness, the researcher runs a comparative analysis between two case studies using identical data collection methods at the Natural History Museum in Mdina and the Gozo Nature Museum. The research design is structured and replicable to both case studies with questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, but overall, the study combines three methods to gather primary data:

1. Post-visit questionnaires to evaluate visitor experience and expectations when visiting a Natural History Museum. The exit survey will help us define both establishments' strengths and weaknesses from the Visitor's point of view and help the researcher understand the visitor profiles.
2. On-site observation of the Visitor's behaviour within the museums to examine how visitors engage with the museum.
3. Lastly, semi-structured interviews with museum and tourism professionals to grasp the limitations and challenges they encounter while promoting and selling a museum product.

The combination of soft and hard data will strengthen the research's validity and be the point of departure to provide recommendations to attract more paying visitors. However, the study will not provide any definitive conclusion because realities have multiple forms and can only partially capture. (Cooper and Schindler, 2011, p.183).

3.2.1 The Choice of the case study

The researcher based the choice of museums for the case studies part of the comparative analysis on the research's purpose. The main objective being assessing the visitor attraction potential and performance of local museums; hence, only one factor motivated the selection: the number of yearly visitors. The number of visitors commonly measures museums' success together with financial statistics. Moreover, for the study's benefit and

relevance, the researcher needs to find two public museums, with one having lower visitors than the others that could be compared. Heritage Malta has a common statistical framework for all the museums under their scope published annually. In this respect, the National Natural History Museum stood up as per the data published in Heritage Malta's yearly Reports (Table 2). On the same theme, the Gozo Nature Museum had an overall higher number of visitors and was ideal for comparative analysis. Furthermore, the curatorial team of both museums has the same senior curator and shares the national collection, narrative and interpretation, adding pertinence to comprehending why one has more visitors than the other.

Table 2: Yearly report of paying visitors at the National Natural History Museum and the Gozo Nature Museum by Heritage Malta (2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021)

Museum	Yearly amount of paying visitors				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
NATIONAL NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM	16095	17477	19848	3339	9586
GOZO NATURE SCIENCE	14044	28053	33155	6091	7987

3.2.2 Visitor questionnaires

The quantitative approach measures objective facts by studying a significant sample (Neuman, 2003, p.16). The researcher selected the sample with the probability sampling method giving them the same chance of being selected. With this method, statements can be made with a certain degree of confidence because the sample size is representative of the population (Re and Hilário, 2014).

The quantitative approach consists of questioning a sample of museum visitors on-site at both museums to understand why there is a lower amount of paying visitors to the Natural History Museum in Mdina. The objective is to collect enough data to discern a pattern representative of the population. Overall, the exit survey is designed to analyse

the current public engagement and the audiences' satisfaction and expectations when visiting local Natural History museums by investigating how tourists from different origins and part of various market segments respond to the museum's visit. It will help us define how to improve cultural participation within local Natural History museums.

In this respect, the questionnaire includes questions related to information on the profile of visitors, their needs and expectations, and to record the level of satisfaction to evaluate the quality level of these museums. Customer satisfaction studies are applied to the museum environment to evaluate the product offered and its impact on visitors. Moreover, exit surveys, where people are asked to participate in a short interview as they leave the museums, are commonly used by VAs to measure concepts such as public engagement, visitor satisfaction and product quality.

The researcher conducted the fieldwork on both sites during peak seasons, such as weekends and Easter holidays. Moreover, complementary data sources such as online reviews on TripAdvisor and the Visitor's books complete the questionnaire's findings and evaluate attendants' satisfaction. The limitation of such secondary data is the possible bias and accuracy of information.

3.2.3 Observations

This qualitative method involves investigation and immersion in the culture under study. The researcher must be on-site to observe the culture's natural behaviour (Durberry, 2018). The design of this dissertation's research methodology evolved during fieldwork, and the observation method was not initially foreseen at the design stage. Nevertheless, while conducting questionnaires on-site, gathering data from the real world through observing visitors' behaviour in an immersive experience was relevant to the study.

3.2.4 Interviews

In order to gather a thorough understanding of the realities and challenges faced by the museum's stakeholders and determine how to increase cultural engagement within these museums, the researcher held in-depth interviews with Heritage Malta's employees and

tourism professionals following a qualitative approach. The data measured in words involve the researcher's analysis of meanings. (Neuman, 2003, p.139). The sample was selected using a non-probability sampling method, meaning that the researcher identified the participants according to the study objectives. In this respect, the researcher selected two Heritage Malta senior officers and an experienced tourism professional. With small samples, the researcher develops trust with participants and collects rich and authentic insights that would not be accessible with another approach. This method presents many advantages, such as reducing misunderstanding, participants' answers to all the questions, and irrelevant replies can be explored further, which significantly benefits the data's truthfulness and accuracy (Veil, 2018, p.129). The downside of a small sample is that no generalisation can be made as data are not representative of the majority. However, they can highlight trends and issues justifying low-risk decisions within an organisation, such as recommendations (Cooper and Schindler, 2011, p.165). Some of the questions forming part of the interview were about collecting comments and explanations based on the findings of the questionnaires. The aim is to understand the institution's background and challenges in implementing some of the Visitor's needs, expectations and suggestions.

3.3 Research and Ethical considerations

As per the University of Malta requirement, the research project started upon reception of approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy. This process aims to ensure the project's compliance with the University Research Code of Practice and Research Ethics and with international standards, particularly EU General Data Protection Regulations. This project does not require UREC (University Research Ethics Committee) clearance as the research does not involve vulnerable participants or sensitive topics. The study necessitated the cooperation of the senior officers from Heritage Malta, the visitors of the museums under study, and a Tourism professional.

The National Agency for Heritage sites: Heritage Malta manages the two museums under study. Therefore, both parties signed a confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement to

keep the data collected confidential and solely for writing a dissertation in an Academic context (Appendix A). Additionally, the researcher has asked for the management's permission to conduct the research (Appendix B). Each interviewee, part of Heritage Malta's senior employees, agreed to participate voluntarily and signed a consent form individually. They were instructed that the Data collected would be stored in a pseudonymised form (Participants A, B, C). However, the organisation's identity (Heritage Malta) will be revealed in the report arising from this research (Appendix C). The tourism professional interviewed also signed a consent form to participate (Appendix D).

Participants received an information letter (Appendix E) before the interviews and before signing the consent form explaining the following:

All data collected through interviews, along with information on the consent forms, interview recordings, and transcripts, will be erased upon the study's completion and publication of the results. Besides the researcher, only the supervisor and examiners will access this data. Moreover, until the result publication, the collected data are stored safely and securely.

About the museum's visitors, questionnaires were anonymous at all times. Participants certify that they were over 18 years old and consented to participate by giving their answers. They were informed about their rights to skip over any questions they did not wish to answer and that all data collected from this survey were solely for this study. The researcher would delete them upon the result's publication (Appendix F). Per FREC instructions, the researcher ensured that participants were aware of their rights and gave their consent before starting the data collection process (Appendix G & H).

3.4 Limitations of the study

While it has significantly limited academic studies for the past two years, the global Covid-19 pandemic did not directly impact this research project. During the fieldwork phase, there was little restriction regarding international travel and tourism, and both museums were open to the public like pre-covid time. Nevertheless, the study's limitations were various, and even though the researcher could anticipate some of them at the

methodology-building stage, a vast number unfolded while conducting the research project.

For instance, concerning surveys, some answers could be biased and thus for many reasons. Some of them would be dishonesty from visitors in filling out the questionnaire; lack of interest in some respondents who wanted to fill it out as fast as possible; finally, the misunderstanding of some questions due to a language barrier. The questionnaire was in English, and even though the researcher could assist the French visitors in understanding the questions, only English-speaking people could respond to the questionnaire leaving out a part of the population.

Furthermore, the number of questionnaires to complete was initially a calculated ratio of 10% of annual visitors. However, due to the limited study timeframe, it proved more reasonable to gather as many questionnaires as needed until discerning a pattern of answers that could be analysed further. Travelling between Malta and Gozo several times to gather the questionnaires and transfer the data from paper to an electronic database was highly time-consuming for the researcher. Therefore, it would have been ambitious to work on such a sample. Although electronic format questionnaires on a tablet would have permitted gathering data directly online (removing the transfer of data from paper to computer), it was not recommended due to Covid-19 sanitary instructions.

On another note, more interviews would have been beneficial to gather further insights from tourism professionals and senior managerial positions at Heritage Malta as well as other actors such as the education sector and NGOs. However, the researcher did not consider it due to time and labour constraints. Transcribing the oral interview into text was a lengthy exercise; consequently, managing more interviews would have been challenging.

Finally, the scarcity of local studies and literature on cultural participation, expectation, and needs in Maltese museums left a gap difficult to fill as there were not many academic theories to build upon, confirming the study's validity.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion of the findings

As discussed supra, when managed as a tourism product, the primary need of museums is to attract visitors and generate income. Their success is based on and proportional to the quality of the cultural experience they offer. The researcher dedicates this chapter to the process and analysis of the raw data collected during the fieldwork into valuable insights and statistics that will assist the researcher in answering each research question. To answer the first research question and understand the visitor profiles, needs and expectations while visiting a natural history museum and demonstrate how they engage with the museum product, the researcher analyses primarily quantitative data issued from the exit survey conducted on-site. The researcher processes these raw data into numerical data using Statistical data analysis and Excel as a data analysis tool, which permits translating the data into statistics and graphs to visualise the findings better. Additionally, insights from qualitative data, such as the semi-structured interviews and observation, will be used with content and narrative analysis.

Since the raw data from the exit survey also enable the evaluation of the museums' quality standards through visitor satisfaction, the researcher uses the same data analysis method to answer the second research question.

While for the third research question, which defines the current views and challenges of HM senior's officers and tourism professionals to selling these museums as visitor attractions, the analyses consist mainly of qualitative data issued from the semi-structured interviews and quantitative data from the questionnaire, which were not translated into numerical data. Therefore, the researcher will also use content and narrative analysis methods.

4.1 The visitor profiles, habits and expectations.

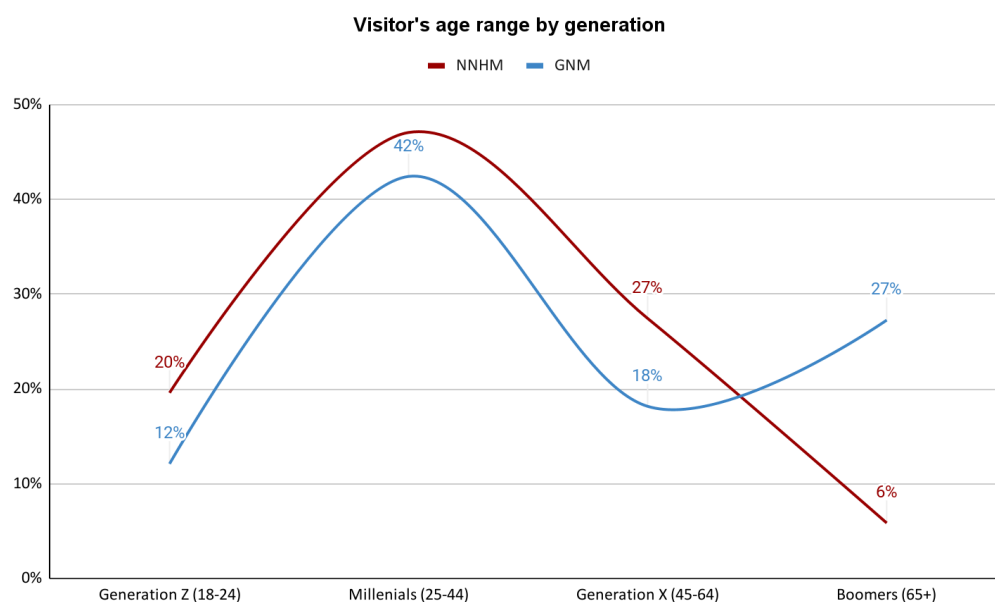
Heritage Malta categorises visitors into two sections, paying and non-paying visitors. As part of the secondary data collected from Heritage Malta, there was no division of visitors by age or segments before November 2021; therefore, the study analysis is based on the

primary data gathered with the questionnaires and focuses on individual visitors from 18 years old onward.

