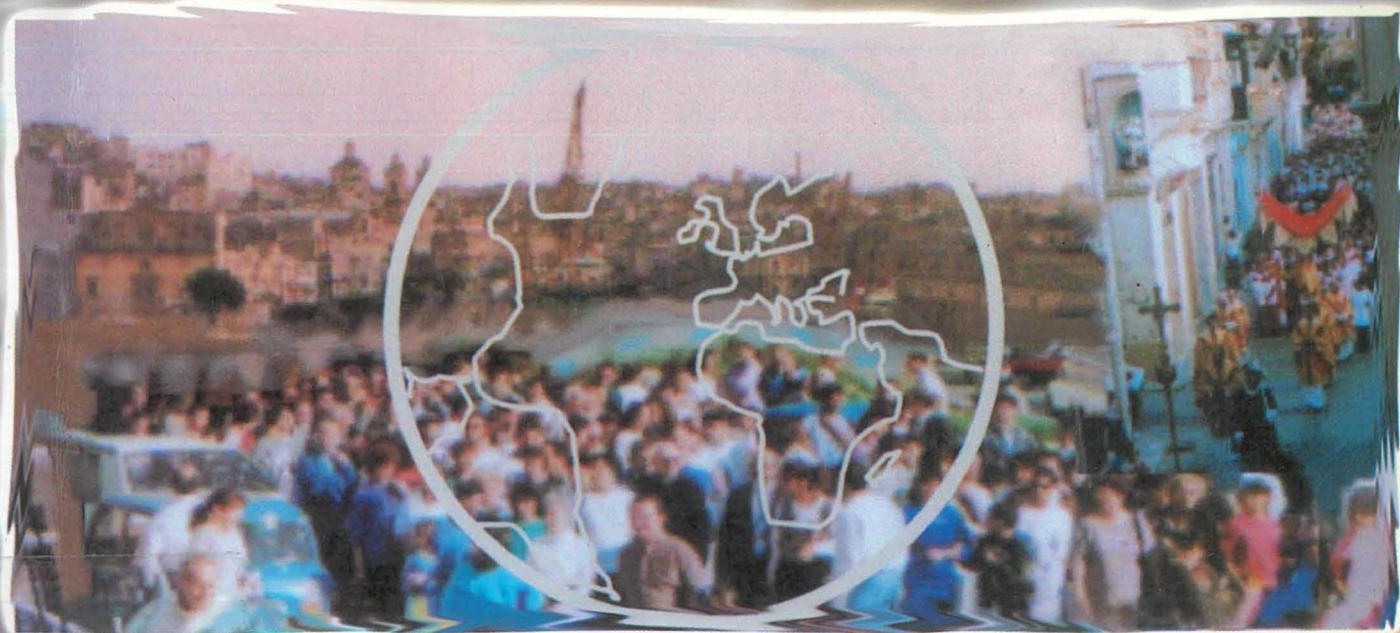


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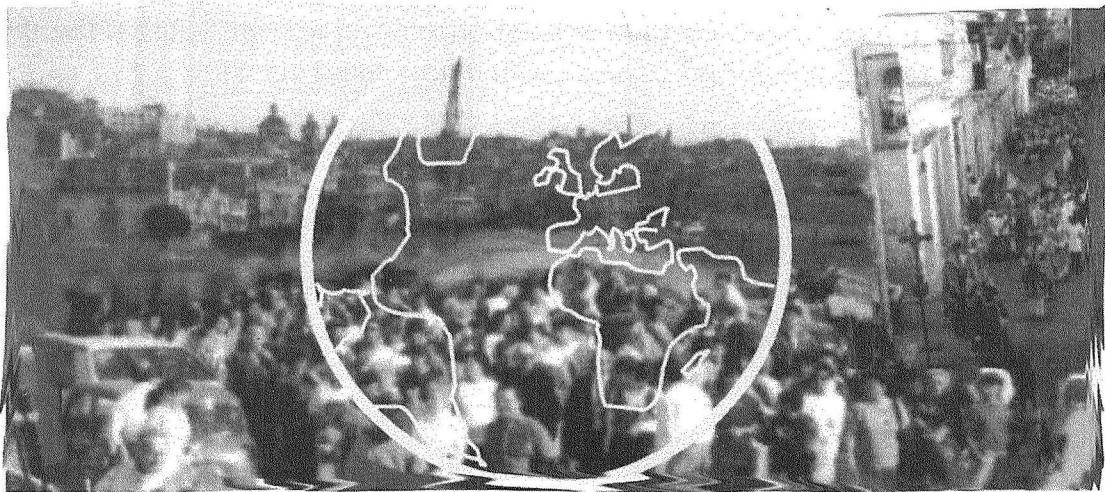


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# *Sociological Aspects of the Maltese Islands*



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**Chapter 3**

George Cassar

**Education**

Though the term 'education' may, at first glance, appear to be a straightforward concept, it turns out to be much more complicated and far reaching when a deeper examination is undertaken. As one analytical description puts it, "Education is a philosophical as well as a sociological concept, denoting ideologies, curricula, and pedagogical techniques of the inculcation and management of knowledge and the social reproduction of personalities and cultures" (Marshall, 1998, p. 183). From this description, it transpires that education is a complex institution that has developed in such a way as to complement the needs of modern societies. One very important requirement of all societies, and more so of complex systems such as industrialised societies, is the preparation of members to be fully functioning entities within their society. Being complex systems, "the amount of knowledge required is so great and diverse that formal, systematic training is necessary" (Johnson, 1995, p. 92). The onus of secondary socialisation has been put principally and essentially on an efficient schooling system. This is expected to construct specific and structured programmes expressly aimed at socialising, first and foremost, the younger generation into full citizenship, so as to lead to a coherent life amongst their fellows living in that same society. It thus becomes clear why in a narrow sense 'education' "is used as a synonym for schooling, specific institutional movement for the transmission of knowledge and skills, the development of competencies and beliefs" (Pateman, 1994, p. 188). This is precisely one reason why Maltese society has seen to it to construct a schooling system that is adjourned regularly to meet the specific needs of its members. Malta has experienced educational development manifested through a consistent increase in school buildings, development of curricula and ever more intensive teacher training. The aim of upgrading standards is to promote national interests within an intensely active and fast moving globalised society.

