

FUTOURISTIC

THE ITS JOURNAL ON HOSPITALITY, TRAVEL, TOURISM AND CULTURE



COMMUNICATING AND DISSEMINATING SCHOLARSHIP | ITS PRIORITISING TRAINING | NEW CAMPUS
IN SMARTCITY | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | AUTOMATED CUSTOMER SERVICE | TRAVEL BLOGS
| COMPETENCY LEVELS AND OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS | SUSTAINABLE LUXURY TOURISM |
PLATE WASTE | GUESTROOM TECHNOLOGIES | AIRBNB IN MALTA | THE SMART HOTEL | CULTURAL
HERITAGE | STUDENTS' WRITING PROCESS | VEGANISM IN MALTA | AIRPORT SERVICESCAPE
| CLIMATE CHANGE | INCOMING TOURISM FROM JAPAN | WATER ON A SMALL ISLAND STATE

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A message from the Editor-in-Chief

Communicating and Disseminating Scholarship

In May 2020 the Ministry for Tourism and Consumer protection, in collaboration with the Malta Tourism Authority, announced that it was investing €5 million euros in the local hospitality and tourism workforce through a scholarship scheme¹. This initiative aimed at providing individuals working in this sector, or those who aspired to be part of it, to enrol in programmes which led to full or partial qualifications. The focus here was to provide such workforce with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competence to contribute towards the recovery, rethinking and revitalisation of the local Tourism industry in a post-covid environment. Such objectives were also in line with the Malta Tourism Strategy.

The Institute of Tourism Studies was one of the higher education providers of formal training under the scholarships scheme – this attracted numerous hospitality and tourism professionals who embarked on postgraduate studies, particularly the ITS' Master of Business Administration in International Hospitality Management. Two years down the line, twenty-five students who benefited from this opportunity graduated with and MBA, and today the efforts made by these graduates is deservedly being shared, in part, with the readership of this journal. I strongly believe that it is the obligation of each institute which provided such training to communicate the outcome of their provision in one way or another – after all, such scheme was only possible because of public funds and therefore the public has the right to know about the return of such educational investment.

The Institute of Tourism Studies is therefore

giving an account of its work in relation to this scheme through the content of this journal. As Ernest Lynton (1994) argues in his article *Knowledge and Scholarship*, 'Scholarship can exist wherever and whenever knowledge is systematically pursued, enhanced, and communicated, be it through research, teaching, or professional service.'² The content in this fourth issue will feature, among a number of interesting articles, the key results of nine different research studies carried out by 'covid-19' scholarship holders.

Mary Rose Briffa ventures in the area of continuous professional development among women working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Malta. The author focuses on the existing opportunities for training and retraining as well as female motivation and expectation in this context. Briffa examines career progression among genders and controversially argues that, despite efforts from policymakers, equality in terms of career progression in the tourism and hospitality industry will be more difficult for females in view of the strong patriarchal elements in our society.

Fabien Sant Fournier writes about the effects of automated customer service on guest satisfaction in Malta's hotel establishments. Sant Fournier successfully attempts to obtain a clear understanding of the hotel management attitudes towards the introduction of automation in a very sensitive department, notably the customer care. He explores the key factors which affect the employment of automated customer service technology and delves into the quality of service if such systems are introduced.

The author argues that despite a recent improvement among hoteliers to be more open to automation, the lack of research does not allow hospitality and tourism entrepreneurs to invest in such technology.

Jessica Grech studies the phenomenon of blogging and its contribution towards the process of travel planning. The author argues that travel blogs and vlogs have a key function during the travel planning process. In fact, such element is a core driver in sourcing the right information but also in providing feedback and reviews. Grech writes about the trustworthiness of blogs and vlogs, particularly in relation to the promotion of film tourism and the importance of this sector as a showcase to local destinations.

Angele Mallia discusses a very important element of tourism and hospitality, notably the National Occupational Standards related to this sector. Mallia analysis the effectiveness of these standards vis-à-vis the recruitment, training, and career advancement of among workers in this industry. The study is an extension of a previous research which draws from the competency level of front office personnel in 2013. The author identifies the notable difference in the roles of a receptionists in the last ten years, particularly with regard to the use of technology. This research draws from a bottom-up approach where the key players in the sector were asked what, in their opinion, are the main competences required to carry out the job in the most effective and efficient way – the results were eventually compares with the NOS'.

Daniel Debattista delves into the topic of

1 Government of Malta. (2020, May 8). Press Release by Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection: €5 million investment: e-learning training scheme launched for the tourism industry. DOI. *Government services and information*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2020/May/08/pr200866en.aspx>

2 Lynton, E. A. (1994). Knowledge and scholarship. *Metropolitan Universities*, 5(1), 9-17. Retrieved from <https://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/muj/article/download/19385/19144/27229>

luxury tourism, a product which has for many years been the subject of discussion. Debattista analyses the characteristics and behaviours of luxury consumption, in relation to the possibility of Malta being a luxury destination. The author argues that a number of ancillary services which support tourism in Malta, such as maritime, have the potential in offering high end services and products. The author argues that local gastronomy is among the products which has a considerable potential for contributing towards luxury tourism, and the same goes for boutique accommodations which highlight authenticity and offer superior services.

Jonathan Zammit investigates the issue of food waste in Malta and argues that there are clear red flags about this situation which require immediate addressing. Zammit provides an indication of the average amount of plate waste generated from buffets offered by local 4-Star and 5-Star hotels. His research includes the exploration of different strategies that may contribute to the decreasing in food waste. He proposes down-to-earth examples such as, changing how buffet layouts can be set up or having a mixed plated service. The author takes a deep dive into the trends of customer behaviour at buffets in the local market and tries to shed light on the customers' and businesses' approach to plate waste.

Michaela Magro analyses the impact of today's technological facilities adopted in 5-star and 4-star hotel guestrooms in Malta on customer satisfaction. Magro looks at the customers' attitudes and perception toward digital technology, notably self-service and artificial intelligence (AI) technology. The author argues that when compared to other countries, Maltese hotel establishments lag behind the implementation of smart technologies and are less likely to have a positive outlook vis-à-vis the implantation of new technologies. She provides

useful recommendations on how digital innovation in a hotel can positively affect the clients, particularly when using fingerprint scanning, facial biometrics to process specific commands as well as to process payments.

Olesya Micallef looks at the concept of authenticity and its importance vis-à-vis the service provided by Airbnb. The author studies major motives that may influence Airbnb guests and their choice of accommodation, including the location. Micallef further investigates the factors that influence inbound travelers' decisions to use Airbnb as a platform rather than the conventional tourist accommodation, notably hotels using Malta as a case study. Finally, Micallef discusses whether the elements of authenticity and experience, be it cultural or social, play a role when choosing an Airbnb accommodation in Malta.

Patrizia Negro writes about the Internet of Thing and Artificial Intelligence in the context of hotel establishments and related Infrastructure. The author emphasizes on the dynamic element of the hospitality industry and how today's modern and smart technology is influencing not only the hotel infrastructure but also its operations. She proposes a Smart Hotel business model category to rejuvenate the current hospitality industry practices and to progress towards sustainability in Malta.

Once again ITS is giving proof that that it is nurturing a strong research culture among its academics and students and only a sample of this output is being reproduced in Futouristic. We have plans to make the students's research available online for all researchers to access, but details of this will be given in the upcoming editions of this journal.

Glen Farrugia
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ITS Chief Operating Officer -
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Ghar ir-Rih interior, facing the opening in the cliff face at its rear, Benghajsa, Malta. Photo by Marika Caruana on Wiki Loves Monuments 2022. CC BY-SA 4.0

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ITS Prioritising training for the hospitality and tourism industry: Enhanced Skills, Excellent Product, and Exceptional Experience

In 2022 the Institute of Tourism Studies continued the implementation of its strategic plan 2021-2025 with the launch of a key initiative: the ITS Training School. Futouristic spoke to Dr Frank Fabri, the general manager of the Training School, on the objectives of the school and how this complements the Institute's established VET academic programmes in Higher and Further Education.

1. HOW IS THE ITS TRAINING SCHOOL LOCATED WITHIN THE ITS 2021-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN?

The ITS Training School is a business unit within the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). It is a professional training entity that designs and delivers high quality industry-

driven, innovative, and hands-on training programmes to the hospitality and tourism industries and the public.

Our training in hotel management, food preparation and service, travel and tourism, events, sports, wellness and leisure, and others related to hospitality, is delivered by qualified, knowledgeable, and experienced trainers.

Apart from the training design and delivery, we provide other ancillary services including the recognition and validation of the employees' skills, knowledge, and competencies. Our professional training and development services are designed to recognise and validate the skill sets, address

the skill gaps, and upskill the workforce. The organisation and attendance of seminars, conferences and webinars too form part of our portfolio.

The Institute's ultimate goal is that the hospitality and tourism sectors succeed in the provision of an exceptional product and the achievement of an excellent customer experience.

2. WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE ITS TRAINING SCHOOL?

Our mission is to upskill and reskill the workforce in the service-driven industries. This is key in obtaining a quality service that meets and exceeds the expectancy of the customer.

It is common knowledge that among the issues regarding human capital within the service-driven industries are the shortage of skills, the quality of the overall product, the recruitment of untrained employees, the skills gap, and the retainment of employees with the right skill set.

A study conducted by Deloitte and commissioned by the MHRA in 2022 showed that among the main supply-side limiting factors identified by the stakeholders in the tourism sector is related to the labour force, including the difficulty in recruiting and the loss of the authenticity caused by the lack of Maltese working in the sector.¹

3. HOW HIGH TRAINING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IS ON THE AGENDA?

Our training programmes intrinsically capture the high value that both hard and soft skills carry within the industry, the product and experience. Hard skills come from specific knowledge and are often tied to specific tasks or technologies. These are teachable skill sets and are measurable. Soft skills are qualities and abilities that reflect how employees perform their job and relate to others in their workplace, such as work ethic, empathy, creativity, and communication with co-employees and customers. These are more subjective and not easy to measure.

Upskilling and reskilling are in general needed in both the soft and hard skills of employees for their own personal and professional development, the industry's and the customer's benefit. That is why high-quality and industry-based training for the industry is key. That is why we adopt reliable and valid different types of assessment that identify the skill sets and through training programmes we address the skill gaps.

4. HOW WILL THE ITS TRAINING SCHOOL COMPLEMENT THE CURRENT ACADEMIC AND VET PROGRAMMES AT ITS GIVEN THAT THE LATTER ARE ALSO PREPARING THE CURRENT AND FUTURE INDUSTRY WORKFORCE?

As from September 2022 the ITS has a clearer dual role, one complements the other. The ITS traditional teaching role prepares a future-ready workforce through its full qualification courses to full-time and part-time students. The ITS is attracting

ever more students that will eventually join the hospitality and tourism industries after completing their studies. This increase in student population and graduates mitigates the challenges that employers face with regards to shortages and recruitment of workers.

The other complementary role is fulfilled by the newly established Training School through its training and other services provided to the industry. Our aim is to upskill and reskill the workforce. The fast-growing hospitality and tourism industries face the challenge of deskilling, reskilling, and upskilling of the workforce and there is an urgent need in properly addressing it.

An urgent systemic and collective intervention is needed to stop skills widening. A PwC survey (2022) shows that there is a strong need to help employees develop the skills needed today and, in the future, from technology to environment, social and governance and soft skills like leadership, resilience and global acumen to navigate the changing world.²

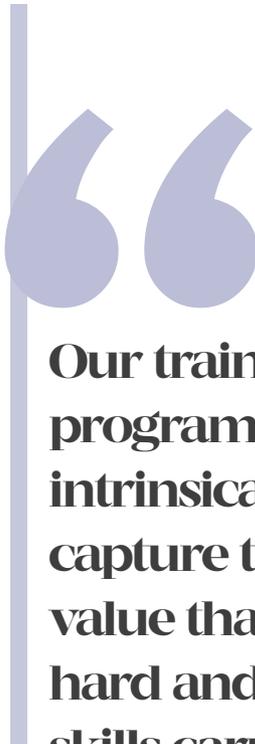
5. WHY SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON SKILLS DEVELOPMENT?

The ITS Training School is where employment and education blend together. Our training programmes are designed to enhance the knowledge, uplift the skills, and reinforce the competencies of the workforce and the public. According to the World Economic Forum, employers need to embrace upskilling and reskilling of their employees to future-proof their business and reduce societal polarisation: "There is a strong need to help people at scale in developing the skills needed now and, in the future, – from tech to environment, social and governance and soft skills like leadership, resilience and global acumen to navigate the changing world."³

We recognise and validate the knowledge, skills, and competencies of employees within the sectors of hospitality and tourism. Our training programmes focus and bring together the soft and transversal skills that are needed for the multi-cultural environments typically found in hospitality businesses and for delivering outstanding customer experience, and the hard skills which are specific to a function or necessary

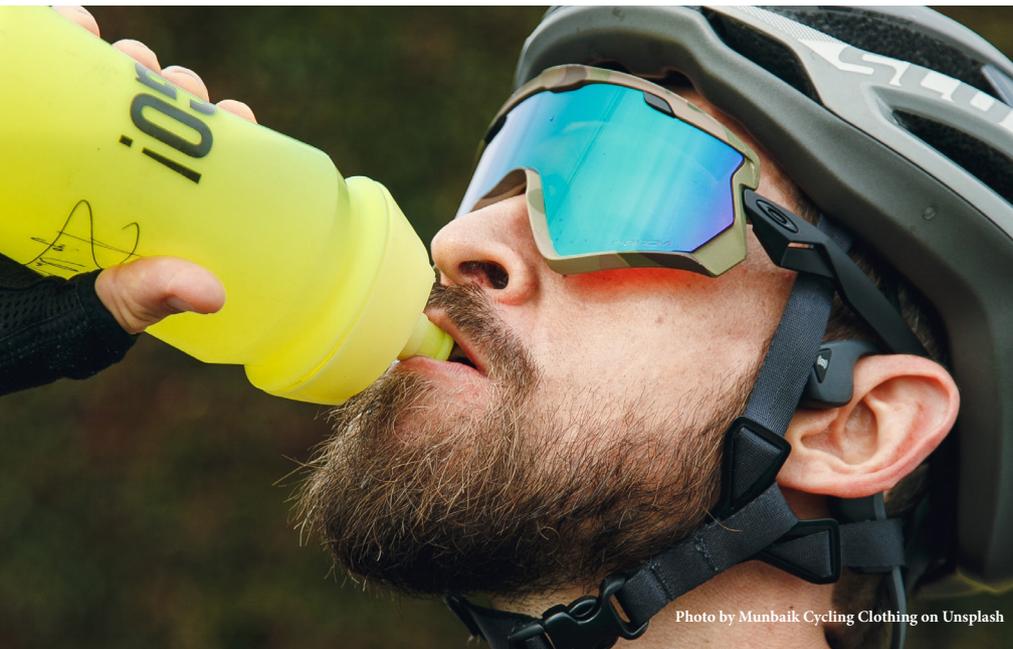
to accomplish technical tasks. We package our training services under either of two options, namely off-the-shelf and bespoke training programmes. Either option addresses the industry's needs and helps bridging the skill gaps.

Ultimately, our aim remains that of providing training programmes that uplift the employees' skills, enrich their knowledge, and sustain their competences. Quality service delivery and excellent customer experience are only achievable through continuous training and development.



Our training programmes intrinsically capture the high value that both hard and soft skills carry within the industry, the product and experience.





6. THE OVERALL PURPOSE OF THE TRAINING SCHOOL IS TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY TRAINING FOR THE INDUSTRY'S SPECIFIC NEEDS. IN WHAT WAYS WILL THESE PROGRAMMES PROVIDE INNOVATION, ADAPTABLE LEARNING STYLES AND CUSTOMISATION?

The ITS Training School delivers training to employees, apart from to the public. We provide relevant and effective training that benefits the employers' demands whilst being flexible enough to cater for the busy schedule of the trainees.

Our mission is thus that of serving the industry's needs rather than expecting the industry to fit our schedules. Our learning outcomes address the employers' needs, the realities on the place of work, and the employees' skill sets and skill gaps. Our preferred option, whilst having the necessary facilities of our own, is that whenever and wherever possible, training is delivered on the place of work, face-to-face and hands on. Technology is used to facilitate the delivery of our training.

7. INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS IS A STRATEGIC SUCCESS FACTOR FOR THE TRAINING SCHOOL. HOW WILL THE NEW TRAINING SCHOOL EXTEND AND ENHANCE THE ALREADY STRONG PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN ITS AND INDUSTRY?

The training school benefits from the already established professional

relationships and partnerships between ITS and industry.

Following the establishment of the training school, we started designing new additional training programmes under five hospitality and tourism sectors namely, hospitality management, food preparation and service, travel and tourism, events, sports, wellness and leisure, and other related sectors. We at ITS are confident enough that through our high-quality training programmes and experienced trainers we'll succeed in building further partnerships at national and international levels.

Our endeavour is that of establishing further new partnerships related to the upskilling of the workforce within sectors from the hospitality and tourism industries. We strive for partnerships that improve the provision of quality product and an excellent customer experience.

8. WHAT ARE THE PLANS TO TARGET THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET? ITS ALREADY HAS A GOOD PERCENTAGE OF ITS STUDENT POPULATION COMING FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD.

The Institute's industry-based training programmes, both off-the-shelf and custom-based, are relevant to the national and international industry within the hospitality and tourism sectors.

One must keep in mind that during the initial weeks of establishment our marketing and outreach campaigns focused mostly on the national market whilst remaining open and very much available to the international one. In fact, most of our training is currently being delivered locally.

At the same time, we are very much dedicated to the setting-up of the training school's management and operations, including the design of the training school's corporate image and its human resource and capacity building, the development of new accredited training programmes, the establishment of new training agreements, and the provision of the widest possible professional opportunities for our trainers.

The ITS has reached several training agreements with the industry at national level from a variety of sectors including hotels, restaurants, retail, diving, real estate, old people's home, and government entities.

During these last weeks we also managed to secure a couple of training agreements at international level. An agreement with the Malta Embassy in Turkey and another with the World Tourism Association for Culture and Heritage (WTACH) have also been reached.

9. WHY IS THE TOURISM PASSPORTING PROGRAMME OFFERING BASIC SKILLS LISTED AS A CORE PRODUCT OFFERING OF THE TRAINING SCHOOL?

The hospitality and tourism sectors, and Malta is no exception, which definitely remain among the most fast-growing sectors, are caught in a situation where to provide their services have no other option other than that of engaging employees, including foreigners, who might happen to have skill deficit, little knowledge of English and Maltese, little or no knowledge about the Maltese culture and perhaps with limited or no customer service skills. Added to all this, is the reality of soft and hard skills deficit the industry is experiencing. This is the reason why among the first initiatives taken by the ITS Training School, was the development of basic training programmes intended to employees, and to prospective ones, with skills deficit who are engaged in the sector.



Photo by Peter Hansen on Unsplash

This employment reality might compromise the quality of service and the customer's experience. Thus, among the training programmes that we have on disposal include basic English and Maltese, basic customer service and basic Maltese culture in the hospitality and tourism sectors

10. GENERAL PUBLIC COURSES ARE ANOTHER OFFERING MENTIONED IN THE STRATEGIC PLAN. COULD THIS BE A REPLICATION OF WHAT IS ALREADY OFFERED BY THE MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION IN TERMS OF LIFELONG LEARNING COURSES?

The ITS Training School has a very clear and well-defined remit, i.e., hospitality as a transversal area and tourism as a particular sector. It is not a generalist training institution but a specialised one. The ITS, and its Training School, is the leading national vocational education and training institution

in hospitality and tourism and specialises in training programmes that are intrinsically related to these sectors. The training school is also very keen in providing services to and/or collaborating with other training institutions, being government-owned or private.

We are not in competition with any other training institution. We are only very keen in designing high-quality world-class training programmes in hospitality and tourism and delivered by our knowledgeable, qualified, and experienced trainers.

11. THE STRATEGIC PLAN ENVISAGES THE SETTING-UP OF THE GOZO TOURISM TRAINING SCHOOL. HOW WILL THIS BE DIFFERENT, COMPLEMENTARY OR TAKING THE PLACE OF THE CURRENT ITS CAMPUS IN QALA?

The ITS Training School, being in Malta or Gozo or abroad, complements, and is not

the replacement of, the ITS as an academic institution that provides full qualifications up to MQF/EQF level 7 to 16+ year old students. It is a business unit within ITS that caters for training provision to the industry and the general public.

12. ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

An updated list of training programmes for the industry and the public provided by the ITS Training School can be viewed at www.trainingschool.its.edu.mt and the Management can be reached by email on trainingschool@its.edu.mt.

ENDNOTES

¹ <https://secureservercdn.net/160.153.138.249/cm0.4ad.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/TCC-Final-Report.pdf>. Last retrieved on 7/11/2022

² <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/upskilling-why-businesses-need-to-bridge-the-skills-gap/>. Last retrieved on 7/11/2022.

³ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/upskilling-why-businesses-need-to-bridge-the-skills-gap/>. Last retrieved on 7/11/2022.

Institute of Tourism Studies unveils plans for its new campus in SmartCity



Works on the new Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) campus in Smart City, Kalkara have started.

The new campus will provide a quality experience for students, with facilities that will translate into more specialized courses that will prepare future workers for the needs of the tourism industry in Malta and around the world.

