

JURISDICTIONAL CAPACITY AND LANDSCAPE HERITAGE: A CASE STUDY OF MALTA & GOZO

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Amongst the citizens of the Mediterranean archipelagic state of Malta, the current broad understanding of landscape as heritage is that it is a key component of the tourism industry but somewhat dead and alien to daily modern life. In its material expression, heritage is tolerable and acceptable as long as it is functional; highly appreciated if appropriated as a private good; but insufferable if it clashes with private and individual interests, foremost amongst which is construction. Moreover, the relationship of the Maltese with the past is also disengaged, elusive and uncertain: they remain bereft of a unifying national consciousness that includes some general agreement about the salient features of their own history, thanks in part to a fierce, political factionalism.

And yet, this paper argues that the Maltese may be energized to develop a better appreciation for their island and its past, if a stronger sense of national identity, and a 'progressive sense of place' are introduced. This would appear much more feasible on the smaller island of Gozo than on the main island of Malta. A virtuous cycle could develop between a stronger sense of pride in local landscape heritage as a working, living culture which in turn fosters sustainable development, both of these being driven by a securing and flexing of a stronger jurisdictional capacity.

A Preamble

When I moved to live in the quaint sea-side town of Marsascala, Malta, in 1985, I was intrigued to note that one of the streets close to my house was called *Triq il-Katakombi*, Catacombs Street. Upon further inquiry, I was told that there are indeed catacombs dating back to the Roman Period in Marsascala; the catacombs were some 40 metres long, and had Roman inscriptions. There was one snag however: the catacombs were right below the street that bore their name; the entrance was a rather shoddy and obtrusive stone structure located on the side of the street, covered with a padlocked rusting metal cover, located just 1 metre away from the drive-way of a detached villa. For some time, the catacombs were actually sign-posted and the key to the padlock was held by the Marsascala Local Council. However, the adjacent villa has since been sold, demolished and 2 new luxurious

detached villas have taken its place. Their sale price on an international web-site is quoted as: € 390,000 (European Estates Agents Union, 2006). In the process of construction, the offending protrusion from the street has been removed. Any evidence of these catacombs has now literally been buried. The catacombs are now out of sight, and out of mind. And that is a relief, since a much worse fate might have befallen.

This episode is typical of the outcome of heritage assets whose management and appreciation seem to run contrary to the enjoyment of private goods in the Maltese Islands. The profusion of 'culture' or 'history' on an island archipelago with 7 millennia of civilization perched vertiginously on just 316 km² is so widespread that the chances of stumbling on the past as one tries to embellish the present or craft the future is significant. Moreover, the prevalent attitude amongst the locals is to keep mum about any such discoveries lest that watchdog, the Superintendent of Heritage, invokes the law to stop construction.

What does this example suggest about Maltese attitudes to culture? How does this episode reflect on the locals' attitude to the relics of the past? How useful are the lessons of the Malta story to other regions that find themselves located on the periphery of economic development and yet are rich in heritage sites?

This paper focuses on the Mediterranean archipelagic microstate of Malta (total land area: 316 square km), independent since 1964, and comprising two main inhabited islands: Malta (246 square km) and Gozo (67 square km), separated by an 8-km strait. Written by a Maltese academic working abroad since 2003, this paper benefits from a physical and emotional detachment between its author and his focus. It thus serves as a useful platform from which to propose how the general attitude of the Maltese to their cultural and historical heritage suffers from a serious disconnect, one brought about by a nagging concern for the short-term and the present, as well as by a weak sense of national consciousness. The past, it seems, and echoing David Lowenthal (1985), is becoming a foreign country, the victim of an encroaching detachment. This attitude may, in obliterating the past for the sake of the present and the short-term, cancel Malta's future.

Part I: Rich People in a Poor State; with an Uncertain Rapport to a Rich Heritage

David Lowenthal again reminds us (2006) that the wealth, variety and seaborne accessibility of Mediterranean societies since late prehistory have rendered the region's cultural heritage as the world's most widely acclaimed.

However, since the fall of the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean has been increasingly disadvantaged, its legacy beleaguered, its vanguard role in cultural vibrancy and economic ascendancy marginalized. Two thousand years of pillaging and environmental despoliation, religious vendettas, imperial conquest, colonial subjugation, ‘sea, sun and sand’ mass tourism and (of late) waves of irregular migration have left Mediterranean peoples today with larger population densities but fewer resources and weaker infrastructures than those of trans-Atlantic or trans-Alpine states.