*The origins of education - a brief overview*

From an historical overview of the development of education in Malta, it transpires that some form of schooling was already in existence from at least Medieval Times (Dalli, 2001). Even during the era of the Knights of St. John (1530-1798), some Maltese, mainly male from the elite classes, benefited from a small number of private schools run by clerical and lay individuals (C. Cassar, 2001) who fulfilled the role of teachers, even though pedagogical training was as yet unknown. Indeed, higher education also existed through a *Collegium Melitense* run by the Jesuits, which later became the *Universitas Studiorum* run by the state, both institutions catering for the educational formation of those who could afford it (Fiorini, 2001). In the short French interlude (1798-1800), attempts at educational reform were introduced – though they could not be carried through because of the Maltese uprising in September of 1798. It was therefore during the British colonial period (1800-1964) that schools and schooling really made a leap forward, a step which ultimately encompassed education for all.

During the nineteenth century, primary education was initiated through the work of a series of Directors of Schools, such as Canon Paolo Pullicino (Camilleri, 2001) and others. Such work was consolidated during the twentieth century through the contributions of other directors, such as Dr. Albert V. Laferla (Said, 2001) and many others. Schools became widespread, reaching all towns and villages of the Maltese Islands. Even small villages, which enjoyed little social significance compared to other much more populated and esteemed localities, witnessed the setting up of schools for the benefit of the children and others who resided in the area. One such case amongst many was the rural village of Mosta, where full-fledged structures were set up to give a variety of services to the community. This school provided day and evening classes, lessons for the young and not so young, continuation classes, dockyard preparatory classes, and also teacher-training classes (G. Cassar, 1999, 2001). This was no isolated case. Maltese education aimed at reaching the widely illiterate population. It sought to bring the Maltese gradually into the wider world through various subjects and topics. Formal education began to work slowly towards the minimisation of the insular mentality which geography had imposed on Maltese society, and which has for a long time dominated the thoughts, feelings and actions of the Maltese.

This surge towards a global perspective is evident in the modern curricula, methodologies and structures, which today take a macro- and outward looking standpoint, rather than the more traditional, introverted stance. Schooling in modern Malta is considered an essential and irreducible feature of society. It is considered essential in the socialisation process leading to fully-fledged citizens. Indeed, as Newman reflects, "Although schools are officially charged with equipping students with the skills they need to fulfil various roles in society (for example, reading, writing, mathematics), they also teach students important social, political, and economic values" (2000, p. 111).

Education in Malta has always been a dire need. As Sultana accurately remarks, "countless commissioners who came to investigate various aspects of Malta's social, cultural, political, economic and educational features and institutions noted over and over again, the islands had little to offer – or to develop – other than their human resources" (1992, p. 1). It is exactly this that the Maltese educational system has attempted to do, and is continuously committed to doing, through the many assessments and reassessments, reforms and revisions, in the field of educational policy and legislation. A general overview of education in Malta, and the system of education as reflected in school structures, examination systems, and other related aspects, would show this (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

### *More recent developments*

Much has changed and especially so with Malta achieving political independence in 1964. By the last decade of the twentieth century, the majority of Maltese citizens could claim to have attained some form of education (Table 1). Newman observes, "The prospect of international economic competition can ... foster change in a country's educational system" (2000, p. 293). In Malta, this change has been an ongoing process. Attempts at meeting pressures created by international political,

economic and social developments have been on the State's education agenda for many years. The State has seen to it to prop up education and schooling to meet such exigencies (Table 2). The results can be easily identified in the increased numbers of students who are beginning school earlier and staying on longer. Thousands of three- and four-year olds are attending the numerous kindergarten centres all over Malta and Gozo, and the number of graduants gaining their first degree each year, in courses run by the University of Malta, is on the increase.

**Table 1. Level of education attained by men and women by the 1990s**

Level of education	men	women	men %	women %
No schooling	6206	7772	4.4	5.3
Primary not completed	11974	14869	8.6	10.2
Primary completed	29221	38874	20.9	26.6
Secondary not completed	17013	17334	12.2	11.9
Secondary completed	40385	44052	28.8	30.1
Secondary vocational not completed	4548	2376	3.2	1.6
Secondary vocational completed	12030	7864	8.6	5.4
Tertiary not completed	5343	4752	3.8	3.3
Tertiary completed	8380	6129	6.0	4.2
Post-graduate not completed	3086	851	2.2	0.6
Post-graduate completed	1821	1321	1.3	0.9
Total respondents	140007	146194	100.0	100.0

(Source: Central Office of Statistics, 1997)

**Table 2. Percentage of labour force by educational level and gender (2003)**

Educational level	Jun-03		
	Total	Men	Women
No schooling	0.8	1.1	0.1
Primary	16.6	19.9	9.4
Secondary (general)	45.3	43.6	49.2
Secondary (vocational)	7.5	9.4	3.5
Post-secondary (general)	9.5	7.4	14.2
Post-secondary (vocational)	7.7	8.2	6.7
Univeristy diploma	3.1	2.6	4.3
First degree	7.7	6.3	10.9
Masters *	1.0	1.0	1.2
Ph.D.	0.5	0.6	0.4

[Note: \* under-represented]

(Source: adapted from Table 5 in JIM, 2003, p.47)

Student attendance in Malta is obligatory between 5 and 16 years. Indeed, in the year 2000, there were about 10,000 students attending school at kindergarten level. Another 34,261 attended primary school, with a further 27,254 going on to secondary school. In the post-secondary sector, there were another 5,191, with the vocational sector incorporating 4,262 students within it (National Statistics Office, 2003a, p. 13).

Maltese education has also invested in a recently reorganised post-secondary sector. This saw the re-setting up of a Junior College in 1995, under the aegis of the University of Malta, whose objective is the formation of university-oriented students. (This College was in operation in the 1960s but was amalgamated with other post-secondary schools in 1973). The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (M.C.A.S.T.) was also re-established in 2000 for post-secondary vocational education (this institution had been in existence throughout the 1960s and 1970s but was phased out by 1977). Besides, there is also the Institute of Tourism Studies (established as a Institute in 1988), for the training of those who aim to take up a career in tourism and the hospitality industry. In addition, there is the University of Malta, which is witnessing a constantly increasing yearly student intake. This expansion is reflected in the two thousand students who, for example, graduated from the University of Malta in the year 2000 (Government of Malta, 2002, p. 20).