When completed, the new campus will welcome 2,500 students, or double the amount it is accepting today. The €60 million project is co-financed by European funds and includes 58 classrooms, three restaurants, three bars and a cafeteria for training, together with 21 specialized laboratories and a library.

The project will also provide facilities for more than 300 staff members, 400 parking spaces together with a hall that

can accommodate more than 300 people. Further facilities that will be part of this state-of-the-art campus include: an indoor pool suitable for diving training and a sports centre.

Prime Minister, Robert Abela stated that by investing in quality our country can reach new levels and such an investment is only possible as the economy has registered strong growth and is presenting an economic trend that allows the government to emphasize more the quality of the product and a skilled workforce.

The new campus investment will improve the tourism service and continue to improve the tourist product that Malta offers. It is an investment that sends a strong sign that the government believes in tourism as one of the main pillars of the Maltese economy.

The Prime Minister claimed that while new economic areas are being created, it is essential

to keep servicing those areas that provide a good economic return. In fact, by September, 1.8 million tourists have already visited country, spending €1.5 billion on our shores. Investment in tourism is also an important contribution in terms of jobs, with restaurants and hotels creating one out of every five new jobs this year along with an increase of 700 part-time jobs in the same sector.

The Minister for Tourism Clayton Bartolo explained that over the years ITS has worked hard to provide a leap of quality in tourism education. "We believe that the building of this campus will be a strong foundation through which we will continue to encourage more young people to choose hospitality as a major career. Ancillary to the building of this campus, is the birth of a training school within the ITS to provide a boost to the existing demand we have in the industry for training and strengthening the local skills in hotels and restaurants."

ITS CEO Pierre Fenech reiterated that this investment will provide the opportunity for ITS to continue investing in new and innovative courses. He explained that for the last three years, ITS had a record number of new students and claimed that “we are confident that once we move to our new campus these numbers will increase at a faster rate. We already have commitments from a number of foreign institutions, who want to send their students to continue their studies here in Malta.”

View the ITS Smart City plans by scanning the following QR code



“
This new ITS campus will continue to improve the tourist product that Malta offers.”



Continuing Professional Development in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry among Women in Malta: Opportunities, Motivations, Expectations, and COVID-19 Pandemic Effects

BY MARY ROSE BRIFFA,
MBA IN INTERNATIONAL HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT IN ACADEMIC AFFILIATION WITH THE EMIRATES ACADEMY
OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

Continuing Professional Development refers to the procedure by which a person takes control of her/his own development and learning (Meggison & Whitaker, 2007), engaging in an on-going process of action and reflection. It is an exciting and empowering process, which can motivate individuals to accomplish their ambitions. This research project aims to analyse the process of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the tourism and hospitality industry among women in Malta. Additionally, the purpose of this research is to focus on the existing opportunities for Continuing Professional Development in Malta, women's motivations and expectations, and the overall effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the sector.

A gap was identified in the literature review regarding women and work-life balance issues, specifically, women working in the Tourism and Hospitality industry in Malta. The researcher aimed to identify what has been achieved to date in terms of providing lifelong learning opportunities and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on motivation and expectations of women in Malta. The main hypothesis statement assesses whether a significant difference exists in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance between women and men. An explanatory mixed approach has been adopted for this research study, starting with a quantitative online questionnaire, followed by qualitative focus groups to explain in further detail what was found in the online questionnaires. A non-probability sampling procedure was applied for the online questionnaire, resulting in

51% (N=53) female participants and 49% (N=51) male participants, totalling 104 valid responses. The fifty women participants for the focus groups were selected from amongst the questionnaire participants, using the first four largest groups (according to the course followed). Twenty-one showed their interest in participating. Ultimately, nineteen women participated in the three focus groups. The data for the online questionnaire was collected through Google Forms and analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.0.0). The focus groups were conducted through Microsoft Teams and the content elicited was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by means of an online software called Delve.

Key Words: Continuing Professional Development, Continuing Vocational Education & Training, COVID-19, Expectations, Motivation, Work-life Balance, Stress, Progression, Gender Equality

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

CPD enables learning to become an initiative-taking process, rather than reactive. It is a holistic professional commitment with the aim of improving employees' personal skills and proficiency throughout their careers. CPD can be facilitated through different means, such as workshops, events and conferences, online learning programs, and best practice methods, focusing on individual improvement and successful professional development (CPD, 2022). Over recent years, CVET has progressively become prominent in European policy (Cedefop,

2015) varying drastically from just two decades ago, when the industry's current challenges were not even contemplated (Cedefop, 2015). The importance that VET is given by Europe's policy makers has been accentuated when in November 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration initiated the launch of the European strategy for enhanced cooperation in VET, called the 'Copenhagen Process', reaffirmed at Maastricht in 2004, Helsinki in 2006, Bordeaux in 2008, Bruges in 2010 and the Riga Conclusions in 2015 (EC, 2020). Lifelong learning is vital to increase motivation, aid equity, and increase possibilities for disadvantaged groups' participation in society (Cedefop, 2014). In fact, its aims are to expand employees' knowledge, skills, competencies, and professional knowledge (Bahçelerli, 2018). Training is essential as it affects the competitiveness of the tourism offer and enables innovation through the development of new products and services (Bahçelerli, 2018).

KEY FINDINGS

The Independent Samples T-Test confirmed that the null hypothesis for each question cannot be rejected, and therefore, the main null hypothesis was confirmed. The findings from the focus groups indicate that women have overall positive views about Continuing Professional Development however, they express preference for online lifelong learning as they can achieve a better work-life balance. Furthermore, participants feel that they are more empowered after receiving training and that progression can never be gender equal as they believe that the Maltese society is patriarchal.



Photo by Norbert Braun on Unsplash

RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSING RESEARCH LIMITATIONS LITERATURE REVIEW GAP

This limitation may come as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic being a recent phenomenon and Malta holding such a small geographical location, therefore studies related to Malta would be limited. Future studies on the subject must still be published therefore, the recommendation is for future research on the same subject using a different geographical location. Findings on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality employees may not be identical to those for Malta, however, they are still comparable as COVID-19 affected the entire world, not only Malta.

SAMPLING METHOD AND GEO-POLITICAL SITUATION

The use of the non-probability sampling method is the most commonly used by researchers due to cost and time limitations (Bhandari, 2020) when conducting quantitative research. The study had the requirement of mixed research imposed; therefore, quantitative research was imperative. A future recommendation would be to conduct a qualitative analysis wherein research findings are related to words, feelings, and emotions (Dudovskiy, 2022) rather than data. Hence, more in-depth focus groups are recommended in a year's time from the original research.

In-depth interviews are also suggested with policymakers and tourism and hospitality practitioners. Finally, it is important to allow a relevant time gap before replicating the study, so that the economical/political situation is more stable following the current turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war between Ukraine and Russia.

BUILDING UPON FINDINGS

A pivotal element in the research study findings was the sad conviction, by at least five of the female participants in the focus groups, that Malta retains a patriarchal society, and that despite attempts by policymakers to make things better, career progression will never be equal. On the other hand, positive elements were also noted. The focus group participants exhibited a prominent level of motivation to progress in their careers. They also declared that after their training they feel more empowered and perceive themselves to be setting an even better example to their children.

Future qualitative research, using various techniques available, such as one-to-one interviews, observations and focus groups, in continuation to this study is being recommended. The present study was related to CPD and women in Malta, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the opportunities, motivations, and expectations

of the female gender. The recommended study should continue to focus on CPD and women in Malta, but further research must detail the effect of the patriarchal society on equal progression.

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An analysis of the effects of automated customer service on service quality in Maltese hotels

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Market trends develop quickly in today's digital age. The real time responses typical of instant messaging and social media have given rise to expectations of instant replies in all facets of communication; including interaction with companies. Many corporate and governmental websites make use of automated customer service technology in order to fulfil this growing need. However, the implementation of such technology together with research into the topic have been very limited within a hospitality context. This thesis contributes towards filling that gap by providing an analysis of the effects of automated customer service on guest satisfaction in Maltese hotels.

A case study of a Maltese company owning several small hotels was undertaken in order to thoroughly explore the topic. The case study consisted of the implementation of two chatbots on the websites of two of the company's hotels. Qualitative research was then carried out which consisted of an interview with hotel management in order to explore the factors affecting chatbot adoption. After the implementation of the chatbots, surveys were distributed amongst respondents of both the chatbot and users who chose to use standard forms of communication. Respondents were requested to answer questions based on the service quality of their interactions with the chatbot and hotel employees.

In this study an endeavour was made to understand the attitudes of hotel management towards automated customer service which could reflect on the justification for its adoption or lack

thereof. There appears to be a clear demand side for a human counterpart with respondents of the surveys highlighting the shortcomings of the technology, a desire for personal attention and need for a genuine connection. Despite these identified shortcomings, respondents to the chatbot surveys rated their interaction with the chatbot as feeling natural. (33% of respondents strongly agreed and 33% agreed). Although there is a clear desire to maintain the status quo when it comes to the involvement of human respondents in guest correspondence, the interviewee highlighted that the realities of the business need to be considered. The interviewee expressed concern over the sheer feasibility of manually responding to all queries accurately and in an acceptable time frame. The labour-intensive nature of human involvement might not be a scalable procedure for a growing company such as the one in question. In addition, market trends of real time responses further fuelled the interest in chatbot technologies.

Despite technological advances, the human element was identified as still being a crucial aspect of the product positioning of hotels. Guests also expressed a preference for interacting with a human counterpart given the choice. The results of this study are similar to those reported by Ivanov and Webster (2017) and Nam *et al* (2021) whereby guests, particularly those of high-end hotels, have higher expectations of service and demand personal attention. This desire is expressed via a preference for legacy methods of communication. This notion was further echoed by hotel management who declared that the guest

experience was to be prioritised above all else. This represents a challenge for the future adoption of chatbots in similarly styled hotels. Several perceptions of automated technology emerged from both hotel management and the guest, which, whilst acknowledging the potential of automated customer service in cooperation with a human counterpart, also identified a need for improvement of the technology as well as further research into the field. Despite these setbacks, both the literature (Cancel and Gerhardt, 2019 ; Ivakhnenko, 2021) and the interviewee stated that a compromise between automation and human input could be an ideal situation. This would allow for mundane and basic tasks to be handled expeditiously, whilst allowing a person more time to handle individual cases that require their attention.

Smart phones innovations have facilitated the popularity and growth of web 2.0 platforms such as social media. Businesses have been quick to adapt and take advantage of these new platforms, both for promotional and communication purposes. However, the next iteration of the internet will feature new technologies which will increasingly be more focused on Artificial Intelligence and automation. The results from the study have shown that although certain platforms may have performed favourably in the past, the dynamic nature of the market (fuelled by technological innovation) is giving rise to new trends which must be adapted to. Specifically, up and coming technologies can leverage the power of their predecessors. An opportunity exists for hotels to integrate Artificial Intelligence via third



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party applications across social media platforms in order to improve service quality standards. This improvement in quality could lead to increased sales, particularly direct reservations which many hotels of the type under review have been losing out to Online Travel Agents (OTAs). Furthermore, cost savings can be made as the operation becomes less labour intensive and employee morale could improve due to the reduced workload.

This thesis has explored factors affecting the adoption of automated customer service technology and its effects on service quality. The research conducted has shown that despite the shortcomings, such technology has the potential in providing a competitive advantage. Despite this, there is a lack of research on chatbot technology in Malta, especially within the hospitality sector. Future research could explore whether the conclusions reached in this study are replicable.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, chatbots, service quality, hotels, customer service

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The suitability of travel blogs and vlogs as a way to promote Malta's niche screen tourism sector

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The objective of this research was to study the phenomenon of blogging and its role in the process of travel planning through the development of user-generated content (UGC), with a theoretical framework concentrated on the properties of UGC, specifically, blogs and their benefits towards other sources of information. The link between tourism and film tourism was also researched. To achieve the best results, in-depth interviews with experienced managers from both the tourism and filming industries were conducted, and web-based questionnaires were distributed accordingly. Research and data for this study was collected through the literature review, and the empirical part of this research was implemented by using qualitative research methods to gather in-depth insights of the topic being researched, with the qualitative method tools being in-depth interviews and web-based questionnaires.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study confirmed that travel blogs and vlogs have several important roles in the travel planning process: they act as motivators, as sources of important information, as well as a way of providing feedback. There are specific qualities that make blogs and vlogs trustworthy, which can also be observed through the promotion of film tourism.

With regards to film tourism, the combination of film and tourism is successful and can have a positive impact on tourism destinations. The film locations that have become film-induced tourism are iconic locations and have a strong emotional connection with the viewer. These findings might be useful for companies wanting to learn how to effectively implement word of mouth and for film tourism to transform iconic film locations into long-term tourist attractions rather than just a temporary phenomenon due to the influence of film.

Film-tourism is important within the Maltese context because it is already influencing and attracting important segment of visitors, and has great potential and the possibilities for growth are very strong. Tourists, including those already visiting Malta, are not only being influenced by filming localities when selecting a destination but are also seeking more information about screen tourism when in the destination. This strengthens the need for resources to be made available to provide information to potential travellers about Malta's lengthy association with the film industry.

This research has shown that screen tourism is an important phenomenon, as a niche in its own right, and the impact it has on a tourism destination. Authors such as Markwell (2001) consider that film tourism has the capacity to contribute to social and cultural development. With regards to the effect that film tourism can have on the image of a tourist destination,

authors such as Schofield (1996); Morgan & Pritchard (1998); Croy & Walker (2003) and Hyounggon & Richardson (2003), recognise that visual media have a decisive influence on the formation of the image of a tourist destination. This statement is supported by the interviewees, as they have all agreed that audio-visual productions are powerful drivers in the creation of a destination's pre-image. In addition to the image, the interviewees have also considered that film tourism can influence the reputation of destinations.

The link between tourist destinations and travel blogging and/or vlogging was also closely observed in this study. Results obtained from the web-based questionnaire has proven that reading travel blogs is an important source of inspiration and brings several advantages from the reader's point of view: the Web is readily accessible; content is selected and often up-to-date, and blog entries promise personal experiences of other travellers. From the blogger's point of view, in online environments a variety of blogging practices can be performed, which allow for creativity in presenting one's own travel experiences in a multimedia format, including text and photographs. Moreover, travel blogs can be regarded as interfaces for community members to share travel advice, exchange opinions on tourist activities, and communicate with each other.

Travel blogs are a source of inspiration because their main goal is to encourage others to consider visiting the destination. Travellers are keen to read about others' experiences. They want to be as well informed as possible. Travel blogging plays a vital role when it comes to the tourist industry since bloggers show what other places are really like, hence making tourists feel comfortable enough and excited to go there.

Social media has become an important marketing tool to promote Malta and attract tourists. Blogs and vlogs offer a fantastic opportunity to influence others. They are both effective as it's easy for visitors to access information and to have a glimpse of what Malta and its landscapes look like.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In future lines of research, it could be beneficial to study the language of tourism promotional films with regards the cinematographic techniques applied to tourism destinations and products, specifically in the analysis of the frames deployed in promotional films and correspondingly ascertaining which verbal and visual languages and shot typologies are most applied in tourism communication filmed content. Research of this type may enable the construction of a tool for evaluating the quality of tourism promotional and advertising films.

It would also be interesting to study the way in which film tourism should be integrated into the marketing plans of tourist destinations, as well as to analyse who should be the agents involved in this integration and promotion of destinations through the audio-visual. Further study and analysis are needed to better understand the impact of films and TV series on Internet entertainment services regarding cultural affinity and screen tourism. While screen tourism has been studied at length, less has been done concerning the effect of growing cultural affinity and its benefits on the influence of a country, as well as the economic impact.

Mutual support from the government and respective entities to support further research into the cultural affinity and screen tourism phenomenon, including economic analysis of cultural affinity through films and TV series would be helpful in informing local strategies in linking the creative and tourism sectors.

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The Competency Levels and Occupational Standards in the Hospitality Industry: A study of the Receptionist role in 5 Star Hotels in Malta

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This study focuses on receptionists working in 5-Star Hotels and the role of National Occupational Standards (NOS) on their recruitment, training, and career advancement. The study builds on research conducted on the competency levels of receptionists in 2013. There have since been many changes in the role of a receptionist regarding the type of services required and a massive improvement in technology use within Hotels. This study compares what competences HR Managers and Front Office Managers (receptionists) believe are needed for the receptionist job and for determining ongoing training, as well as identifying to what degree these reflect competences indication in the NOS. The study also considers VET training providers in the hospitality sector and if and how are NOS used for programme design. The study also probed whether HR managers would be interested in validating the receptionists' learning, and whether receptionists would be motivated to validate their informal and nonformal learning.

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology involving semi-structured interviews with HR managers, receptionists, and lecturers in hospitality, combined with non-participant observations of receptionists at work across five 5-star hotels and one VET provider in Malta. Analysis of the data collected shows that there is very limited awareness of the

existence of NOS for the hospitality sector. While HR managers mentioned fewer competences than indicated in the NOS, they still reflected the main competences

needed. Receptionists mention similar competences but focused more on specific aspects of the jobs which they considered important. HR managers appreciated the



contribution which the NOS can make to the sector and were overall in favour of supporting the validation of their receptionists' learning. There were also positive reactions to validation among receptionists, even if not among all.

Although the hospitality sector remains one of the most important industries on the Maltese islands, with a GDP of 17%, and 15.9% of total employment in Malta (OECD, 2019), there has seen a decrease in GDP in the past few years. For example, in 2005 the tourism industry generated a growth of 24% of the total GDP (MTA, 2005), whilst in 2019 there was a significant decrease in GDP. The main reason is attributed to the introduction of gaming companies.. In fact, in 2019 prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the gaming industry contributed to 12% of the Maltese GDP (<https://www.maltachamber.org.mt/>).The biggest drop in GDP was

however more pronounced during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic, with the Tourism Sector registering a contribution of 664 million Euros, in comparison to a 2.15 billion Euros generated in 2019 (Statista, 2022). In fact, according to the Davahli et al. (2020), the Tourism Sector was one of the most impacted sectors by the Covid19 Pandemic. Hotels' revenue saw a drastic decrease of 90%. Consequently, as reported in the Times of Malta (2021), many foreigners who worked in Malta decided to move back to their country of origin due to a lack of job security. This translated into a huge gap between work demand and supply. The demand-supply gap might have impacted the qualities that HR Managers look for during the hiring process. Indeed, through this study, the researcher intends to find out whether HR managers are accepting lower competency levels, due to lack of labour supply or not, and the approach adopted to

upskill their employees as per the NOS.

Another aspect of this study involves the advancement in technology as a contributing factor to the various significant changes within the Front Office department. When the researcher started her career as a receptionist, the main technology used was the Property Management System (PMS) to mainly check guests in and out. Today, receptionists use other technologies and platforms, including but not limited to customer service platforms, mobile applications, review sites and more; ergo being able to use such tools has become part of the employees' remit. The researcher is thus curious to know whether HR Managers are also looking for proficiency in such technologies as a job requirement to fulfil vacancies.

This study also aims to investigate whether educational programmes/courses related to hospitality, as organised by the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS), are based on the standards attributed in the NOS. It is also vital to first understand whether the occupational standards created by experts in the hospitality sector for the National Commission for Further and Higher Education Agency are being used as the basis for designing the official training and education curriculum at IVET (initial vocational education and training) by the Institute of Tourism Studies. Furthermore, this study will also look at receptionists' awareness and perceptions of these occupational standards, whether they possess such competencies and are willing to validate their learning or not.



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Malta, the possibilities of sustainable luxury tourism on a Mediterranean island megalopolis

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Luxury tourism is a niche market that sees growth with global affluence and Europe is the main source provider.

This study explores the characteristics and behaviours of luxury consumption, in relation to the possibility of Malta being a luxury destination. Various sectors within tourism in Malta, such as maritime, have the potential in offering deluxe services and products, whereas other areas, such as gastronomy, are gaining momentum on others. Boutique accommodations highlight authenticity and some offer superior services. Overall, Malta has the potential within the tourism sector to offer luxury products.

The Maltese Islands, which are situated in the middle of the Mediterranean region, are increasingly gaining popularity as a destination. Pre Covid Pandemic, 2019 has taken Malta to record inbound figures, as it reached 2.75 million tourists. In economic terms, the results achieved were significant for the total tourist expenditure. However, when comparing and measuring expenditure per capita, there was a drop in growth. It is identified that in 2017, although inbound tourism was less than in 2018, and 2019, expenditure per capita was greater.

Popularity does not come for free. Various destinations within the region, mainly islands and coasts are experiencing the effects of saturation.

One can debate various factors regarding this phenomenon. Malta is very limited in its footprint. Tourism is considered one of the main resources, hence its performance is crucial as it affects the socio-economic environment. The statistical data highlights characteristics of a saturated destination, where the hosting country increases the

quantity but not the quality. This can also be called mass tourism. Within the region, the occurrences of touristification are evident as it enjoys high levels of attractiveness, and demands are met with the supply of needs.

Malta's tourism policies, from 2016 onwards, show efforts within its strategy proposals to avoid becoming a quantitative destination but rather a destination with a qualitative direction. Sustainable values are within the agenda, which also includes human resources, as emphasized within the Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030.

Although Malta's status has achieved a sun and sea destination, luxury activities are evident. Governance, stakeholders, and investors are willing to support and invest in infrastructure and quality product development. Consumers of luxury do not necessarily indulge in conspicuous consumption, as personal experiences get more authentic. The big city development is not the trend, nor is it environmentally sustainable, hence a sustainable future could be seen throughout the evolution of luxury niches.