This has serious implications for the care and control of Mediterranean landscape heritage. That heritage may be both the region’s self-defining pride and its economic mainstay. Yet, it is at the same time a crippling burden to protect and maintain, let alone interpret and celebrate. It is everywhere threatened by human and natural attrition: weathering and erosion, illicit excavation and tomb robbery, souvenir hunting, graffiti marking, urbanization, high population density and its consequences, including the exigencies of the ‘machine that changed the world’: the automobile (Womack *et al.*, 1991).

This state of affairs is clearly witnessed in the Maltese archipelago. A crop of arid, semi-desert, water-less and tree-less limestone blocks in the centre of the Mediterranean sea, the islands bore 20,000 poor and miserable souls with difficulty in the mid-1530s; they now bear the full weight of a sovereign state with 400,000 residents and 1.2 million annual visitors. The Maltese Islands are thus clearly the country with by far the highest population density in Europe, a situation that exacerbates tensions and conflicts on land use. Some 25% of its total land area is currently built-up. Housing stock is running at some 20% excess of supply over demand. Space is at a premium. A few centimetres of deviation from a presumed plot division line is likely to lead to a court case, along with much fuming and puffing. When 10 countries joined the European Union in 2004, Malta was the only one to obtain a permanent derogation, limiting foreigners from buying secondary residences on the islands (e.g. Xuereb, 2005: 3). While all this is going on, the Maltese must contend with an enormous amount of artifacts and cultural assets that jostle each other for priority conservation and management. A number of these—like Ġgantija, Haġar Qim and the Tarxien Temples Complexes—have been included on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and thus expect from the Maltese people the responsibility to protect and preserve them for the benefit and enjoyment, not just of the locals, but for all humankind, now and into the future. Yet, even these special sites have not been spared by either the construction industry or the interests of hunters and trappers who envisage open spaces for rather narrowly defined purposes.² The bulk of historic sites in the Maltese Islands, meanwhile,

struggle to attract attention. The saga of the Marsascala catacombs described above is suggestive. Standing stones or giant's rocks survive surreptitiously between two rows of houses. Perhaps, in some cases, these assets' best defence against the practices of appropriation for private use or vandalism is, simply and sadly, wanton abandon and benign neglect.

For those who look on 'from the outside in', it is easy to adopt a judgmental stance. The Maltese are not appreciative enough of their priceless heritage, they may say. *Biskuttini f'halq il-hmir* (literally translated as: cakes in donkey's mouths), would be an appropriate Maltese proverb to describe the lackadaisical attitude of the Maltese to matters local and historical. In their enthusiasm to sample and experience the past, foreign observers may forget that Malta is *not* a living museum, and that its people are *not* just commodified quaint natives, but members of a society firmly wedded, for better or for worse, to the 21st Century (e.g. Boissevain, 1996: 235). Nevertheless, value-laden judgments will not take us anywhere, except down a *cul-de-sac* of recriminations. What is needed is a better informed, inductive understanding of the Maltese attitudes towards cultural heritage, 'from the inside out'. That might then help chart a way towards a stronger appreciation of cultural heritage, and of its link with economic development.

The truth is that there is some space for the physical residues of past history and current heritage in the contemporary life of the Maltese. First of all, various of these enduring artifacts have persevered or transformed themselves into providing some kind of contemporary use-value or service, with varying degrees of success (e.g. Macdonald, 1996; Prösler, 1996). Innumerable churches still provide social and spiritual gratification; an auberge has been turned into the prime minister's office; palaces have been turned into museums; coastal batteries turned into restaurants; triumphant arches turned into traffic islands or roundabouts; dolmens into hotel garden sculptures; and, of course, many sites, under *Heritage Malta's* tutelage, help to nourish the vital tourism industry.

Both old farmhouses and old town houses of a certain charm have now become especially attractive properties for the *nouveau riche*. Property conversion is not only big business but a major expression of a triple renewal: of the past, of the countryside, and of old urban cores (particularly in Vittoriosa and Senglea); Jeremy Boissevain reminds us that this exercise thus becomes a manifestation of an inversion of both time and space (e.g., Boissevain, 1986). In a similar vein, Reuben Grima & David Zammit (1996) have commented insightfully about the revaluation of old and weathered limestone (*sejjieh dekorattiv* and *tal-fil*) as a trendy and sought-after material for modern house façades. It is as if local heritage is today appreciated best

when it is privatized, appropriated, reinvented and consumed as a modern 'kitsch' appendage to personal property.

