

# Master of Arts in Islands and Small States

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## Introduction

I graduated with a Bachelors of Commerce degree from the University of Malta in 1991 and subsequently obtained the B.A. (Hons.) in Business Management in 1992. In March 1994 I was appointed as executive secretary to the Xagħra Local Council, a position I still occupy to this very day.

In the summer of 2008 I decided to apply for the Masters in Islands and Small States which was being offered at the Gozo Campus of the University of Malta. This course covers many important subjects relevant to islands and small states like Malta including environmental planning and management, microeconomic and macroeconomic issues, environmental concerns, ecological issues and also international and European environmental law. The lectures are conducted in such a way that participation by the students is allowed and even encouraged.

## The First Year

During our first semester the main topic was environmental planning and management. It included discussions on environmental policy,

geographic information systems, management of environmental resources, environmental management systems and spatial planning (including also territorial cohesion). This semester ended with an interesting field trip to Victoria, Gozo where the groups of students had to analyse various issues related to spatial planning.

We turned our attention to economic issues during the second semester of the first year, both from a microeconomic and macroeconomic perspective. The important concepts of demand and supply, costs of factors of production and competition law and monopolies and perfect competition were discussed in depth. Other issues included the effects of inflation and unemployment on economies with special reference to islands and small states, international trade, the labour market and also the multiplier effect. At the end of the semester, students were grouped to prepare various presentations regarding the vulnerability and resilience building of the economies of islands.

## Dissertation Proposal

At the end of my first year I was required to submit a dissertation proposal. After much thought and



Azure Window - Taken on the field trip to Dwejra. Photo: Joe Azzopardi

consultations with my lecturers, including the Director of the Gozo Campus Prof. Lino Briguglio, I decided on the title: The efficiency and effectiveness of local government in small European states, which is very much related to my professional career. The states which I am researching are Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Cyprus, Luxembourg and of course Malta. In fact local government, in all these countries except Malta, has been functioning for many years now. In our case local councils are still evolving after their enactment in 1993 and are presently undergoing a reform which will hopefully benefit the services they offer to their citizens. The research will analyse the various theories regarding effective and efficient operation of local government. To assess the efficiency and effectiveness of local government I have prepared a questionnaire analysing the various services offered. This has been sent to more than 30 local governments around the countries mentioned above according to their size including those administering less than 5000 residents and those administering around 20,000 residents.

The research will analyse their ability to operate and whether it is feasible for them to pool their resources in various areas. These include street cleaning, road maintenance, waste management including refuse collection, complaint handling, local enforcement systems and also the organisation of cultural activities. Besides their relations with their residents, these local governments are being questioned if they could provide a better service if their localities were much larger (in the case of small councils) or much smaller (in the case of large councils). Another important question in this research is their ability to access E.U. Funds for their activities. The mayors of the localities have also been asked to add further comments about the operation of local governments.



Fungus Rock - Taken on the field trip to Dwejra. Photo: Joe Azzopardi

At this point I would like to mention the very useful credit on research and methodology held during the summer between the first and second year. The techniques taught during this credit, regarding both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, were essential for the research and data collection purposes needed for our dissertations.

## The Second Year

During the first semester of the second year, our focus was turned on environmental concerns for sustainable development in islands and small states. These included climate change, integrated coastal zone management, nature conservation, water and waste management, various spatial planning systems, agriculture and fisheries, air and marine pollution, managing mineral and energy resources, land use, transport, effects of natural disasters, communication and sustainable tourism. The semester rounded up with a very interesting field trip to water and waste treatment plants in Gozo.

During the final semester we analysed environmental law and environmental diplomacy and also covered the ecology and bio-geography of islands. The legal aspect included history and basics of environmental law and policy, international law addressing climate change, protection and conservation of wildlife, effects of European Union enlargement on environmental law, E.U. treaties, international conventions and cultural heritage. The ecological part introduced us to a number of ecological and biological concepts and their application to islands and small states considering that these are known as natural laboratories. The semester was concluded with an interesting field trip to Dwejra.

## Conclusion

I wish to thank all our lecturers, the Gozo Campus staff including its Director and also my fellow students for the interesting experience during these past two years. I certainly recommend this post-graduate degree to all those interested in both environmental and economic issues especially in their application to islands and small states.

Joe Azzopardi possesses a Master of Arts Degree in Islands and Small States Studies.