WHAT IS LUXURY?

Luxury tourism does not have a strict definition. Positioning in the luxury segment requires engagement and delivery of superior services and products. Consumers of luxury would also expect a personal touch. This would also diversify and characterise the product from one experience to another.

Characteristics of luxury products are made up of various factors all of which contribute to the delivery of an expected experience or service. These include: high levels of service, quality of product, uniqueness of product, positioning and setting, artisanship

and craftsmanship, exclusivity, authenticity, sustainable value.

It seems that achieving a state of luxury entails high levels of all the highlighted keywords, service, product, and comfort, which could be related in various forms. The Demir & Saribas (2014) study adds the price dimension with a high monetary value, to the quality of services. Johnson (2013) points out the superior levels of accommodation, and dining, which could also be referred as comfort. The modern luxury traveller goes beyond the tangible product and its expense as they seek to satisfy an inner need. Most often, it connects with feelings, emotions, or a past memory. Such services are deeply personalised and highly unique to the consumer.

Luxury tourism can take various shapes for consumption depending on the needs of the customer. However, regardless of how one tries to describe or define luxury, the fundamental elements for luxury remain high levels of service, product, and comfort.

It is also a perspective. Luxury consumption can be very sustainable if compared to the mass tourism needs and the overconsumption it generates. In terms of the service provider and exclusivity sustainable principles apply, and the risk of overconsumption is low. However, this is not always the case. If one takes the example of Capri among others, it became a victim of its success. Touristification is the opposite of a sustainable destination, at the cost of authenticity and social impacts.

Valletta, named for its historical heritage and unique architecture is one of the unique Mediterranean cities listed (Junior, 2018).

Given its popularity, and if not well governed, it also can risk becoming a tourist highway.

Sustainable values are now perceived as complementary to luxury, especially by their patrons. Craftsmanship in making luxury products, and luxury brands, are expected to run through the commitments to sustainable values within their supply chain (Cervellon & Shammas, 2013).

The challenge of sustainable luxury consumption is to cater to the wants and needs of today without impoverishing the environment for future generations (Sesini, et al., 2020). Sustainable luxury consumption is positively affected by materialism. Materialists favour the sustainable values of green luxury products over generic products. Materialism increases the perception of functional value over generic products, and thus it generates more of the intention to purchase. Unlike conspicuous consumption, this is noted only when a product is privately consumed and not publicly consumed (Talukdar & Yu, 2020).

With the term sustainability clichéd, it is easy for its principles to be overlooked. In fact, when we think of luxury-related products and their characteristics, sustainable factors are among the last values we consider. Nevertheless, it is an essential element throughout the supply chain from source to supply, including the maintenance of a healthy human resource.

This worrying occurrence should be taken into consideration, and further recommendations for sustainable awareness should be stimulated. With sustainable practices as an important phenomenon, a balance between quality services and sustainable values should be achieved. A state of new luxury entails also pristine levels of the environment, product authenticity, identity, and culture.

To be able to deliver a high-caliber and authentic product, the author thinks that first the product itself must be cherished by its people. Subsequently, every touch point and interaction with the consumer must be delivered gracefully, from the leads to the follow-up. In this regard, more efforts and resources should be allocated towards the schooling and coaching processes and its curriculum. From a young age, nourishing and preserving cultural values,

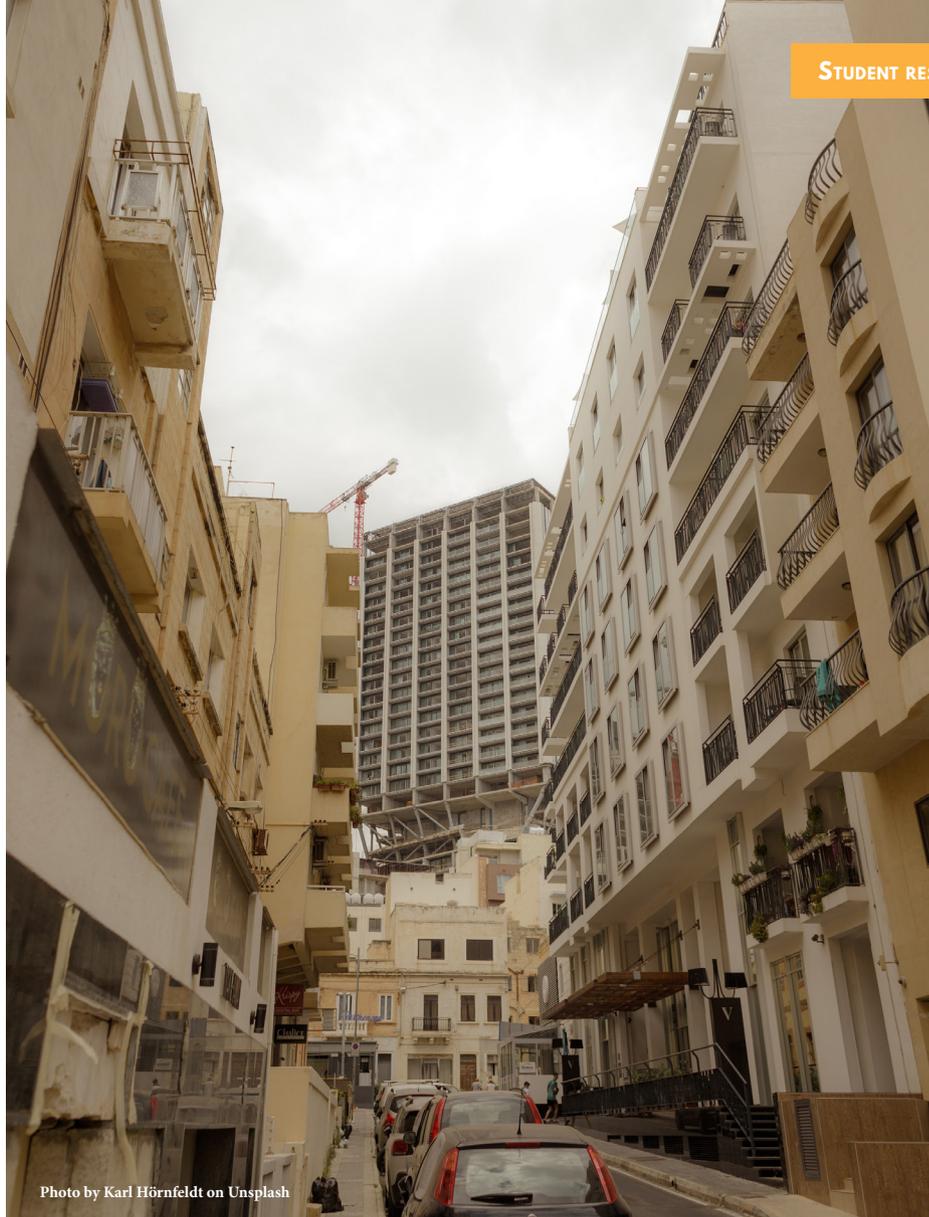


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and authenticity is essential. Creativity, tradesmanship, and craftsmanship within our villages should be revived, fostered, and encouraged through our younger generations with pride.

Infrastructure, not in the concrete sense, but heritage and cultural preservations, maritime provisions, and holistic cleanliness management are the key.

Overall, many products, tours, and attractions are still considered mainstream. A change in mindset is essential, we need to learn to look not only at the number of tourists but rather at a qualitative and sustainable overall experience.

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An Analysis of Plate Waste and Consumer Behaviour at Buffets in Hotels in Malta

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In a society where food security and prices are on the increase, the issue of food waste is evolving into a daily matter of global concern, with present estimates suggesting that worldwide, one-third of food produced does not reach a human stomach. Food waste occurs at all stages, from production to consumption and at the consumption stage, the term “plate waste” is normally used to globalise food that has been served but had not been eaten (Chen Feng Kuo, 2016).

Food waste is a growing concern in Malta. Unfortunately, little public attention is given to this problem. Malta has one of the largest per capita waste generations in the EU and the know-how and willingness to recycle is low. Most of the food waste being generated is dumped in landfills, taking up more of the already limited space and most of the retail food waste which is still edible is not being donated to food banks (Friends of the Earth, 2020). Food deterioration and wastage is found in every stage of the food supply chain and a great deal is wasted at consumption, especially in developed

countries. This is common in restaurants and large catering establishments.

Due to the size of the Maltese Islands and the fact that the island has such a large population density, the volume of waste generated is more noticeable. By measuring food waste during a buffet, the researcher has a better tool towards understanding the challenges and the monitoring of the food waste hierarchy. As Chefs, our main objective when preparing a buffet is to present a broad selection of nutritional wholesome foods, prepared in a sustainable manner and as a researcher, the aim is to identify and determine the customers’ perception and behaviour to help avoid plate waste.

The main purpose of this research is to provide an indication of the average amount of plate waste generated from buffets offered by 4-Star and 5-Star hotels in Malta and explore different strategies to decrease food waste such as changing how buffet layouts should be set up or having a mixed plated service. The research will also delve into the trends of customer behaviour

at buffets in the local market, as well as determine customers’ and businesses’ approach to plate waste.

Due to COVID-19 and its imposed restrictions, buffet set-ups were either eliminated, served by Chefs or in some hotels, partly plated. These various buffet set-ups facilitated the evaluation of their correlation to plate waste. An evaluation of food waste data gathered from seven case studies, indicates that various food service set-ups produce different levels of food waste. A set-up which worked well with local guests, especially with COVID-19 restrictions, was a par plated buffet or hybrid buffet. Using this concept, one can adjust the number of pre-plated bowl food or small plates issued on the buffet display according to the flow of guests arriving, whilst keeping the remaining food well-stored and having the buffet always looking fresh. The second part of the buffet was chef-assisted allowing better control of food portions, minimising plate waste. In fact, from this set-up only 3% of the amount of food prepared was discarded by customers.



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Research results also show that hybrid meals – combining several types of food service such as family-style starters with a la carte mains and desserts, while still offering guests the liberty of choosing what food they prefer with meal sharing food portions controlled, and having plated courses, enables food to be prepared per order thus saving on food waste. Another constructive approach to serving food is having a pre-order menu. This enables the kitchen brigade to prepare food according to client requests, in the correct amount and without having excessive preparation. Data collected in Pre-order Event proves this; where there were no leftovers from prepared food in contrast with Buffet Self-Service, 31 kilos of leftover food remained untouched (27% of prepared food).

An average of 6% plate waste was generated from the various food service set-ups analysed in this study. This is encouraging compared to Europe's plate waste average of 34%. The study showed certain set-ups lead to a dramatic decrease in the amount of plate waste, from an average of 7.2 kilos to 460 grams. This number can be demonstrated per customer basis where each customer produced an average of 91 grams per meal. When comparing this study with previous research, this number is lower, especially when one compares different buffet and plating setups.

The result of this analysis indicates that most food waste generated at buffets is mainly due to the number of customers, style of food and even fixed practices by the Hotel. This study demonstrates that the volume of waste can be reduced by adjusting the buffet set-ups, involving, and training employees when serving and where possible using smaller crockery (plates and bowls). This approach could be a potential learning curve in the hotel industry, although one must analyse the pros and cons particularly when discussing with management. The only issue mentioned when setting these buffets would be, that crockery loss of glassware might increase due to breakages or theft by customers, as well as the need to add more staff, especially nowadays when labour costs are sky high, and it has become almost impossible to find suitable staff.

Changes need to be introduced gradually, giving time for customers to adjust to new concepts such as reducing the spread of food, focusing more on par plated or plated food and finding the ideal plate size. The consumer needs to be educated to trigger behavioural changes and introduce new patterns to reduce waste. Plate waste analysis and data should be accessible to consumers. Such awareness could change consumer behaviour and at the same time management could adapt to these changes.

In the study, the researcher assessed food leftover on the buffet counter that mostly had to be discarded to understand the relationship between different buffet layouts, sources of food waste and overall food service wastage. The weight of guest leftovers and buffet counter leftovers from the 7 set-ups were analysed to expand the potential impact of such events. Data shows that a set-up that involved a chef assisting and buffet that included bowl food had a consistent wastage. The speculations are that chefs are directly monitoring the food consumed and therefore effectively controlling the portion control. By contributing to these changes, the hotel industry can help to reduce the gap between how much food is being produced and how much our clients are consuming.

Future work is required to support and understand what type of serve-ware may influence perceptions and expectations for fulfilment. In contrast within the research done, one should explore alternatives to wasting food and foster scenarios where alternatives to save food for later consumption or packed to be taken home must be developed.

The following table illustrates the quantitative data collected.

Type of Service	No of Pax	Amount of Food Prepared	Leftovers ¹	Total Plate Waste	Total Food Consumed ²	Average Consumption	Average Plate Waste
Set-up A <i>(Breakfast buffet self-service)</i>	60 pax	57.3 kg	15.3 kg	5.9 kg	36.1 kg	602gr	98.3gr
Set-up B <i>(Half board dinner buffet self-service)</i>	30 pax	50.85 kg	31 kg	2.57 kg	17.28 kg	576gr	85.6gr
Set-up C <i>(Half board buffet dinner self-service, plates dimension reduced)</i>	60 pax	75.3 kg	22.2 kg	7.2 kg (5.04 kg) ³	45.9kg	765gr	120gr (84gr) ³
Set-up D <i>(Chef assisted lunch buffet)</i>	43pax	42.6 kg	18.6 kg	0.46 kg	24 kg	558gr	10.7gr
Set-up E <i>(Bowl food buffet starter/ chef assisted hot section - lunch)</i>	70 pax	82.94 kg	39.04 kg	2.15 kg	41.75 kg	596gr	30.7gr
Set-up F <i>(Pre-order event)</i>	41 pax	43.29 kg	0 kg	4.2 kg	39.09 kg	953gr	102.4gr
Set-up G <i>(Family service starter, choice for Intermediate and Main Course - lunch)</i>	42 pax	43.1 kg	0 kg	3.2 kg	39.9 kg	950gr	76.2gr

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Analysing the guestroom technologies in the hospitality industry along with the customer performance

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The hospitality industry is one of the fastest growing businesses in the global tourism economy and has transformed into one of the largest markets in the world. The extensive adoption of new and modern technologies in this industry has enhanced the way services are offered and applied to achieve customer loyalty. It is an excellent example of how the industry is transforming itself to apply customer requirements and demands. The adoption of technology has refined significantly and transformed into many spheres that exist in our daily life. Applying innovative technologies in hotels offers a possibility for creative and personalised guest care.

One example is the “Smart Hotel Room.”

Having smart technology in the operation process can give the hospitality industry a boost, especially in the global market. Investing in new innovative information and communication technologies (ICT) and integrating them with Artificial Intelligence (AI) services can be beneficial in providing customers with the latest inventions and new experiences (Xu, 2018). Although technological amenities come with a cost, investing in technology will increase hotel productivity, reduce costs and increase sustainability. While at the same time, it is a way of adding value to the services and products offered to its customers which can

help promote differentiation and enhance guest satisfaction.

Hoteliers rely on technology, especially regarding special amenities such as in-room technology. However, to complement and increase interaction between the guest and the server, the hotel management must use a powerful platform of smart technologies. Providing high-quality, customised and diversified smart technology features or services, can increase the number of hotel guests that re-visit the property.

As guests are becoming more demanding and more diverse, the expectations of guests are increasing, and they are anticipating the quality of their guestrooms.



Photo by Andrew Neel on Unsplash

In an industry with a highly competitive and ambitious market, customer satisfaction is one of the essential strategic components. Companies must be aware of their customers' needs and wants. Heo and Hyun (2015) mentioned that to meet the needs, hoteliers must offer different kinds of guestroom amenities and other services to their guests. Brochado et al. (2016) mentioned that business travelers and leisure guests are searching for new experiences. Customers expect to connect to the newest technological services in hotels including those of entertainment smart technology, and automation amenities Yu et al. (2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to analyse the impact on the current technological amenities found in 5-star and 4-star hotel guestrooms on the Maltese islands. Furthermore, the researcher analysed customers' attitudes toward digital technology such as self-service and artificial intelligence (AI) technology. Data was collected from local hotels and the Maltese society. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, followed by thematic data analysis, together with hotel website observation and online questionnaires with hotel guests. The appearance of new smart technologies, have a powerful impact on the hospitality business, from searching online to booking the hotel stay via an online site and included innovations such as keyless entry app-based guest services and smart appliances in a hotel room. Improving functionality and efficiency in the industry can enhance the guest experience and can offer different opportunities. Considering the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19, technology has become more crucial to the tourism and hospitality industry and plays a vital role in recovery.

The research aimed to explore new interests as one listened to various thoughtful

opinions and identified connections within the same subject of interest. Thus, detailed data was collected to help the researcher to reinforce the research and to develop a research question. This led to the study focusing on identifying the most crucial technologies found in a hotel room and how they have potentially enhanced guests' experience within the hotel.



For a successful transformation, the business depends on organisational and cultural change. The aim is evolving into more innovative and adaptable smart amenities, especially in a hotel room.

The main research question for this study is:

Q1. What is the impact of technological amenities on the customer experience in a hotel room?

With the above research questions, the study was evaluated and implemented by connecting the research questions with the collected data in the context of the literature review.

To figure out which technological amenities can be found in the Maltese hotel territory and what is being planned in the future, the researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with local

hotel managers as part of the qualitative method. For the study, a set of open-ended questions were implemented, and two random hotels were chosen to conduct in-depth discussions. In addition to this, the researcher along with the interviewers sought to understand the perception of technological demands and desires they create when collaborating with the hotel guests. Apart from the interviews and the analysis of the hotel websites, the researcher also conducted a questionnaire. This was designed to include the features of the smart technological amenities, the benefits and challenges that they might bestow and any recommendations for future improvements.

ANALYSIS

Smart technology supports hotel businesses with an opportunity to offer different services that are far beyond the basic and continues to evolve and invest more into the latest smart amenities. There are a limited number of hotels in Malta that are very well equipped with smart technology and are inclined toward digital transformation.

According to the findings from the website observation and the interviews, hoteliers still depend on the traditional operational processes. The local stakeholders within the hospitality industry, therefore, need to start activating and investing in the latest innovations in the hotel rooms. Added to this, implementing contemporary channels of communication can be a benefit to the employees working within the property as they can meet and provide a seamless digital guest experience.

For a successful transformation, the business depends on organisational and cultural change. The aim is evolving into more innovative and adaptable smart amenities, especially in a hotel room. To stay in line with the local and foreign competitors, the management must implement AI technologies which can simplify the travel and accommodation

procedures for the staying guests. The service technology which includes AI-enabled has become an alternative to human beings. Despite the acceptance of smart technologies in the hospitality industry, it is still a challenge to find a legitimate balance between technology and human interactions.

Although the hotel operators or the customers associate the term technology with a materialist or a piece of equipment, technology can be a way of influencing society's preferences and human relations. Undeniably, this research examines many important improvements to be applied in the hospitality industry. Based on the results, it is possible to discuss some recommendations and suggestions that can be used for future projects. One recommendation is to deploy innovative methods in a hotel room such as AI, recognition technology such as, for example, retinal scanning or fingerprint scanning

to unlock the hotel room or even facial biometrics that could be used to authorise payments or to ease out the process of checking in or out. For a fully developed digitalised hotel room, cutting-edge technology can be redistributed in each hotel room where the guest can point out their smartphone at an AR (Augmented Reality) compatible wall map which allows them to gather information to be able to plan beforehand the places that they would like to visit. The third recommendation is installing beacon technology or QR codes which can be a benefit to promoting and upselling the services such as spas and restaurants.

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Do authenticity and experience play a role when choosing AirBnB in Malta?

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Currently offering over 6 million active listings in 100,000 cities in over 220 countries (Airbnb, 2022), Airbnb offers an affordable way of visiting a destination when compared to traditional hotels. Airbnb homes range from very modest to extremely luxurious and even quite unusual (castles, boats, igloos, caves, yurt, etc.) and it is also known for providing interactions with hosts and authentic experiences at inexpensive rates.

Airbnb has witnessed such an outstanding growth worldwide since its inception in 2008 and Malta is no exception. According to Ellul (2019), the number of properties registered in Malta to offer Airbnb accommodation has increased from 813 in 2013 to 6,800 in 2018 and in May 2019 there were over 8,700 spaces available for rent on the website.

The literature review indicates that there is little research on Airbnb and particularly on the concept of authenticity in Airbnb stays when it comes to island destinations and this research intends to cover this gap in the context of Malta.

Firstly, the research looks at the concept of authenticity and its importance in a such a disruptive innovation like Airbnb (Guttentag, 2015) and continues to study major motives that influence Airbnb guests to choose a place to stay. Secondly, the study aims to investigate the factors that influence travellers' decisions to book an Airbnb while visiting Malta and to ascertain whether authenticity and experience play a role when choosing an Airbnb accommodation in Malta.

METHODOLOGY

One of the study's research questions, as what makes customers choose Airbnb when travelling to Malta. This is based on the author's particular interest in the research topic due to being an Airbnb host herself and using Airbnb platform for personal travel abroad.

For this study, the quantitative research method was adopted to collect data from individuals over 18 years of age or older who have used Airbnb in Malta at least once during last 12 months or had their recent Airbnb stay before Covid-19 travel restrictions. A qualitative survey was chosen as the most suitable research instrument for this study to identify the importance of various factors for Airbnb's choice in Malta.