4.1.1 Visitor profiles

a. Demographics

The data analysis on visitors' demographics highlights compelling contrasts and diversity between the visitor profiles at both museums. According to the primary data gathered, most of the questioned participants at the NNHM were female, while male at the GNM. The predominant age range is below 45 years old for the NNHM and over 35 years old for the GNM (Appendix I). These findings led the researcher to divide the data on age range by generation to have a clearer picture of the visitor's age segmentation. When designing the questionnaire, the researcher did not foresee this segmentation; therefore, the generation's years gap could be more accurate by a year or two compared to published frameworks. Nevertheless, the researcher believes analysing the data on customers' expectations and needs by generation is compelling since there is more publication on the topic. Table 3: Visitor's age range by generation.



The most significant divergence appears with the Boomers segment. The Boomers generation represents one of the main segments of visitors at the GNM, while it is the minority at the NNHM. This difference might be due to the lack of accessibility of the NNHM, which is one of the main negative feedback from visitors and will be discussed later in this chapter. Similarly, there is a lack of accessibility at the Gozo Nature Museum, which does not seem to discourage Boomers visitors as Gozo's Citadella, which hosts the museum, is on its own hardly accessible. Therefore, if visitors climb up the hill to access the Citadella on their own steam, they are fit enough to visit the GNM and maximise their time within the Citadella. Additionally, the five museums within Gozo's Citadella are incentivised by Heritage Malta, offering an attractive single combo ticket providing access to all the sites for a maximum of 5€ (Gozo Museum of Archaeology, Gran Castello Historic House, Gozo Nature Museum, Old Prison, Citadel Visitor Centre). On the other hand, the City of Mdina is easily accessible via the main gate and offers an extensive choice of public and privately owned museums and sites which all have their entrance fee. The Mdina/Rabat combo tickets include the entrance to the Domvs Romana, the National Museum of Natural History, and St Paul's Catacombs for a maximum of 13€.

On another note, Generation Z is an essential public at NNHM and the minority of the GNM. This dissimilarity might be due to the average time spent in Gozo by tourists, which is commonly a one-day excursion; as a result, younger audiences allocate less time to museum visits and favour other types of experiences such as adventure tourism or ecotourism that are very popular in Gozo. The most prominent visitor segmentation within both museums is the Millennial generation. The researcher observed that most adults visiting as a family accompanying children and teenagers were part of the Millennial generation on both sites. The researcher did not measure the number of children and teenagers visiting the museums. However, measuring the number of minors should be included in future research to gain deeper insight into visitor profiles and needs. Participant A (GNM) believes that children are a significant motivator behind the visit of the museum for both local and international visitors.

b. Nationality

Table 4: NNHM - Visitor's nationality

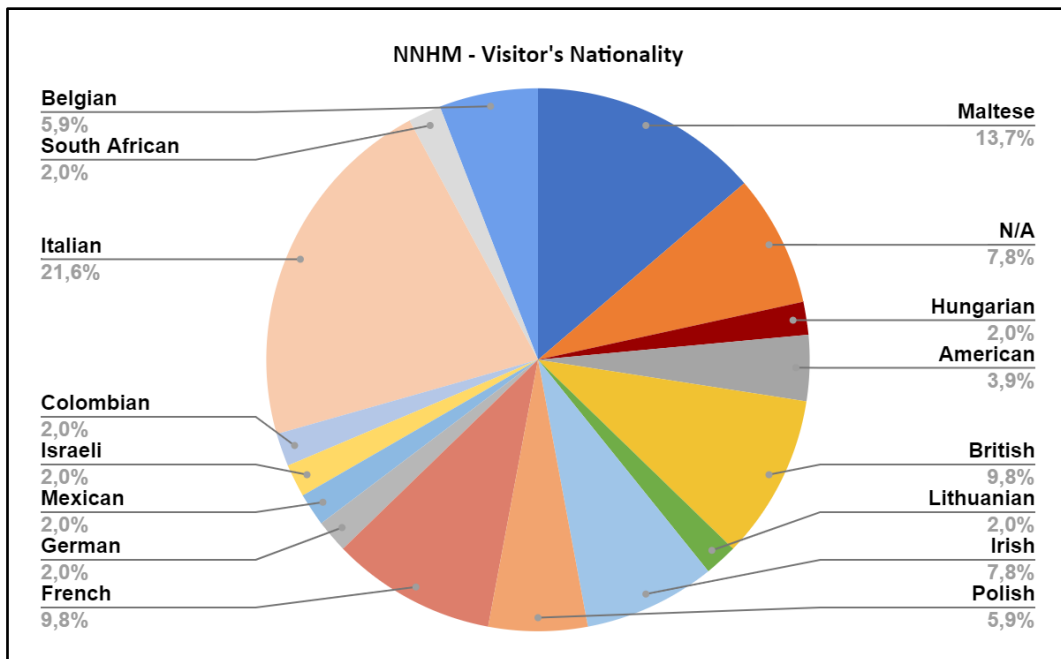
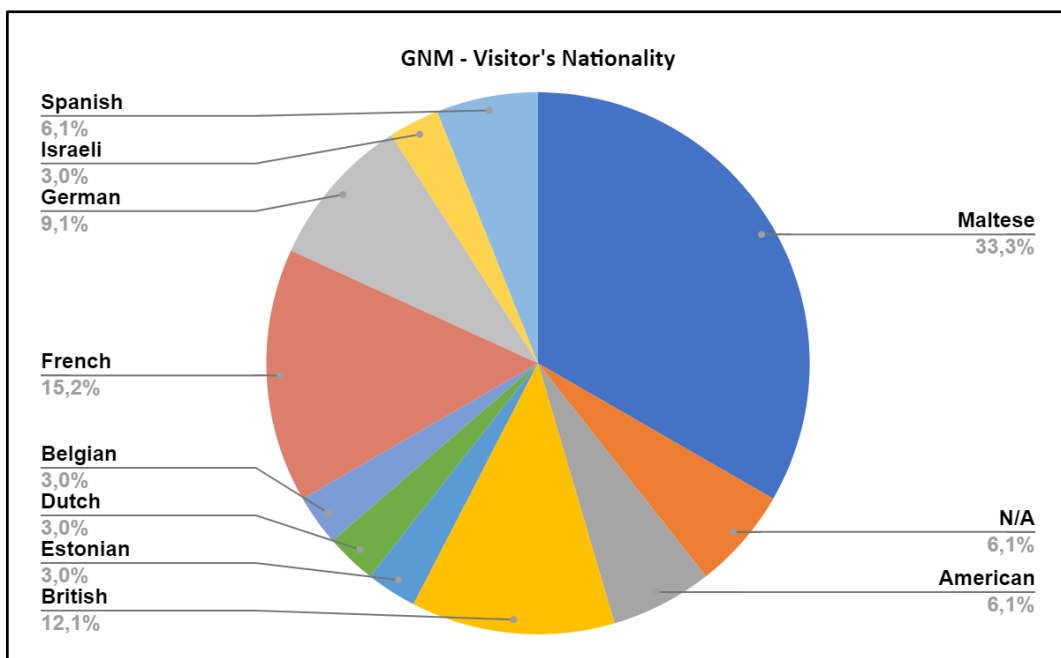


Table 5: GNM - Visitor's nationality



Concerning the provenance of visitors, the researcher observes a great contrast here again. The NNHM visitors are from all continents, with a majority of Maltese, Italian, British and French, while at the GNM, they are primarily European: Maltese, French, British and German. The variety of nationalities allows the museums to target various potential customers. However, the researcher could observe the absence of translated

information panels or booklets into languages other than English and Maltese. In their suggestions to the museums, some visitors advised providing translated mediums for foreign visitors.

Participant A (GNM) was surprised that Maltese visitors were predominant at GNM and thought it was because the researcher conducted the surveys during the Easter Holidays and weekends. It is common practice for Maltese nationals to come to Gozo with their relatives during these periods. Additionally, the researcher presumes that since the surveys were performed during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is natural to see many Maltese visitors who privileged domestic tourism instead of outbound tourism.

c. Individual visitors versus groups

Participant B (NNHM) regrets the absence of groups at the NNHM compared to nearby museums, such as St Paul's Catacomb and the Domus Romana. Participant B believes that Tour guides do not bring their groups to the museum because they need to learn about the natural environment. Participant C, a licensed private guide, mentions another explanation behind the lack of groups in such museums and points out that when a group of tourists visit Citadella or Mdina with a guide, that group must follow a pre-defined schedule with selected visits according to the tour's content. For instance, if the visit concerns Malta in the medieval era, then the NNHM and the GNM compete with the fortified city. It indicates that both museums' locations might not be in the right place and are out of context, and as a result, miss group visit opportunities. According to Participant C, the only reason for a group to visit a Natural History Museum is if the aim of the visit is about Natural Heritage.

Furthermore, the competition with other museums in Mdina is fierce. Suppose visitors are looking to learn about Mdina in the Medieval context and have limited time. In that case, the researcher assumes that they will privilege other museums in their free time such as the Cathedral Museum or the Palazzo Falzon, rather than the National Natural History Museum, which addresses a different theme.

The researcher noticed on-site that when a guide on the premises of the NNHM accompanied groups, it was for a short time and only in the courtyard, freely accessible

without visiting the museum. Guides were discussing the Vilhena Palace architecture, the mosaic floor of the courtyard and, to a bigger extent, the knights of Malta, but not the museum itself. The researcher did not observe any group with guides nearby the GNM.

d. The museum's target audiences

When asked about the museum's target audience, Participant A (GNM) and Participant B (NNHM) emphasised that their primary audience was group students due to the scientific nature of the displays. Both museums host many group visits for schoolchildren as part of the biological studies curriculum or for university students' research projects. As a result, the museum targets primarily students who are part of the "non-paying visitors" category, which directly impacts the museum's revenue.

On another note, although the museum does not exclude the general public, it does not focus on other types of visitor profiles forming part of the "paying visitors" category. Participant B indicates that because the NNHM reaches school audiences, they also reach individual visitors' children through educational displays on the Maltese ecosystems, ecology and some international issues. Participant A (GNM) shares the thought and observes a particular interest from individual visitors' children who visit with their relatives and often ask questions about the exhibited materials. This observation was confirmed by the researcher when on-site at both museums. Nevertheless, when the researcher asked visitors to rate both museums regarding children's activities, the scores were on the lower side, highlighting one of the weaknesses of these museums. This topic will be discussed later on in this chapter.

e. Conclusion

To conclude, both museums focus mainly on the scholarly perspective and conservation of the collection and its academic research projects, targeting predominantly students. As a result, they are still deeply rooted in the traditional museum model offering a passive experience through educational narratives (Appendix J). Both museums do not have a sound knowledge of the profiles and segmentations of their visitors, which prevent them from adapting their products to the public needs and expectations. These findings confirm

Weidenfeld and Leask's (2013) theories that museums cannot have a standardised cultural product to satisfy visitors. They must know their audiences to provide a relevant interpretation and a suited experience per visitor segment. Both museums' efforts focus on "non-paying visitors" to fulfil the cultural and educational role towards national schoolchildren and do not actively target any other visitor segments, which is one of the current flaws on both sites. Nevertheless, the survey outcome is encouraging and demonstrates an interest and enthusiasm from all genders, generations, educational backgrounds and nationalities for both museums. This shortcoming is an excellent opportunity to increase the number of yearly visitors and revenue by diversifying the products to reach various visitor profiles.

