

Towards a Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Maltese Islands with Special Reference to Gozo

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Pursuing sustainable development goals is important for the Maltese Islands given their high population densities, which lead to heavy pressure on the environment. This is especially so in the case of the island of Gozo, which is more dependent on the environment than Malta, due to its reliance on agriculture and tourism.

The Conference on sustainable development in Gozo, which was held at Hotel Ta Cenc on 26 November 2004, highlighted the main sustainable development issues in this small island with a land area of 67 square kilometres and a population of about 30,000. The conference was organised by the National Commission for Sustainable Development, together with the Ministry for Gozo and the University Gozo Centre, with the support of the EC Representation in Malta. It was attended by about 90 participants.

In his introductory remarks, HE Ronald Gallimore, who at that time headed the EC Representation in Malta, said that the meeting was an important one in view of the fact that it dealt with sustainable development, which encompasses economic, social and environmental dimensions. He referred to the EU Lisbon Agenda, which sets out a ten-year strategy to make the EU the world's most dynamic and competitive economy. He said that this strategy should lead to a stronger economy based on sound environmental policies and social includes, which are at the basis of sustainable development. He praised the National Commission for Sustainable Development for taking the initiative to draw up a sustainable development strategy for the Maltese Islands.

The Ethical Dimension

Hon Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo,

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spoke about the meaning of sustainable development, and emphasised the point that such development has, at its roots, an ethical dimension in that thinking long term for future generations is an ethical issue. She dwelt at some length on the special development constraints faced by Gozo in view of its double insularity, small domestic market and ecological fragility. She gave a brief account of the actions undertaken by the Ministry for Gozo to promote sustainable development on the island. The full speech of Minister Debono, in Maltese, is presented as an annex to this article.



The author of this article (second from left) addressing the participants. Other speakers on the panel were The Hon Giovanna Debono (left), The Hon George Pullicino and HE Ronald Gallimore

Hon George Pullicino, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Environment, who represents the Prime Minister as chairman of the National Commission for Sustainable Development, also referred to the ethical dimension of sustainable development and emphasised that need that every one of us feels the need to act responsibly to improve the quality of life of the population as a whole and not just to a section of it. He said that sustainable development is multifaceted and it is therefore necessary to consider its many dimensions in the strategy. He said that economic development is necessary to create sound environmental management, and that the quality of life of the people is intimately tied with economic and environmental concerns. He explained the role of the National Commission for Sustainable Development in promoting

awareness of the need for a holistic approach in attempting to improve the quality of life of the Maltese population.

Sustainable Development and Quality of Life

Professor Briguglio spoke next. He said that ultimately sustainable development is intended to improve the quality of life. He said that economic development is very important in this regard, and efficiency is at the core of such development. However, environmental and social concerns require that economic development should not be short sighted, and should have a long run dimension, so that the changes will be durable and will benefit current and future generations.

He explained that the process of drawing and implementing the strategy itself should be conducive towards the creation of participatory schemes and educational experiences. He also explained the role of the National Council for Sustainable Development in the drawing up the strategy, and said that the Commission was set up in terms of the Environment Protection Act (2001) to raise awareness on the need for sustainable development.

The Special Needs of Gozo

The participants then split into three groups, focussing on economic, environmental and social issues respectively. Each group was asked to review the draft strategy document and to suggest improvements to the text.

The main outcomes of the sessions, in so far as Gozo is concerned were the following:

- The sustainable development strategy is likely to include more reference to Gozo. In its present form, the draft strategy does not give appropriate importance to the special needs of the island
- Issues of direct relevance to the sustainable development of Gozo were discussed at length during the break-out sessions. The most important constraints identified by

participants related to:

- (1) Gozo's heavy dependence on transport for economic development. There was a call for improvements in the inter-island transport connections
- (2) Gozo has a fragile ecosystem, and tourism and agriculture, which are Gozo's most important economic sectors, exert heavy pressure on the system. There was a call for better environmental management on the island
- (3) There are various threats to Gozo's social cohesion, arising from the rapid changes that were taking place. There was a call for policies to take account of these threats.