By the turn of the new millennium, Malta's workforce comprised 81.6 per cent of workers having at least a secondary school education, and another 9.5 per cent having a post-secondary or a higher secondary education. Such data conceals the fact that up till the 1950s, many had still not been exposed to a secondary level of education. Moreover, the University of Malta of that time was still admitting a few hundred *per annum* (Galea, 2003, p. 15). Up till 1970, Malta's university primarily accepted fee-paying students, and it was only from 1971 onwards that all Maltese students were to be exempt from paying tuition fees at this institution.

The thirty years up to the turn of the new millennium were full of educational reforms. Malta witnessed the setting up of the Higher Secondary School, later to become the New Lyceum. This institution amalgamated together all centres that prepared Sixth Form students for their Advanced Level examinations (Zammit Mangion, 1992, pp. 89-90). In 1984, the Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School was also set up to cater for students who had not acquired the full entry requirements for the New Lyceum (G. Cassar, 1995, pp. 6-10). Gozo also had its own post-secondary education structure housed in one complex. In 1972 the Maltese Islands also experienced the introduction of the comprehensive secondary school system, which did away with examinations, and students passed from one level and from one class to another without needing to pass through any formal examination process. This system remained operative till 1981, when the setting up of Junior Lyceums in 1982 re-introduced the selective process for entry into secondary school level (Zammit Mangion, pp. 92-100, 132).

Compulsory education age was also raised to age sixteen from fourteen in a two-step process between the scholastic years 1973-74 (when it became fifteen years) and 1974-75 (Zammit Ciantar, 1991, pp. 104-5). State run kindergarten centres for 4 year olds were launched in 1975 (Zammit Ciantar, pp. 114-5). Trade schools were also restructured and a new system was launched in 1972 (Sultana, 1992).

In the sphere of post-compulsory education, various governments brought in measures to strengthen student participation at all levels. The University of Malta underwent a number of reforms, and the worker-student scheme was set up in 1978



and remained unchanged till 1987. This involved work phases for students who had to find sponsors with whom they worked for a number of months. A similar system was created at sixth form level (Zammit Mangion, 1992, pp. 162, 316 et. seq.). All this was changed when in 1988, a stipend began to be given, eliminating the phases that students used to work during each academic year. This stipend was restructured into a maintenance grant in 2003, and given to those post-compulsory students who qualified according to specific criteria.

These recent developments in education can be gauged from the data, for example, for 2002. Thus, in this particular year, 16-year-olds attending educational institutions formed 75 per cent or 4,044 persons of the same age cohort. The 17-year-olds (the average age for post-secondary education) numbered 3,210 or 57.5 per cent of those in this age bracket. On the other hand, those in the 19-year-old bracket (this being the average age for students at University or at MCAST) reached 32.2 per cent or 1,936 students from this same age cohort (Galea, 2003, p. 15).

Nevertheless, no educational progress is measured simply on the basis of numbers. In fact, many reforms have taken place with the scope of strengthening the quality of education enjoyed by Maltese society. Sultana (1997, p. 102) identifies various changes that indicate a “qualitative improvement”. These include, for example, the intensification of in-service teacher training, the restructuring of the administrative hierarchy of the Education Division, and the trade-school sector reforms. With regards to the selection of school administrative personnel, credentials and training in the area of school administration are utilised instead of the purely ‘seniority in the service’ criterion. Other reforms incorporate the direct involvement of teaching staff in curriculum development, and the intensification of the integration process to include more students with special learning requirements within mainstream education. One cannot refrain from noting also the significant undertaking to promote gender equality through the curriculum, the equalisation of access of females to the University of Malta, and parental involvement in school life through School Councils. Students also benefit from new textbooks and educational material constructed by fellow Maltese. In addition, the locally structured end-of-cycle examinations under the MATSEC (Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate) system have given space for local teachers to give more direct feedback and contribution towards the students’ global assessment in these examinations that are created by Maltese educators specifically for Maltese candidates.

These reforms have helped to promote a stronger educational structure that aims to vitalize a complex industrialised society. In one Maltese document of the 1990s, the key concerns of any schooling system have been underlined. These are, “the schools themselves as learning communities, the educational leaders and their role in the schools and in the system, and the curriculum as the instrument and programme of learning in the schools” (Consultative Committee in Education, 1995, p. 1). Emphasis on such areas leads to schools and education systems being considered efficient and effective enterprises. As Newman (2000, p. 265) has argued in the instance of U.S. education, “Education is highly valued in this society – it is seen as the principal means of achieving financial success, and it makes possible a complex division of labor.

Without education a technologically advanced society would be impossible." It can be asserted that Maltese education has made long strides forward, especially in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Sultana (1997, p. 11) summed up the situation of Maltese education thus: "the reach and diversity in educational provision in this small island is impressive, and compares well with services offered in similar small states with intermediately developed economies, and with some of those to be found in more industrially developed nations."

### *The National Minimum Curriculum*

Growth is an ongoing process. The Maltese State is involved in a continuous search for better and more effective educational structures, systems and methodologies. In the last decade of the twentieth century, a decision was taken by the government of the day to set the stage for the drawing up of a new "comprehensive national curriculum" for the primary and secondary school levels. Thus, in 1994, the Education Division was restructured to include a Department of Curriculum Development, Implementation and Review. When this Department became fully functional, a ministerial directive was issued in March 1996 for a draft curriculum document to be presented to the Minister of Education by March 1998 (Sammut, 1996, p. 3). A draft curriculum was presented in March 1998, according to the instructions of the brief of 1996 (Ministry of Education and National Culture, 1998). In December 1999, a new National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) was finally established to regulate Maltese education up to Form V of the secondary school level. It is quite evident that Maltese society, represented through its various governments, has done its part to safeguard itself by improving education as it has seen fit. To an extent, this effort may be interpreted through the words of Emile Durkheim (as quoted by Marsh, 2000, p. 578), "In sum, education, far from having as its unique or principal object the individual and his interests, is above all the means by which society perpetually recreates the conditions of its very existence." Yet this functionalist macro perspective does not seem to be the sole scope of the NMC. A more micro consideration is also contemplated. In a message annexed to the new NMC, the Director General of Education emphasised that "The National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) is a framework establishing parameters within which every school will be empowered to design and propose an educational provision that meets its particular curricular needs. This is meant to eventually lead to a more ambitious objective, namely that of providing an educational provision that caters for the particular needs of every individual student" (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 7).