4.1.2 Visitor habits and expectations

a. Visit habits by generation

For both the NNHM and the GNM, visitors are accompanied by their family or friends regardless of their generation or level of education. When looking closer at visitors who come by themselves, they have a higher level of education, such as a Bachelor's Degree, Master or Doctorate and tend to be from the Millennials Generation. In contrast, visitors with a high school education level do not visit on their own but exclusively with family or friends (Appendix K & L).

b. Frequency of visits by the level of education

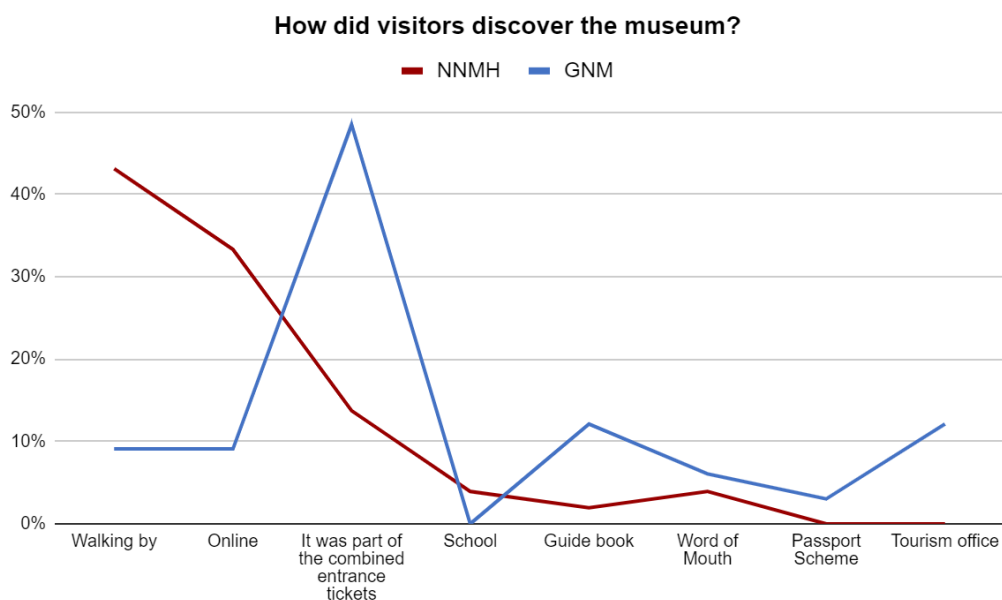
Regarding the frequency of visits to Natural History Museums, the respondents from both museums who answered multiple times a year tend to have a higher level of education, such as a Bachelor's Degree, Master and Doctorate. Amongst respondents from the NNHM, High School graduates were also an important segment visiting multiple times a year Natural History Museums. When looking closely at them, the researcher noticed that the majority are from Generation Z, so they probably still need to finish the course of their

studies, and educational visits might be one of the reasons behind the frequency of visits. The rest of the respondents with a high school education level are from Generation X and therefore show a genuine interest in visiting Natural History Museums (Appendix M).

When looking closer at the segment of people who said that it was the first time they visited a Natural History Museum, there is a divergence between the NNHM and the GNM. Amongst respondents from the GNM, all those who answered that it was their first visit were Maltese and had a combined entrance ticket. While at the NNHM, they were mostly foreign tourists, and none had a combined entrance ticket. This difference is evidence that combined ticket entrances encourage locals to visit some museums for the first time. On the other hand, it also indicates that the Mdina/Rabat combined ticket entrance, which includes the NNHM, is less successful for tourists than the Citadella visitor centre and museums combo tickets. This lack of popularity for the Rabat Combo ticket might be because most NNHM visitors are walk-in visitors who did not plan their visit.

c. How did visitors discover the museum?

Table 6: How did visitors discover the museum?



At the NNHM museum, most respondents were walking by before deciding to visit the Museum (It was also the case with the GNM but to a lower extent). Indeed, Participant B (NNHM) considers the museum to be in an ideal position that cannot be missed by any visitor entering Mdina via the main gate, making it an essential factor in attracting potential visitors. The Vilhena Palace is attractive to tourists, and the museum's location is undoubtedly an asset to attract more visitors; however, views on this topic differ. Participant B (NNHM) thinks that the building hosting the museum is a "wow factor" as a historical landmark, not as a museum and presents serious limitations for the museum product due to the layout and the initial nature of the building. These challenges will be discussed further later on in this chapter. This finding also indicates that visitors did not initially plan to visit the NNHM when they came to Mdina. Participant B (NNHM) supposes that it is due to a lack of interest in the theme of Natural History and that tourists prioritise other sites, such as the Temples and Cathedrals when visiting Malta.

Another explanation could be that visitors coming to Mdina might need more financial resources and time to visit all of Mdina's sites in contrast with Gozo's Citadella. Citadella is smaller in surface area than Mdina, and the combined ticket includes the entrance fee for the five museums held within its fortified wall. For a low fee between 2.50€ and 5€, individual visitors have access to the Gozo Museum of Archaeology, Gran Castello Historic House, Gozo Nature Museum, Old Prison, and the Citadel Visitor Centre. In equal comparison, the combined tickets for Mdina/Rabat cost between €7.00 and €13.00 and include three Heritage Malta sites: the Domvs Romana, the National Museum of Natural History, and St Paul's Catacombs. Suppose individual tourists wish to visit all the museums present within the walls of Mdina: The Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum, the Palazzo Falson, the Domvs Romana, the Mdina Dungeons Museum and the Knights of Malta experience. It would cost them considerably more money and more time than Citadella, so they have no choice but to select which sites to visit. Furthermore, Participant B (NNHM) points out that the promotion of the NNHM to tourists is insufficient and that the positive impact of promotional initiatives, such as a feature on local television and webinar, is short and mainly addressed to local visitors.

Online information is an essential factor for visitors to learn about both museums. It is a more common tool for the NNHM than for the GNM because the audience is slightly younger and uses online tools more frequently. However, when looking at the Online information found on Google, the first link is the Official Website of Heritage Malta, the second is Wikipedia, and the third is TripAdvisor which shows averagely-rated museums. For further research, the researcher would like to know how many potential visitors using online tools chose not to visit the museum due to online ratings' influences.

<https://www.tripadvisor.com> › Attraction_Review-g190...

National Museum of Natural History (Mdina) - Tripadvisor

The National **Museum of Natural History**, situated within the Vilhena Palace, including display areas that cover various topics such as **Maltese** Geology and ...

★★★★★ Note : 3 · 263 avis



<https://www.tripadvisor.com> › ... › Gozo Nature Museum

Gozo Nature Museum (Island of Gozo) - All You Need to ...

Located inside the Citadel, this is again a small **museum** (like almost all **museums** in **Gozo** Island) but it provides the visitors information about the **natural** ...

★★★★★ Note : 3 · 23 avis



At GNM, half of the respondents confirmed that the museum was part of their combined tickets, while at the NNHM, it concerned a few visitors. In reality, only the combined ticket exists for visitors wishing to visit Citadella's sites. Also, the Tourism office in Gozo promotes the museum and encourages tourists to visit it. At the NNHM, no respondent indicated that the reason for their visit was the Tourism Office, which is surprising considering that its location is currently within the museum's premises.

d. Audiences expectations

As discussed in chapter 2, to stay relevant to visitors, museums must answer to the needs and expectations of the profiles forming part of the community (Ames, 2003; Kreps, 2003). The expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm is one of the prevalent theories employed in measuring service quality standards and visitor satisfaction. It impacts positively or negatively the perception of the museum product by its visitors. Even though both museums provide great efforts in arranging attractive displays according to their

means, the visitor decides how to engage with the collection according to their state of mind, perception and expectations. Therefore, tangible or intangible elements affect the visitor's experience, and museums must focus on the visitor experience rather than the collection itself.

Table 7: NNHM - Visitor’s expectations

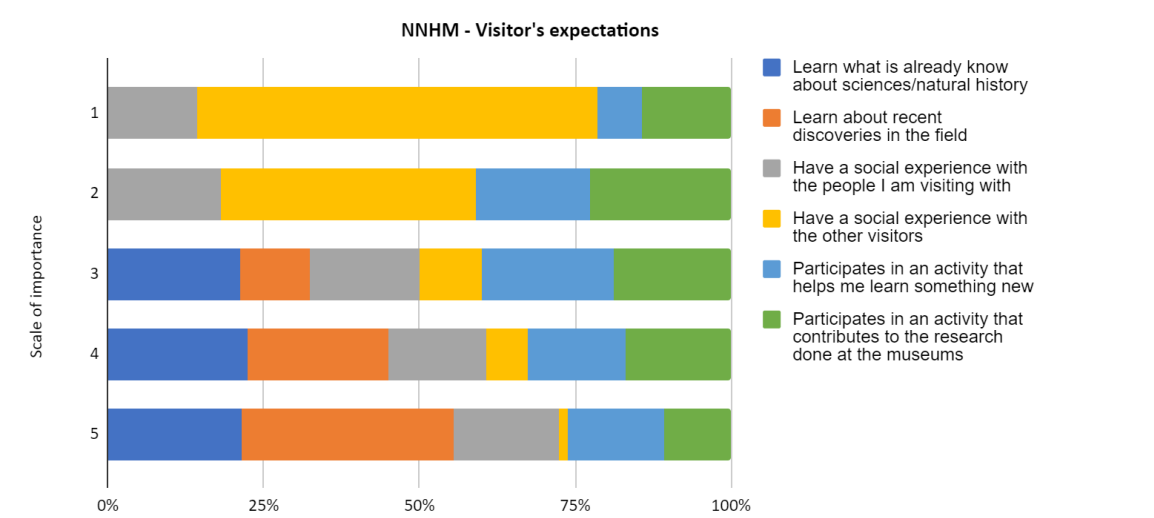
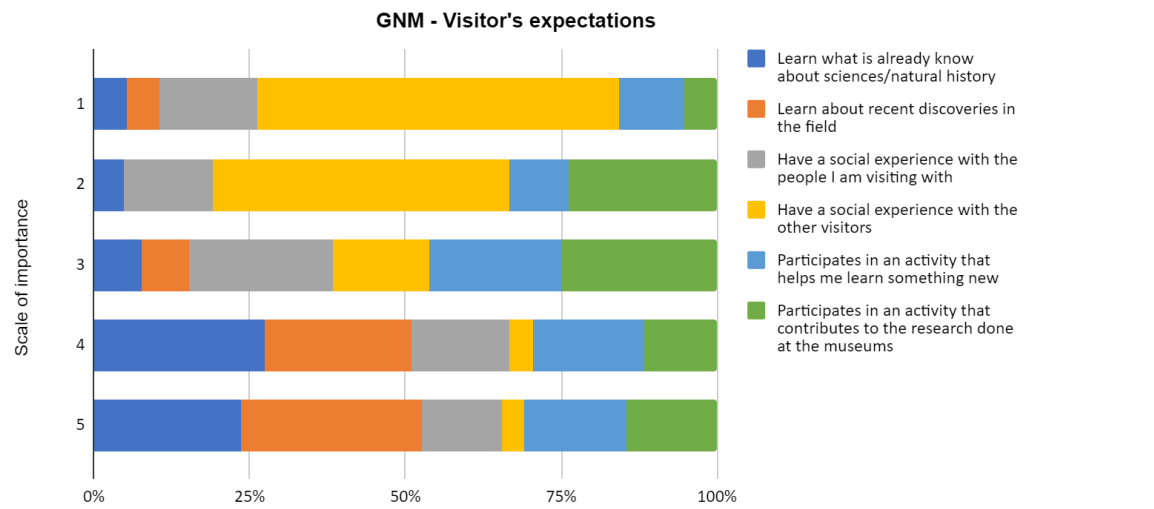


Table 8: GNM - Visitor’s expectations



The survey reveals that it is extremely important for the NNHM and GNM visitors to learn about what is already known and recent discoveries in the sciences and natural history

fields. Regarding participation in citizen science projects, visitors are interested in participating in an activity that helps them learn something new. However, there is mixed opinion on participating in an activity that contributes to the research done at the museum. Some visitors find it unnecessary, while others think it is. Nevertheless, there is a growing interest in citizen science projects which bring the museums outside the boundary of the physical museum. Finally, visitors do not have to have a social experience with the museum's other visitors but want to share an experience with the people they are visiting with. Similar statements are valid for the GNM.

Participant B (NNHM) explains that visitors come to the museum with expectations that stem from famous museums, movies, and popular culture constructing images of what a Natural History Museum should be in their mind, which often leads to some disappointment when visiting local museums. For instance, many visitors expect to see dinosaurs and mammoth when visiting Natural History Museums; however, there are no dinosaurs at the NNHM or GNM simply because the Maltese islands did not exist yet at the time of the dinosaurs and therefore never lived on Maltese soil.

Additionally, considering that Millennials are the primary visitor segment in both museums, Joan Sheridan's recent findings on the expectations of this particular audience in Maltese museums are of interest to this research project. According to her dissertation, millennial audiences seek multisensory and interactive exhibits; participatory experiences involving technology such as AR, VR and AI while visiting a museum. They also support museums that adopt eco-friendly measures and create awareness (Sheridan, 2021). It would be interesting to study other segments' expectations for future research projects, such as Generation Z, Generation X and Boomer.

e. Conclusion

To conclude, the visitor's habits reinforce Pierre Bourdieu's high and low culture theory. Many local and international institutions such as ICOM fight to reduce the gap between classes and make the museum accessible to everyone regardless of visitor's cultural

background and provenance. Pierre Bourdieu opened the debate on high and low culture and the close relationship between cultural taste and class position. The more educated the visitors are, the more frequently they visit museums and the higher their expectations are. These findings indicate that these museums still have room for improvement in democratising culture and making the museum more accessible on multiple levels, such as experience-wise, financially and physically.