The focus on personal property is of course absolutely fundamental to an understanding of the socio-economic psyche of the residents of the Maltese islands. Like many resource poor small islands, the construction industry has a huge multiplier effect on the local economy; there are also significant cost advantages involved in using globigerina limestone as construction material—one of the few locally quarried (but nevertheless finite) natural resources, which thus does not have to be imported. Property assumes a towering importance as economic and cultural capital in Maltese society. In spite (or because) of the phenomenal cost of residences, many Maltese would undergo enormous sacrifices to purchase an owner-occupied dwelling. An own house is a major and safe investment; a source of family pride; a fortress to protect its owners against an all-intrusive society where privacy comes at a premium; an heirloom for the children. Major industrial and service establishments may not turn an annual profit, and yet they would continue to operate in the full knowledge that handsome profits will be made when the establishment is eventually sold. When there is money to spare and an own house is already available, a second summer house is a favourite acquisition. Housing is such a key rampant investment that no Maltese Government has yet mustered the courage of taxing it. As Margaret Mizzi from Sannat (Gozo, Malta) argues, Maltese Islanders remain comfortably wedded to 'The Stone Age' (personal communication, November 2006, emphasis in original). These insights collectively explain the glut of housing in the space-starved archipelago,³ the willingness to hold on to vacant property until it sells at a reasonable profit;⁴ and the continued tendency of appraising public space as potential private real estate (e.g. Darmanin, 1994). This is perhaps why the environmental movement still only makes limited headway; and why so many are willing to condone the transformation (*read* development) of a *xaghri* (literally, a 'wasteland', an empty space) into building plots. This also explains why, in the choice between construction for private gain and maintaining a historic asset for the common good, the choice for the former is, usually, a foregone conclusion.

In true Southern Mediterranean character, the Maltese have a subconscious predilection for operating beyond the clutches of a rapacious state and its tax regime. Those in a position to do so enjoy and trade in a form of economic wealth that avoids taxation and thus rarely appears in the country's official statistics. All the more reason to do so now that Malta is, since 2004, a member of the European Union and whose legitimate claim to development funds depends on it *not* reaching a minimum of 75% of the

mean total gross national income of the EU member states. And, even were the citizens of the main island of Malta to reach that threshold, those on the sister island of Gozo are guaranteed to continue to benefit from development assistance if they do *not* make the grade in their own right.

What all this could mean is that the current broad understanding of landscape heritage amongst the Maltese is that it is a key component of the tourism industry but somewhat dead and alien to their daily modern lives; heritage (in its physical form) is tolerable and acceptable as long as it is functional; it is appreciated best if appropriated as a private good; but insufferable if it clashes with private and individual interests.

Moreover, the Maltese relationship with their past is also disengaged, elusive, uncertain. There is no general pride in the country's history, because (1) much of what is flouted as 'Maltese history' is not *their* country's history anyway, but a report of the sojourns and activities of imperial powers on the Maltese Islands (e.g. Cassar, 2006); (2) historical information is communicated in schools in the context of an exam-driven system that privileges knowledge and rote over experiential or emotional engagement; and (3) the only country in the world with five national days, the Maltese have serious difficulties in securing agreement on anything of national significance, thanks to a damaging and fierce, political factionalism (Baldacchino, 2002). Indeed, a fall-back to long-past episodes (like the Shipwreck of St Paul in AD 60; the Great Siege of 1565, or the Insurrection against the French over 1798–1800) is often evoked by the Maltese on the understanding that these long past events are non-contentious and unaffected by a duality of partisan interpretation. Matters get progressively worse, however, as one approaches the present.⁵

And yet, there may be a way in which the Maltese, and even more the Gozitans, can be energized to develop a better appreciation, a manifest pride, a positive and enduring emotional attachment to their island and its past (and not just its exploitable present). This route lies plainly through an assertiveness of the 'powers of jurisdiction' (Baldacchino & Milne, 2000) that the Maltese Islands obviously have (as a sovereign entity) and which Gozo appears to have (as a semi-recognized autonomy within the Maltese state).

Part II: National Consciousness and Jurisdictional Autonomy as Drivers for Economic Development and Cultural Appreciation

The constraints of small size and geographical separateness are sometimes presumed to render islands particularly economically 'vulnerable' (Briguglio, 1995; Streeten, 1993). However, conceptually, there are advantages as well

as disadvantages in smallness and isolation (Bertram & Poirine, 2007). Proponents of the vulnerability hypothesis have introduced the countervailing concept of ‘resilience’, placed in a dialectical relationship to vulnerability, to produce indeterminacy of outcomes (Briguglio *et al.*, 2005).