These projected intentions constitute a revolutionary perspective. It is a fact that prior to the Education Act of 1988, Maltese education could not even claim to have a proper curriculum. Such a curriculum was for the first time mentioned in this Act (Section 7) and was followed by an embryonic National Minimum Curriculum, formalised through Legal Notices for the Pre-Primary Level (1989), Primary Level (1989), Secondary Level (1990) and Post-Secondary Level (1991) (Zammit Mangion, 1992, pp.433-447; Zammit Ciantar, 1996, pp. 42-71). All these were relatively brief documents giving a somewhat skeletal indication of what was to be the aim of education at each level. Yet the prospect of a fully-fledged curriculum gave rise to a

series of discussions, workshops and proposals, which had the purpose of turning a collection of suggestions and syllabi into a real curriculum. In the initial stages of discussion on a proper curriculum, Farrugia (1991, p. 21) had warned: "the desired changes will not just occur by high sounding rhetoric, since it is much easier to teach information based content than to develop concepts, convey values and form attitudes." He then stressed that, "If the Maltese educational system is to benefit from the intentions of the new legislation, it should become a priority for all educators to design concrete strategies that establish and retain a balance between the three domains of the curriculum." The three domains mentioned are, in fact, intertwined within the first real NMC Malta has ever produced. Yet, though this Curriculum came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2000, the process did not stop there. As the NMC document itself states, "the process of curriculum development is an ongoing and dynamic one. This document therefore does not signal the end of the process but another chapter in a never-ending story. Continuing curriculum development ensures that our schools remain relevant institutions within the community" (Ministry of Education, 1999, p.14). Thus, at the start of the third millennium of the Christian era, Malta has at last acquired an NMC that structures school systems, methods of teaching and learning, while delineating appropriate objectives for the future.

### *The hidden curriculum*

What has been discussed up to now is, of course, the formal curriculum, which is the educational programme that the Maltese State proposes for the student population as a whole. The formal curriculum is understood to be the means through which society's ideals in education are to be fulfilled. Thus, the curriculum is the instrument incorporating learning content and teaching methods employed by schools to fulfil the ideals embraced by that particular society (Farrugia, 1991, p. 75). These are overt aspects, clearly written down and easily checked at any time to see that what the school formally teaches is in line with the official requirements set by the state. As I. Mifsud (1997, p. 335) has, however, remarked: "Schools have in fact come to be seen as social sites with a dual curriculum – one overt and formal, the other hidden." The latter type is based on norms and values, which are nowhere stated and much less written down, yet they form part of the school's everyday social and educational environment.

The hidden curriculum constitutes the other side of the coin with regards to the daily interactions within schools. Through the hidden curriculum, specific yet subtle, socialisation takes place, putting students of a particular school into a pre-set frame of mind to which they are introduced and, indeed, into which they are immersed. It is thus opportune to conclude that, "Our formal education does not simply teach us uncontroversial 'facts'; schooling also includes hidden messages or unofficial rules that must be understood if we are to succeed in education" (Marsh, 2000, p. 568).

Students emerging from a particular school have idiosyncratic characteristics, aspirations and points of view that are, many a time, far off from what is established in the official, formal curriculum. I. Mifsud (1997) in his study of a particular private school has attempted to observe how the hidden curriculum operates. This research

was carried out at 'St. David's College', a pseudonym for a boys' private school run by a religious order which holds quite a high reputation amongst many in Malta. Mifsud observed that "rituals, symbols, and everyday interactions construct the particular ethos of the schools in such a way that students become enveloped in a miasma of almost subliminal messages which take in a common-sense, 'natural' quality that is difficult to contest" (pp. 349-50). Such is the power of the hidden curriculum, which may be found in schools in diverse forms and in varying intensity, but which is rarely, if ever, absent. As Mifsud noted, with regards to the school he was observing:

A key element in the formation of the school's identity was the constant emphasis made by administrators and teaching staff on the fact that St David's College was the best private school, and therefore the best school on the island (1997, p. 337).

Such a continuous flood of consistent subjective observations would in the end leave an impact on the student. It is no wonder then that students exclaim:

I'm very proud to have attended St David's. It's the best there is [...]. It's known world-wide. The order is found all over the world. And I have had the opportunity to go to a school like that! (Mifsud, 1997, p. 337).

It is thus evident that schools are much more complex communities than first meets the eye.

### *Social background and educational attainment*

According to the formal curriculum, schools should be places where equity dominates. Indeed, the NMC recognises that diversity is part and parcel of a school community. This diversity, it is stated, "enables and requires a pedagogy based on respect for and the celebration of difference" (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 30). Having an adequate school environment that caters for diversity is an important element that affects educational achievement.

Yet, achievement is also tied to the different social groups and backgrounds from which students derive. Surveys have been carried out to gauge the influence of social background on attainment and the one done in 2000 in English and Welsh schools helps to put the picture in the right perspective. As Williams (2003, p. 34) has underlined, "the evidence for the correlation between socio-economic status of parents and educational performance seems pretty clear-cut." The data from England and Wales showed clearly that children coming from higher professional backgrounds were three times more likely to achieve five or more GCSE grades A to C than students with parents from routine occupational background.

A number of studies in Malta have sought to examine the relationship between educational attainment and the students' social background. Sultana (1991) reviewed a number of such studies in this field. On examining progress in subjects both at primary and secondary levels, it seemed evident that there was a connection between the father's occupation and the pupil's attainment. Indeed, much data points to a lack

of equality in attainment, even though Maltese society offers everyone the possibility of free state-run education from kindergarten to university.