Furthermore, both museums rely on their status as public institution part of Heritage Malta and their location to attract visitors without making targeted efforts towards specific audiences. Participant B (NNHM) is conscious of the museum's weakness as a tourism product and despite tremendous efforts to increase the displays and exhibition's attractiveness, the museum faces operational and managerial influences that prevent efficiently working on these issues. Being part of Heritage Malta sites means that requests for funds are a competition with other sites. As a cultural tourism product, the Agency gives much intention to history, archaeology and fine arts, and the field of Natural History or Natural Environment, in general, is underrated by Heritage Malta and the local Government.

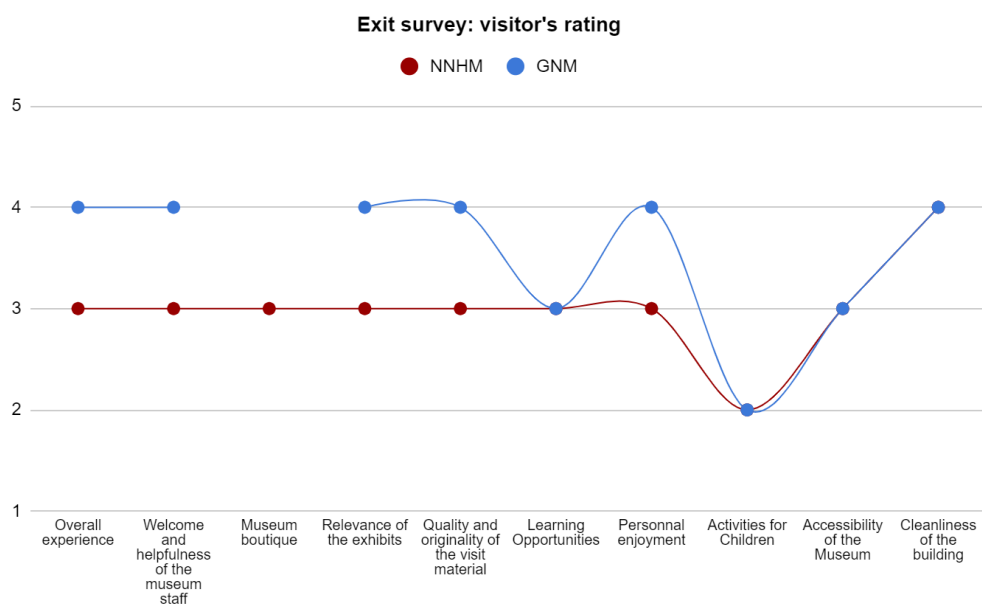
On another note, difficulties in generating revenue and lack of appeal to new audiences depict the museum's weaknesses. Such establishments have no other choice than to adapt their product to visitors' needs in terms of accessibility, diversity as well as preferences. Museums are dependent on funding and sensitive to consumers' demands and expectations. Therefore, museums need to supply visitor-oriented products which enhance visitor engagement.

4.2 Evaluating the museum's quality standards through visitor's satisfaction

The second research question aims to evaluate the museum's performance and Quality standards through visitor satisfaction. The researcher gathered this data via the exit survey with questions inspired by Visit England's Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme (Appendix N). Data collected from the questionnaire will be translated into scores to reflect the visitor experience and the quality of the product and services offered by the museum. Overall, the Post-visit questionnaire will help us define both establishments' strengths and weaknesses from the visitor's point of view and assess the museums as a

tourism product. After their museum visits and upon leaving the premises, the researcher asked respondents to rate their experience and some particular aspect of the museum which helped define the product quality. The ratings were measured on 5-point Likert-type scales anchored by "Poor" (1) to "Excellent" (5). Quality schemes commonly use these types of evaluation to assess an attraction's quality standards and compliance and address potential weaknesses.

Table 9: Exit survey - visitor's rating



As mentioned in chapter 2, Parasuraman et al. explain that there are five dimensions to Service Quality: Empathy, Responsiveness, Reliability, Assurance and Tangible. To attain quality performance and experience, museums must achieve these dimensions. Performance quality is about the visitors' perceptions of the characteristics of a site fully managed. In contrast, the quality of experience relates to the psychological outcome's visitors emanate from the site visit, reflecting visitors' perceived benefits from the experience.

Overall, the GNM obtained higher rates than the NNHM in Mdina, which has an average of 3 points, corresponding to "good" on most criteria. Intangible components such as safety and security, accessibility, cleanliness, and hospitality influence the visitors' satisfaction. Both establishments have good ratings regarding the Responsiveness

dimension, such as cleanliness and helpfulness of the staff. However, regarding accessibility, respondents complained about the lack of chairs, lifts, and light and the abundance of stairs.

When looking closer at respondents who could have had a better overall experience (below 3 points), no particular pattern was observed within their profiles and in either museum. However, the vast majority were foreigners indicating that it might have come from their expectations before the visit and affected their rating. Expectations vary according to cultural background, educational level and past experiences. On another note, some had a good experience but scored low when asked about their personal enjoyment levels and vice versa. This phenomenon shows a deficit of consistency in participants' answers and a limitation in the reliability previously highlighted in the methodology. When comparing the ratings of the overall experience, the learning opportunities and the personal enjoyment, the researcher noticed that those who did not enjoy the experience also thought that the learning opportunities were low regardless of their age or educational level.

According to the survey results, the vulnerability of the museums under study, particularly the NNHM, lies in the service's Tangible, Reliability and Empathy dimensions.

The tangible dimension corresponds to the museum's appearance, which visitors often describe as outdated in their reviews at the NNHM (Appendix O). The tangible dimension concerns other elements, such as equipment or interpretation tools. For instance, the quality and originality of the installed visit material and the exhibit's relevance to the visitors. At the NNHM, respondents who did not find the exhibit relevant to them by rating below "3" predominantly rated negatively the quality and the originality of the visit material put in place. When observing closely those who were not satisfied with the tangible dimension of the NNHM, they belong to the Millennial, Generation X and Boomer generations emphasising a shortcoming in the service provided, sensed by various visitor's segments.

The vast majority of respondents at the NNHM (38 out of 51) and the GNM (20 out of 33) gave a rate below "3" concerning material and activities implemented for children during the visit. This occurrence emphasises a paradox between the museum's management

which trusts efficiently targeting school children and, more significantly, individual children; and visitors' perception about the interpretation's need for children, which ought to be met. This rating reveals an underlying weakness which is an obstacle to the museum's success. Both museums need to understand their visitor's needs and appropriately give individualised attention to the different segments of visitors, which affect the empathy and reliability dimensions. Visitors can perceive this as a lack of care, accessibility and adaptability that negatively impacts their experience and, consequently, the quality of the museum as a tourism product.

The empathy dimension encapsulates the accessibility of the museum and the adaptability they offer to their visitors' demands. It also encompasses the museums' reliability and ability to perform the service accurately and dependably. Negative comments on this dimension were often found in secondary data, especially online reviews and visitor books. Most of the comments from the NNHM visitors' books dating from 2010 to 2020 are positive comments illustrating an enjoyable and exciting experience. Nevertheless, there are conflicted opinions between those who find the traditional didactic method and displays charming and those who find it outdated and tedious. The negative comments raised concerns that the museum needs refurbishment and upgraded quality standards, especially regarding accessibility and essential comfort. They also emphasise the need to improve the overall maintenance of the displays, which exhibit dusty and moldy items. Disappointed visitors questioned the entrance fees, which they found too expensive compared to the service quality. The displays and collection of items raised some concerns about bird hunting in Malta, the lack of natural space and wild animals on the island, and feeling uncomfortable and sad observing mostly stuffed animals at the museums. Such criticisms are similarly found online on platforms such as TripAdvisor.

In terms of suggestions to the museums, not all respondents provided an answer, nevertheless, the researcher could regroup the ones collected into the following visitors advises topics:

- Having access to materials in foreign languages.
- Having a more modern interpretation including interactive displays, games, new technologies such as 3D and VR.

- Having the possibility to follow a guided-tour or an audio-guide.
- Having short video documentaries with explanations in the rooms.
- Increasing the number of items exhibited focusing on Malta and Gozo.
- Raising awareness on global warming and dangerous human practices for the natural environment.

4.2.1 Conclusion

To conclude, the quality of tourism products is closely linked to customer satisfaction, and as a result, dissatisfied visitors can damage the site's reputation. Both museums are Visitor Attractions (VA) and primarily aim to attract, educate and entertain all types of visitors, tourists or local residents. The literature review highlighted a few principles that apply to VAs, such as museums: managing museum access to the resources, developing visitor engagement and interaction and offering an experience designed for conservation, education, interpretation and appreciation. Here is where both museums' weaknesses lie. The interpretation must be relevant to the segment of visitors interested in the museum and is a vital feature of the museum experience (Bulger, 2011) and the experience offered needs to be innovative to stay competitive (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). The accessibility of the museum is not met either due to the initial nature of the buildings.

4.3 Analysing tourism professionals' needs and challenges to selling the museum to visitors as a tourism product?

In order to answer this last research question, the researcher brought the previously discussed findings issued from the exit survey to the attention of tourism professionals and Heritage Malta's senior officers during in-depth interviews to have a better understanding of the stakeholder's realities and challenges in selling the museum as a tourism product and implementing some of the visitor's suggestions.

4.3.1 Challenges related to the location, name and theme of the museums

Participant C believes the museums' main challenges are their locations, names and theme. The NNHM is competing with the medieval city of Mdina as an independent attraction and other museums within Mdina, which receive more significant financial investment to extend and improve their offer and attract more visitors. One example is the fully refurbished Mdina Cathedral. Both the NNMH and the GNM museums are out of context within a Medieval City. Therefore, if visitors have extra time in Mdina, Participant C recommends like-minded museums, such as the Mdina Cathedral and the Palazzo Falson, before the National Natural History Museum. Participant A agrees that the location of the GNM prevents visitors from coming. However, the theme is also dissuading. According to Participant A, adults do not seem as much interested in this topic as children and can be targeted mainly through children who would need to be accompanied.

With regards to the names of the museums, Participant C considers that "Natural History" has a colonial implication which is not attractive to younger generations who do not feel connected to it. Participant B notices that there are many misconceptions about the museum itself and, to a more considerable extent, the theme of Natural History that leads to the threshold fear in such museums. On the other hand, Participant A finds the name of the Gozo Nature Museum ambiguous for visitors who might need help comprehending what it contains and thinks that such names have a low attraction power and the nomenclature associated with the theme is not captivating.

4.3.2 Structural challenges

The buildings housing both museums present a challenge regarding accessibility and exhibition space. The Vilhena Palace and the premises housing the GNM was not built for the museums but had other roles. For instance, the Vilhena Palace was a Palace for the knight, then converted into a hospital with small rooms not adapted for displays. The curatorial team is limited to the space they have at their disposal. There is no large exhibition space but many small rooms with narrow corridors. The museums are missing that wow factor. Participant C feels that the fact that a historical landmark hosts the

museum is overwhelming for the younger generation and not attractive. It does not convey the right message to visitors as the building relates to the Grand Master's history. Participant C points out the inaccessibility of the museums at first glance, with all the stairs to access the NNHM and the GNM discouraging some visitors who will continue walking. Participant B believes that the building is confusing visitors who think they will visit a Palace.

4.3.3 Operational challenges

Participant B (NNHM) explains that Heritage Malta has over 80 sites competing for funds. Most of the time, history, archaeology and fine arts are favoured as they are considered more attractive to tourists than Natural History. When looking at the Heritage Malta Annual Reports, the researcher records that most investments allocated to the NNHM and GNM are mainly site refurbishments or enhancements but no consequent budget toward rethinking the museum's strategy, products and its displays.

Participant B is aware of the need for the museum to create an interactive experience and to introduce discussions on contemporary issues such as the loss of biodiversity due to human activity, climate change, and sustainability. Much efforts have been carried out by the museums to enhance the current displays but the experience offered is still passive. The museums' teams need financial resources to complete such projects successfully. Furthermore, the curatorial teams have two people at the NNHM and one at the GNM to look after the collection and set up the displays. To mitigate this challenge, the NNHM has a volunteer programme to assist them with preserving the collection.

Participant A considers that the Gozo Nature Museum achieves its goal of transmitting to the general public the historical knowledge about the geology of Gozo and the living organisms inhabiting the place, including humans. However, the Participant agrees that the displays could be enhanced and that there is room for further achievement. The researcher observed that in both museums, displays were mainly focused on the past, while present challenges could be more represented.