The Conference was attended by a large number of participants

Educational Outcomes

The conference offered an opportunity for an educative experience arising from the informative introductory speeches, video on sustainability indicators and presentation on the purpose of a sustainable development strategy. The conference helped to foster greater awareness that the development challenge in Gozo needs to be tackled in a holistic way, with economic, social and environmental concerns integrated in development strategies and plans for implementation.

In addition the participants from the different walks of life and with different interests, had the opportunity to share their views and express their opinions on what needs to be done to promote sustainable development in Gozo and in the Maltese Islands as a whole. As expected there were contrasting views, but in general, participants agreed that a one sided approach to development is no development at all.



The Hon Giovanna Debono delivering her speech during the conference

ANNEX

Diskors ta' l-Onor. Giovanna Debono, Ministru għal Ghawdex fil-ftuh tal-konferenza "LEJN STRATEGIJA GHALL-IŻVILUPP SOSTENIBBLI TA' GHAWDEX", organizzata min-National Commission for Sustainable Development b'kollaborazzjoni mal-Ministeru għal Ghawdex u ċ-Ċentru ta' l-Universita' ta' Malta f'Ghawdex. Lukanda Ta' Ċenċ, Sannat. 29 ta' Novembru 2004.

L-iskop ta' l-iWwilupp sostenibbli hu li titjeb il-kwalita' tal-hajja tagħna u tal-generazzjonijiet li għad iridu jiġu. Dan japplika għad-dinja, għall-Ewropa, għal Malta u għal Ghawdex. Irridu niftakru li Wwilupp mhux sostenibbli ifisser Wwilupp għal Wmien qasir, li, mill-esperjenza li għandna, ma jkun Wwilupp xejn.

Żvilupp sostenibbli għandu dimensjonijiet ambjentali, soċjali u ekonomii. Huwa mibni fuq valuri msejsa fuq l-etika u r-responsabbilita'. Dan għaliex iħares l-interessi ta' generazzjonijiet futuri, jiehu in konsiderazzjoni l-gruppi kollha tas-soċjeta u jikkunsidra l-hajja b'mod shiħ u komprensiv.

Ghawdex

Ghawdex huwa gWra Wghira. Ghalkemm id-densita' tal-popolazzjoni hija baxxa meta mqabbla ma' dik ta' Malta, xorta wahda f'Ghawdex id-densita' hija għolja meta mqabbla ma' gWejjer u pajjiW ohrajn fil-Mediterran u fid-dinja. Għalhekk il-pressjoni fuq l-ambjent hija għolja.

Barra minn hekk, hemm ukoll diffikultajiet ekonomiċi. Minhabba l-problemi ta' insularita doppa, f'Ghawdex għandna problemi ta' kompetittivita'. Dan kemm f'dak li jirrigwarda l-manifattura kif ukoll it-turiWmu. Ma dan inWdu l-arrangamenti amministrattivi li xi kultant jagħmluha aktar diffiċli biex produtturi Ghawdxin jikkompetu *on a level playing field* ma' dawk Maltin.

Ghawdex jiddependi hafna fuq l-agrikoltura

u t-turiWmu. Dawn iW-Wewg industrij għandhom it-tnejn konnessjoni qawwija ma' l-ambjent. Żvilupp sostenibbli għalhekk huwa mportanti hafna, speċjalment f'dak li għandu x'jaqsam mal-harsien ta' l-ambjent.

Direzzjoni

L-istrateġija għall-iWwilupp sostenibbli għandha l-iskop li tagħti direzzjoni dwar x'għandu jsir fl-oqsma soċjali, ambjentali u ekonomiċi biex ikun Wgurat li l-iWwilupp tal-pajjiWma jtellifx il-kwalita' tal-hajja tagħna u ta' dawk li se jiġu warajna.

Il-qafas ewlieni ta' l-istrateġija għandu jkun marbut ma' pjan li qablu miegħu l-pajjiW kollha tad-dinja, magħruf bhala 'Agenda 21'.