Other studies demonstrate that there is a positive correlation between social class and educational achievement. In her study of primary school lower-streamed students, Cachia (1997, pp. 172-3) observed that the majority of students derived from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Fathers had manual occupations such as barmen, cooks, drivers, farmers, labourers, postmen, tile-layers and the like. These fathers had not experienced a successful formal education, and their schooling had not gone beyond the obligatory years. The mothers were mostly housewives, and were the main intermediaries between their children and the school. Such elements, which influence working class students' outlook on education and schooling, were also found amongst those students coming from a rural background. As N. Mifsud (1997, p. 220) has observed, "They tend to celebrate the culture that prevails in the home and village community, its use of dialect, its belief in hard, physical work rather than the culture of the school, with its use of standard Maltese, and its preoccupation with achievement and examination results."

This does not mean that all students coming from the lower strata of Maltese society fall behind in their studies. There is research which indicates that some working class students can and do succeed. In his ethnographic study, Grima (1997) found that some students deriving from a lower socio-economic background believed that the schools they attended facilitated their success. "In general terms, they described schools as institutions which provided them with the means to further their goals, and to participate in a competitive society" (p. 395). Grima notes that the students saw streaming and discipline as beneficial for the able and motivated. The respondents also identified caring teachers as important assets in the success of students coming from a working class background (p. 395). This indicates that one cannot generalise when studying lower class students and their attitude to school. Those determined to move on will take a different approach to education, no matter from which social setting they originate.

Notwithstanding the exceptions to the rule, at secondary school level it is already evident for many working class students that it is hard for them to cope and progress in their studies. This is reinforced at tertiary level. A number of studies carried out throughout the 1980s and 1990s have revealed a particular trend. Though university education in Malta is free for all, and indeed maintenance grants are paid out by the state to those who choose to go on studying, yet little has changed with regards to working class students. Data collected from 1982 to 1994, for example, showed that only about 30 per cent of university students came from families belonging to the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled social bracket. The bulk of the students derived from families falling within the professional, the administrative and managerial, together with the executive and clerical occupational strata. This was the situation, notwithstanding the fact that about two-thirds of occupations in Malta are located within categories IV (skilled and semi-skilled) and V (unskilled) of the hierarchy of occupations (Sultana, 1995).

These trends have been confirmed by a more recent study carried out on a large sample taken from those who graduated from the University of Malta in 2002. It was quite evident from this study that parents' occupations were closely linked to students' career choices. As Debono, Debono & Caruana (2003) have observed, "Children of white-collar workers seem to have a higher disposition to complete a University course than their blue-collar peers" (p. 14). When taking into consideration the occupations of the fathers of these graduates when the latter were 16 years old, one notes a link between the decision to continue studying and class derivation. Thus, 24 per cent of the students' fathers were in administrative/managerial jobs, 21 per cent in professional/technical occupations and a further 15 per cent had executive/clerical jobs. Those having fathers in skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled jobs were less likely to make it to tertiary education. Regarding the mothers of those students who continued their studies, a similar picture emerged. Though 65 per cent of the mothers did not work, that is, they were housewives, 16 per cent of the remainder came from the professional/technical grades while a further 11 per cent had executive/clerical jobs (pp. 13-14).

It thus seems evident that equalisation of access to all who wish to continue their studies proves to be more complex than at first glance. Even when there is equality of opportunity, one cannot assume that members of the working class will be able to benefit more and enhance their chances vis-à-vis their more socially privileged and advantaged student peers. As Sultana argues, "a policy of equality of opportunity has failed, therefore, to bring about equality of outcomes" (1995, p. 55). Yet the opportunities are there. In 2003 alone, for example, 88 per cent of the 17-year-old cohort availed themselves of such opportunities and embarked on post-secondary education (Galea, 2003, p.15).

### *Parental involvement*

In today's perspective of the school, it is often stated that parents should also form part of the educational system. Indeed, many countries officially promote the contribution of parents towards the schools attended by their children. This involvement has resulted in the coining of the term 'parentocracy'. This expression translates itself into the system where the education of children is becoming more and more dependent upon the wealth and wishes of their parents, rather than on the children's abilities and efforts (Macionis & Plummer, 1998, p. 584).

The Maltese State has also given official recognition to the rights of parents to be partners in education. For example, in Britain, the Parent's Charter was updated and published by the government in 1994 "to help parents choose the 'best' and encourage schools to improve their performance" (Browne, 1998, p. 308). Indeed, there is a Charter of the Rights and Duties of Parents in Europe, and a European Parents' Association that was set up in 1996. All this goes to show that parents have gained a strong presence in the domain of schooling and education, and thus their weight is somehow felt when policies are being drawn. As Sultana (1994, p. 14) has observed, parents are the first and best educators of their children, as what they teach remains with their offspring for life. So, the author continues, it does not make sense to leave

parents out of the school system if they are educators. They bring with them a baggage of skills, knowledge and information that provides an added insight into the education of their children.

Following the Education Act of 1988, School Councils were set up to include both teaching staff and parents. The School Council Regulations 1993 (Cap. 327) (L.N. 135 of 1993) gave importance to parents and considered them part of the administration of the schools which their children attend. It is stated in Section 6.1: "The Council, together with the Head of School, shall study ways and means of increasing parent participation and contribution" (Zammit Ciantar, 1996, p. 77). State schools have adopted School Councils and practise this interaction regularly. Parents are also involved in Church Schools, where they contribute, in one way or another, to the decisions these schools make in the interest of their children. Thus, the Association of Parents of Children in Church Schools (Malta) [APCCS] in Section 2.2.3 aims "to develop and cultivate the partnership between parents, administrators, teachers and pupils, so that the educational endeavour be strengthened and bears the desired results" (APCCS, 2001, p. 2).

