

Rural Culture

Gozo is rooted in its rural culture. However, the preservation of the Gozitan's rural culture is challenging in the face of development pressures and it is a national priority to preserve the cultural tapestry that makes us unique as a rural community.

Distinct rural identity of Gozo

There is insufficient documented information on the rural identity of Gozo in terms of the historical, cultural and social aspects. There is a need to rediscover through historical research and documentation the distinct rural identity of Gozo.

Recommendations

1. Set up and operate a research and documentation facility to support the conservation of Gozitan rural culture, including gastronomic, cultural, heritage and traditional ventures
2. Train farmers to use part of their holding as a demonstration and dissemination site for eco-sustainability and traditional sustainable applications

issues

- Lack of distinct gastronomical identity*
- Limited land management and rural business development*
- Diminishing traditional farming techniques*
- Intrinsic value of built heritage within rural environment*
- Lower social class perception*
- Rural products exhibitions*
- Loss of animal breeds*
- Integration of traditional practices*
- Distinct rural identity of Gozo*
- Biodiversity*

Distinct Gastronomical Identity

In Gozo, there is a lack of distinct gastronomical identity that builds upon traditional agricultural products, processes and skills. There are a few known yet isolated examples of traditional specialities such as cheeselets (gbejniet), Gozo Ftira, olive oil, limoncello, sun-dried tomatoes, production of honey and wines such as Gozo Syrah. Apart from these traditional specialities, there is no system for identifying and defining Gozitan gastronomy and typical food, and there is nothing that distinguishes these products from other similar Maltese products on the market. A distinct gastronomic identity could enable the selling of these products at a premium, whilst giving them an enhanced branding.

Recommendations

3. Assess quality of presently sold traditional products, identify counterfeits and protect genuine products.
4. Incentivise farmers to plant indigenous carob, citrus and olive trees, grape vines and other fruit trees that are native to the island of Gozo
5. Encourage and foster events which promote traditional and local produce such as honey, olive oil, cheeselets and other traditional products

Limited land management and rural business development

There is lack of collaboration between stakeholders limiting bottom-up territorial cooperative approach to land management and rural business development within the eco-island concept. At present, there is only one formally recognised and established Gozo action group, bearing the same name. The present regional action group should encompass and represent more members from the rural, civil and business society, in order to heighten cooperation. Successful projects and initiatives in Gozo should be implemented for the benefit of rural culture development.

Recommendations

6. Activate, promote and facilitate the Leader programme to encourage territorial bottom-up collaboration for rural business and initiatives
7. Improve farm/fields access roads

Diminishing Traditional Farming Techniques

There is limited documented information on old and traditional techniques of farming linked to Gozo heritage. There is the need to rediscover and exploit potential of old techniques of farming using traditional practices and methods instead of relying solely on mechanism and modernisation. Nonetheless not all practices are 100% compatible with ecological principles. Rural society has to accept the principle of co-existence of natural habitats with agriculture. Traditional techniques should be rediscovered and valorised through research and documentation to enable this form of heritage to be held for display, marketed and appreciated by visitors, thereby promoting agro-tourism.

Recommendations

8. Research and document on traditional farming practices
9. Train farmers to use part of their holding as a demonstration and dissemination site for eco-sustainability
10. Incentivise farmers to incorporate ecological habitats within their holdings (ecological corridors, buffer strips, etc) in order to facilitate the co-existence of agricultural landscapes and ecological habitats and their appreciation by visitors
11. Improve farm/fields access roads

Intrinsic Value of Built Heritage within Rural Environment

There is not enough documented information on built heritage in the rural environment of Gozo and its value. There is the need to conserve, rehabilitate and demonstrate the intrinsic value of the built heritage within the rural environment and exploit its cultural, educational and recreational value. Built heritage needs to be conserved, rehabilitated and valorised through research and documentation to enable this form of heritage to be held for display, marketed and appreciated by visitors.

Recommendations

12. Exploit the cultural, educational and recreational value of the rural built heritage

13. Facilitate the use of old rural structures for agricultural/agro-tourism purposes

Lower Social Class Perception

Although there is no documented information on how the public in general perceives the farming population in the rural sector, it is customary believed that the society's perception of farming is one of an occupation associated with the lower social ranks. This stems from lack of appreciation of farming as a way of life.

To combat this mentality, the general public should be educated, starting from school children. Farming should be promoted as being not simply about production of food and basic commodities but is a way of life of rural stewardship.

Recommendations

14. Promote the importance of rural communities in environmental stewardship
15. Promote agriculture as a modern science-based career

Rural products exhibitions

Although there are some permanent exhibition venues in Gozo displaying rural heritage, these may be in financial difficulty and may need support for them to be linked and promoted better. There is the need to set up events, festivals and permanent exhibitions and museums displaying rural products, culture and heritage.

Exhibitions need not be on a large scale and on a permanent basis but these should be links in trails and routes and that offer a unique experience to the visitor.

Recommendations

16. Set up and promote a calendar of rural culture events that feature Gozitan produce, traditions, food, heritage and culture
17. Make use of the media to promote and market Gozitan rural and traditional produce

Integration of Traditional Practices

There is limited documented information about traditional social patterns of the Gozitan family and way of life in rural society. There is a need to rediscover social patterns and habits of family unit within rural community including integration of traditional practices and breeds. There is insufficient documented information on the rural identity of Gozo in terms of the historical, cultural and social aspects. Through historical research and documentation there is a need to rediscover the distinct rural identity of Gozo.

Recommendations

18. Perform research and documentation to rediscover the social heritage of rural communities
19. Extend national food quality scheme for Gozo (regional) that builds upon unique eco-friendly product characteristics, practices and process ethics
20. Identify and promote rural culture products such as hand-woven wool, hand painted ceramics, musical instruments
21. Promote a change in mentality of the rural society to diversify production to include non edible, value added products which are part of the heritage and culture
22. Document traditional recipes using herb and wild plants used in the local cuisine
23. Document traditional medicine/remedies from wild plants in Gozo
24. Set up and operate a research and documentation facility to support eco-friendly developments in Gozitan rural culture, including gastronomic, cultural, heritage and traditional ventures

Biodiversity

The flora of Gozo constitutes a major portion of the biodiversity of the island and supports other organisms that are of equal importance to the Gozitan ecosystems. Gozo also enjoys a relatively large amount of endemic species that are considered to be rare.

Gozo's ecological sites need to be identified and restored to their natural state.

Recommendations

25. Incentivise farmers to incorporate ecological habitats within their holdings (ecological corridors, buffer strips, etc) in order to facilitate the co-existence of agricultural landscapes and ecological habitats and their appreciation by visitors
26. Manage and protect Gozo's Natura 2000 sites and other ecological sites
27. Plant indigenous plants and trees in public places and in afforestation projects
28. Educate the agricultural community on its strategic role in protecting biodiversity