Moreover, from an empirical point of view, judged on the basis of conventional economic indicators, many of the world’s small jurisdictions are doing relatively well. Seven of the ten most prosperous *per capita* jurisdictions in the world—Iceland, Aruba, Bermuda, Bahrain, French Polynesia, Jersey and Luxembourg—have populations of less than 1 million, and all except one is an island (*The Economist*, 2003; CIA World Factbook, 2007). Note also that, of the above seven candidates, four—Aruba, Bermuda, French Polynesia and Jersey—are *not* sovereign states and would be defined today as ‘sub-national island jurisdictions’ (Baldacchino & Milne, 2006). Almost 40% of small island economies (with populations of less than 3 million) had a GNP *per capita* above US\$9,200 in 2001, in contrast to just 18% of large states (with populations of over 10 million) and 26% of the world’s 207 states and territories (World Bank, 2004; Armstrong & Read, 2003: 245). Small island economies have significantly *higher* per capita income than others in their region (Easterly & Kraay, 2000: 2024, emphasis in original); while those with close political linkages to former colonial powers now exhibit among the highest levels of economic prosperity (Bertram, 2004). Empirically, on balance, island economies appear quite robust in a globalizing world. The ‘vulnerability index’ is positively, not negatively, related to *per capita* income: this means that, ironically, the more ‘vulnerable’ the economy of a country, the higher is that state’s *per capita* income (Armstrong & Read, 2002). Moreover, various small island jurisdictions have been lucky in not being able even to contemplate autarkist and protectionist development strategies. They have had to export—staples, manufactures, services and people—or perish. Lacking a hinterland, they have worked best by transcending the limitations of their small physical environment and forestall the development of an agricultural-driven economy, because they had no other viable economic alternative (Hintjens & Newitt, 1992): Hong Kong, Ireland, Malta, Mauritius, Singapore and Taiwan are good examples of this (Streeten, 1993: 199). A combination of offshore finance services and high-quality tourism stands out as the strategy of the most successful island economies today (Bertram & Poirine, 2007).

This scenario should be particularly uplifting for Malta, but all the more so for Gozo (population = approx. 30,000). Unlike its self-defining geography, the truth is that the island of Gozo (with its rocky outliers) is elusive to define jurisdictionally. Without going into the merits of the situation, it is

fairly common knowledge amongst the Maltese that, as a territory, Gozo enjoys, and has enjoyed intermittently throughout its history, a clutch of jurisdictional privileges that no other sub-territory of the Maltese islands has ever entertained, let alone benefitted from. This is because the ‘mainland’ Maltese have a love-hate relationship with Gozo’s autonomy: the allegedly parochial and money-wise Gozitans are the regular butt of (mainland Malta-driven) jokes, commentaries and proverbs; and most mainland Maltese cannot swallow why the residents of Gozo have their own special Gozo-Malta ferry fares, their own identity cards, and even their own Minister. Here is a typical ‘letter to the editor’ of a daily newspaper on this subject:

“I have no idea why local politicians are hell bent on giving Gozo its own identity or near status, unless it’s for some sort of political gain. Gozo has an identity; it is an integral part of the State of Malta. I also can’t comprehend why Parliamentarians, when addressing the nation, constantly say “*Il-Maltin u l-Ghawdxin kollha*”, [“All the Maltese and Gozitans”] as if people who live in Gozo were not Maltese!” (Grima, 2006)

Politicians may pander to the presumed national distinctiveness of the Gozitans with the phrase “*Maltin u Ghawdxin*” (Maltese and Gozitans).⁷ However, they have been extra-careful not to let the word ‘Gozo’ appear in the 1974 Republican Constitution, except in the definition of what territory constitutes ‘the Maltese state’. This is arguably because Gozo has serious claims to autonomy. During the Roman occupation, Gozo was a *municipium*, autonomous of that of Malta, with a republican sort of Government that minted its own coins (Island of Gozo web-site). It enjoyed another brief period of formal autonomy, between 28 October 1798 and 5 September 1800, granted to Gozo by Napoleon Bonaparte after his conquest of the Maltese Islands (*e.g.* Bezzina, 2005; Debono, no date). Ecclesiastically, it has been a diocese separate from Malta, and with its own Bishop, since 1864 (Bezzina, 1985). Gozo had its own Civic Council from 1961–1973, and at a time when ‘mainland’ Malta had no local government. It has its own Minister since 1987 (and except for the 22 months of Labour Government in 1996–1998): this being the only Minister in the Cabinet to have a strictly territorial rather than a functional portfolio. It has claims to a distinct culture (*e.g.* Briguglio & Bezzina, 1995) and a distinct dialect (Xuerab, 1996). In spite of the ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings that the terms evoke, 92% of 300 respondents considered themselves ‘primarily Gozitan’ as against 5.7% who considered themselves ‘primarily Maltese’ in a June 2005 poll (TOM, 2005). No other part of Malta comes close. Moreover, it has (so far) served as a single electoral constituency in national politics (with the neighbouring islet of Comino—2.7 square km) for many