The museum's revenue results from entrance fees and boutique sales; HM report 2021 highlights significant efforts made by the Agency to develop an awareness of spaces for

occasional renting with all relevant stakeholders, filmmakers, producers, wedding organisers, and DMCs. The National Natural History Museum is one of them; one can rent the courtyard as a venue. Participant B said the NNHM has a communication programme with lectures or temporary exhibitions that often attract the same participants. When the Agency broadcasts an advert on local TV, the positive effect of increasing visitors is short lasting.

4.3.4 Management's strategy related challenges

According to Participant C, independent guides will only visit these museums with groups if their tour is part of the Natural theme. They do not suggest their visits to tourists because they are out of context within fortified cities. When guides go to Mdina and Citadella, they discuss the Medieval times. With regards to Destination Management Companies or Tour Operators, they do not include any museum visits if they have to include entrance fees in their package price. Therefore, to stay competitive, they might add a few museum visits to their package but as optional and with extra cost. Furthermore, private companies favour sites that give entrance fee commissions to maximise their profit. Heritage Malta needs to put in place a financial incentive for such professionals to sell the NNHM and the GNM museums to groups, who tend to choose private entities to promote the island's culture. As a result, tourists coming as part of a group are barely exposed to Heritage Malta sites throughout their itinerary. Heritage Malta sells tickets to DMC, independent guides and TO through their websites. On another note, from both museums' standpoint, as they are today, they are not logistically able to welcome groups due to accessibility issues and the sizes of the rooms.

4.4 Conclusion

Museums are facing the situation where it is becoming increasingly challenging to attract visitors and generate income. Museums facing difficulties must reinvent themselves and diversify their products to thrive. The NNHM and GNM are excellent examples of a museum under pressure to perform to augment its revenue. Most of the challenges encountered by the two museums under study are due to high competition, cutbacks in

public funding and mismanagement strategies, which prevent these museums from diversifying their offer into experiential and interactive services, focusing on customer orientation and understanding visitor demands and expectations. To stay competitive, museums must innovate and invest in the interpretation and narrative they use as a museum experience, develop and enhance the collection and adapt to visitors.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This research sought to explore the potential and performance of The National Natural History Museum and the Gozo Nature Museum by understanding the correlations between the quality standards of the museum product and the success of a cultural attraction such as a museum. Three important elements were considered to find the reasons behind low participation in museum visits such as having an in depth understanding of the visitor's profiles and expectations; evaluating the museum's quality standards through satisfaction; and finally, analysing the tourism professionals needs and challenges to market the museum as a tourism product. The research questions which this study seeks to answer can certainly be addressed, in spite of the potential for further research that this project underpins. The study certainly is indicative of the potential and challenges of both museums leading to low participation level. The researcher provides recommendations to increase their annual number of visitors. The scope of the study permitted investigating various other aspects, however, restrictions in time limited the study to focus on just these three elements that the researcher could only approach in general terms.

5.1 Findings arising from the first research question

The findings of the research project demonstrated the visitor's willingness to visit the National Natural History Museum and the Gozo Nature Museum regardless of genders, nationalities, educational backgrounds, and age ranges. This interest exhibited by visitors indicates great product development opportunities that deserve further investigation. This keen interest is particularly shared by children, which is a favourable circumstance to increase the number of yearly visitors.

The study reveals two main threats to the museum's attractiveness. Firstly, the NNHM and the GNM have put down roots within the traditional model of museums due to external influences in the operating environment. In these museums, visitors are not the centre of attention conceptualised in the "new museology", and the experience offered is mostly passive through narratives that did not evolve hand in hand with today's visitors' needs and expectations. The NNHM and the GNM did not yet shift toward generating

visitor experience using participatory practices, technology, innovation and engaging content expected in today's museums. As a result, they find themselves out of step with modern museums.

Secondly, the NNHM and the GNM focus on "non-paying visitors" to fulfil the cultural and educational role towards national school children but do not actively target other visitor segments. They do not have a sound knowledge of the profiles and segmentation of their visitors and tend to rely on their public institutions' status and location to attract visitors rather than targeting specific audiences. This prevents the museums from providing a relevant interpretation and a suited experience per visitor segment. The study revealed that visitors seek an interpretation adapted to their age range, interactive displays and experiences during the visit and therefore, museums must develop and adapt their products accordingly. Consumers consider the lack of it a shortage of quality in the service offered.

5.2 Findings arising from the second research question

The line between Tourism and Culture is more blurred than ever, and the key factors of a successful museum shifted from passive to active consumption of cultural tourism attractions. Visitors have higher expectations and request quality in the museum's services. The visitor experience affects the perceived quality of the whole destination, which is why the researcher believes museums should be audited to ensure they fulfil the required quality standards.

According to the survey results, the vulnerability of the museums under study regarding Quality Standards lies in the service's Tangible, Reliability and Empathy dimensions. This finding implies that the museum's strategies could be improved, especially regarding visitor experience and product development. Some respondents were not satisfied with the tangible dimension of the museums, particularly at the NNHM. The Tangible dimension refers to the museum's appearance, often described as outdated. It also refers to the equipment or interpretation tools put in place during the visits. These respondents low-marked the quality and originality of the installed visit material and the lack of the exhibit's relevance to them as an individual. Respondents shared this feedback from

different visitor segments, showing that having a modern exhibition space with original displays and narratives is a common expectation from visitors regardless of age. Furthermore, the service and interpretation offered to Children do not meet their needs for both museums.

The empathy dimension encapsulates the accessibility of the museum and the adaptability they offer to its visitors' demands. It also encompasses the museums' reliability and ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. The survey's findings stress that both museums do not provide individualised attention to the different segments of visitors regarding physical and intellectual accessibility, which is negatively perceived by visitors and impacts their experience. Every attraction needs to consider issues and find adapted solutions to crowd management, site management, and interpretation to reach customer satisfaction.

5.3 Findings arising from the third research question

The research project confirms that the NNHM and GNM are excellent examples of a museum under pressure to perform to augment their revenue and deserve further research. The study reveals that the two museums' challenges vary in nature.

Firstly, the museums' location within the medieval fortified cities put them out of context and in competition with other sites, including the city itself. The historical landmarks housing the museums and the theme of the museums can be overwhelming to younger generations. Furthermore, the "Natural History" field has many misconceptions and can confuse visitors.

Secondly, cutbacks in public funding and limited human resources prevent these museums from diversifying their offer by targeting new audiences and investing in experiential and interactive displays. The museums' teams can only complete such projects with financial resources. Most investments allocated to the NNHM and GNM are mainly site refurbishments and maintenance, but no consequent budget for rethinking the museum's strategy and displays.

Finally, mismanagement strategies directly impact the museum as a cultural tourism product. For instance, the buildings allocated to house the museums are not adequately adapted to welcome all visitors, including groups, and limit the exhibition's pace. The

curatorial team is limited to the small spaces they have at their disposal and cannot accommodate large exhibitions. Another example is the need for more financial incentives towards tourism professionals to encourage groups to visit the museums. Private companies favour sites that give commissions to maximise their profit. Nevertheless, it is currently logistically difficult to welcome groups due to accessibility issues and the sizes of the rooms.

5.4 Recommendations

The National Natural History Museum and the Gozo Nature Museum form parts of the inner workings of the local cultural sector and contribute to developing Malta as a tourist cultural destination. In this respect, they have the dual responsibility to ensure access, preservation and conservation of the national assets while increasing the island's attractiveness to residents and tourists by offering an attractive and viable product. Following the study's findings, the researcher provides a few recommendations to increase the museum's attractiveness to visitors. In the landscape of contemporary museology concepts, the NNHM and GNM are disappearing behind an outdated management strategy which translates into lower visitor participation and engagement than other museums. The main recommendation is for the agency to invest in rethinking and revising the traditional model of these museums into museums of the future. This suggestion translates into the following actions:

1. The museum needs to be broader in theme to attract more visitors. The name of the museums should be related to topics that interest millennials and younger generations and are embedded in the present time, for instance, nomenclature related to sustainability and climate change.
2. Relocate the museums in a place within a context and specially built for the museum's purpose. The museum should include technology, interactive displays and experiences. The project of moving the NNHM to a part of Esplora is attractive because they share common themes and would form a hub of Interactive Natural

Sciences. The museum could also be beyond the museum's building limit with citizen sciences initiatives.

3. Since visitors' needs and expectations evolve with time, it is essential for Heritage Malta to instore dynamic strategies, including implementing Quality Standards throughout their museums and regularly auditing those establishments. Consultations, in-house research and satisfaction questionnaires should be held regularly with all the stakeholders forming part of the tourism product to improve and diversify the offer. Museums can't evolve simultaneously with the stakeholder's needs without this approach.
4. Promote the theme of Natural Sciences by strengthening collaborations with government institutions such as ERA and local NGOs and bring the museums outside the museum's wall with various initiatives.
5. Turn the museum into a Natural Sciences Hub with dedicated space to raise awareness of the impact of human evolution on the local ecosystems, with discussions space where societal and actual topics could be discussed interactively and playfully.
6. Include a multimedia library within the museum to gather literature and materials available on the topic, such as academic projects, NGO booklets, ERA's publications and any other relevant materials.
7. Develop children-oriented services is an efficient way to boost the number of visitors.
8. Develop financial incentives with tourism professionals to encourage them to include the museums in their tours, itineraries, and packages.

5.5 Further research

The case studies selected for this dissertation were not mainstream and reflected a niche category when compared to the theme of the other national museums. The Niche theme might have limited the insights of the findings. Furthermore, a more significant sample of visitors for exit surveys and interviews would provide further patterns of response. On another note, since the literature and research projects were scant for these two museums, the researcher had to focus on the three research questions of the study's framework but was able to identify more elements to explore during additional research.

One of them is to study with great detail each visitor's segments' needs and expectations when visiting museums. Another is to measure the number of minors visiting museums to gain deeper insight into visitor profiles and needs.

This study revealed the willingness and interest of various visitor segments to visit museums and this presents the museums with an opportunity to address the shortcomings highlighted by this study so as to become more attractive and sustainable. This findings from this study serves to encourage management at these sites to evolve with stakeholders' needs and adapt their offers by implementing recommendations and endeavours.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Confidential and non-disclosure agreement with HM

Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement for Students

This Agreement is made and entered into by and between _____ having its registered address at _____ HEAD OFFICE, EX ROYAL NAVAL HOSPITAL, MARINE STREET, KALKARA KKR 1524, MALTA, and Mr/Ms _____ of _____ nationality, holder of _____ identity/passport card number _____ and residing at _____ who is currently registered as a student at _____ (here in after referred to as the "STUDENT").

Student is seeking Confidential Data from Heritage Malta to enable such Student to complete the thesis/dissertation/assignment/task¹¹ titled _____

_____ which is to be submitted to _____ on the / / ¹²(hereinafter referred to as "the Project").

By virtue of this agreement, Student agrees that:

1. Any type of data given to Student by any representative of Heritage Malta or accessed by Student on any premises of Heritage Malta is to be treated as Confidential Data unless the undersigned representative of Heritage Malta (hereinafter "the Representative") indicates otherwise in writing.
2. The Representative has full discretion to determine what data is to be considered as Confidential Data.¹³
3. Any Confidential Data may be included in the Project only upon the written consent of the Representative.¹⁴
4. Such Confidential Data can only be used by the Student for the purposes of the Project and for no other purpose.

¹¹ Delete as necessary.

¹² Day/Month/Year.

¹³ Such data may refer to, but is not limited to, sensitive financial records of Heritage Malta, sensitive information pertaining to the security or safety of cultural objects, inventories of cultural objects preserved in sites belonging to Heritage Malta, unpublished research of other persons including other students or scholars, the identities of private collectors of cultural objects recorded in any of the data belonging to or accessible through Heritage Malta, or records pertaining to the export of cultural objects.

¹⁴ In cases where Heritage Malta does not own the proprietary rights over the data being requested by the Student, the Representative cannot consent to the use of such data. For example, where information includes the identification of third parties who own/owned the cultural object being studied, the Representative cannot consent to the use of such data without the permission of the private collector concerned.