Though parents have been given official recognition and standing in schools, they nevertheless also intervene on behalf of their children in other ways. A recent study has registered a very high level of commitment amongst Maltese parents with regards to their children (Table 3). Indeed, this commitment is even higher than that concurrently registered in eleven other European countries (Abela, 2000, pp. 78, 97-8). A sizeable number of parents in Malta send their children to their preferred schools. This means that they do not follow the state school route through which a student passes from kindergarten to primary, secondary, and even post-secondary levels, all levels being funded and run by the state. Such parents prefer to send their children to schools of their choice, which they view as being 'better' than others. The non-state school sector in Malta consists of full-time schools run by the Catholic Church, and a number of others managed by independent entities (for a list see for example Zammit Ciantar, 1996, pp. 90-93). Church schools do not officially charge a school fee, following an agreement reached between the Government of Malta and the Vatican in 1985, which, after a revision, became the definitive agreement in 1991 (Zammit Mangion, 1992, pp. 478-485).

**Table 3. Interest demonstrated by Maltese and European parents in their children (data for 1999)**

	level of education					
	primary		secondary		tertiary	
	males	females	males	females	males	females
<b>Maltese parents</b>						
do utmost best for children	96%	94%	91%	91%	81%	83%
no sacrifice of well-being	3%	4%	7%	5%	8%	5%
neither	1%	2%	2%	3%	11%	10%
<b>European parents</b>						
do utmost best for children	75%	78%	72%	68%	68%	62%
no sacrifice of well-being	15%	12%	15%	18%	18%	20%
neither	9%	8%	11%	12%	12%	15%

(Source: based on Tables 3.19 and 3.20 in Abela, 2000, pp. 97-8)

The tendency among many Maltese parents is to consider private schools in general as superior to those run by the state. Cilia and Borg (1997) interviewed parents whose children were still at compulsory education age and who attended private schools. Asked why such schools had been chosen, several of these parents indicated, "the social 'polish' they thought their children would obtain more readily by attending schools in the non-state sector" (p. 235). The use of the English language for everyday school transactions was deemed to be a specific, important reason for sending one's children to such schools, English still being considered by many as a sign of elitism. Many of the interviewed parents regarded the use of English as a mark of distinction between private and state schools, and so preferred the former also on this count (*ibid.*). Indeed, Cilia and Borg found that the parents who sent their offspring to private schools came from a broad range of occupations and professions. They derived from both the middle and the lower classes. Yet, though both categories grumbled about the rising fees they had to fork out, all of them stated that they preferred independent schools to Church schools. The reason was precisely because the independent schools were fee paying as opposed to those run by the Church (p. 237).

Such considerations cannot but stress the 'preoccupation' of some parents for the future of their children. They seek a form of privileged segregation, indicating the elitist mentality some parents have. Their decisions also indicate to what lengths they are prepared to go not to 'jeopardise' the future of their sons and daughters. These parents want to procure as much cultural and social capital as possible for their young ones. They do this by means of what they regard to be 'high-quality' and 'superior' education provided by elitist schools, which they possibly consider instrumental in future career opportunities. For, as Pierre Bourdieu has explained:

Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises; as economic capital, [...] as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital (quoted in Marsh, 2000, p. 581).

Parents intervened in their children's educational choices because these schools might lead their offspring to finding high-ranking jobs. Besides, many parents who send their children to this type of school would also be banking on an extensive social capital which will help their sons and daughters to have the right connections. As Ball, interpreting Bourdieu, puts it, "...social capital works in groups and networks, in the form of exchanges, social obligations and symbols, to define group membership, fix boundaries and create a sense of belonging" (2003, p. 2). Ball continues that all this, "can provide real or potential support and access to valued resources, and it varies by social class." As Ball points out, social capital can help to explain privilege (pp. 2-3). And this is what parents seek when they send their children to a privileged environment. Parents dominate the process of the choice of school to an extent that, sometimes, they might not consider enough their children's real needs, wishes and aptitudes.



Parents make decisions on their children's education even at post-secondary level. Bezzina has done research amongst post-secondary students. Taking a sample from the student intake for academic year 2001-02 at the University Junior College, he was interested in revealing who influenced students to join this educational institution. From the data collected, 82.5 per cent of the students believed that they themselves had decided to join. Only 10.9 per cent admitted to having been influenced by their parents (Bezzina, 2002, pp. 53-4). Yet, when the parents were asked about who had persuaded their children to join the Junior College, 46.3 per cent of the parents believed that it was either completely or partially their decision to send their sons and daughters to Junior College (pp. 54-5). Thus, parents perceive that their influence is important, and they make it a point to exert their influence in one way or the other in the sphere of education.

This study also showed that, to some extent, students do seem to seek their parents' advice regarding choice of subjects. Bezzina (2002, pp. 60-2) found that the students' main source of help in subject choice was the parents. In fact, 64.5 per cent of student respondents stated that they turned to their parents for advice. When it came to the parents, 81.3 per cent said that their children had discussed subject choice with them. All this goes to show how important parents are in the educational progress of their children. Indeed, this study unveils that not only do parents expect to be involved in their children's school life, but also, to some extent, the students themselves expect their parents to get involved. Notwithstanding all these revelations, it cannot be said that all parents in Malta seek to assist in their offspring's future.

There are still parents who do not push their children enough, and this may be truer with regards to daughters. While parents sometimes do exhort their sons to study and do well in school, this cannot be said for their daughters. From research done by Gatt and Mula, it was revealed that parents gave more attention to their sons' education, an attention that was not commensurate with the attention expended on their daughters. The authors thus asserted: "A good number of our female students reported [...] that parents tended to give more attention to their sons' educational needs and studies than to those of their daughters, who were left to take care of themselves" (Gatt & Mula, 1997, p. 254). This same research also indicates that girls are suffering from parental neglect where education is concerned, even when they are academically at par with their brothers. Gatt and Mula state that "parents were reported to prefer their sons, often considering them to be more intelligent and inately gifted, even when daughters were achieving the same or similar grades at school assignments and examinations" (p. 255).

### *Gender differences*

Inequality in education does not only concern social class; it may, and many a time does, encompass gender. Thus, male-female discrepancy comes into evidence when education is studied from the perspective of gender. Females have, for a long time, been viewed first and foremost, as women, that is, a separate class. On the other hand, males have been seen as distinguished by their social position, nation and historical era in which they lived (Darling & Glendinning, 1996, p. 9). Women are seen as a

separate class for study purposes, because they are submerged within a patriarchal society where family life engulfs their very existence. Miceli argues that "educating women has always been regarded as essential for the family to better its standard of living" (1994, p. 85).