Strateġija għall-iWwilupp sostenibbli titlob parteċipazzjoni minn kull wiehed u wahda minnha, għaliex kullhadd irid igorr ir-responsabbilita' sabiex titjeb il-kwalita' tal-hajja u tonqos il-pressjoni fuq l-ambjent li ngħixu fih.

L-Ambjent

Biex l-iWwilupp ikun sostenibbli, irid jirrispetta l-kwalita' ta' l-ambjent li ngħixu fih. Ma nistghux insejhu bidliet ambjentali bhala progress, jekk minhabba fihom il-kwalita' tal-hajja tmur lura.

Jehtieg li nharsu l-kwalita' ta' l-ambjent tagħna, mhux għalina biss, iWda għall-istess sistemi ekoloġiċi u naturali li fuqhom tiddependi l-hajja fuq wiċċ din il-pjaneta. Ix-xibka tal-hlejjaq

hi minsuġa b'tali mod li kull impatt u kull dannu jista' jinfirex fuq il-holqien kollha.

F'Ghawdex ghandna ambjent naturali u storiku ta' l-oghla valur u kwalita'. L-uWu sostenibbli ta' dan l-ambjent huwa essenzjali mhux biss għall-kwalita' tal-hajja ta' l-Ghawdxin iWla wkoll biex ingibu 'l quddiem l-attivitá ekonomika mibnija fuq il-karatteristiċi distinti ta' dan l-ambjent uniku. Għalhekk irridu noqghodu attenti hafna, fost l-oħrajn, għaWwamma u l-immaniġġjar tajjeb ta' dan l-ambjent. Irridu nimmaniġġjaw sewwa l-persjonijiet li hemm għall-uWu ta' dan l-ambjent, ta' dan il-wirt naturali u storiku li ghandna.

L-Ekonomija

Hafna mill-attivitá ekonomika f'Ghawdex, l-aktar fis-setturi tal-biedja, tal-kostruzzjoni u tat-turiWnu, iwasslu għal degradazzjoni ta' l-ambjent. Dan iwassal sabiex fl-aħħar mill-aħħar ikun ipperikolat l-istess Wwilupp ekonomiku. Wwilupp sostenibbli jitlob li jtnaqqsu mpatti negattivi bħal dawn.

Biex l-ekonomija ta' pajjiWna tkun sostenibbli u jonqsu l-impatti negattivi, jehtieg li jkun hemm titjib fl-effiċjenza. B'hekk isir uWu aħjar mir-riWrsi naturali, speċjalment dawk li ma jiġġeddux. Jehtieg ukoll li jsir aktar investiment f'teknoloġija nadifa u li jintuWaw sorsi ta' enerġija li jistghu jiġġeddu.

Htieġa oħra hi li ma jsirx hela fil-konsum, sabiex ikun hemm bilanċ bejn il-provvista u d-domanda għar-riWrsi tal-pajjiW

Barra minn hekk, jehtieg ukoll li jonqos il-konsum ta' prodotti li jhallu mpatt negattiv fuq l-ambjent, bħalma huma oġġetti tal-plastik u oġġetti tossiċi.

Is-Socjeta'

Żvilupp sostenibbli huwa mibni fuq l-ekwita' – jiġifieri li jinqerdu l-faqar u l-inugwaljanzi soċjali. Jehtieg li ma nwarbu lill-ebda grupp sabiex kuħadd iħoss li għandu kontribut x'jaġhti u biex ikun hemm aċċessibla' ta'

riWrsi u opportunitajiet għal kulhadd. Jehtieg ukoll li jkun hemm ekwita' bejn il-generazzjonijiet, jiġifieri li dak li jsir fil-preWent ma jaffettwax haWn il-kwalita' tal-hajja ta' dawk li se jiġu warajna.