5. Except as provided herein, Student cannot disclose this Data to any other person except (i) to other students who have executed non-disclosure agreements with Heritage Malta in relation to the same Project, (ii) to the Project's supervisor, provided that such supervisor has also signed a non-disclosure agreement with Heritage Malta, or (iii) in response to the lawful request or requirement of any public authority performing a statutory duty.
6. No information will be deemed to be Confidential Data if (i) Student can prove that such data was already known to Student prior to the signing of this Agreement, or (ii) such data is or becomes publicly known through no wrongful act of the Student, or (iii) if such data is received by Student from a third party without similar restrictions and without breach of this Agreement.
7. Heritage Malta moreover acknowledges that to complete the requirements of the course in which he/she is enrolled, Student may be required to give a presentation concerning the Project to an audience that will not have signed non-disclosure agreements with Heritage Malta for this Project, or Student may be required to publish the Project for academic purposes (non- commercially) for the Library or records of the institution that assessed the Project. In such cases, the Representative will work with the Student to prevent the inclusion of certain types of Confidential Data in the presentation or any written materials prepared by the Student. Such data will be referred to as "Extra Confidential Data". The Representative has full discretion to determine what constitutes "Extra Confidential Data", and this will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
8. Present permission does not apply to any future reprints intended for commercial use. This Agreement shall not be construed as a grant of exclusive rights over any data provided by Heritage Malta or accessed by Student on any premises of Heritage Malta. Any other use of any Confidential Data or the duplication of any written material for commercial purposes must be requested in writing.¹⁵
9. In the case where such data constitutes an image, the following rules also apply:
 - a. the image may not be altered in any manner. It may not be cropped or bled off the page. Nothing may be superimposed on the image. Any

¹⁵ Such other use may be subjected to other terms and conditions, including but not limited to the payment of licensing fees.

detail of the image must be pre-approved in writing by the Representative and must be accompanied by a full frame reproduction;

b. Full documentation and ownership credit (exactly as it appears below) must appear on the same page, on the page adjacent to the reproduction, or in the section reserved for ownership credits.

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10. Heritage Malta remains proprietary of any data, confidential or otherwise, given to the Student by any representative of Heritage Malta or accessed by Student on any premises of Heritage Malta, in so far as Heritage Malta is proprietary of such copyright.
11. Any applicable usage fees must be paid in full for any right of use to be granted by the Representative.
12. This agreement is also subject to any Terms and Conditions, Copyright Notices and Privacy Policies of Heritage Malta. These

may be updated from time-to-time.

13. In cases where the Project consists in a document as opposed to a presentation, one (1) gratis copy of the Project should be supplied to Heritage Malta. In all cases, Student must provide the Representative with a pen-drive containing all the data acquired from Heritage Malta in accordance with the foregoing articles.
14. Responsibility for use of any data provided by Heritage Malta or accessed by Student on any premises of Heritage Malta falls to Student. Student agrees to indemnify and hold harmless Heritage Malta, its representatives, its staff, and its agents from any and all claims resulting from the use of this data.
15. Any breach of any of the foregoing clauses may lead to the immediate suspension of access to Heritage Malta's facilities for a period of 1 year, and this without prejudice to any rights that may be vested in Heritage Malta by the Laws of Malta.

This Agreement is made on ____/____/____.

Student Signature:

Heritage Malta representative
signature:

Telephone_____

As representative of Heritage
Malta

Mobile_____

E-mail_____

Full name_____

Appendix B: Permission request from management to conduct research

Organisation: Heritage Malta

Date:

Request for permission to conduct research at the National Natural History Museum and Gozo Nature Museum.

Dear....

My name is Pian Pauline and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master of Arts in Tourism and Culture. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled the National Natural History Museum, Malta and the Gozo Nature Museum: a comparative study on their potential and performance.

This study aims on one hand to understand the needs and expectations of visitors and tourism professionals when visiting Natural History museums as part of a tourism product. And on the other hand, to pinpoint the challenges of a governmental agency when facing low cultural participation. Finally, the research aims to determine if participatory management and experiences can be an answer to low cultural engagement within museums.

This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Marie Avellino.

I am hereby seeking your permission to contact and meet the curatorial team of both museums in person to collect primary and secondary data. My data collection methods will involve interviews with the curatorial team of approximately one hour each as well as to have access to internal statistics and data for both establishments.

Participation will be entirely voluntary and participants will be free to withdraw at any point, without any repercussions. Data collected will be stored in a pseudonymised form (Participant A, B, etc...) but the identity of the organisation they represent will be revealed in the report arising from this research. All Data collected will be erased upon completion

of the study and following publication of results. Only my supervisors and examiners will have access to this data.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor; both our contact details are provided below.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Pian Pauline
pauline.pian.18@um.edu.mt

Prof. Marie Avellino
marie.avellino@um.edu.mt

Appendix C: Interview consent form - Participant A and B

Title of Research:

The National Natural History Museum, Malta and the Gozo Nature Museum: a comparative study on their potential and performance

Thank you for reading the accompanying Information letter.

Please mark with 'X' the below boxes to confirm that you agree with each statement.

	I agree	I disagree
I confirm that I have read and understood the Information letter and have had the opportunity to ask questions and questions.		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time and for any reason without consequences		
I am giving my consent for the interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded.		
I am asking to review extracts from my interview transcript that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs, before these are published. I am also aware that I may ask for changes to be made, if I consider these to be necessary.		
I am giving my consent for <i>the identity of the organisation I represent</i> to be revealed in publications, reports or presentations arising from this research, and responses I provide may be quoted directly or indirectly.		
I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.		

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Pian Pauline
pauline.pian.18@um.edu.mt

Prof. Marie Avellino
marie.avellino@um.edu.mt / +356 2340332

Appendix D: Interview consent form - Participant C

Title of Research:

The National Natural History Museum, Malta and the Gozo Nature Museum: a comparative study on their potential and performance

Thank you for reading the accompanying Information letter.

Please mark with 'X' the below boxes to confirm that you agree with each statement.

	I agree	I disagree
I confirm that I have read and understood the Information letter and have had the opportunity to ask questions and questions.		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time and for any reason without consequences		
I am giving my consent for the interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded.		
I am asking to review extracts from my interview transcript that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs, before these are published. I am also aware that I may ask for changes to be made, if I consider these to be necessary.		
I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.		

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Pian Pauline
pauline.pian.18@um.edu.mt

Prof. Marie Avellino
marie.avellino@um.edu.mt
+356 23403352

Appendix E: Information letter for interviews

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Pian Pauline and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master of Arts in Tourism and Culture. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled the National Natural History Museum, Malta and the Gozo Nature Museum: a comparative study on their potential and performance

This study is being supervised by Prof. Marie Avellino.

This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to understand the needs and expectations of visitors and tourism professionals when visiting Natural History museums as part of a tourism product. And to pinpoint the challenges of a governmental agency when facing low cultural participation.

Your participation in this study would help contribute to analysing museums' potential weaknesses and strengths in order to recommend alternative forms of management and experiences aiming at increasing cultural participation. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for the purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to provide primary and secondary data through one interview of approximately one hour and by giving access to internal statistics and publications.

Data collected will be stored in a pseudonymised form (Participant A, B, etc...) but the identity of the organisation will be revealed in the report arising from this research. All Data collected will be erased upon completion of the study and following publication of results. Only my supervisors and examiners will have access to this data.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless the erasure of data would render it impossible or seriously impair the achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor; both our contact details are provided below.

Sincerely,

Pian Pauline
pauline.pian.18@um.edu.mt

Dr. Marie Avellino
marie.avellino@um.edu.mt

Appendix F: Questionnaire information letter and consent for visitors

My name is Pian Pauline and I am currently reading for a Master of Arts in Tourism and Culture at the University of Malta.

I am currently conducting a research project that aims to explore audiences' level of satisfaction and expectations when visiting local Natural History museums and define if participatory experiences could improve cultural participation within local Natural History museums.

The survey that you have been invited to complete forms part of this study and will take you approximately 5 minutes to complete. You will be asked about your own experiences and expectations while remaining anonymous at all times. You may skip over any questions that you do not wish to answer and any data collected from this survey will be used solely for the purposes of this study.

By giving your answers, you are certifying that you are over 18 years of age and giving your consent to participate.

Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me at the following email address: pauline.pian.18@um.edu.mt

Appendix G: Planned questions for the semi structured interviews

Participant A	Gozo Nature Museum	Senior Officer
Participant B	National Natural History Museum	Senior Officer
Participant C	Private	Tour Guide

Interview participants A & B

1. How long has the museum been open to the public?
2. What are the roles and missions of the museum?
3. What are the museum's core values that you would like to communicate?
4. Do you think you are achieving the objectives of the museum? Why?
5. What would visitors expect when visiting a Natural History Museum?
6. What is the museum's target audience?
7. How do you explain the number of paying visitors compared to other museums?
8. What is being done to attract paying visitors?
9. What challenges is the museum facing to attract paying visitors?
10. What do you think of the survey's findings on the museum audience and satisfaction?

Interview participant C

1. What do you think of the National Natural History Museum?
2. Do you think it is a viable tourism product? Why?
3. Do you recommend the museum to tourists when visiting Mdina?
4. Under which circumstance would you include it in your Tours?
5. What do you think of the Gozo Nature Museum?
6. Do you think it is a viable tourism product? Why?
7. Do you recommend the museum to tourists when visiting Citadella?
8. Under which circumstance would you include it in your Tours?

Appendix H: Planned questionnaire to visitors

Q1. What is your gender?

Female

Male

Other

Prefer not to answer

Q2. What is your age range?

18-21

21-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65+

Q3. What is your nationality?

Q4. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

☐ Less than high school diploma

☐ Master's degree

☐ High school graduate

☐ Doctorate Degree

☐ Bachelor's degree

Other: _____

Q5. How frequently do you visit natural history and/or natural science museums?

☐ It is the first time

☐ Multiple times a year

☐ Once every 2-3 years

☐ Once a month

☐ Once a year

Q6. With whom do you typically visit natural history and/or natural science museums?

☐ By myself

☐ My colleagues

☐ My family

☐ My students

☐ My friends

Other: _____

Q7. How important are the following to you when you visit a natural history or science museum?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Somewhat Important	Moderately important	Extremely important
Learn what is already known about science/natural history					
Learn about recent discoveries in					

science/natural history					
Have a social experience with the people I'm visiting with					
Have a social experience with other visitors at the museum					
Participate in an activity that helps me learn something new					
Participate in an activity that contributes something to the research done at the museum.					

Q8. How did you learn about the *National Natural History Museum/Gozo Nature Museum*?

☐ Word of mouth

☐ Walking by

☐ Online

☐ Tourim office

☐ Guide book

☐ It was part of the combined entrance ticket with other Heritage sites in the area

Other _____

Q9. Please rate the *National Natural History Museum/Gozo Nature Museum* based on your visit today:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Superior
My overall experience					
Welcome and helpfulness of museum staff					
Museum boutique					

Relevance of exhibits for me personally					
Quality and originality of the visit material in place such as (Displays, information panels, collection etc..)					
Learning opportunities					
Personal enjoyment					
Activities for children					
Accessibility in the museum					
Cleanliness of the building					

Q10. Is there anything you would have expected to learn more about?

Q11. On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you describe the level of interactivity put in place during the visit?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10

Q12. Would you recommend the *National Natural History Museum/Gozo Nature Museum*?