Since Airbnb is a fairly new concept of sharing economy and only a limited part of the population make use of it, the respondents were considered as "hard-to-reach" (Marpsat & Razafindratsima, 2010). Therefore, online surveys were shared on social media platforms like Facebook in travel-related groups via links. The self-administered survey was developed using Google Docs and fielded multiple choice, Likert scale and short open-ended questions that allowed to further research respondents' motivations of giving preference to Airbnb accommodations.

Main motivational factors have been identified from the various sources (Nowak et al., 2015; Tussyadiah, 2015; Guttentag, 2015) and survey questions were built around these motivations to find out what exactly made visitors coming to Malta and choose an Airbnb premises instead of traditional accommodations like hotels,

B&B etc. The motivations are based on practical benefits (price, location, household amenities and space) and experiential values (authenticity, social interactions, novelty and sustainability).

ANALYSIS

The research demonstrates that despite all the studies in this field, the researcher came across while working on this thesis, neither authenticity, nor price appeared to be top motivations for the overall sample of this research. Household amenities was the most "strongly agreed" with motivation (100%) and it proves to be one of the main differences between renting an Airbnb and staying at a hotel, thus directly pinpointing at this unique value proposition of Airbnb.

Price factor was the least "strongly agreed" with motivation amongst practical benefits of Airbnb. This result is perhaps unexpected as this motivational factor has been considered as the most important pull factor by many scholars (Tussyadiah, 2017; Nowak et al, 2015; Guttentag et al, 2017).

It appears that experiential motivational factors (authenticity, novelty, sustainability and social interactions) are secondary when compared to the practical motivators like price, location, household amenities and space. Looking into the experiential factors, it was found out that the authenticity was the most strongly agreed with motivation. The importance of authenticity was highlighted by various researchers (Lamb, 2011; Nowak, 2015; Guttentag, 2015) and authenticity has been acknowledged as fundamental in the Airbnb concept to "live like a local". People enjoy participating in local events, going to authentic restaurants and engaging with locals.



Photo by Kelcie Papp on Unsplash

The results of the survey show that the household amenities and convenient location were the most significant attributes for the sample of 72 travellers. The respondents were attracted to the authenticity and other experiential factors as well but to a lesser extent.

CONCLUSION

The study has looked at the visitors' reasons to choose accommodation on Airbnb platform in the context of Malta and aimed to establish whether authenticity played a role when deciding upon a place where to stay in Malta.

It appears that even though authenticity is a concept Airbnb is based on, this motivational factor was not the leading one for this sample. Even though it is a leading one amongst experiential factors, it is the practical attributes that were highly regarded by all the respondents of the survey. Additionally, the research indicated that location is paramount for Airbnb users when it comes to choosing an accommodation in Malta.

By utilizing the results of the study, Airbnb hosts and local businesses might have better insights on how to create memorable and unique experiences and thus contributing to local economy in a positive way.

In the post-Covid era, knowing what factors are significant to travellers and why they choose Airbnb over other forms of accommodation could be very helpful. It appears that travellers are reassessing their priorities when it comes to their accommodation options, so perhaps local businesses should do the same. Due to Covid-19, home-related amenities (such as an extra indoor or outdoor space in addition to having access to household facilities) are now highly valued by clients, as this survey has proved. The study outcomes may be used as guidelines for a strategic plan for various stakeholders.

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The Smart Hotel: a contactless and digital journey towards sustainability in Malta.

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Internet- and Cloud-based systems are transforming the way businesses operate. This is particularly interesting for the hospitality industry, though with limited application to date due to many variables. Advances in the smart technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provide the opportunity not only to optimize hotel operations but also create personalized services and experiences. Prior research discussed extensively the numerous advantages of smart technology for hotel guests, however the barriers that stop hotel stakeholders from implementing it in hotels is a grey area that has not been sufficiently explored yet.

The study, through primary data gathered from a qualitative research methodology and secondary data obtained from the academic literature, aims at analyzing the above-mentioned poorly investigated area and identifying the gap between the literature review and the hospitality industry in Malta. Besides, the research study contextualizes the hospitality industry in today's modern and smart era and propose a Smart Hotel business model category to rejuvenate the current hospitality industry practices and to progress towards sustainability in Malta.

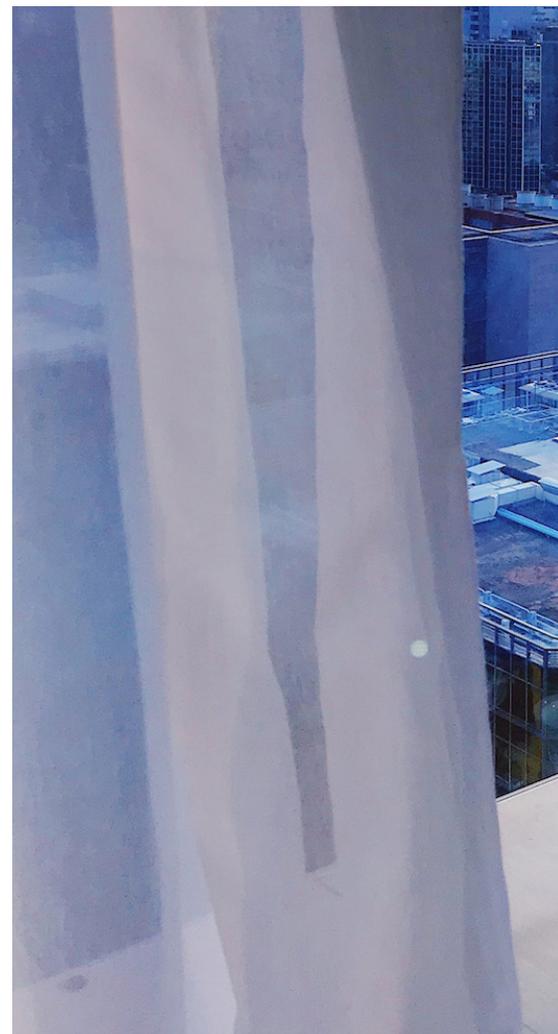
In order to accomplish the goal of the study, a qualitative research method was used consisting of two surveys: one addressed to the general public working within the tourism sector and the other to professionals in the hospitality industry. Interviews were conducted with Hotel Senior Managers, IT suppliers and Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) and Ministry of

Tourism (MOT) representatives. Through the findings it was possible to answer the research questions and correlate them with the academic literature to identify the gap between academia and the stakeholders' perspective on Smart Hotels.

It appears that all hotel stakeholders defined a smart hotel as highly dependent on automation and digitalization. Most of the respondents' approach about smart technologies in hotels is customer-centric (in-room facilities designed to enhance and personalize the guest experience), employee-centric (improving working efficiency, whilst reducing workload and human errors), and revenue-centric (saving operational costs and increasing revenue). Conversely to academia, none of the participants mentioned that the association with the term 'smart' could help to enhance their hotel brand image and online reputation.

The study clarified that currently there are no indicators yet for digitalization or use of smart technologies in local hotels. Nevertheless, most of the participants believe that the introduction of a Smart Hotel would add value to the tourist experience, and, at the same time, it would elevate the hospitality industry offer and overall, Malta as a destination. It was even suggested that such a hotel business model could tap into special interest travel niche markets like the Digital Nomads phenomenon, or the Medical Tourism, the Sustainable Tourism (green) segment and the Bleisure Tourism (business and leisure). Though everybody agrees that the Smart Hotel has potential, there seems to be a collective consensus among participants that it should not fall among the existent

hotel star rating (2- star, 3-star, 4-star or 5-star hotels) category but it could be an additional label or a sub- category (i.e., 3-star hotel with technology). In addition, the research findings reveal that cost, return on investment (ROI), time and resistance of owners and stakeholders are the key barriers. On the contrary interoperability and connectivity, security and privacy risks, and employee turnover were not mentioned by the participants as threat motivators.



Instead, the smart technologies integration is perceived by both employees and stakeholders as a strength, as repetitive tasks can be automated, and people can focus more on guests.

With regards to the proposal of increasing smart technology to existent hotels and the hypothesis of introducing a Smart Hotel category to pursue sustainability goals, the study reveals that this is an aspect often overlooked by most, and that any smart practice adoption is mainly due to marketing interests rather than to actual pro-environment concerns. Nevertheless, several points were proposed as to why Malta should become a Smart and Sustainable Island and hotels in Malta should engage into environmentally conscious initiatives. Firstly, the smart service intervention can not only streamline operations, increase revenue and personalize the guest experience, but can contribute significantly to the reduction

of the environmental impact in services, products, supplies, and even contribute to persuading guests to behave sustainably by educating them to the eco-technologies and the “green practices”.

Secondly, the Smart Hotel business model adds value to the accommodation offer by elevating the quality of the experience in hotels and transitioning from a hotel room to a smarter and more sustainable accommodation that deploys technology to pursue a sustainable competitive advantage. Thirdly, it would increase the guest expectations with regards to digitalization, automation, speed and, by providing immersive experiences through AI Technology (wall maps and AR videos), to match the trends and the changes in travel and living brought by the pandemic.

The study helped to derive several conclusions, one of which being that the society has become dependent on technology and sensitive to environmental

practices at the point that these are not only influencing the buyer's behaviour, but even the employees', who are increasingly demanding welfare in the workplace. Therefore, the study's observations, while recognizing the challenges for Malta to become a Smart and Sustainable Country, also indicate the potential of the Smart Hotel business model in the hospitality and tourism industry, as a source of experience co-creation and promoter of environmental sustainability. The research places emphasis on the necessity of adopting a transformative and reinventive approach as well as a holistic and futuristic vision which is clear and shared equally by tourism and hospitality stakeholders.

Keywords: Smart Hotel, Smart Technology, Sustainability, IoT, A.I., Malta.

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Cultural heritage: a question of definition compounded by nimbyism

BY MARTIN DEBATTISTA
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Its role in the preservation of our heritage is unquestionably crucial, and yet the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage (SCH) is often mistaken for having the same role as Heritage Malta and that it only intervenes when historical remains are discovered or are at risk of damage. FUTOURISTIC spoke to Mr Kurt Farrugia, the Superintendent for Cultural Heritage, to shed more light on the role of the regulator in the Maltese landscape.

Q:The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage is responsible for the establishment of policy, standards, and guidelines related to cultural heritage. Yet, there are many who still confuse the SCH with Heritage Malta. Can you clear this misconception?

A:The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and Heritage Malta, whilst being both entities working within the cultural sector, serve different functions. The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage is the national regulator of cultural heritage and

is responsible for ensuring the protection and accessibility of Malta's cultural heritage, whilst the latter is the operator.

Q:In page 8 of the SCH 2020 report p.8 there is the following statement: "Insufficient funding once again weighed down the Superintendence as it was not possible to recruit and provide training, exasperated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the past two years' improvements the Superintendence is still catching up with years of backlog

of inadequate funding and capacity building." Why does the SCH need more funding and human resources and what actions have been taken in the meantime to mitigate these challenges?

A: The Cultural Heritage Act (CAP 445) establishes 17 functions for the Superintendence, with some of the functions requiring more resources than others. This, together with the challenges the Superintendence faces on a day to day basis, require numerous resources and capacity building. Since



2020 the Superintendence has recruited 10 new officers, with different areas of specialisation, thereby increasing its complement to 45 employees. In order to keep performing its functions in the most efficient manner, and to keep offering its employees opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills, funding for further training and recruitment is always desired.

Q:Speaking of challenges, what are the major challenge for the protection of cultural heritage in Malta right now?

A:The greatest challenge is to make the public aware of what actually is cultural heritage. Despite the definition in the Cultural Heritage Act (CAP 445) of what constitutes cultural heritage, everyone has his own definition of what defines cultural heritage and is important historically.

Furthermore, nimbyism is trait that is unfortunately ever present, and cultural heritage is only so when it is outside of my property, and not when discovered within.

Q: It seems we are entering the post-Covid-19 phase. What is the outlook of the protection and appreciation of Maltese cultural heritage post-Covid-19?

A:Malta's legislation on cultural heritage dates back to 2002, with the Cultural Heritage Act. In the meantime, UNESCO and other international organisations have regularly updated their definitions of cultural heritage and strategies.

Q:Don't you think it's high time to update Maltese legislation, especially with the rise of digital heritage and the digitisation of heritage?

A:The Cultural Heritage Act of 2002 was updated and superseded by the Cultural Heritage Act of 2019 (CAP 445) and subsequently amended by ACT XLI of 2021. Whilst the functions remain unchanged, notable changes in the Act include the establishment of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Technical Committee, whose functions include advising the Government on matters related to World Heritage Sites and to ensure synergy between the responsible bodies in the protection and management of such sites. Furthermore, a number of international conventions have been signed and ratified, and outcomes of these conventions have been integrated within the amendments to Cultural Heritage Act.

Q:The SCH is mostly associated with the protection of tangible heritage, an area which our country is very rich in. What is the SCH doing towards intangible heritage and born-digital heritage?

A:The Superintendence is an active member of the National Board of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which encourages entities and individuals to nominate any intangible cultural heritage elements to be included within the National Inventory and possibly to be included in UNESCO's International List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Q:Can you give an update on the implementation of the SCH cloud platform and the digitisation of assets?

A:The cloud platform project was a project which the Superintendence started in 2020. This project entailed collecting all the data gathered while onsite on inspections, fieldwork or archaeological investigations, and converting of such data into a digital format. Subsequently all data was checked, and sorted into separate folders for easier access, whilst any duplicate data was removed. During 2021 the Superintendence held many discussions with different ICT systems management companies in order to discuss the possibility of creating a working portal to be used both internally by staff and externally by clients. The idea behind this portal is to receive any correspondence through this platform, rather than via email as is currently done, and thus would ensure keeping better record of the whole process. Undoubtedly, procuring such software requires funding, and hence that is why the Superintendence reiterates the importance that adequate funding and resources are made available.





Q:Second World War shelters are discovered on a regular basis. What is the approach of the SCH towards such discoveries? Public Air-Raid Shelters are cultural heritage features and should be treated in keeping with the Cultural Heritage Act.

A:The Superintendence is already aware of the approximate location of many Public Air Raid Shelters and refers to such data when officers assess any development application which entails ground disturbance. Prior to start of works, applicants/developers are requested to determine whether any shelters are found within the route of proposed works and are requested to communicate such findings to the Superintendence. This helps us to have a more comprehensive picture of where air-raid shelters are located, thus enabling the Superintendence to take any necessary precautionary measures when making its recommendations during the planning application process.

Q:The SCH has signed guardianship deeds with *Din I-Art Helwa* and *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna*. How is the relationship with these NGOs and how is SCH supporting their work?

A:The Superintendence is legally entrusted to enter into a guardianship deed on behalf of the State. Guardianship deeds are essentially management agreements entered into for a set period of years during which the NGO will be responsible for ensuring the well-being and care of the government-owned cultural heritage property. The scope of a guardianship deed is also to promote the active participation of the community in cultural heritage through voluntary work. As at December 2021 the Superintendence had 19 active guardianship deeds and has a total of 45 requests which are still being processed. The Superintendence recognises the importance of NGOs, especially cultural heritage NGOs, and their role in civil society and therefore strives to have a good working relationship with these NGOs. The Superintendence has also recently issued an expression of interest for all cultural heritage NGOs wishing to enlist in the Cultural Heritage NGOs register, held by the Superintendence.

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This project entailed collecting all the data gathered while onsite on inspections, fieldwork or archaeological investigations, and converting of such data into a digital format.
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Implementing student peer review to improve students' writing process

BY CHARLOTTE GERONIMI,
ITS LECTURER IN FOOD & BEVERAGE AND EVENTS MANAGEMENT

THE TRANSITION CHALLENGE: WRITING SKILLS

For the last four years, I have been lecturing at the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) – one of six post-secondary institutions students can opt to attend after secondary school. Established in 1987 and acting as Malta's main Tourism and Hospitality educational institution, ITS covers the necessities of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry by offering a vast selection of programmes thus ensuring students have the opportunity of specialising in areas best suited to their abilities and interests (ITS n.d.).

During this time at ITS I have come to realise that academic writing at post-secondary can be important and challenging for both students and lecturers. In fact, lecturing at various levels has enhanced my awareness of the commonalities and differences in academic writing expectations at each level. I was able to witness the gap in

students' writing skills between secondary and post-secondary more explicitly when I was appointed External Verifier for VET Hospitality in secondary schools.

Here I noticed that although secondary students were being taught to analyse and combine ideas, post-secondary students are expected to produce deeper, more complex interpretations by contributing new, own perspectives. This made me realise that academic writing appeared to be one of the most important, yet challenging, academic skills for post-secondary students to learn. Given that it encourages students to think critically and promotes the use of powerful word expressions and great vocabulary, writing plays an essential part in educational activities (Ismail 2011), hence I felt it was essential for me to help students with this transition challenge.

Consequently, I analysed various strategies to ensure I made research-informed decisions that will help my students

overcome the transition. I have come across several interesting ways to improve students' writing, including the introduction of a communication module (Silin & Chan 2015), writing process training, parent involvement, use of writing strategies (Kapka & Oberman 2001), use of Google tools to enhance student writing (Ebener, 2017) and the implementation of peer review (Dickson, Harvey & Blackwood 2019).

PEER REVIEW STRATEGIES

Since students are not exposed to examples, they often find it difficult to determine what writing skills are expected of them and what constitutes a good quality written assignment. Peer review allows them to compare assignments, thus making it easier for them to identify strengths and weaknesses both in their own work and that of their peers' (Reinholz 2015).

Moreover, Li, Liu and Steckelberg (2010) state that engaging in peer review facilitates individualised learning through the



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generation of collaborative knowledge and that external judgement of creative writing provides an environment in which two minds may assume adversarial roles, thus facilitating critical thinking (Furedy & Furedy 1979). Similarly, to help improve students' writing, Baker (2016) focuses on peer review timing, structured feedback forms, writers' revisions after engaging in peer review, formative feedback to their peers and the revision of drafts before submitting the final paper.

Additionally, Webb and McEnerney (1997) identified twelve steps for planning and implementing a peer review process and Topping (1998) further highlighted seventeen different factors that contribute to the success of peer review in post-secondary institutions. Gielen, Dochy and Onchena (2011) built on this framework to group these variables in five clusters to provide educators with a checklist of important peer review decisions.

Evidently, multiple factors appear to contribute to the efficacy of peer review in the context of writing instruction. In fact, there are various strategies and methods that can support educators in

the integration of peer review in their learning environments. Regardless of the implementation process – in pairs, small groups or asking students to discuss short texts in class, peer review is a great way to help students improve their writing skills (Arbor n.d.).

THE APPROACH

Gonca and Eksi (2012) noted that students see their educator as an expert and decline revisions; Sims (1989) associated peer review with polished writing skills, Farrah (2012) asserted that peer review has a substantial impact on students' learning and Al-Ghamdi (2017) stated that students take the role of active learners that helps them build their writing skills through concerted interpersonal engagements. Given the above, I feel that implementing peer review in my practice would not only allow me to enhance my teaching objectives, but it will help post-secondary students improve their writing skills through a collaborative approach.

Whilst reading through different publications on peer review (Furedy & Furedy 1979; Webb & McEnerney 1997; Topping 1998; Baker 2016) I came to realise

that although they all refer to the same terminology, they have diverse working methods. However, Gielen, Dochy and Onchena (2011) appear to group variables previously identified by Topping (1998) into five clusters, thus providing a checklist covering important peer review decisions for educators.

The first cluster focuses on the decisions concerning the use of peer assessment, particularly, information on the 'goal' and 'function' of peer assessment. The second cluster concentrates on the link between peer assessment and other elements in the learning environment by looking at *if* and *how* a peer review application truly 'fits' into its learning environment rather than being an artificial add-on. The third cluster refers to the interaction between peers which may be a pass/fail message, a grade or mark, a diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses, a suggestion for remedial actions, a personal interpretation, or an interactive dialogue between learners. The fourth cluster looks at the composition of assessment groups and the final cluster deals with the way peers assess, provide feedback, or perform other aspects of the assessment process.

I feel that this approach provides a clear purpose that focuses on managing the quality of the peer reviews to ensure that are improving students' writing skills and to safeguard fair marking. During the peer review training stage, I plan on implementing hands-on activities such as reviewing writing samples that will allow students the opportunity to learn about peer review hands-on. In agreement with McGarr and Clifford (2013), this stage is essential because peer review is not self-directed and so, students need to be prepared for their role if this process is to be successful.

Following this, students will be asked to read a text written by one of their classmates whilst providing, discussing and negotiated this feedback. This would facilitate critical thinking and help individualised learning through collaborative knowledge (Li, Liu & Steckelberg 2010). Following this, students will be given time to reflect on their writing process because allowing students to reflect on their writing ensures they become more aware of their writing choices and processes (Feuerstein, Hoffman, & Miller 1980).

Although engaging students in peer review provides ample opportunities for students to receive immediate feedback and support in a non-threatening environment with such feedback being particularly beneficial in improving their writing skills (Ober & Flores, 2020), the implementation of such a change, brings about various anticipated impacts.

ANTICIPATED IMPACT

The implementation of student peer review is expected to show that the more critically engaged the students will be, the better their own writing skills will become. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that (a) peer review is useful for improving student writing (Jensen & Fischer

2005; Liu & Carless 2006; Sun et al. 2015; Costa & Kallick 2008) and that (b) the degree to which students are critical during peer review is a possible mechanism for this improvement (Selman, n.d.; Lundstrom & Baker 2009; Ober & Flores 2020).