decades. A recent debate about the possible removal of the Gozitan village of Ghajnsielem (and its 2,000 voters) from the 13th electoral district and its annexation to the 12th electoral district on Mainland Malta has especially galvanized some Gozitans in agitating successfully for Gozo's claim to be officially considered as a distinct region within the Maltese state, leading to a Constitutional amendment, with the backing of both political parties in the House of Representatives (e.g. DOI, 2005, MaltaMedia News, 2007). Claims for the formal recognition of Gozo as a sub-national jurisdiction have escalated of late, especially in the run-up to European Union accession in 2004 and once again in 2007 since the Maltese state may be granted a sixth, additional Member to the European Parliament (Masini, 2007; Gozo news web-site, 2007).

But the Maltese political elite are not exactly warming up to these suggestions. Gozo remains the major implicit headache of all Malta-based politicians and political parties. Intra and inter-generational partisan allegiance in Gozo is weaker than in Malta; electoral swings in Gozo (as a single constituency) are typically wider than those found in any of the other 12 electoral constituencies. No wonder that Gozo ends up hosting the largest proportion of mass meetings per district in the run-up to general elections. This mainland nervousness is also premised on the fact that the only two regionally-specific political parties to have successfully elected candidates to the Maltese Parliament since the Second World War have been Gozo based: both parties fielded candidates in the 1947 general election.

As a sub-national jurisdiction within the Maltese state, the Gozitans have every incentive to adopt a (sub-)national consciousness that uses the 'mainland' of Malta as an oppositional out-group. Whereas both Malta and Gozo are geographical islands, the insular psyche, and the reference to insularity in daily parlance, are much more common in Gozo than in Malta: and understandably so, since Malta's own insular condition is more easily eclipsed by its standing as a sovereign state. Moreover, Malta may qualify as a 'nationless state', where partisan allegiance and rivalry take on the character of ethnic conflict (Baldacchino, 2002). Of course, Gozo is not spared from this polarity. However, its obvious definitive geography, its distinct culture and history, and the usage of reference to Malta and the Maltese by the Gozitans as 'the Other' can collectively serve to nurture a stronger sense of national (here meaning Gozitan) consciousness. This, in turn, can translate into a more robust sense of self and civic pride. 'Mainland' Malta, in contrast, has no clear 'Other'.⁸ Like other small islands, Gozo is special because its 'geographical precision' facilitates a (unique) sense of place (Weale, 1992); a vibrant culture of migration (e.g. King & Strachan, 1980); an even stronger role and presence of

the Roman Catholic church in civil society;⁹ and an obvious sense of alterity with the rest of the world beyond the horizon. Place, and its shared definition, fosters, though it does not guarantee, a sense of ‘unitarism’ (Baldacchino, 1999). Gozo is less burdened than mainland Malta by the legacy of Maltese factional politics to define its past, since it has always been on the periphery, irrespective of the (mainland Malta-dominated) government of the day and its policies (*e.g.* Hache, 1998: 60, 64–65).

The pervasive allegiances, friendships and enmities resulting from long years of a partisan spoils system will make this strategy difficult but not impossible. In a subtle way, it is perhaps already being played out.

The development of a unifying consciousness does not only foster a stronger appreciation for one’s defining past; it also facilitates a more assertive engagement with the challenge of economic development. Proclaiming ‘the ability of a people to work together for common purposes and to trust each other ... is crucial for economic success’ (Coleman, 1988: 98). ‘The cornerstone of economic success is the creation of a society suffused with trust and social cooperation amongst its members’ (Srebrnik, 2000: 56). ‘If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference’ (Landes, 1998: 516). Societies tend to do a better job, culturally and economically, when they are well-run jurisdictions with open, export-gearred economies, harbouring an *ethnie* (a people), a ‘moral community’ with a shared history and language (*after* Smith, 1986; Katzenstein, 1985). Islands are typically blessed with the geographical physicality, social capital and historical attributes to facilitate this condition.