Żvilupp sostenibbli huwa wkoll mibni fuq l-edukazzjoni. Din twassal biex jiWdied l-għarfien tal-benefiċċji ta' l-iWwilupp sostenibbli u tiWgura li jkollna l-opportunitá li niksbu t-tagħrif, il-hiliet u l-valuri mehtieġa. Hekk inkunu nistghu nieħdu sehem b'mod attiv u responsabbli f'deċiWjonijiet li għandhom impatt fuq il-kwalita' ta' hajja tal-generazzjonijiet preWenti u dawk futuri.

Il-parteciġazzjoni twassal biex iċ-ċittadini jkollhom sehem attiv fid-deċiWjonijiet li jolqtuhom. Barra li din twassal biex tiWdied il-possibilitá li jintlahaq ftehim dwar x'għandu jsir, twassal ukoll biex iċ-ċittadini jħossu li għandhom rwol importanti fl-iWwilupp tal-pajjiW u li mhux qegħdin sempliċiment ikunu infurmati b'dak li jkun diġá deċiW L-opportunitajiet ta' parteciġazzjoni għandhom ikunu offruti sa mill-ewwel faWjiet tat-tfassil ta' strateġija għall-iWwilupp sostenibbli.

Il-Pjan għal Ghawdex

It-titjib fil-kwalita' tal-hajja f'Ghawdex, hija, nistghu nġhidu, il-prinċipju li fuqu l-Ministeru għal Ghawdex ifassal u jwettaq l-proġetti u l-pjanijiet tal-Gvern għal Ghawdex. Għalina, il-prijoritajiet huma ddetati mill-aspetti ambjentali, soċjali u ekonomiċi. Meta nġhidu titjib fil-kwalita' tal-hajja, aħna nifhmu, titjib fil-kwalita' tal-hajja tal-faxex kollha tas-soċjeta' tagħna. Nifhmu titjib fil-kwalita' tal-hajja tal-familji, tal-haddiema, ta' l-irġiel u tan-nisa, ta' l-anzjani, ta' l-istudenti, taWwghaWagh. Nifhmu wkoll kwalita' ta' hajja għolja li tattira turisti f'Ghawdex u speċjalment turisti ta' kwalita'. Nifhmu fuq kollox kwalita' tal-hajja oghla milli kellna fil-passat sabiex inhallu din il-gWra tagħna aħjar milli sibniha għall-benefiċċju ta' dawk li ser jiġu warajna.

B'dawn il-ħsibijiet aħna naghWu liema proġetti ser ninvestu fihom. NaghWu li niffukaw l-enerġija u r-riWrsi tagħna f'dawk is-setturi li

fihom ghandna vantaġġi jew tradizzjoni ta' suċċess. Fuq kollox naghWu – b'konsultazzjoni wiesa' u diskussjonijiet li permezz tagħhom il-partijiet kollha jkunu konvinti – li l-proġett in kwestjoni huwa dak li rridu u li verament ghandna b'Wnn sabiex intejbu l-livell ta' ghixien tagħna lkoll f'Ghawdex.

Partikolarment hawn nixtieq nirreferi għal xi proġetti u inizjattivi li l-Ministeru qed jaħdem fuqhom bhalissa.

L-ewwel proġett li xtaqt insemmi huwa dak tad-Dwejra. Il-Ministeru għal Ghawdex qed jaħdem flimkien mal-MEPA u *Nature Trust*, li qed imexxu l-proġett, biex flimkien noholqu *management framework* sostenibbli għal dan is-sit tant importanti. Fost l-oħrajn ahna rridu li n-nies kollha tal-lokal li ilhom juWaw din iW Wna għal skopijiet differenti, jibqgħu juWawha fil-futur. L-istess għat-turisti li jiffrekwentaw din li hi wahda mill-*prime spots* t'Ghawdex bhala destinazzjoni turistika. Imma fl-istess hin ahna rridu li din iW Wna ntejbuha fuq livelli differenti – pero' ntejbuha b'mod sostenibbli, minghajr ma ggarra ebda hsara.