The first cluster focuses on the decisions concerning the use of peer assessment, particularly, information on the 'goal' and 'function' of peer assessment.

I am also hopeful that implementing student peer review would reflect previous studies that show the degree to which students are critical of their peers' writing rather than their own writing, as the driver of improved writing skills (Lundstrom & Baker 2009). Similarly, it is also anticipated that this will be supportive of findings that link specific written and/or spoken feedback with positive impacts on students' learning outcomes (Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2000; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock 2001; William 2011).

CONCLUSION

This reflective research has helped me to improve my own pedagogical practices by leveraging on verified and analysed data to ensure I make a research informed decision when looking to implement student peer review or other developments in my practice. Similarly, it is imperative that academics follow this route because although decisions that are not research-driven and may work in the short-run, lack of research leads to failure in the long-term, hence the importance of research-informed decision making for effective teaching (Masters 2018).

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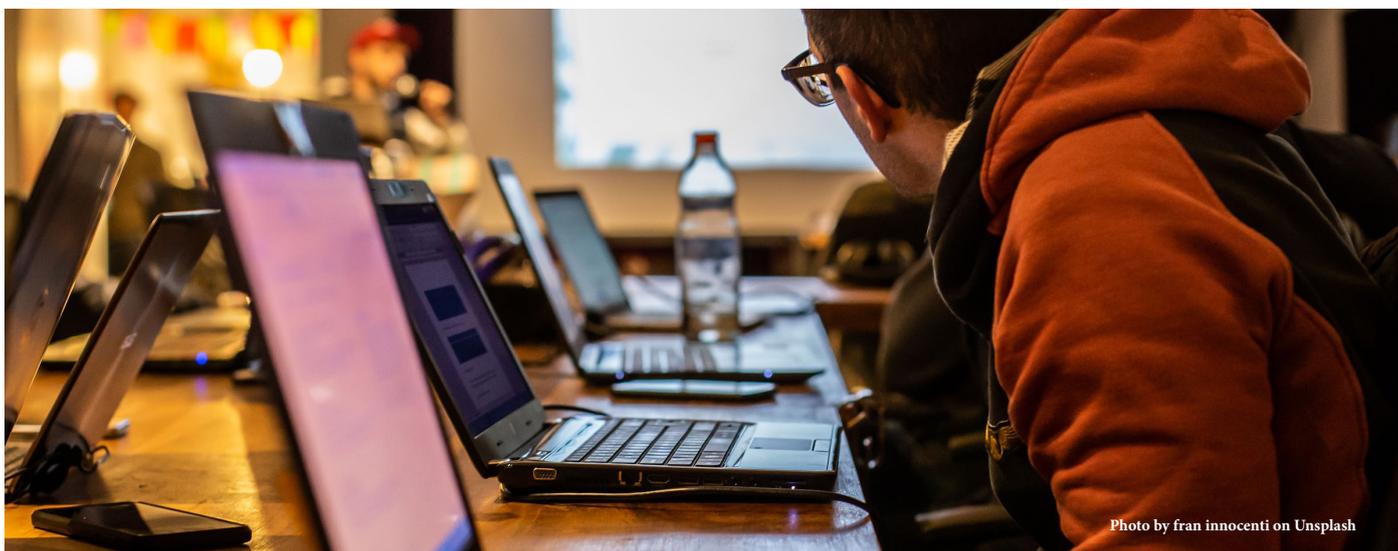


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Veganism in Malta

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INTRODUCTION

The word 'veganism' is defined as the asceticism of animal products and by-products from one's diet. A 'vegan' is an individual who follows the diet and the philosophy, which is based on the idea that using animals as a commodity is ethically wrong.

The objective of this research is to examine veganism and its impact on the local scene, including the perception of the vegan community and the versatility of the catering industry to accommodate this new niche market.

One may attribute this need for change to the well-educated Generation Z, who are more morally aware and more influenced by social media. Another factor is the growth in the hospitality industry, which has seen a substantial rise in inbound tourists in recent years (Arena, 2019).

This study will also focus on identifying difficulties encountered by the vegan community when dining out, including the lack of dining out options and other contributing factors.

EVOLUTION OF VEGANISM

The term 'vegan' might have sounded quite ambiguous a few years ago. There was always a misunderstanding over its significance as well as enmity to its connotations. However, this concept has evolved over time, and veganism has perhaps become something of a distinctive

counterculture. Nowadays, veganism has grown to be more colloquially acknowledged by the public.

The concept can be traced back to ancient India and Eastern Mediterranean civilisations, yet the phrase 'veganism' was not used until 1940. According to *The Vegan Society*, there is evidence of people deciding to avoid the intake of meat and other animal products dating back to 2 000 years.

In early 500 B.C., Pythagoras and his Greek followers had practiced vegetarianism, both socially and spiritually. Following the availability of dietary knowledge, the modern vegans omitted certain restrictions imposed by the Pythagorean School since they avoided beans that were thought to be made of human flesh (Doucet, 2020).

Research questions

In this essay, the student will attempt to identify reasons for shifting to a vegan diet, and the challenges faced by this niche culture, including the difficulties encountered by vegans when dining out. These will be explored via the following research questions:

- Why do people choose to adopt a vegan diet?
- When did they consider adopting a vegan diet?
- What are the difficulties they encounter whilst following this diet in Malta?

- What are the contributing factors that create a lack of dining out options for vegans in Malta?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vegetarians and vegans are repeatedly categorised collectively in nutritional and psychological research, as both constrain the animal intake in their diet. Yet, there are differences, since vegetarians solely renounce the consumption of meat whilst vegans renounce the consumption of all types of animals and their by-products, including dairy, eggs, honey, leather, and wool (Petre, 2016). While some vegans are considered as a subcategory of vegetarians, other vegans recognise themselves as a distinctive category (Rosenfeld, 2019).

THE VEGAN LIFESTYLE

As described by the USA Vegan Society in 2018, being vegan is a way of living that seeks to exclude all forms of exploitation and cruelty to an animal for food, clothing, or other purposes. Thus, veganism promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of all – including animals, humans, and the environment alike (Wright, 2017).

People choose a vegan lifestyle mainly due to four fundamental praxis: health, environmental reasons, animal welfare, and religious/spiritual beliefs. Vegans are most often more conscious of the choices they make when purchasing or consuming products that are less likely to have a direct and detrimental impact on the environment

and the world around them (Jamieson, 2010).

The term 'going vegan' is a growing phenomenon in the Maltese Islands. Knowledge and information on the vegan lifestyle are shared daily on social media, spiking a lot of interest.

Additionally, the guidelines below have been proven to be helpful when transitioning to this lifestyle (Abela, 2021):

- Transition at your own pace.
- Conduct your research or speak to a professional.
- Keep track of your progress.
- Inform those closest to you about your decision.
- Talk to other vegans.
- Learn how to cook.
- Find good vegan-friendly eateries.

VEGANISM: IS IT JUST A TREND?

Donald Watson coined the term way back in 1944. His intention was to create a term for a vegetarian who does not consume dairy. Locally, partaking into a vegan diet is challenging, especially when dining out with family and friends. Not so long ago, restaurants were not catering for vegans, and thus one had to resort to eating side dishes or not eating at all. This factor might have discouraged many people from embracing this diet. Fast forward to today, we are now seeing that there is more availability for vegans as some establishments were even converted to cater for the new eating habits brought about by the vegan lifestyle. This has fuelled the increase in demand for vegan consumer products.

According to a *Forbes* article, "10 Food Trends of 2013" (Bender, 2013), veganism became one of the top ten food trends due to its social media presence and being vegan became desirable. Many celebrities are following this trend, including Ellen De Generes, Alicia Silverstone, and Mike Tyson (Doyle, 2016).

At first, vegans were deemed as being oversensitive and hostile, and were often excluded and ignored (Cole and Morgan,

2011). However, as acknowledged by the international weekly journal *The Economist*, what was on the borders, now became mainstream. In fact, 2019 was named by said journal as "The Year of the Vegan. Nevertheless, despite many restaurants endorsing this trend, some are still regarding it as dangerous (McCann, n.d.).

On the other hand, social media and the World Wide Web have drastically improved people's awareness. Instagram and Tik Tok have particularly played a very important role as they are credited with demonstrating the fun and colourful side of veganism (Joe Phua, 2020). Zoomers (the Generation Z cohort), who are more technologically-inclined and spend a considerable amount of time using technology, have continued to fuel this interest by showcasing a variety of vegan recipes on their favourite media. This is slowly decreasing the stigma associated with following a vegan lifestyle (J. Mitchell Vaterlaus, 2015).

VEGANS IN MALTA

Malta is still very critical towards veganism since it is proud of its meat and fish dishes, and of its singular cooking techniques. A poll created by an online portal, Vegan Malta Eats, showed that 66 % of the participants followed a vegan diet before 2018, and nineteen (19) other participants responded that they became vegan the following year. Twenty-five (25) participants responded that they have been fluctuating from vegetarian to vegan and vice-versa many times whereas twenty-three (23) participants responded

that they were vegetarians before 2018 (Magri, 2019).

Although no official study or statistical data has been published in the last years, specifying the amount per capita of vegans in Malta, the two most popular local vegan Facebook groups dedicated to veganism boast a total of over 9 000 members. Participants in these groups are regularly posting recipes and advice throughout the day, thus showing an increase in interest (Arena, 2019).

VEGAN PRODUCTS

Against popular dogmas, a vegan diet is not necessarily expensive and can be managed at any income level. To pursue this diet, one is not required to purchase exotic or glamorous ingredients. Basic ingredients such as potatoes, beans, fresh seasonal vegetables, fruit, and rice will still work wonders. A case in point is the traditional 'Soppa tal-Armla', which can be easy veganised if one uses a vegetable broth and forfeits the traditional soft 'gbejna', which is only added at the very end of the recipe.

Unfortunately, this is not the case when dining out. In Malta, a vegan salad will most likely cost as much as (if not more than) a regular main course with meat or dairy. Such prices deter non-vegan customers from considering vegan options and are the main reason why vegans tend to prefer homecooked meals.



Figure 1. Malta & Gozo Vegan Deli – Gbejna tal-Bzar

Several individuals believe that they need to buy vegan food from specialised health shops, yet all locally-grown vegetables and fruit are more reasonably priced and ethically produced. Frozen and canned foods are also more affordable and can be stored for a longer period (Greenebaum, 2016). Since Malta is not self-sufficient, most of the produce is imported, leading to increased prices. As a result, it is relatively more expensive to eat out in Malta when compared to other countries. Furthermore, despite regular farmers' markets promoting the use of good quality locally-grown fresh produce, they tend to have very limited variety.

The author of *Mouthwatering Vegan*, Miriam Sorrell, has opened the Malta & Gozo Vegan Deli, which is a vegan-exclusive deli. She even managed to incorporate her version of the veganised Maltese *gbejna tal-bżar*. Among an array of shops which also offer vegan products, this deli stands out as being entirely vegan. Additionally, even if similar online shops are starting to appear, there is constantly a long waiting time for orders due to everything being made-to-order.

THE MALTESE VEGAN DINING SCENE

As the vegan world is establishing its roots, the London-based Michelin-star chef Alexis Gauthier will be relaunching his restaurant as fully vegan. Being a vegan himself, Gauthier expressed that "it would be unethical for [him] to profit from selling dead animals" (AXWORTHY, 2021). Although a similar concept is being explored in Malta, no restaurateur has so far taken the risk of going fully vegan.

In fact, Malta is not typically touted as a vegan-friendly island. Most often, there is little to no vegan choices in restaurant menus. The Maltese vegan society is still growing and even if some restaurant owners are currently offering vegan options in their menus, a lot of work still needs to be done. Meat, fish, and seafood are still the stars of the menus (Werneth, 2019).

Good data on eateries which are exclusively vegan remains unavailable and this further adds to the lack of research in the field. One can only manage to find clear information on approximately ten (10) restaurants. Could it perhaps be that this lifestyle is too

exclusive and thus restaurant owners are finding it unfeasible to consider and commit to adding and offering vegan-inclusive menus?

The vegan scene has started to flourish through the tourism industry and the locals' dietary requirements. Maltese cuisine is typically Mediterranean, being based on seafood, meat, and cheese. However, restaurants have identified that the tourists, who the most prolific customers, are starting to adapt to this vegan demand (Travel, 2019). One restaurant in Malta which is standing out is Balance Bowl. This restaurant claims to be the only vegan-exclusive restaurant on the whole island.

In recent years, some salad bars have also started to appear, particularly in Valletta and Sliema. Despite not being exclusively vegan, they seem to be offering decent lunch choices to their customers.

RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of this research study is to identify whether vegans are satisfied with the current local dining-out options and determine how easy it is to find vegan-inclusive restaurants. The primary data was collected from a selected group of individuals. A questionnaire comprising twenty-four (24) questions was distributed through social media to target vegans in Malta.

The question format consisted of six (6) multiple-choice questions, seventeen (17) Likert-scale questions intending to measure the attitude of the participants, and a final question requesting the participants to leave a comment to sustain their opinion. This questionnaire was distributed electronically to the sampled audience with the help of the Malta Vegan Society and shared on various Facebook pages dedicated to this subject. The goal was to gather a minimum of 50 responses to analyse accordingly.

The second part of this research aims to identify what is hindering restaurant owners and chefs from offering vegan-inclusive menus in their establishments. This data was collected from well-known chefs around the Maltese Islands. The interview comprised eleven (11) open-ended questions.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Due to the novelty of this concept, the data obtained was very limited. However, it was determined that the affiliation to the vegan society in Malta is increasing at a steady pace, thus indicating subject-related interest. Global collaborations, such as Veganuary, which is a worldwide movement that promotes veganism to interested individuals for the month of January, are supporting the growth of the vegan community in our country. This study will focus on the difficulties encountered when dining out, be it geographical accessibility, price point, restaurant staff awareness, and accessibility to vegan options. One of the main limitations of this research was the lack of prior data and thus the primary data had to be collected and analysed.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS AND RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to find out whether the Maltese vegan community is feeling included in the catering industry. In fact, this research would not have been possible without the help of this community. All the questionnaires were directed to the attention of vegans who are either Maltese or residing in Malta. The results from this study show that although Malta is a small country, the vegan society is growing at a steady pace. Since there was no prior study indicating the current vegan population, the help of two main Maltese groups on social media i.e., Vegan Malta and Vegan Malta Eats, was crucial since these Facebook pages have a massive following of 13,400 members amongst them. This study identified numerous reasons why the sampled group of individuals follow this diet. However, the most recurring were health, ethical, and environmental reasons.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

A total of 53 respondents participated in the online questionnaire. The aim of the first two questions (Q1 and Q2) was mainly to gather demographic information on the persons completing the questionnaire. Most of the respondents were female (42 respondents, 79.25 %) and 11 were male (20.75 %).

It must also be noted that there were no responses from the 'under 18' age group. The predominance in responses from the 25-40-year age group (27 respondents, 50.94 %) illustrates that a large millennial cohort (Generation Y) follows a vegan diet. This factor indicates that the Generation X cohort and the baby boomers, which precede the millennials, have instilled good reasons for becoming vegan. One can also notice a steady increase in zoomers.

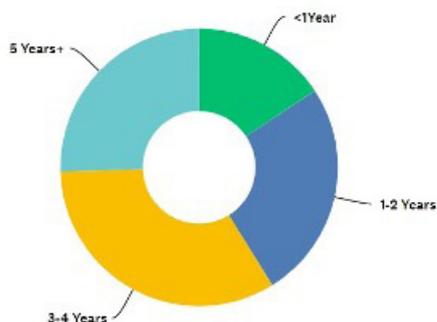
Figure 3 clearly shows that the majority of the respondents (20 respondents, 37.74 %) reside in the south of Malta. This is followed by 15 respondents (28.30 %) from the northern region. In comparison, only a small amount of respondents reside in the western and eastern regions i.e., 9 (16.98 %) and 7 (13.21 %), respectively. With regard to Gozo, there were only 2 participants (3.77 %).

As one can notice in figure 2, only about a quarter of the participants (13 respondents, 25.49 %) have been following a vegan diet for over five years. An equal number of participants responded that they have been on a vegan diet for the last one to two years. 17 respondents (33.33 %) have been following a vegan diet for the past three to four years. Only 8 respondents (15.69 %) have been vegan for the past year. Additionally, 2 respondents opted to skip this question.

The question in figure 3 aimed at eliciting from the respondents the reasons for following this diet. The majority of the participants (31 respondents, 58.49 %) endorse the vegan diet because they are aware of the animal cruelty present in the food industry. 13 participants (24.53 %) deem the vegan diet a healthier lifestyle option or a diet tailored to their health needs. Only 2 participants (3.77 %) chose to transition to veganism for environmental reasons. The rest of the respondents (7 respondents, 13.21 %) opted for 'other' reasons.

How long have you been following a vegan diet?

Answered: 51 Skipped: 2

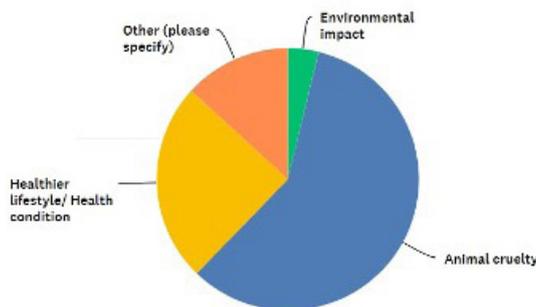


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
<1 Year	15.69%	8
1-2 Years	25.49%	13
3-4 Years	33.33%	17
5 Years+	25.49%	13
TOTAL		51

Figure 2. Vegan diet durations

Why did you choose to shift to a vegan diet?

Answered: 53 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Environmental impact	3.77%	2
Animal cruelty	58.49%	31
Healthier lifestyle/ Health condition	24.53%	13
Trend	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	13.21%	7
TOTAL		53

Figure 3. The reasons for transitioning to veganism

The ease of access to imported food commodities and staples of the vegan diet which are not pervasive in the Maltese islands has greatly facilitated the life of vegan people. Most of the respondents (18 respondents, 33.96 %) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement shown in figure 4. On the other hand, 17 respondents (32.08 %) agreed and 8 respondents (15.09 %) strongly agreed. Only 10 respondents (18.87 %) find it difficult to follow a vegan diet in Malta.

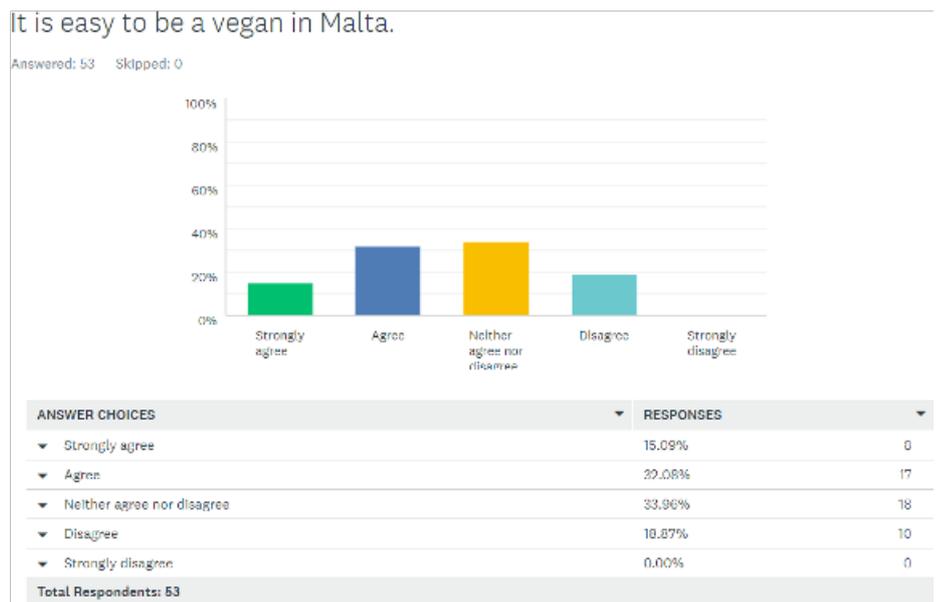


Figure 4. Is it easy being vegan in Malta?

The results displayed in figure 5 show that vegans still incur difficulty in finding dining options in their locality, with seventeen (32.08 %) and nine (16.98 %) responding, respectively, that is 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to find a local place that catered to their diet. On the other hand, 12 (22.64 %) and 6 (11.32 %) participants responded, respectively, that one is 'likely' or 'very likely' to find vegan dining options locally. 10 participants (18.87 %) responded that such a possibility is 'neither likely nor unlikely'.