But, this is easier said than done: how does one bring about a unitary, unifying consciousness? How does one conceive of a ‘progressive sense of place’ (Massey, 1993: 66), dynamized and rendered vibrant by a people keen to express, manifest and locate it centrally within their life-world? A review of the literature and examples of ‘best practice’ suggests that vibrant and confident societies embody (as a minimum) the following four characteristics:

- A respect for the dialectic of island *roots* and *routes* (after Clifford, 1997; also DeLoughrey, 2007)—this suggest an openness to diversity and pluralism, with minimal social class and status barriers and tensions, in order to facilitate a flexible, supple, ‘learning organization’ setting.
- Transcending geophysical delineations by reaching out to the (relatively large) diasporic hinterland of islanders abroad—crucial for markets, and for flows of people and ideas, investment and entrepreneurship. The rhetoric of the skills/brain gain/drain also needs to be reined in;

the real challenge is not to prevent the mobile and able from leaving but to learn how eventually to tap their new skills and contacts for local purposes. One needs to cultivate an indigenous ‘glocal’ elite, one which is proud of its roots yet at ease in both local and global spaces (*after* Robertson, 1995).

- Ensuring that the administrative apparatus of the state (if dealing with a sovereign territory) is the embodiment of the nation. The political institutions inherited by many postcolonial states are guided by elites of questionable skill and are managed by poorly trained bureaucrats who place personal, group or political party interests above those of the state (Palmer, 1997: 217–227; Srebrnik, 2000: 65). A high level of popular confidence in the public service and political institutions is essential. An effective, educated and neutral bureaucracy facilitates the operations of both state and civil society.
- Expanding on the nature of understandings, to incorporate all forms of human and other natural expression; in other words, seeking a holistic sense of place. Island consciousness, for example, cannot fail to include a keen environmental sensitivity, heritage appreciation, and to find expression in all forms of art, song and literature.

These characteristics are the raw constituents of the ‘geometry of power’ (Massey, 1993). They are the manifestations of high levels of social capital which can catapult an island people into the world with bursting confidence in their ability to handle—together—whatever may be in store.

Of course, the development trajectory of small islands does not always help to generate such visions and facilitate the construction of such robust identities. Diseconomies of scale, resource scarcity (at times after imperialist despoliation) and absence of markets can easily engender and engrain a ‘dependency plus deficit’ pathology among island communities. This tends to reduce the public policy of the periphery to searches for the maximization of ‘rents’, including fiscal transfers (Kakazu, 1988; Poirine, 1995). Such societies would tend towards ‘cargo cults’ (Worsley, 1968). Vulnerability becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, in spite of contrary empirical evidence (Armstrong & Read, 2002). *Intrapreneurship* (working the system and deploying political and diplomatic acumen to maintain, rather than reduce, dependency flows) replaces *entrepreneurship*. Higher education reinforces the syndrome by exalting continental, modernizing paradigms: of knowledge, of curricula, of avenues for learning or employment. A string of regional

modernizing programmes blessed from the metropole becomes legitimate; their measurable effects—so many kilometres of tarmac or of laid sewage drains, so many new jobs, so many euros of direct investment—becoming a mesmerizing, yet facile, synonym for ‘development’. The local state becomes a reactive conduit for the receipt and distribution of external wealth, rather than a proactive promoter and instigator of local enterprise and wealth creation. In turn, the indigenous resources of the small and peripheral—including their traditions and customs—are devalued, labelled as primitive and dismissed as non-conducive to progress. The end-result is a structural impossibility to develop. Development ‘from the outside in’ looks and feels like common sense; but, as long as it is not ‘from the inside out’, can it ever be *good* sense (Baldacchino & Greenwood, 1998)?

“Governments will contribute to the development potential of small islands only if their efforts have the effect of supporting or enhancing the mobilization of *indigenous* island resources” (Bickerton, 1998: 257, emphasis added).

The focus on mobilization obliges a consideration of ‘sovereignty’: one other key parameter in the ‘culture as economic development’ equation. It can, in itself, constitute an indigenous island resource. Sovereignty, apart from itself facilitating identity and the inculcation of a progressive sense of place, provides the ‘jurisdictional capacity’ to structure and restructure local law and economic policy (e.g. Groome Wynne, 2007); it also enhances the stature of a location beyond its physical size. Jurisdiction thus stands out as a key primer for carving one’s economic destiny. Again, islands are lucky here, since islandness is almost certain to provide an inducement for some degree of political or administrative autonomy. Through the effective use of the instruments of jurisdiction—including power over legislation generally, and over banking and insurance, taxation, citizenship, exports and imports, natural resources, transportation and international trade agreements specifically—the terms of the inevitable engagement of a small island people with the external world fall more readily, though never fully, into its political lap (Baldacchino, 2006).