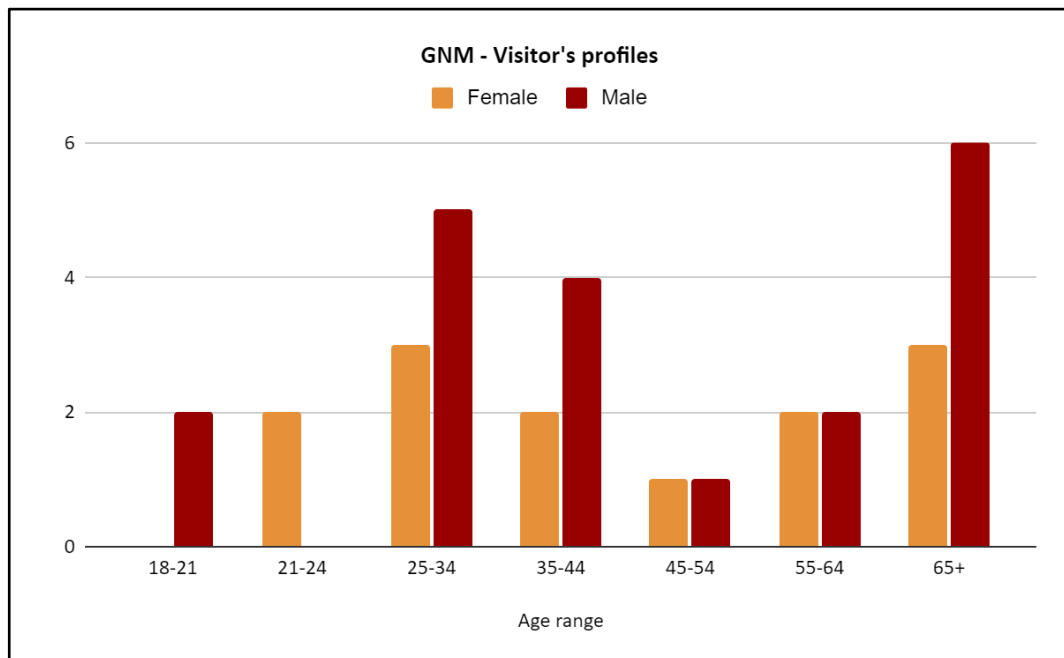
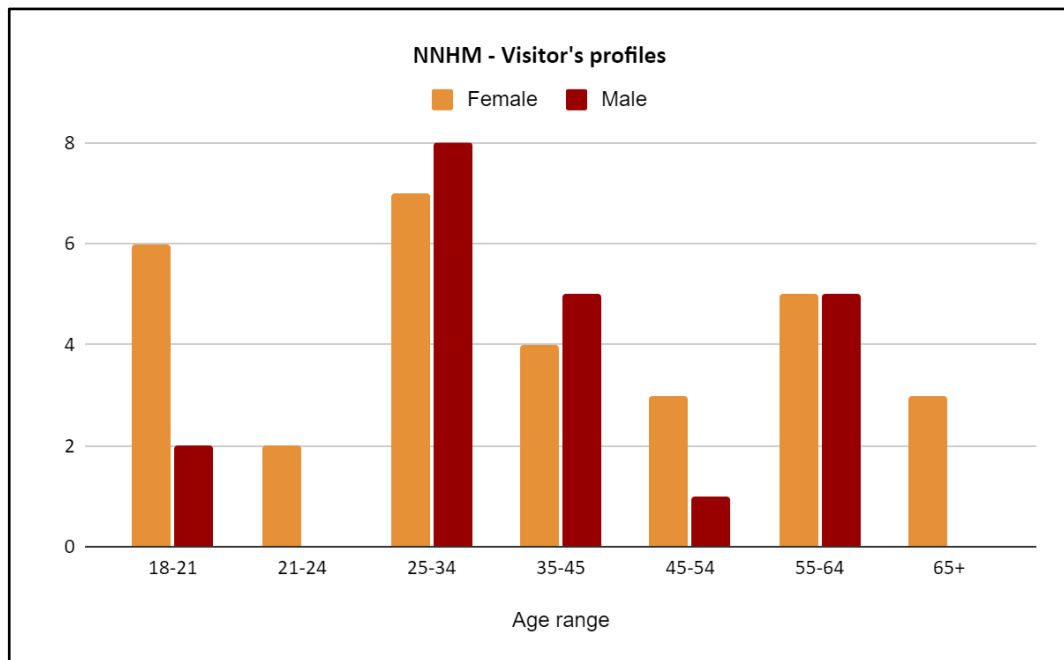
☐ Yes

☐ No

Q13. If you could give a recommendation to the *National Natural History Museum/Gozo Nature Museum's* team what would it be?

Thank you for participating in our study. Your contribution is greatly appreciated!

Appendix I : Visitors demographics



Appendix J: Pictures of the NNHM and GNM display's

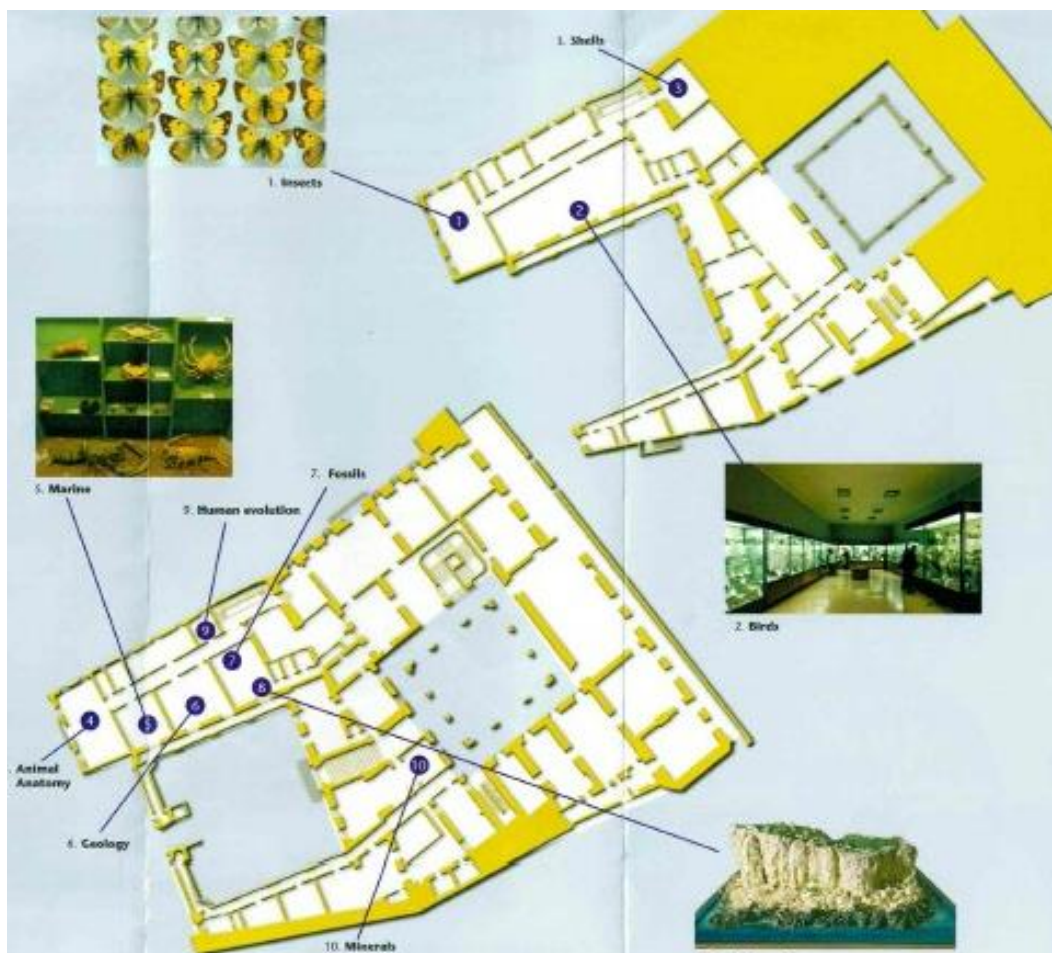
Gozo Nature Museum's displays and the rooftop's botanical garden:



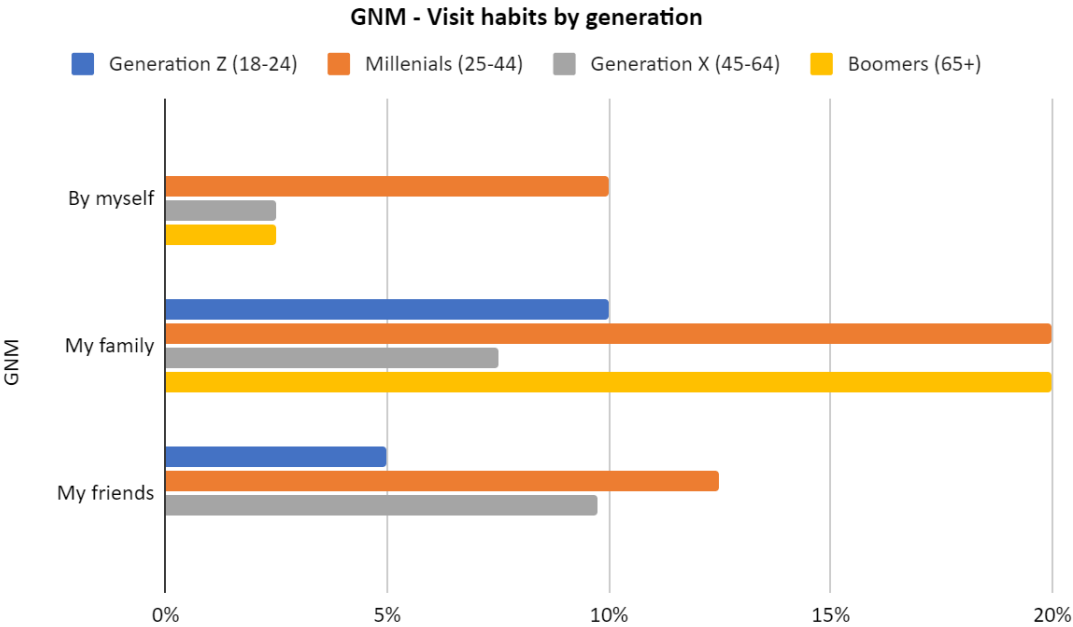
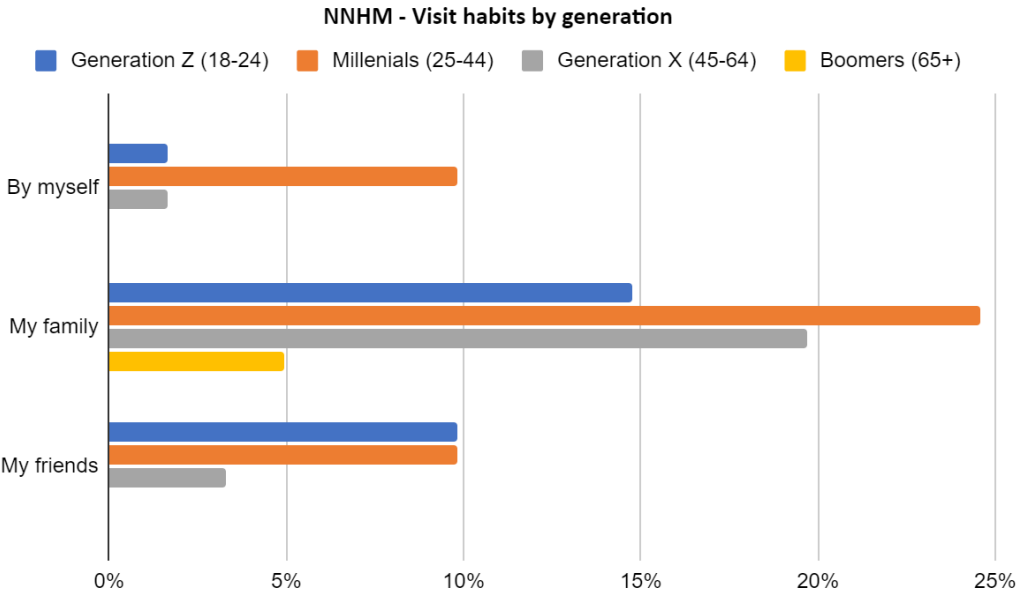
National Natural History Museum's displays:



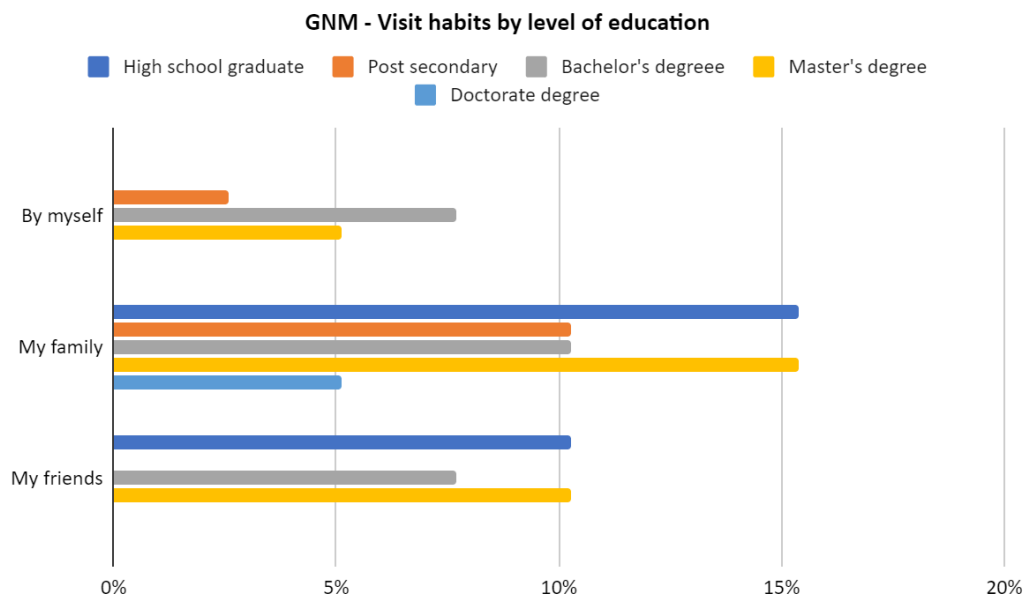
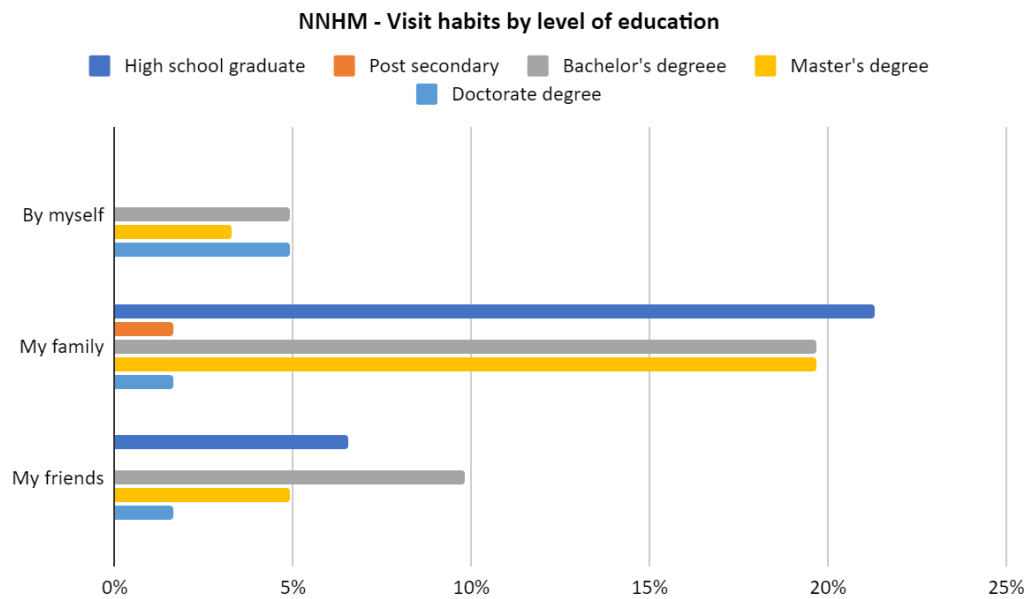
At the entrance of each thematic room, there is an information panel on the academics/scientists who contributed to the current collection of the museum:



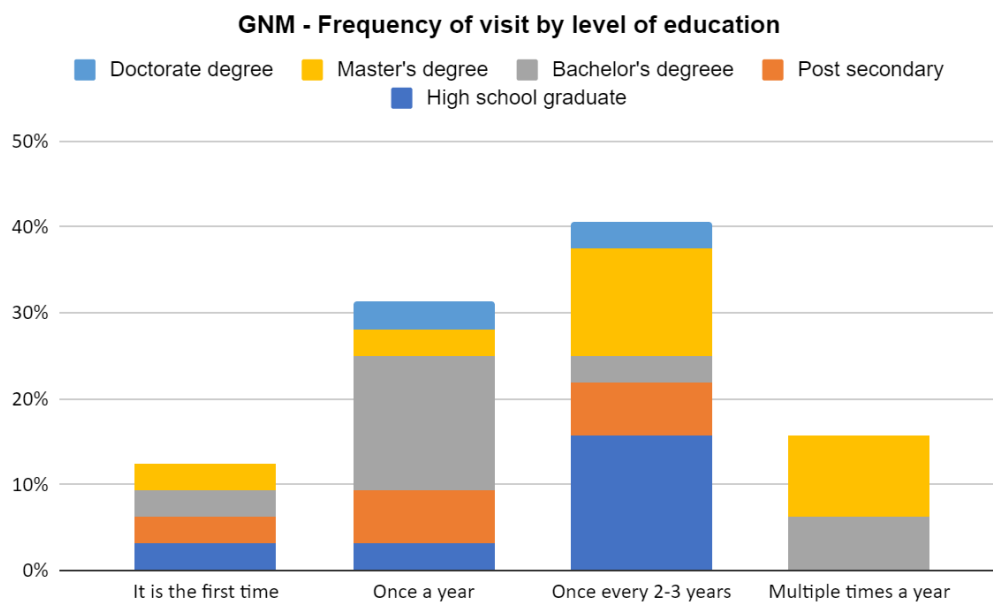
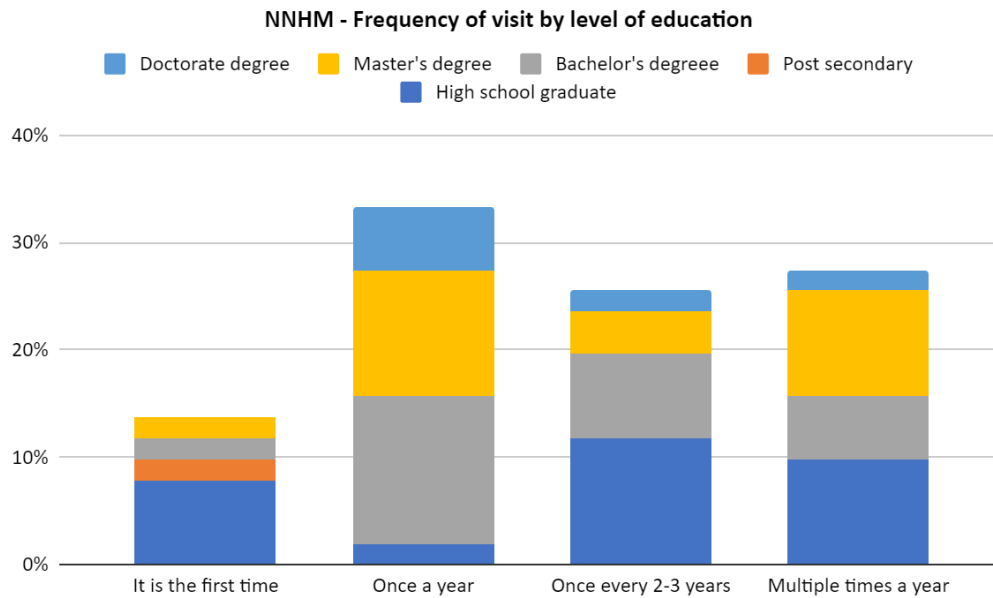
Appendix K: Visitors habits by generation



Appendix L: Visitors habits by level of education



Appendix M: Frequency of visit by level of education



3

How do we Measure Quality?

During your visit, your assessor will make quality judgements across all aspects of your attraction and award a score from 0 to 5 for each element.

- 0 = unacceptable
- 1 = poor
- 2 = disappointing
- 3 = good
- 4 = very good
- 5 = excellent

At the end of the visit they can calculate a percentage score for the overall attraction and for each section of the attraction. In order to achieve VisitEngland Visitor Attraction accreditation, the overall percentage score has to reach 60% or above. Additionally, seven of the eight sectional scores must also reach 60% or above.

These seven key sections are: ● Arrival ● The Attraction ● Cleanliness ● Toilets ● Catering ● Retail ● Staff

By requiring a minimum score in each of the key sections, VisitEngland and your visitors can be sure that the attraction offers a consistent level of quality throughout.

We understand that not all attractions will provide all of the services and facilities listed above. Where this is the case, the relevant scoring areas will be removed from the assessment process with no detrimental effect on the overall outcome.

Assessment Example

In the assessment example, Attraction X provides all of the Core Criteria facilities and services and meets the percentage score requirements in order to be accredited by VisitEngland. Accreditation requires a minimum overall score of 60% and a minimum of 60% for each key section. These scores are met, but in two sections the scores are borderline and there is a concern that they might fall below the required level at the next visit if action is not taken.

The scores show that the weaker areas in the catering section are the first impressions and decoration, furniture and fittings, both of which are disappointing in terms of their quality. The assessor will detail the reasons for this at the verbal debrief and in the written report, with suggestions as to how the situation might be improved. The arrival section is also borderline, but all individual elements have been scored as good or above. Advice will be offered across the section about how the overall percentage score might be improved.

Pre-Arrival				
Online presence	5			
Leaflet/Brochure	4			
	<u>9</u>	9/10	90%	Pass
Arrival				
Car Park	3			
First Impressions	4			
Layout and Entry Point Management	3			
Visitor Information and Signage	3			
	<u>13</u>	13/20	65%	Pass but borderline
The Attraction				
Layout and Visitor Flow	4			
Range of Content vs Expectations	4			
Visitor Information and Signage	4			
Appearance of Grounds and Gardens	4			
Appearance of Buildings (exterior)	3			
Decoration and Maintenance (interior)	4			
Presentation of Displays	4			
Quality of Interpretation (fixed)	4			
Quality of Interpretation (other)	3			
	<u>34</u>	34/45	75%	Pass
Cleanliness				
Car Park and Arrival Areas	4			
The Attraction	4			
Toilets	5			
Catering Outlets	5			
Retail Outlets	5			
	<u>23</u>	23/25	92%	Pass
Toilets				
Provision and Location	4			
Decoration and Maintenance	4			
Fixtures and Fittings	4			
	<u>12</u>	12/15	80%	Pass
Catering				
Layout and Ease of Use	3			
Ambience and First Impressions	2			
Decoration, Furniture and Fittings	2			
Food: Menus and Range	4			
Food: Quality and Presentation	4			
	<u>15</u>	15/25	60%	Pass but borderline
Retail				
Ease of Use and Visitor Flow	4			
Display Units, Fittings and Lighting	4			
Presentation of Merchandise	3			
Range and Appropriateness of Merchandise	4			
	<u>15</u>	15/20	75%	Pass
Staff				
Appearance of Staff	4			
Admissions				
Customer Care	4			
Efficiency	4			
Knowledge	4			
Guides, Volunteers, Gardeners et al				
Customer Care	4			
Efficiency	4			
Knowledge	4			
Catering				
Customer Care	3			
Efficiency	3			
Knowledge	3			
Retail				
Customer Care	3			
Efficiency	4			
Knowledge	4			
	<u>48</u>	48/65	73%	Pass
Overall score = 169/225 75% Pass				

Appendix O: Visitor's books: 2020 and 2019

2020	Observation: Most of the comments are positive thoughts and many comments are irrelevant.	
	15/1/2020	Nice but very cold - Poland
	17/1/2020	I expected more - Turkey
	19/1/2020	Kind of disgusting - Malta
	24/2/2020	Very impressive collection especially the skeletons - Sweden
	16/2/2020	Very nice (no lifts) - Malta
	16/2/2020	Boring - Poland
	17/2/2020	Needs updating. Disappointed with outdated style of presentation with notable exception of the Maltese islands displays, still not amazing lost morning in the wrong direction. - Scotland
2019	4/3/2020	Beautiful butterflies - Greece
	13/8/2019	deco like school but terrific stuffed animals - Spain
	15/8/2019	un peu vieillot - french
	18/8/2019	Boring - sri lanka
	22/8/2019	Bird could be better stuffed, Maltese
	20/8/2019	This place needs a serious refurbishment, Malta
	24/8/2019	It was good but had no spiders
	25/8/2019	Malta, beautiful exhibit, would like more light in shell room.
	5/9/2019	Lifts - accessibility for wheelchairs - malta
	8/9/2019	We felt sorry for the animals. Holland
	11/9/2019	beings. France
	13/9/2019	It was interesting however there was not new things for a long time, need to invest - Malta
	19/9/2019	need more toilets -Denmark
	19/9/2019	Has to be renovated, more interactive stuff! - Switzerland.
	21/9/2019	Malta - Boring
	24/9/2019	Better they were alive! - Malta
	20/10/2019	Canada - needs updating + very poorly signed
	21/10/2019	The showcases need a brush up - Germany
	21/10/2019	Taxidermy needs a touch up. Otherwise good
	10/11/2019	enjoyed it but needs a refurbishment - Malta
	8/12/2019	I like the butterflies
	15/12/2019	I loved the squid. Malta
	23/12/2019	Boring - spain
	23/12/2019	looks the same as 1966 - Malta
	23/12/2019	You should make it more interactive - Romania
	24/6/2019	Beautiful animals especially the island room. Austria
	26/6/2019	Very expensive - Norway
	28/6/2019	Shocked! You are in the 1980!
	29/6/2019	Could be more dragonflies - Uzbekistan
	2/7/2019	I wish there was more fans for summer
	4/7/2019	Interesting but more fans in summer please - Malta
	17/7/2019	Everything is dead ! Turkey
	18/7/2019	No threes? Italy
	21/7/2019	Very good but nothing new
	24/7/2019	Great but some information are missing - France
	27/7/2019	I wanted to see a jellyfish -Italia
	3/8/2019	Save the planet ! UK
	4/8/2019	really appreciated the skeletons anatomy, less the "mummified animals"