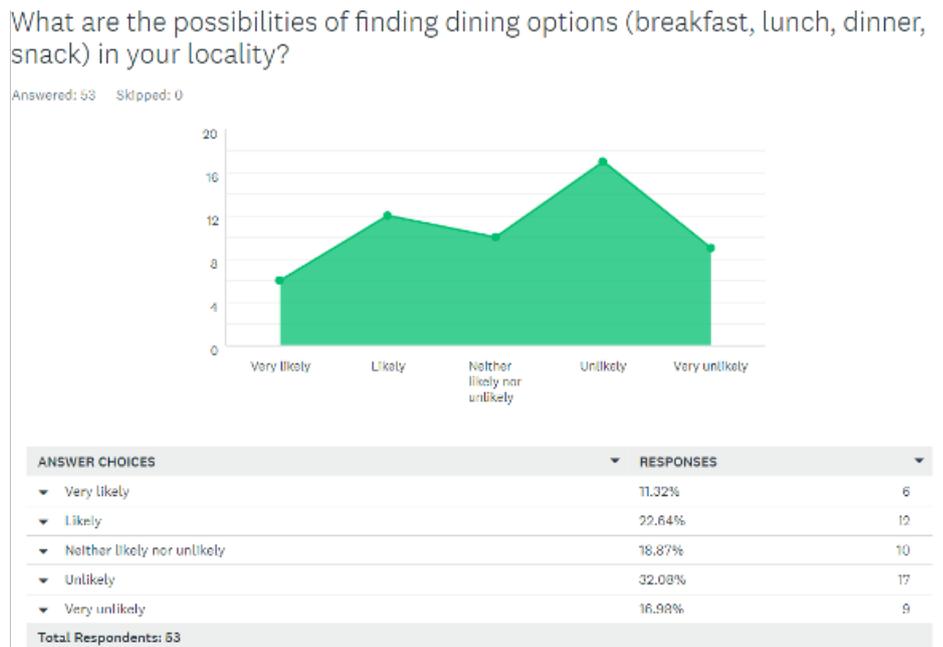


Figure 5. The possibilities of local dining out options

Figure 6 reveals that many establishments offering vegan dining options are highly concentrated in one district. The Northern Harbour District was selected by almost three quarters of the respondents (39 respondents, 73.58 %) as the main area in which one is most likely to find such establishments. This district mainly comprises tourist areas, including Sliema and Valletta, and a high response rate for this district could therefore be predicted. The Northern District ranks in second place with 8 respondents (15.09 %). The rest of the districts all had an equal number of responses (1 respondent, 1.89 %) whilst Gozo was selected by 3 respondents (5.66 %).

In which district you are most likely to find establishments offering Vegan dining options? (choose multiple answers if needed)

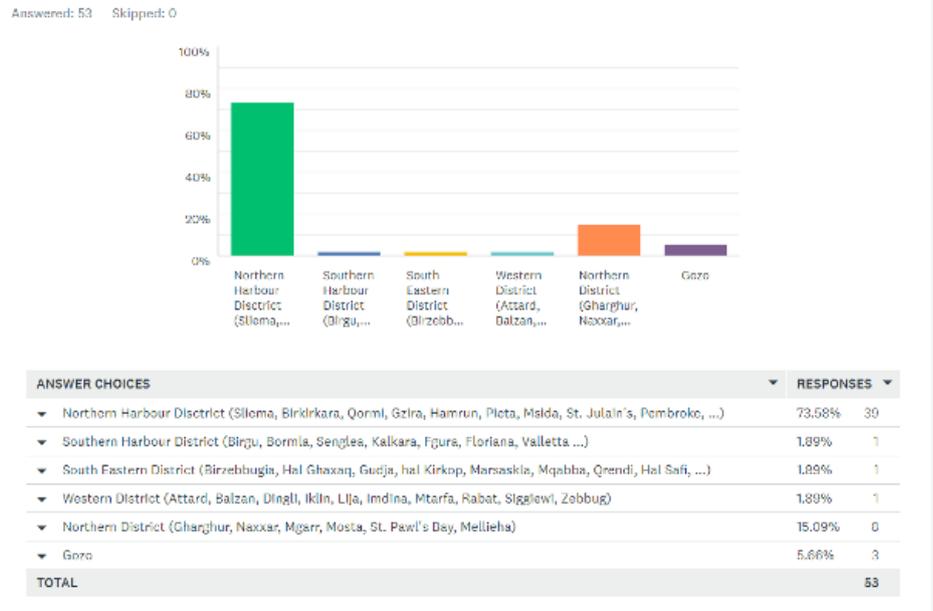


Figure 6. The districts which are most likely to have establishments offering vegan dining options

Maltese culture and lifestyle revolve around food, notably with family and friends, and it is thus highly expected for one to be invited to dine out. Figure 7 clearly shows that most people following a vegan diet find it difficult to accept dinner plans with non-vegan family members and friends. The majority of the participants responded that it is 'difficult' (17 respondents, 32.08 %) or 'very difficult' (4 respondents, 7.55 %) to accept dinner plans with non-vegans.

On the other hand, 10 (18.87 %) and 7 (13.21 %) participants find it 'easy' or 'very easy', respectively, to accept dinner plans with non-vegans. Additionally, there is also an aggregate of 15 participants (28.30%) who responded that this is 'neither easy nor difficult'.

How easy is it to accept dinner plans with non-vegan friends/family?

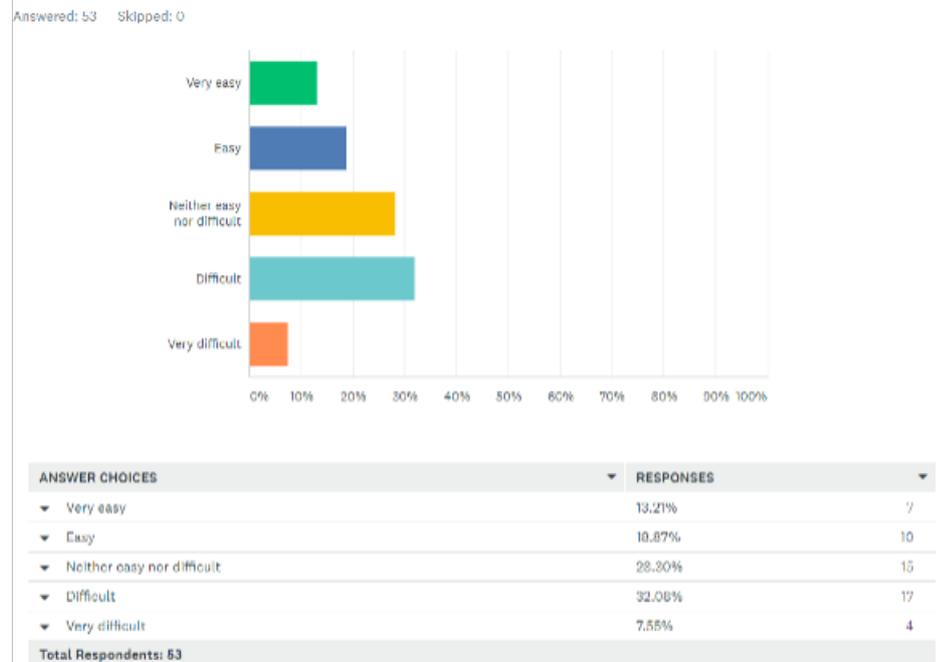
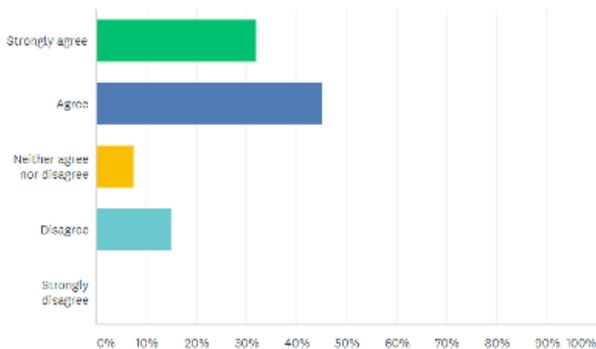


Figure 7. Accepting dinner plans with non-vegans

Most restaurants do not offer vegan inclusive menu.

Answered: 53 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	32.08% 17
Agree	45.28% 24
Neither agree nor disagree	7.55% 4
Disagree	15.09% 8
Strongly disagree	0.00% 0
Total Respondents: 53	

Figure 8. The lack of vegan inclusivity in restaurant menus

24 respondents (45.28 %) were unsure if restaurants with non-vegan inclusive menus were keen to cater to their vegan needs on the spot, responding that they 'neither agree nor disagree' with the statement. On the other hand, 16 respondents (30.19 %) agreed and one respondent strongly agreed (1.89 %), whilst 11 respondents disagreed (20.75 %) and one respondent strongly disagreed (1.89 %).

Most of the participants generally tend to choose a restaurant they trust, with

20 respondents (37.74 %) opting for 'always' and 24 respondents (45.28 %) opting for 'usually'. Only one participant (1.89 %) selected 'never', whilst the rest (8 respondents, 15.09 %) opted for 'sometimes'.

The majority of the respondents (39 respondents, 73.58 %) always look up the menu before going to a new restaurant. The rest opted for 'usually' (11 respondents, 20.75 %) or 'sometimes' (3 respondents, 5.66 %). This clearly shows that most

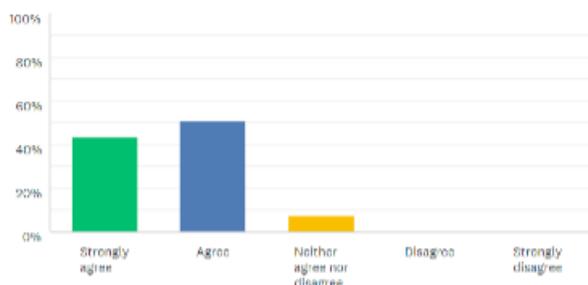
Similar to the previous figures, figure 8 also illustrates the lack of vegan inclusivity with the majority of the respondents agreeing (24 respondents, 45.28 %) or strongly agreeing (17 respondents, 32.08 %) that most restaurants do not offer a vegan-inclusive menu. Only 8 participants (15.09 %) responded otherwise and 4 participants (7.55 %) neither agreed nor disagreed.

vegans generally like to be well-prepared in advance.

The results indicate that 28 respondents (52.83 %) know more than ten restaurants which offer a vegan-inclusive menu whilst 25 participants (47.17 %) responded otherwise. The fact that there is only a slight discrepancy between the two choices suggests that there are still many restaurants which do not offer a vegan-inclusive menu.

I have noticed a lot of change towards vegan inclusion in the restaurant industry in Malta in the last 5 years.

Answered: 53 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	43.40% 23
Agree	50.94% 27
Neither agree nor disagree	7.55% 4
Disagree	0.00% 0
Strongly disagree	0.00% 0
Total Respondents: 53	

Figure 9. Change towards vegan inclusion in the restaurant industry in the last five years

Figure 9 shows that most vegans have seen a noticeable change from restaurants in Malta towards the inclusion of vegan options in the last five years. In fact, the majority of the participants (27 respondents, 50.94 %) agreed with having noticed this change whilst 23 respondents (43.40%) strongly agreed. Only 4 respondents (7.55 %) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement shown in the figure and no one disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The statement in figure 10 aimed at eliciting from the respondents whether they are confident in the catering industry's level of knowledge and understanding of the principles of a vegan diet. However, the results show that more than 60 % of the respondents are not confident in this regard. In addition, another 16 respondents (30.19 %) were unsure. On the other hand, only 5 respondents (9.43 %) agreed with the statement and one respondent (1.89 %) strongly agreed.

I am confident that restaurant staff have a certain degree of knowledge and understanding of the principles of the vegan diet?

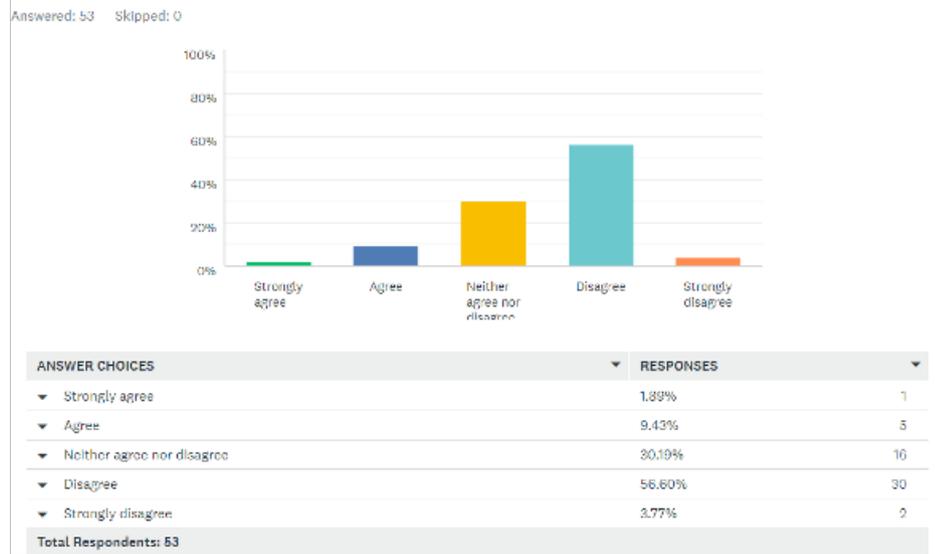


Figure 10. Confidence in the restaurant staff's knowledge and understanding of the principles of a vegan diet

With regard to the expenses of following a vegan diet, figure 11 shows that most of the participants agreed (14 respondents, 26.42 %) or strongly agreed (14 respondents, 26.42 %) that following a vegan diet was more expensive than following an omni-diet, whilst 12 (22.64 %) and 5 (9.43 %) participants disagreed or strongly disagreed, respectively.

I think that it is more expensive to follow a vegan diet rather than an omni-diet in Malta.

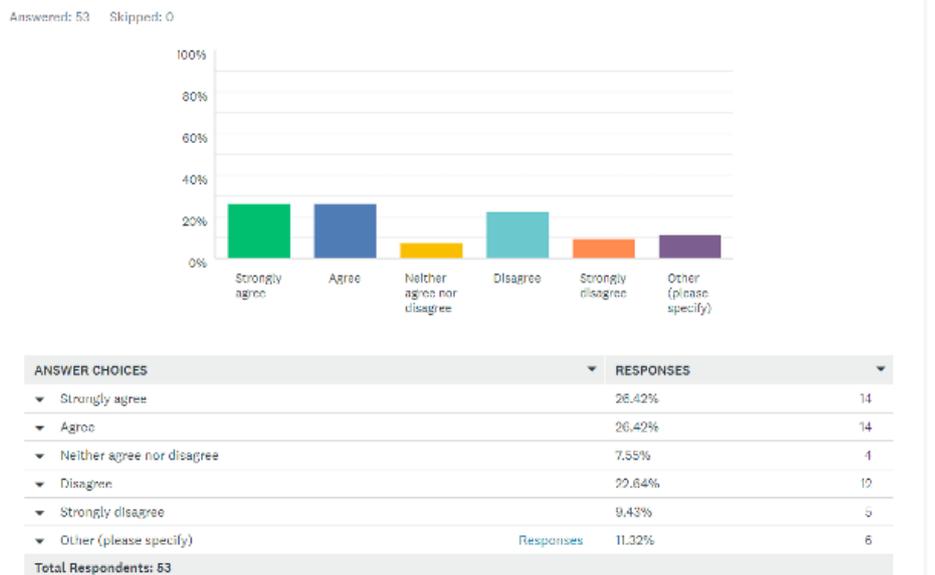
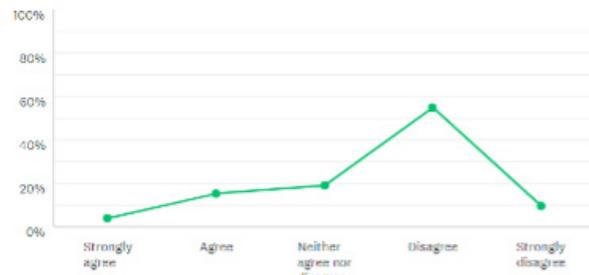


Figure 11. Is it cheaper to follow an omni-diet than a vegan diet?

The results in figure 12 confirm that most vegans do not deem vegan meals in restaurants justly priced. The majority of the participants did not agree (29 respondents, 54.72%) or strongly did not agree (5 respondents, 9.43 %) that the pricing of vegan meals is justified in restaurants, to the contrary of 8 (15.09 %) and 2 (3.77 %) participants who agreed or strongly agreed, respectively. The rest of the participants (10 respondents, 18.87 %) neither agreed nor disagreed.

I think that vegan meals are justly priced in restaurants.

Answered: 53 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	3.77% 2
Agree	15.09% 8
Neither agree nor disagree	18.87% 10
Disagree	54.72% 29
Strongly disagree	9.43% 5
Total Respondents: 53	

Figure 12. Are vegan meals justly priced?

Most of the participants disagreed (22 respondents, 41.51 %) or strongly disagreed (2 respondents, 3.77 %) that dining out options are accessible to all, amounting to a total of 24 respondents. However, the results are not very clear-cut as almost an equal amount of participants responded otherwise, i.e., 16 respondents (30.19 %) agreed and 3 respondents (5.66 %) strongly agreed, amounting to a total of 19 respondents. This is not to mention that the rest of the participants (11 respondents, 20.75 %) neither agreed nor disagreed.

All 53 respondents (100 %) stated that there is still room for improvement in the catering industry with regard to vegan inclusivity on the menus. They claimed that the food was not varied enough and argued that being vegan is not equivalent to eating salads.

DISCUSSION

The constant increase in tourism influx and digital globalisation were two contributing factors that allowed Malta to become a cultural and gastronomical melting pot. Therefore, it was expected that veganism would eventually reach our shores.

Veganism is still quite a foreign concept in the Maltese islands since most of the dishes revolve around meat. From the results of the questionnaire, it seems that the most common conclusions in this regard are:

- The overall lack of knowledge on veganism;

- The lack of dining options and food choices for vegans; and
- The exorbitant costs of foreign vegan ingredients and vegan substitutes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Both the online questionnaire and the interviews generated the following recommendations which may support the progression of veganism in the Maltese islands:

- There is much need for awareness on the attributes of following a vegan diet. Despite NGOs keeping their respective social media pages quite active, this information is still not reaching the general audience.
- In the Maltese islands, the Institute of Tourism Studies is the main seat of learning in culinary arts. Unfortunately, it offers no specific modules on the vegan diet. The introduction of such a module can help an aspiring culinary arts student gain knowledge about and practice this diet. Such information can also be offered on a part-time basis to expose and educate local chefs with regard to this diet.
- Incentives for the consumption of locally produced goods are not being pushed enough by the government. There should be more incentives targeting local farmers to decrease the

cost of local produce.

- Most of the time, vegan food is overpriced because its ingredients are not locally processed. Tofu, which is a processed soybean product, cannot be locally grown and the import costs are quite high. However, eating vegan does not necessarily mean using foreign ingredients and this idea needs to be emphasised. Many dishes can be prepared with local ingredients which are less costly and more ethical.
- Even if some vegans will not consume meals in an omni-dietary environment, one may still need to cater for vegan guests. Therefore, it would be ideal if all restaurants had a couple of vegan-friendly dishes in their arsenal.

CONCLUSION

A more substantial effort needs to be made by the restaurant industry to better accommodate this growing market niche. Staff education is key. Furthermore, the vegan registry, notably its list of vegan-friendly restaurants, needs to be constantly updated and regulated. Chefs need to invest more time and creative effort in order to come up with more interesting and innovative meal options other than the currently offered run-of-the-mill options such as pasta, salads, and rice, which are dated and out-of-style.

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The constant increase in tourism influx and digital globalisation were two contributing factors that allowed Malta to become a cultural and gastronomic melting pot.



The airport servicescape

BY FIORENTINA DARMENIA-JOCHIMSEN
ITS SENIOR LECTURER 2

Gupta and Venkaiah (2015) place airport operations very neatly into four major services regulating areas. The first and main airport responsibility confirmed to date is that of the transportation of both passengers and goods. The second is based on the airport's servicescape and hence concentrates on the natural, communal, and commercial environments. The third deals with the airport's responsibility for income generation, while the fourth and last is based on its landside tenants through the payment of fees, rents, and airside concessionaires. (p. 47.)

The authors further group the activities within the airport into definite areas, namely those of vital operations and facility services, handling services and commercial activities. Aeronautical services are included in the vital operations, as is airport safety, which is given priority to ensure the security of the airport visitors and passengers. The handling services, on the other hand, deal with aircraft and passenger arrivals and departures and all the related sectors therein. From the non-aeronautical side, commercial services were pre Pandemic and are being seen to be given prominence yet again due to the amount of revenue which past years had shown to have been brought in from this sector. These services, such as those from food and beverage and retail outlets, entertainment, car rentals and parking facilities, as well as office rentals had proven to be very lucrative, as they were utilised not only by passengers but also the general public. (Gupta & Venkaiah, 2015.)

In fact, Gomes and Bezerra (2015) confirm, as many others, that airports were pre-pandemic no longer utilised for the sole purpose of transfer from one point to

another but had been, and are now again commencing to be utilised for the provision of retail, relaxation and enjoyment. They particularly identify the provision of a vast array of services to provide passenger satisfaction and hence the stress on the relevance of service quality around which this study places special emphasis (p. 79).

Bitner's servicescape concept has concentrated on the figure below due to it being identified as high relevance to the customer's perceived service level which this study targets. Despite its age, its relevance even in present times is demonstrated here through its application and reference by pre pandemic researchers. It will be utilised in a following article to display the perceived and experienced services for both the employee and customers alike.

The above model was first developed by Booms and Bitner in the early 1980s in order to focus on the 'physical environment' within which a service is performed. Bitner (1992) defines servicescapes into two broad divisions. The first so-called lean servicescape is the simpler of the two which provides for the straightforward entity, having few components and involving scant interactions between customers and employees. Examples given of such entities are those of stalls, coin-operated machines, and self-service outlets. The second, more complex form of servicescape is defined as elaborate. The entities within this sort of environment have several spaces and physical elements with a vast array of analogies, and involve multiple interactions between the customer and client. Entity examples are those of airports, hotels, or cruise liners. (Lockwood & Pyun, 2020.)