Discussion

This analysis confronts us with a specific predicament: on one hand, Gozo as an island jurisdiction—*de facto* if not *de jure*—that has a strong sense of self, and of the ‘other’ with which it must inevitably engage; on the other hand, there is a persisting belief in the resilience of ‘the Stone Age’ as a driver of economic development, and of the need to woo, cajole and lobby Valletta (Malta’s capital, and seat of national government)—and, via Valletta,

Brussels (the EU capital) for fiscal transfers. Gozitans by and large continue to relate to mainland Malta—and its machinery of government administration—as a ‘cash cow’, investing resources and providing employment opportunities to Gozitans, preferably on Gozo itself.

These tactics may and do provide welcome cash into the Gozitan economy. However, they do not suggest a ‘progressive sense of place’. The price being paid for doing so is a high one: a mainland state that maintains discretion on Gozitan domestic policy via the ‘power of the purse’; and a rapacious erosion of landscape as heritage, a permanent elimination of those same natural and cultural assets that have given Gozo that prized ‘aesthetic allure’ (Boissevain, 2001: 290). There is also a threatening demographic trend: various mainland Maltese (and some foreigners) are buying property in Gozo (and so fuelling the construction boom) and amongst these, some have set their eyes on the island as a retirement location. Some 1,927 mainland Maltese are reported to have changed their national identity cards to an address in Gozo between April 2001 and March 2006.¹⁰

Mainland Malta is, in a way, too large, too close, too tempting to avoid tapping into; and the mainland Maltese have proved willing to oblige, perhaps sensing that fuelling such a dependency is likely to dampen overtures for greater Gozitan autonomy. By citing ‘double insularity’ as a structural handicap, the implementation of what amounts to asymmetrical federalism ‘by stealth’ (e.g. Debono, 2003; Gozo News web-site, 2006) is legitimized, securing a measure of special status for the Gozitans.

Thus, like many sub-national jurisdictions around the world that are locked into a constitutional relationship with a larger state, and as with various other Mediterranean islanders that relate with mainland centres of power (Ankara, Athens, Madrid, Paris, Rome . . .) Gozitans exploit the fuzzy nature of their multiple identity (Gozitan, Maltese, European), just as much as they do the fluid nature of their autonomy (e.g. Palan, 1998). Indeed, one key element of such an exploitation lies in it not being explicitly articulated. I know of only one key scholarly work (penned by a Gozitan who refuses to consider publishing the text) that grapples explicitly with this fundamental identity issue, and how it drives Gozitans in their relationships with foreigners, mainland Maltese, and amongst themselves. The focus is on how the Gozitans take immense pride in their ability to craft solutions (in the vernacular: *nirrangaw*, which translates best as ‘just managing’) beyond any formal or legal mechanisms, and thus functions as a form of sub-altern politics (Azzopardi, 2002). Yet, it seems, the ability to ‘find solutions’ may work only up to a point: one which does not threaten the overall suzerainty of the Maltese polity. The current plight of landscape

heritage in Gozo may present a stark, visual rendition of the state of this power game, and in whose overall interests it may be working.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to propose that the sources of the fragility of the Maltese Islands in relation to their cultural assets—as with various other Mediterranean states and territories—have to do with an excess of cultural artifacts that strains available fiscal and human resources, but also with an underdeveloped sense of national pride and consciousness that finds ‘heritage’ clashing with ‘development’: with the present trumping the past (unless the latter is repackaged for personal, public or commercial use or embellishment).

Small island states are keen on export orientation, flexible adaptation and creative trans-territorial diplomacy to secure their development (Poirine, 1998). Such measures *could* spawn an ideology of nationwide social partnership and high levels of domestic social capital. Anthropologist and islands scholar Grant McCall (1996: 3) puts it succinctly:

“When islands control themselves, there is innovation and the elaboration of island high culture in monuments and, probably other works of art and literature. When, however, islands fall victim to continental control, the peripheralized islanders become conservative, mimic their masters and become exchange-oriented with island resources in people, materials and ideas flowing to continental cores of power and influence.”