Whatever the attempts in gender equality in education, data indicates that a certain amount of inequality is a reality. From an analysis of the 1995 Census of the Maltese population, more women than men never had any schooling. The census shows that women were more likely to have a primary and secondary standard of education; males surpassed them in secondary, vocational and tertiary education (Abela, 1998, pp. 93-4).

Not all women had the same access to education. For example, the age of a daughter with regards to other siblings in a family sometimes made a big difference. Cutajar (2001) went into the life histories of a number of women, and found that, in the past, it was more likely that the eldest daughter in a family would have her education interrupted if the parents needed somebody to help them around the house or in the fields. It was found that, "Gender expectations interacted with birth order in these cases" (p. 246). Younger daughters had less pressure to leave school early.

**Table 4. Students opting for post-secondary education (1990-1999)**

Year	Total		Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1990	1962	56	1027	52	934	48
1991	2554	63	1435	57	1108	43
1993	2652	60	1461	67	1165	56
1995	2734	58	1481	63	1206	52
1997	2846	65	1168	60	1560	69
1999	3496	66	1706	65	1708	66

(Source: adapted from Table 27 in JAPP, 2001, p. 36)

Prior to the mid-1990s, female students were less likely to continue with their studies. Nowadays, even when they continue their studies at post-secondary and tertiary levels, more females tend to stop after their first degree, as compared to their male counterparts (Blackburn, 2001). With regards to secondary school level prior to 1992 women left school in larger numbers than men when they reached the obligatory school leaving age of sixteen years. Thus, the exit rate in 1992 was 59 per cent of females, as compared to 42 per cent of males (Workers' Participation Development Centre [WPDC], 1996, p. 21). This does not mean that females are not engaging in post-obligatory (16+) studies. This same source unveils that, according to Parliamentary Question number 30656 (of 23.i.1996), a steady rise in female numbers is clearly revealed. Therefore, while in 1990-91 there were 1,166 females as compared to 1,978 males, these figures rose to 1,558 females and 2,107 males by 1994-95. Percentage wise, this means that while in 1990-91 females made up 37 per cent of all students in

16- studies, this rose to 43 per cent by 1994-95. Such an upward trend in the number of females continuing post-secondary schooling did not stop there (Table 4). By 1999, there were 66 per cent of females who continued their studies after compulsory education (Government of Malta & European Commission Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs [JAPP], 2001, p. 6).

Taking one specific post-secondary institution into consideration, namely the former Upper Lyceum at Msida in the year 1991-92, out of 1,442 students, 47.3 per cent were females. This percentage rose sharply in the decade 1991-2002. In 2001-02, first-year female students in the University Junior College amounted to 56.4 per cent of the College intake for that year (Bezzina, 2002, p. 131). By the academic year 2003-2004, female students in the Junior College had consolidated their upward trend and constituted 57.8 per cent of the whole College population (first- and second-year students together), with boys making up the remaining 42.2 per cent. If the intake of 2003 is taken into consideration, female students score even higher on the percentage scale. Thus first-year student percentages at the Junior College read 58.5 per cent for girls, as compared to 41.5 per cent for boys (based on data supplied by the Junior College Administration Office).

With regards to the newly set up MCAST, which in 2003-04 had ten institutes, the female population for that year was a little less than that for males. This is an institution that carries out vocational training, and has within it a number of institutes catering for subjects that are still considered to be male oriented. This may explain why the number of female students is inferior to that of males. From all applicants at the start of academic year 2003-04, the MCAST accepted 1,318 males and 939 females. Thus, from 2,257 students, 58.4 per cent were males, with the remaining 41.6 per cent being females (based on data supplied by the MCAST Administration Office).

On evaluating this picture of post-compulsory education, the data seems to indicate that, in spite of equal access and opportunity, there are gender discrepancies. More female students started making it to university level since the mid-1990s. In fact, female students have, from the academic year 1995-96, been in the majority in Malta's institution of tertiary education (Department Equal Status of Women, 1997, p. 16). This tendency is, of course, also reflected in the degrees, diplomas and certificates obtained from this same university by women, as compared to the achievements of men. Thus, in 1985, only 22.37 per cent of successful students were female, as compared to 77.63 per cent who were male. By 1997, the percentages became much more equitable as female students now reached 49.70 per cent of successful students (p. 17). By 2002, females amounted to 56 per cent of all university students (Government of Malta, 2002, p. 74). In this respect, the gender situation in higher education in Malta has reflected similar developments taking place in other parts of the world. By the mid-1990s, the European Union registered an average of 50 per cent female presence in higher education amongst its member states, while in North America, female student figures in the U.S.A. reached 55 per cent, and in Canada, 51 per cent (Marsh, 2000, p. 598).

Gender awareness has intensified in the Maltese educational sector, especially in

the last decade of the twentieth century. Social and Personal Education attempts to raise gender awareness and consciousness. A handbook for teachers was also translated into Maltese to help educators promote this issue (Department Equal Status of Women, 1997, p. 19). This publication came into circulation in 1998 under the title of *Lejn Ugwaljanza bejn in-Nisa u l-Irgiel: Programm ta' Gharfien - Manwal għall-Għalliema* (Camilleri & Portelli, 1998).