The servicescape includes the facilities, landscape, design, signage, surrounding environment, interior design, décor, sound, and available equipment provided. These were categorised by Bitner (1992) in the dimensions of 'ambience, spatial layout and functionality, signs and symbols and artefacts' (p. 65). Within the servicescape model above, they are displayed to clarify the behavioural patterns of the employee and customer in their individual and separate reaction to the servicescape, as well as the interactions between them influenced by the same servicescape. This model is based on the stimulus-response model dealing with the physical environment in the representation of the stimulus, the organism representing customers and employees, and the resulting physiological, emotional, and behavioural responses.

Since both customer and employee engages with, and is therefore affected by, the servicescape, both are included in the above model. However, due to the possibility of perception variances, each is considered separately. An example given is that of the perception of a large number of guests in a restaurant. While for the employee this, despite the higher amount of work, is favourably perceived due to the anticipated higher level of tips, for the guest the disturbance level and waiting time probably decreases the level of positive service experience. (Chang, 2016.)

Bitner's (1992) concept model deals with environmental dimensions, holistic environment, moderators, internal and behavioural responses. In the first column dealing with environmental dimensions, the ambient conditions deal with aspects such as those of temperature, air quality, lighting, noise, and odour in all areas of, in this case,



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an airport. They are those that affect the five senses, despite not being able to be seen or physically touched.

In support of this and albeit the fact that it is based on hotels, the article entitled *Invisible and Intangible, but Undeniable* (Su et al., 2015) is considered to be very relevant to all customers including those of the airport. The authors disclose that even though ambient conditions do not affect the customer's behaviour directly, it has been found that when any of them reach undesirable levels or are not present within the servicescape, the customer's demeanour is negatively affected. This influences the 'overall image, customer satisfaction and loyalty intentions' and should, therefore, be placed high on any entity's agenda. Through their research, they were able to specifically identify that temperature played a major role in the overall image, while odour/aroma had a great influence on satisfaction. (Suh, Moon, Ham, & Ham, 2015, p. 729.)

The relevance of these and similar conditions are provided by Edwards (2016) in an example where it is explained that a good, fresh odour in restrooms provides for a guarantee of cleanliness, while 'a ... smelly background affects your guests' memory of the service they will experience' (p. 92). Other researchers confirm the pertinence

of the playing of the right music suited to the respective areas such as restrooms, waiting areas, retail outlets and control areas for calming and stress elevation purposes. Music therapy as an approach to stress management is confirmed by many scientists, who state that listening to music such as Omkar 'keeps us stress-free, elated and happy, which triggers the synthesis of happy hormones like dopamine and serotonin which in turn promotes holistic wellbeing' and relieves stress (Payrau, Quere, Breton, & Payrau, 2017; Saraswati & Dixit, 2018).

Besides ambient conditions, space and its function are considered separately by Bitner (1992). This division deals with the area layout, equipment, and furnishings set up in a servicescape and the ease or difficulty in manoeuvring with and/or around them. Zeithami, Jo and Gremler (2018) utilise spatial elements in the representation of space and relate to how all the equipment, furnishings and the physical arrangement are set out while correlating functionality to the level that the spatial elements provide for the requirements of the customer. Furthermore, researchers such as Moon, Yoon and Han (2016) propose that roomy areas are connected by customers to a higher level of service.

The signs, symbols, and artefacts as the last of the environmental dimensions (figure 1) are represented by signage, personal artefacts, and style of décor. Signs and symbols serve as symbolic representations of actions, processes, or objects and to provide instruction as to the accepted behaviour within the entity. Some signs provide simple directional instructions, whereas other more complex signage gives information through a combined meaning framework system, where colour very often plays an integral role. Signage will be discussed further in a following article, due to its bearing and usefulness for the customer to find his/her way about the terminal and hence assist in the avoidance of stress and wasted time. Suffice here to allude to Symonds' (2017) claim that not finding one's way would materialise in a frame of mind less able and willing to seek any form of money spending diversion. Artefacts, on the other hand, serve as figures of representation and as physical keepsakes of the encountered service/s. These can normally be sold as souvenirs, or are handed over to customers as gifts and provide entity valuable tokens as 'signifiers of memory' (Sthapit & Björk, 2017, p. 2).

The holistic environment as the second column in Bitner's concept (1992) is the perceived servicescape, commencing

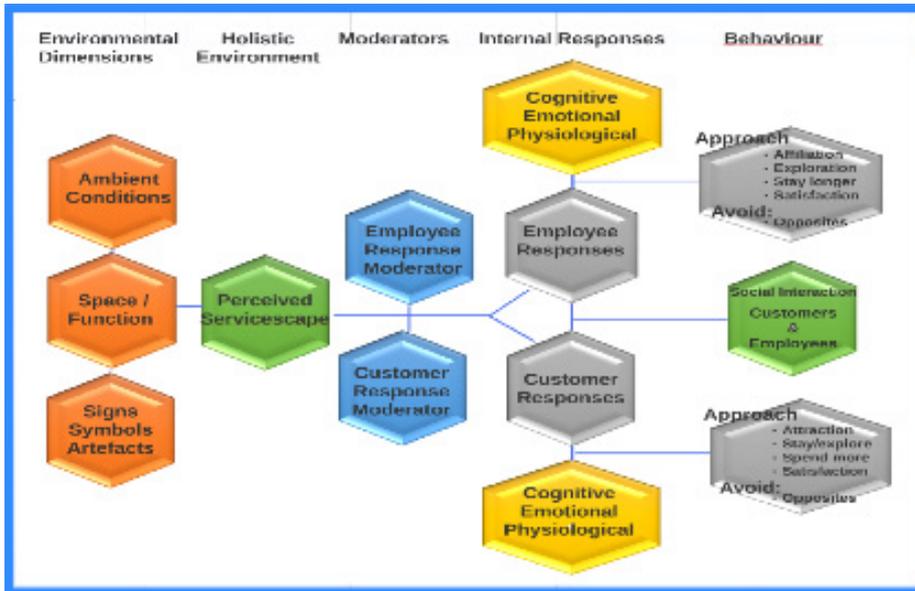


Figure 1. Concept of perceived and experienced Servicescape (Developed version of Bitner's 1992 concept model)

from the first instance that the customer is exposed to the various physical environmental dimensions. Studies have shown that lasting impressions of an entity are obtained during the first few seconds of exposure, after which it is very difficult to rectify any impact made. Hence 'a strong first impression is critical to establish a favourable anchor so subsequent experiences will be interpreted in a more favourable light'. Thus, the image/s of the holistic multidimensional environment is obtained through stimuli, each holding their weight and possibly affecting the individual differences and within the first few seconds of exposure. The customer goes away with this image and also passes it on to others (Kotler, Bowen, Markens, & Baloglu, 2017, p. 176).

The employee and customer response moderators are dealt with in the third column of the above figure. The definition of a response moderator of this model is anything which accentuates the state of stimulus and response. Here, within the stimulus-response theory, it is stated that 'the causes of behaviour can be found exclusively in the environment'. This supports the environment-stimulus and servicescapes theories that the environmental dimensions are responsible for cognitive, emotional, and physiological changes in the person exposed to these elements. These changes are related by

the researchers to the states of 'pleasure – displeasure, arousal/non-arousal and dominance-submissiveness'. The effect on the person's cognitive elements is, here, mainly related to beliefs, categorisation, as well as symbolic meaning. Emotional aspects deal with mood and attitude, while physiological elements are based on pain in the physical and mental form, comfort and physical fitness of the person concerned. (Bitner, 1992; Suh et al., 2015; Overskeid, 2018.)

The internal and behavioural responses found in the last two columns (figure 1) relate to the brought-out responses under the servicescapes model. These are represented in the form of behavioural approaches, avoidance, and social interactions. The possible forms of social interactions which reflect the many aspects they may bring about are plentiful. Hence, they are placed in the sociological behavioural groups of 'cooperation, conflict, exchange, competition, coercion and conformity' (Argyle, 2017). These interactions may be seen in the concept model (figure 1) which are taken in the representation of those 'between and among customers and employees' (Bitner, 1992).

However, the servicescape model seems to ignore the possible interactions stimulated by servicescapes which could emerge with

customer to customer and employee to employee interaction. These, as with the customer to employee interactions, could also have an impact on the elements of satisfaction and comfort, as well as performance and attitude, and should, therefore, not be excluded. Although this will be included in following articles, the dealings thereof do not serve the purpose of this study. They would, however, serve for further enlightening research.

The approach as taken by Bitner (1992) is dealt with in two aspects in the same model. The first is taken in relation to the usage of the area during and after the provision of service, while the second considers the behaviour at the end of the service experience.

'Enter and explore' is placed under the first of the two approaches, where it is targeted at those who show a desire to explore and know more about all that the entity can provide. Another is the 'stay longer' aspect, which defines the customer's willingness to be further exposed to the entity's products or services. The last of this type of approach is that of the 'carry out plan', which represents the customer's desire to carry out the provided information through a complete experience engagement while targeting his/her set goals. For the second representation of approach, 'affiliation' is listed, to display the customer's eagerness

in repeat custom and to demonstrate the willingness in the advocacy of the brand's name. On the other hand, 'avoid' for both approach aspects is meant to represent detachment from the entity and its products/services, avoidance of the set-up environment and the exhibition of dissatisfaction of the provided experience. (Bitner, 1992; Argyle 2017.)

However, in the article entitled Role of Airport Physical Environments in the Satisfaction Generation Process (2016), the authors Moon et al. state that not much importance is given by any entity to the servicescape aspect, which they stress is very relevant for the achievement of the perceived service quality for both customers and employees alike. They state that instead, purchase attractions and motivations are tackled mainly through 'pricing, advertising, and service/product characteristics, while employee motivation is dealt with mainly through salary, 'promotions and benefits'.

This is surprising considering that Bitner and other researchers have since determined and demonstrated that the psychological impact and hence behaviour of both the employee and customer alike are influenced directly through the physical setting, which also refers to the notion of wayfinding, which shall be dealt with in another article.

Furthermore, in support of this study's claim about the necessity of services directly related to the cultural traits and expectations, a number of articles, such as The Staging of Contested Servicescapes (Chronis, 2019) and Cultural metaphors: Enhancing Consumer Pleasure in Ethnic Servicescapes (Elliot, Cherian, & Casakin, 2013) display the emotional reaction to servicescapes through the person's cultural self-construal. Such studies maintain that servicescapes construed to indigenous traits 'have the potential to be particularly effective when they represent the consumers' cultural values, attitudes, and behaviours' (Elliot, et al., p. 9).

In contradiction to Bitner's concept's direct relation to behaviour, other psychologists such as Geir Overskeid (2018) in their article Do we Need the Environment to Explain

Operant Behaviour states that 'human behaviour is continuously shaped and maintained by its consequences' (p. 2). He claims that the individual tends to weigh the effects of a particular behaviour and adapt and/or adjust accordingly, rather than what is claimed by Bitner about behaviour being a sole reaction to the given environment. Overskeid warns that the incorporation of the 'environment in behaviour analytic hypothesis or explanations can sometimes hinder predictions and control'. He supports this by maintaining that if the environment is taken in the representation of the only stimuli which initiates a response, this may lead to the conclusion that it is only through the same environment's manipulation that behavioural change is brought about (p. 5).

Hence in the recognition of the relevance of Bitner's concept, but identifying the discussed omissions, its application in following articles will be adapted to include the servicescapes consequential stimuli on behaviour and this also in relation to the interaction between employees, as well as that between customers.

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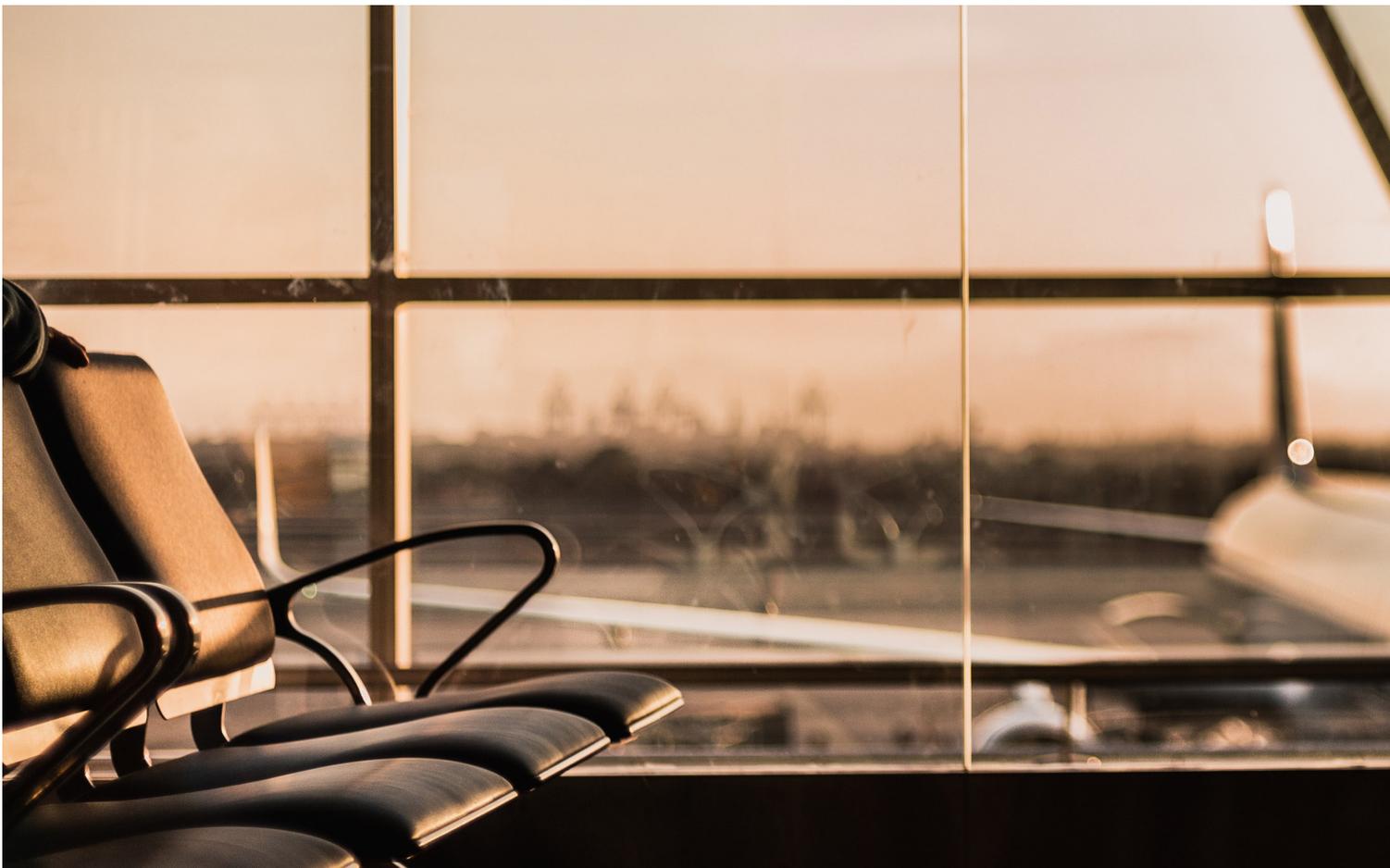
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Why is climate change regarded as the most serious environmental problem affecting our planet?

BY ARTUR LENGYEL,
ITS VISITING ACADEMIC AND INDUSTRY PRACTITIONER

Climate Change poses serious challenges to the global and the local community. The issue reached the media, hence became focal point of interest, due to the increased effects of climate activism what one can label as a “Greta Thunberg effect”, after a young activist leading the Fridays for Future movement.

To understand the magnitude of the issue one need to see the complex interrelationship between profit orientation

of businesses, the related management practices, and their relation to the natural environment.

The complexity of the climate change is the major factor when it comes to the difficulties to tackle it. Humanity has already proven able to solve global environmental matters with the ozone layer issue but is currently failing to successfully address the climate crisis.

The scale regarding different disciplines, levels of uncertainty, dispute regarding general values on a global level and the clear urgent decisions that must be taken and actions to mitigate the problem, all create a ‘wicked’ problem as it was described by Rittel and Webber (1973) urban planners of Los Angeles. Climate change as a dispute is not a new discovery of the 21st century, however, humanity did not act with the level of urgency and presently, the outcome of global warming is questionable. The expression of ‘wicked problem’ is a

good indicator and starting point to our discussion on the actual state of our planet.

STATE OF THE PLANET

Today, it's hard to ignore the news headlines continuously revealing new insights into the current state of the planet, as the consequences of a lack of actions is being felt worldwide. The World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual Global Risk Report documents the top risks to the global economy. In 2021 the top five risks were predominately within the environmental category, apart from one in the social category namely extreme weather, climate action failure, natural disasters, human environmental damage, infectious diseases and bio-diversity loss (WEF, 2021, p. 14).

The United Nations also developed a programme which address 17 issues related to the sustainable development, that need urgent attention. Earth system scientists (Rockström et al. 2009) developed a rather disturbing model to demonstrate the severe state of the Earth while showing nine planetary boundaries and their level of exhaustion (figure 1).

Dark blue in figure 1 indicates the recent state where the boundaries are already exhausted and urgent action needs to be taken. It can be seen that climate crisis is one issue together with biodiversity loss and nitrogen cycle imbalance.

Earth system science is a complex adaptive system and can be summarized in five points:

1. The interaction between physical, chemical, biological cycles and energy fluxes that provide the necessary conditions for life on the planet.
2. The planet is a materially closed system apart from an external primary energy source – the Sun.
3. Human beings are an integral part of the system.
4. The planet is a complex dynamic adaptive system in which internal forces and feedbacks trigger changes that occur within the materially closed system.

5. Theory of complexity – many changes do not occur in a linear and predictable fashion (Steffen et al., 2004).

The list is clear, indicating that humanity and a wicked, often unpredictable nature of the issue are the elements we are struggling to act against.

To comprehend how the Planet arrived at this stage, we need to understand what happened?

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PLANET?

The Anthropocene dashboard developed by Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin (2018) demonstrates the cause of the human activities from the discovery of the Americas, and their escalation with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The general approach of the business society with a 'Business as usual' conventional management thinking not converting into results when it is analysed from the Earth system indicators perspective is a major problem.

Climate change is one of the indicators that humanity is not performing well. Both Earth system scientists and management experts have strongly argued that the management of the planet should be in accordance with the boundaries to prevent catastrophic outcomes (Rockström et al., 2009; Whiteman, Walker and Perego, 2013).

There is a steady and inevitable growth in carbon emissions. This process is commonly understood as the 'greenhouse effect', where heat from the sun gets trapped on the Earth's surface, thus increasing the temperature. Many believe that management education attributed to the recent state, as conventional thinking believes that environmental issues can be easily fixed. This thinking actually fails when facing a complex challenge such as climate change. Elinor Ostrom, a Nobel prize holder economist explains that a falsely assumed simplicity and circumventing trust in scholars and scientists to find simple models to solve complex social-ecological issues is underestimated (2007).



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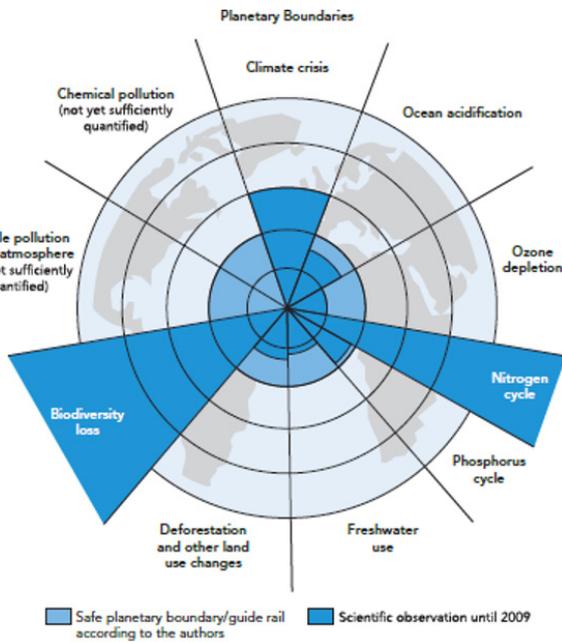


Figure 1 Planetary Boundaries (Source: Knights and Willmott, 2022, p.507)

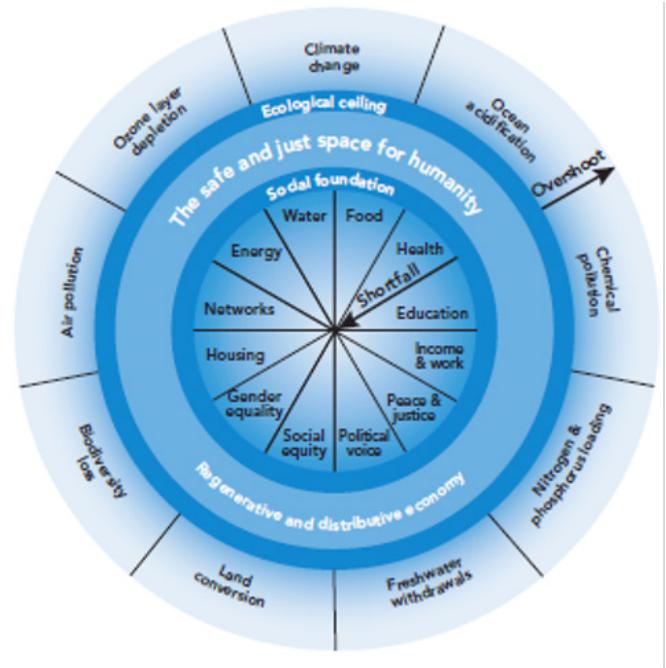


Figure 2 Social boundaries and safe operating systems (Source: Knights and Willmott, 2022, p524)

WHAT CAN WE DO?