Of course, the sovereign state of Malta controls itself as much as is possible in an interconnected age. It is the only unproblematic sovereign island state in the Mediterranean; and one of just two Mediterranean islands with distinct indigenous languages (the other being Sardinia). It has no lack of ‘island high culture in monuments’ (*ibid.*). Yet, this richness is confronted by a poverty of identity, a fledgling environmental consciousness and an uncertain relationship with the islanders’ past. Malta risks seeing its *international* politics degenerate into lobbying for resources from Brussels. Malta risks seeing its *national* politics remain sunk into a favouritism of factions, families, individuals . . . while the temporarily powerless, wait and sulk until it is their time to gloat and wallow in the control over public goods for private ends. Meanwhile, Gozo risks securing for itself a destiny as a microcosm of the Maltese predicament: its politics locking into lobbying for resources from Malta *and* Brussels; and its private sector economy being driven essentially by construction investment and associated tourism.

Culture and economic development are essential and mutually reinforcing to human existence: one without the other induces material, moral or cultural poverty. Together, they reinforce and source each other. When accompanied by shrewd usage of jurisdictional power, they can emerge as both cause and effect of a resilient island identity.

This story—of a peripheral island community that may be economically under-developed, rich in landscape heritage, poised to become gentrified as a location for secondary or retirement homes (e.g. Clark *et al.*, 2007), and which could muster stronger local governance—is one that repeats itself throughout the insular Mediterranean. Gozitans would do well in continuing to resort to explicit and implicit exhortations for stronger jurisdictional autonomy. The Gozitans effectively defy a fixity of their identity, seeking to extract the best of many worlds (and including that of an autonomy as well as of being a modest component of both a larger unitary state and the EU). What the Gozitans seem to have failed to do so far is to recognize that any such garnished jurisdictional powers would be, in themselves, resources than can be operationalised to secure their island landscapes, diversify their sources of economic prosperity, drive economic differentiation (as in niche manufactures, transportation or tourism services) and reduce their overall dependence on mainland Malta. Ironically, protests about the despoliation of the Gozitan countryside continue to be driven mainly by mainland Maltese environmentalists. In ‘just managing’, the Gozitans don’t seem too keen on post-materialism (Inglehart, 1977). Of course, as long as any ‘special powers’ remain unsecured constitutionally, and indeed continue to be articulated via a mainland Malta-based and entrenched political party system, these powers remain unilateral, subject to political blackmail, and are essentially manifestations of structured dependence.

Notes

1. *Correspondence Address:* Dr Godfrey Baldacchino, Canada Research Chair (Island Studies), University of Prince Edward Island, Canada. E-mail: gbaldacchino@upei.ca This paper is based on a previous draft presented at a conference on *Island Fragility and Cultural Resources*, Heritage Malta, November 2006. My gratitude to Heritage Malta and the constructive comments of peer reviewers for JMS. The usual disclaimers apply.
2. In the 1970s, a private quarry exploded dynamite in the vicinity of the Mnajdra Temples, causing irreparable damage. In April 2001, some 60 megalithic stones at the same prehistoric temple site were damaged, in what was described by a Malta Museums Department official as the worst criminal act ever inflicted on Maltese heritage (Dunn, 2001).

3. The percentage of built up area in the Maltese Islands was 22% in 1997 (Chapman & Cassar, 2004) – by far the highest in Europe. The next highest would be the Netherlands, where the percentage of built up area is nevertheless less than 10%.
4. This is exacerbated by ancient rent laws that do not encourage property owners to lease or rent their homes.
5. I remain grateful to German entrepreneur, Helga Ellul, for this observation.
6. For example, a regular newspaper columnist has written: “People on the Maltese island of Gozo [are] . . . a part of Maltese society that is considered culturally and socially backward, and they are definitely not representative of Maltese opinion . . .” (Daphne Caruana Galizia, 2006). Gozitans were not amused.
7. Interestingly, this ambiguous phrase has also been used in this journal by such foreign academics as Boissevain (2001: 290, 292).
8. Though that seems to be changing of late with boatloads of undocumented migrants that are arriving in mainland Malta from North Africa and the Middle East. An anti-immigrant feeling is now running high in Malta and has spawned a new far-right political party in June 2007 (The Economist, 2007). Gozo has (so far) been largely spared of this phenomenon.
9. 84.5% of Gozitan respondents to a 2006 survey claimed to have gone to Church the previous Sunday (Debono, 2006).
10. Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi in reply to a Parliamentary Question by Leo Brincat (MLP), July 19th 2006, <http://www.gozonews.com/2006/07/19/>.

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