Irrid insemmi wkoll l-involvement tal-Ministeru għal Ghawdex fil-*management committee* tal-gWra ta' Kemmuna, fejn ukoll qed naħdmu flimkien ma' partijiet oħra, sabiex inwettqu strategiji li jħarsu l-ambjent naturali ta' din il-gWra filwaqt li jippermettu li l-potenzjal turistiku tagħha jibqa' jiġi sfruttat fil-futur.

Żvilupp sostenibbli iehor li pajjiWha, u allura anke Ghawdex, jista' jisfrutta, iWda li ovvjament jehtieg anke tip ta' investiment, huwa dak marbut mal-patrimonju tagħna. PajjiWha ghandu fost l-isbah u l-iktar patrimonju antik ta' l-umanita'. L-utilizzazzjoni tal-wirt storiku tagħna bhala prodott turistiku jista' jiġġenera dhul ekonomiku li jiġi ndirizzat lura lejn l-istess patrimonju, permezz ta' iktar restawr.

Xtaqt ukoll insemmi l-proġetti marbuta mad-depoWtu ta' l-iskart. Il-Ministeru għal Ghawdex ghen biex jiffacilita l-proġess biex jiġu ntrodotti *bring-in sites* f'diversi lokalitajiet f'Ghawdex, li għamluha possibbli li l-pubbliku

jibda jiddepoWta skart separat. Din l-inizjattiva hija fost l-ewwel passi biex nibdew indaħhlu kultura ġdida dwar il-mod kif ghandna niddisponu mill-iskart. Bhalissa għaddej xogħol relatat mat-twaqqif tal-*waste transfer station* f'Ghawdex wara li f'Mejju għalaqna għal kollox il-miWbla tal-Qortin tax-Xagħra.

Fix-xhur li ġejjin jibdew ix-xogħlijiet relatati ma' l-impjant għat-trattament tad-drenagġ li ser jassigura li jkollna kosta aktar nadifa milli hi bhalissa, u fl-istess hin, niproduċu ilma tajjeb għat-tisqija. Dan l-impjant ser iwassal biex id-drenagġ kollu ta' Ghawdex ikun trattat qabel ma jintrema. B'hekk Ghawdex jiġi konformi kemm mal-leġiWazzjoni tal-Unjoni Ewropea fil-qasam tal-kwalita' tal-ilma, kif ukoll biex jiġu onorati obligazzjonijiet reġjonali u internazzjonali fosthom il-konvenzjoni ta' Barcellona. Dan il-proġett ser iwassal biex titjeb b'mod sostanzjali l-kwalita' tal-baħar madwar il-kosta kollha ta' Ghawdex, għall-ġid ta' l-ambjent naturali u b'mod indirett ukoll, tat-turizmu f'Ghawdex.

Qieghdin naħdmu wkoll biex infasslu pjan għall-Afforestazzjoni f'Ghawdex u b'hekk intejbu l-ambjent rurali u ninkoraġixxu l-uW ta' art abbandunata. Marbuta ma' dan, nista' nsemmi wkoll il-haddiema li ghandu l-Ministeru għal Ghawdex li huma mharrġa fis-sengħa tal-bini tal-ħitan tas-sejjeġġ, li jagħmlu xogħlijiet tant siewja ta' manutenzjoni madwar Ghawdex.

Qed insemmi dan biex nagħti eWempju ta' kif fil-prattika ahna qieghdin nikkontribwixxu u niWguraw li kull pass 'il-quddiem li jagħmel Ghawdex ikun verament pass li jassigura kwalita' ta' hajja ahjar għalina lkoll illum, u għall-ġenerazzjonijiet futuri.

Nikkonkludi billi nesprimi l-awgurju tiegħi li permezz ta' din il-konferenza johorġu iktar ideat ta' kif nistgħu nkomplu niWguraw Wwilupp sostenibbli f'Ghawdex. B'hekk inkunu qed niWguraw Wwilupp soċjali u ekonomiku li, mhux talli ma jeqridx l-ambjent, iWda jkun Wwilupp li jħares u saħansitra jtejjeb l-ambjent ta' madwarna.