As previously discussed, a multifaceted issue needs complex adaptive system thinking. Raworth (2017) presents a critique to conventional management thinking. The combination of planetary boundaries and the socio-ecological factors should offer point to a right direction (figure 2). In this sense, we need to understand that surprises are anticipated, and coping strategies need to be accepted. The nature of the planet dynamic systems, which is difficult to predict do not leave much leeway for further hesitation.

Management education, hence, the behaviour of business stakeholders plays a significant role when it comes to the solution. Scientists' views may be different but are crucial in creating consensus and appreciating the transdisciplinary approach to the challenge. The already perceived solution would be the application of sustainable practices, however without radical policy changes they are unlikely to materialise.

Karp and Goulding (1995) argue that without incentives to businesses and likewise to consumers, backed by rigid law enforcement and supported by voluntary compliance, the climate emergency cannot be solved.

Schwarz and Thompson (1990) emphasize the importance of understanding the cultural circumstances. Humanity is demonstrating significant differences when it comes to the relationship to the natural world, the economical arrangements, the meaning, and level needed to sustainability, if it can be achieved in a capitalist economical system. Such cultural theory highlights the value of education on a global scale to tame the climate emergency. Ideally it would lead to a more unified approach of living indifferently from the local beliefs and practices. However, one needs to admit that this solution is rather utopistic than realistic.

Elkington's (1997) triple bottom line approach conceptualised the need of a business approach based on the three Ps in the Planet-Profit-People triangles. This would present a balanced practise favourable to the future state of the planet. Perhaps, it is not enough to tackle climate change at this recent stage, and more radically, the so-called deep ecology business approach would need it. This would seek to repair the gap between human beings and nature, recognizes irreducible uncertainties and calls for radical change in the direction of contemporary society.

EFFECTS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE

To offer a comprehensive list of the impact of the climate change is out of the scope of this essay, however, significant perceived effects must be noted.

The change in weather conditions is the most significant indicator – what everyone feels. The shifting pattern of temperature distribution during the year, the seasons' typical weather changes (e.g. mild winter, extreme hot summer, water shortage) impact many industries, not only the "good feel factor" of the population. Global warming is a serious threat to nations living near the oceans, due to the rising sea-levels of melting ice caps. Malta is not an exception, however, not that endangered as, for example, the Maldives, where the mean sea level of the island is not more than 1,5 meters. This could lead to significant land loss and as consequence, mass migrations in the very near future.

Water shortage in Malta is significant. The fresh water supply can only support 50% of the population needs, so leads to a further decrease in natural rain water that will effect both the urban population and the agricultural activities of the island, eventually spiralling in a disruption towards sustainable local produce.

Scientists connect the effects of the exhaustion of the planetary boundaries with the COVID pandemic. Deforestation and biodiversity loss as well as the air pollution and the severity of COVID-19 symptoms are highlighted (Malm, 2020; Travaglio et al. 2021).

The list of further sustainability related challenges related in the Maltese island to the land use and population density, to waste management, biodiversity loss, air quality and energy resource questions need to be added to the previously mentioned ones as highly problematic.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be argued that there is still relatively long way to find the appropriate solution to solve climate change. The 'wicked' problem is posing an enormous challenge, which requires a multidisciplinary cooperation and willingness from regulatory and private stakeholders, as well as a radical behavioural change from the humanity. Based on the best available science we should not let time pressure us to find a more radical way in dealing with the climate change but need to be proactive before it's too late.

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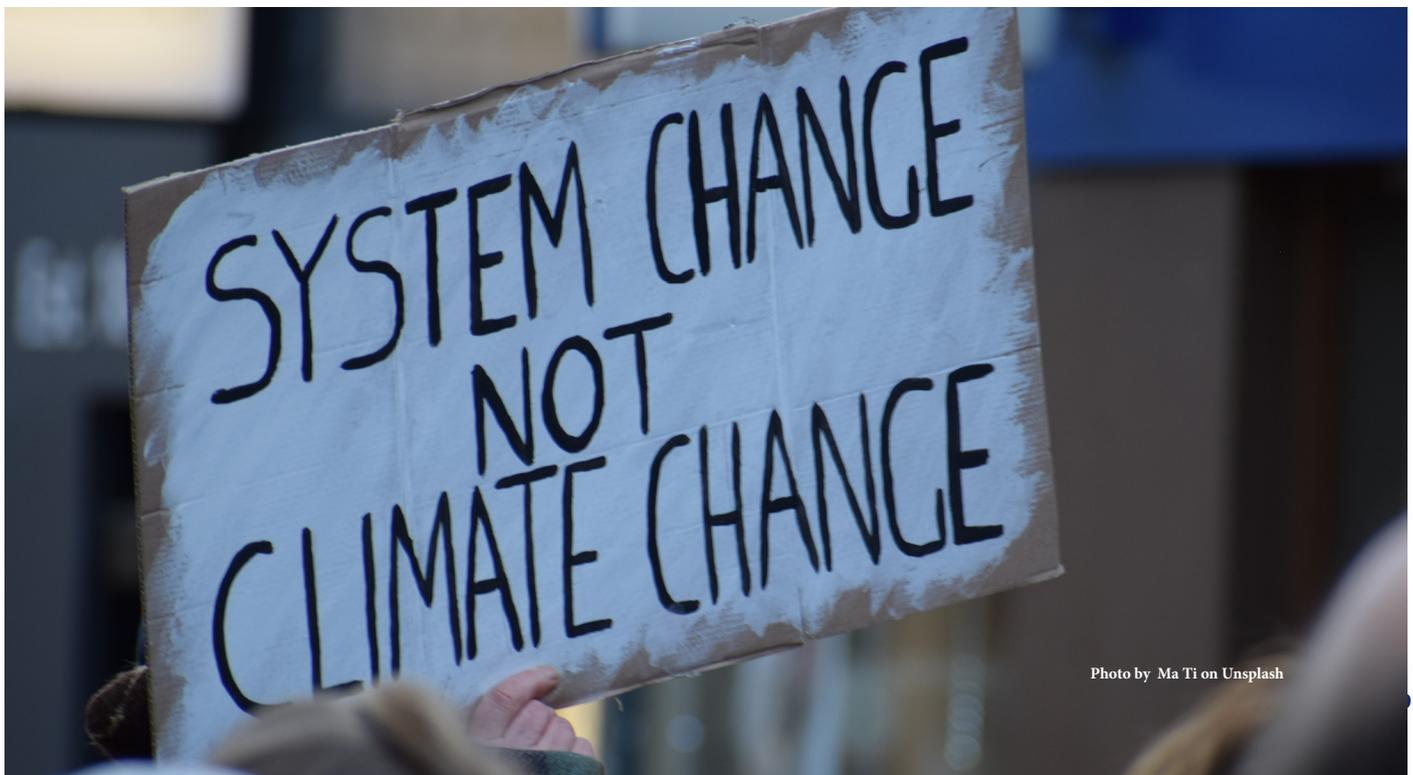
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Incoming tourism from Japan

BY TOMIE MCCARTHY,
HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN TOURIST GUIDING

When I started working as a travel agent in Malta in 2007, most Japanese tourists used package tours, since tours were mainly sold through travel agencies in Japan. Their main promotion was either through their websites or brochures displayed at travel agencies' offices. Most people who had booked expensive private tours were wealthy people or people who had already travelled around the world so that customers sought a new destination. However, the relationship between Malta and Japan is not limited to the travel industry.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALTA AND JAPAN?

The Diplomatic relationship between Malta and Japan started in 1965, after Malta gained independence from the United Kingdom. But before that, during World War I, Malta was a British colony, and a detachment of His Majesty the Japanese were stationed in Malta to protect Allied ships in the Mediterranean from enemy naval attacks. In June 1917, the Japanese destroyer 'Sakaki' was bombed near Crete by an Austrian U-boat, killing many of the crew on board. There is a Japanese war memorial commemorating that at Kalkara Naval Cemetery in Malta. Family members of the deceased sometimes visit to lay flower wreaths or may be included in group tours. [Shiga, 2022] On the other hand, the economic relationship between the two countries is also active. Successful Malta-based companies export tuna to Japan. The tuna industry is a major part of the Maltese economy and a major export commodity to Japan. On the other hand, Japanese second-hand cars are imported and have been popular for many years.

Before Covid-19 the number of Japanese tourists annually in Malta was around 25,000, and an additional 4,000 English

learning students [Times of Malta, 2022]. The number of visitors from Japan now is three times more than when I started to work in Malta in 2007. The study shows that this boom started around 2013 [Bank, 2020]. One of the reasons was the number of flights via the Middle East such as Emirates, Turkish Air, and Qatar air increased, making it easier to access Malta, thus Japanese people's interest in Malta increased. Also, Malta has become recognized even by the younger generation through digital marketing tools such as Instagram, Twitter, and LINE, which is a common social media application in Japan. A youth-targeted marketing strategy resulted in increased sales of low-cost tours.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE JAPANESE ECONOMIC SITUATION AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

As in other countries, Japan is experiencing a raised cost of living and energy prices, higher airfares due to rising fuel surcharges, along with depreciation of the Japanese Yen. Moreover, many airlines are still reducing the number of flights from Japan to Europe, and there are no direct flights to Malta, so it will take time for the number of tourists to return to as they were pre-Covid-19.

HOW TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY TO RETURN TO NORMAL AFTER COVID-19 CRISIS AND ITS ECONOMIC CRISIS,

Compared to 15 years ago and before the Covid-19 pandemic, Malta has become more accessible, however, mass tourism has often fallen into price competition, and the focus has been on accepting a large number of tourists rather than quality of their trips.

Travel agencies should create niche tours, of a high quality that competitors do not offer, along with, other ordinary tours throughout the year. They should market to wealthy, retired customers who would love to visit

World Heritage sites in the low season in Malta, where there are cheaper flights, cheaper hotel rates, and good weather for sightseeing.

They should continue to target language students for the young generation using digital marketing, while distinguishing themselves from competitors, and adding internship proposals that are also attractive for students. ITS provides a variety of courses giving an opportunity for many students, including many foreigners, making it a great selling point for Japanese students who wish to continue learning and seek their future career path, who would also love living in Malta.



In Conclusion, high-quality service and niche tours can be marketed and sold throughout all seasons, along with general year-round tours that bring a constant stream of people to Malta, and brings them back too. This is a very important element for sustainable tourism, as well as for the Maltese economy, which requires regular, as well as new, eager tourists.



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Water on a Small Island State: A Hydrological Tour of Malta

BY CHRISTOPHER MERCIECA,
HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN TOURIST GUIDING

INTRODUCTION

Though the concept of niche tourism remains a contested one, it is generally understood as a targeted tourism offering, with a particular segment of the market in mind, as opposed to a generic product designed for mass consumption (Robinson, Heitmann, & Dieke, 2011). Framed slightly differently, the process of creating a niche tourism product can be seen as an effort to design a product with the specific needs of customers in mind. As such, then, any tour specifically designed to the needs and interests of a particular group (as opposed to a mass consumption standardised tour, designed to have something to please everyone) can be said to constitute niche tourism.

This assignment follows a hypothetical case of a multinational group of hydrologists and environmental policymakers visiting Malta for a conference. It is designed to offer an entertaining and informative full-day experience on the side of the conference, exploring different periods of Malta's general history as seen through the experience of water; a basic need necessary for human survival which is in short natural supply due to the islands' arid climate.

The following sections provide some background information and justification for each of the potential stops on this tour. The itinerary of the tour itself is then presented at the end of the article.

WIED BABU AND IL-MISQA

Wied Babu provides an ideal starting point to explain the geology of the Maltese Islands, on which the entire hydrological system depends. The Maltese Islands are composed of sedimentary rock, stratified into five main layers as shown below.

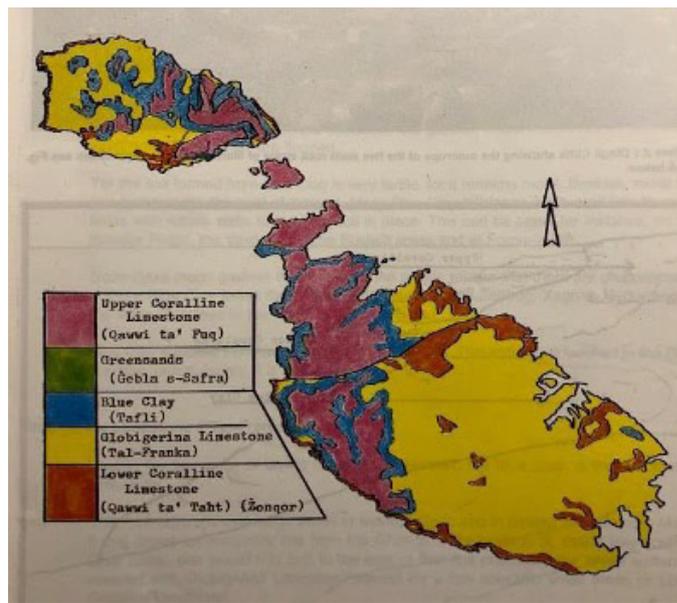


Figure 1: The five major rock strata in the Maltese Islands. Image Credit - (Azzopardi, 1995)

With the exception of Blue Clay, the other layers of rock are porous. This therefore allows the limited rainwater which falls on the islands to percolate through the rocks, until it reaches the mean sea level aquifer and its water table (Azzopardi, 1995).

Wied Babu is a fine example of a river valley, formed by the passage of water over time which gradually wore away at the limestone. In this case, a deep ravine (also known as a gorge) was formed since the rock (mostly Lower Coralline Limestone) was relatively resistant and the speed of the stream rapid (Schembri, Lanfranco, Farrugia, Schembri, & Sultana, 1987). It thus offers an insight to a time when the Maltese climate was much wetter than today.

At the nearby Misqa Tanks, one can then observe some of the earliest known human interventions for the collection of rainwater in Malta. These are situated close to the

megalithic sites of Mnajdra and Hagar Qim and generally dated to the same Temple Period or shortly after it and consist of a group of rock-cut water cisterns which are fed by rainwater runoff from a rocky outcrop. They display an adaptation to life in the southern part of the island, which has relatively few springs (Stroud, 2015).

THE RABAT AREA

Moving on to the Rabat Uplands, one observes an entirely different water system. Since all five rock layers are present in this area, rainwater passes through the topmost rock strata until it reaches the impermeable Blue Clay layer. It then gathers above this to form a perched water table (Azzopardi, 1995).



Figure 2: The Wied Babu gorge, as seen from the viewpoint off the main road.
Image Credit - Chris Mercieca



Figure 3: Aerial view of Misqa Tanks. Image Credit - Daniel Cilia (in Stroud, 2015)

Where a perched water table is present, places where the layer of Blue Clay is exposed lead to the formation of springs from which fresh water flows out unaided (Azzopardi, 1995). Many of these springs were enhanced in the past by the construction of rooms, such as the Knights-era structure at Ġhajj Ħamiem below the walls of Mdina. Its name probably originates from a corruption of the Arabic *hammam* meaning public bath (Zarb Dimech, 2016). The washhouse has several deep troughs and was likely a popular haunt of the residents of Mdina. Another spring is also to be found just a few meters away at Ġhajj Ġheriexem.



Figure 4: Ġhajj Ħamiem spring below the walls of Mdina. Image Credit - Google Street View

The nearby Sentini Reservoir of Fiddien was constructed in the 1950s, with the aim of collecting water from yet another spring. On a stone building situated at the entrance to Fiddien valley, a plaque states in Latin that “this is a gauging chamber for the two 12 inch cast iron pipes taking water from a spring nearby on to the Sentini reservoir” (Borg, 2002 as cited in Hallett, 2015, pp. 47-48).



Figure 5: An extensive layer of Blue Clay as seen inside the Mdina railway tunnel.
Image Credit - Chris Mercieca

It is also important to point out that the Fiddien area feeds two major water systems which will be seen later on - Wied il-Qlejgħa (better known as Chadwick Lakes) and the Wignacourt Aqueduct.

Chadwick Lakes consists of a series of dams, named after Sir Oswald Chadwick, who oversaw their construction in 1886. Their function is to retain rainwater flowing down the Wied il-Qlejgħa valley, giving it



Figure 6: One of the dams at Chadwick Lakes. Image Credit - TVM (Zammit, 2018)

time to percolate through the rock so as to replenish the aquifer. Besides this, water may of course also be drawn directly for irrigation and keeps the soil around the valley moist (Azzopardi, 1995).

THE WIGNACOURT AQUEDUCT

The tour proceeds by driving towards Valletta, passing along the Wignacourt Aqueduct in Fleur-de-Lys and Hamrun. Commissioned by Grand Master Aloff de Wignacourt in the early 1600s and constructed by two engineers, Natale Masucci and Bontadino de Bontadini, the arched aqueducts form part of a large-scale project designed to bring freshwater from the Rabat-Dingli area to Valletta by gravity (Azzopardi, 1995). Water flowed through underground pipes for most of its length, with the arched sections traversing uneven depressions in the terrain. Notable features are the Fleur-de-Lys Gate, Tower of St. Joseph and Floriana water tower, amongst others.

VALLETTA

A brief walk into Valletta's Parliament Square and a stop at the *Omnibus Idem* fountain gives a sense of completion to the drive along the Wignacourt Aqueduct. This fountain, whose inscription translates as *the same to all*, was originally located on the Knights' Ferreria (where Palazzo Buttigieg-Francia is now situated) and was moved several times before being placed in its current location during the recent City Gate Project (Malta Independent, 2011). It is only one of several fountains to have been installed by the Knights in Valletta and Floriana, following the successful completion of Wignacourt's project.

To round up the Knights' Period, it may be brought to the attention of the group at this point that in the Order of St. John's initial evaluation of Malta, they found it arid and ill-suited to their needs, with its water described as "salty and putrid" (Sapiano, Micallef, Attard, & Zammit, 2008, p. 100). Yet just a few decades later, they had successfully transformed the islands, with Valletta having plentiful flowing water and in fact becoming one of the most advanced cities of its time.



Figure 7: The Reverse Osmosis Plant in Pembroke. Image Credit – Malta Independent (2018)

As a transition to contemporary times, the view from the Upper Barrakka Gardens will offer a suitable backdrop for explaining the continued population growth, especially in the Harbour region, making

Malta one of the most densely populated countries in the world today. Despite the large-scale projects undertaken by the British such as those in Chadwick Lakes and a further upgrading of the Wignacourt Aqueduct system, post-independence Malta was plagued by water shortages.

Standing now in Castille Square, surrounded by the likes of Paul Boffa, George Borg Olivier and Dom Mintoff, the politicisation of water can be mentioned. The 1980s and 1990s in particular were characterised by water shortages, generally in regions of the island that tended to lean towards the party not in power and alternating with changes in Government (Vella, 2017). Water was so high on the political agenda that successive elections were contested primarily on water and energy issues, and protests were held across the islands such as one in which "hundreds of Vittoriosa residents vented their anger at years of water supply cuts...banging buckets and bottles and shouting 'we want water'" (Calvert, 1993 as quoted in Vella, 2017, p. 103).

THE PEMBROKE REVERSE OSMOSIS PLANT

Though energy issues remain high on the national political agenda today, the provision of water seems to have stabilised in the previous decades. This has been made possible in spite of a growing population largely due to reliance on Reverse Osmosis. The Maltese Islands are currently served by three large-scale Reverse Osmosis plants, in Pembroke, Ċirkewwa and Għar Lapsi. Together, these provide for approximately 58% of Malta's water consumption (Water Services Corporation, n.d.). A fourth Reverse Osmosis plant is currently under construction in Gozo.

CONCLUSION

As this brief paper has shown, water quite literally permeates all layers of Malta's history. Ever since the Temple Period, humans have been shaping the natural environment of the islands in order to collect water, from the Misqa Tanks right up to the 21st Century Reverse Osmosis plants. A hydrological tour of Malta thus offers a double benefit; it allows the guide to specifically target the group's interests, yet still allows for a comprehensive overview of the major periods in the islands' history.

Detailed Itinerary for a Full-Day Tour

The below tour aims to present the sites in chronological order, though compromises had to be made for practical reasons.

- 09:00 Meet group in St. Julian's
- 09:45 Arrive at Wied Babu viewpoint
- 10:15 Arrive at Hagar Qim Visitor Centre & walk to Misqa Tanks
- 11:15 Depart for Rabat
- 11:45 Visit Għajn Ħamiem and Fiddien
- 12:45 Arrive at Chadwick Lakes
- 13:15 Depart Chadwick Lakes for Valletta, via Fleur-de-Lys
- 13:45 Arrive in Valletta. Visit Parliament Square, Upper Barrakka Gardens and Castille Square
- 15:00 Depart for Pembroke
- 15:30 Arrive at Pembroke RO Plant.
Tour to be conducted by WSC staff
- 17:00 Return to St. Julian's

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