Contemporary legislation attacks such instances of gender-differentiated treatment. The NMC in Principle 11 states this clearly. It says: "The educational system should be based on the principle of gender equality based on respect for gender difference," (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 39). Principle 11 recognises these differences and encourages "the affirmation of gender identity" (p. 39). This is a far cry from what was happening prior to the 1990s. Subjects were allotted according to gender, and this was evident throughout the school system. A perfect example to illustrate this gender bias in education may be gleaned from the situation existent in Malta's trade school system, which was initiated in 1972. First of all, as soon as these trade schools were established, it was quite evident that they were primarily intentioned for male rather than female students. By 1974, there were eight boys' trade schools in operation as compared to only one reserved for girls. Furthermore, the subjects offered were also highly stereotyped and affirmed the gender differences current in Maltese society at the time. Female students were taught millinery, sewing, lace making, knitting, crochet, embroidery and dressmaking (Sultana, 1992, pp. 242-3). Such traditional male/female subjects were thus highly evident, and they become starkly so when male subject options were examined. Male students could choose from fitting, fabrication, welding, electrical installation, electrical winding, auto mechanics, furniture making, carpentry and joinery, plumbing and pipe-fitting, building construction, radio and television servicing, pattern making and agriculture (Darmanin, 1991, p. 135). Boys' vocational subjects were much more focussed towards a career in industry than those offered to girls. The message sent by education was quite clear. Men should go out to work while women should engage in home bound activities. In fact, the 'trades' open to girls via the subjects offered in their trade schools led to few real openings in the industrialisation process of Malta as conceptualised in the 1970s. As Darmanin argues, "For girls the trades available are either domestic skills, or lead to unskilled and semi-skilled labour in the textile industry" (1991, p.136).

Such a situation was also reflected in the more academically oriented schools, where subject choice indicated clear gender stereotyping. However, compulsory subjects helped to constrain girls to take up subjects which otherwise would normally have been considered to fall within the male domain. Such was the case of Physics, which became a compulsory subject for all students after 1979. By 1990, the number of female candidates deriving from the state school sector that sat for this subject at ordinary level matched that of male candidates, though more males achieved a pass. From the private school sector, female candidates sitting for the Physics exam also increased considerably (Ventura, 1991, pp. 196-7).

It is a process that is repeated in various other subjects thus indicating that gender may be affecting the educational future of girls *vis-à-vis* boys. As a general rule,

between 1994 and 1997, more girls than boys sat for 6 'O' level subjects, these being selected from the languages (Maltese, English and Italian), the sciences (Mathematics and Physics) and the humanities (Religious Knowledge). A slight exception was the May 1996 session, where boys slightly outnumbered girls in Mathematics, English Language and Physics (Ventura & Murphy, 1998, p. 58). This goes to show that gender perception regarding academic subjects is changing over the years. Girls are becoming attracted to a wider spread of subjects, some of which traditionally may have been perceived as male-oriented. On the other hand, results in such subjects still betray a stark difference between genders. These results tally with the situation on the international scene. Thus, the Maltese and English languages are subjects where female candidates do better. The same results are achieved in other countries, where girls seem to excel in verbal competence. In Mathematics, the international trend is also replicated by the Maltese situation. This time, male candidates do better. Regarding achievement in Religious Knowledge, Italian and Physics, neither boys nor girls have been found to have any significant edge on each other. Physics is an interesting case, which shows that though in Malta girls have been quite successful in the subject, this does not tally with what has been happening in other countries (Ventura & Murphy, 1998, p. 69).

**Table 5. Choice of subjects for the Advanced Matriculation Examination (May 2001 Session) by gender**

Subjects	Males	Females	Total
Accounting	182	228	410
Applied Mathematics	8	3	11
Art	11	33	44
Biology	133	206	339
Chemistry	124	150	274
Computing	92	29	121
Economics	123	144	267
Engineering Drawing	4	0	4
English	98	282	380
French	15	61	76
Geography	10	27	37
German	1	15	16
Graphical Communication	10	3	13
History	27	26	53
Home Economics	1	58	59
Information Technology	31	15	46
Italian	45	111	156
Maltese	107	217	324
Marketing	76	148	224
Music	4	8	12
Philosophy	14	34	48
Physics	219	114	333
Pure Mathematics	276	161	437
Religious Knowledge	37	35	72
Sociology	35	147	182
Spanish	1	23	24

(Source: based on Table 2.3 in MATSEC, 2002, p. 9)

At an advanced level, gender-typical choices are more in evidence. This was evident in the May 2001 examination session (Table 5). These 'male' subjects include Information Technology, Computing, Physics (optional at this level), and Pure Mathematics. On the other hand, females predominantly chose languages, humanities and some sciences (MATSEC Examinations Board, 2002, p. 9).

This tendency, of course, reflects what has been happening at tertiary level (Table 6). In the student intake for 2000-2001, at undergraduate level, females prevailed in the humanities while males surpassed the opposite gender in the sciences. At postgraduate level, gender differences were smaller, but the tendency just mentioned was still evident (University of Malta, 2003, p. 44). The sciences in general seem less attractive to female students. Yet, this is not the case in all scientific areas. The Institute of Health Care of the University of Malta, for example, registers a high female intake. This Institute includes courses in nursing and midwifery, and other 'caring' occupations. This may go to show that females are more attracted to applied sciences (Xuereb, 2001).

**Table 6. Male and female statistics: choice between humanities and sciences at the University of Malta**

Student intake 2000-2001			
	males	females	total
<b>Undergraduate level</b>			
Humanities	550	987	1537
Sciences	212	131	343
<b>Postgraduate level</b>			
Humanities	245	290	535
Sciences	46	13	59
<b>Student population 2001</b>			
<b>Undergraduate</b>			
Humanities	1654	2585	4239
Sciences	763	479	1242
<b>Postgraduate</b>			
Humanities	543	508	1051
Sciences	100	52	152

(Source: based on *Annual Report 2001*; University of Malta, 2003, p. 44)

At MCAST, the same gender tendency was evident (Table 7). While in the Institutes of Mechanical Engineering, Electronics Engineering, Building and Construction, I.C.T., Maritime, and Agribusiness, male presence dominated, in Business and Commerce, together with Community Services, it was the female component that prevailed. In the Institute of Art and Design, the numbers were practically equal (based on data supplied by the MCAST Administration Office).

Table 7. Male and female preferences in courses at the MCAST (2003-04)

Institute	males	%	females	%	total
Mechanical Engineering	131	98.5	2	1.5	133
Electronics Engineering	199	96.1	8	3.9	207
Building & Construction	230	94.3	14	5.7	244
I.C.T.	313	84.8	56	15.2	369
Business & Commerce	218	33.2	438	66.8	656
Art & Design	54	49.1	56	50.9	110
Maritime	21	95.5	1	4.5	22
Community Services	43	13.3	280	86.7	323
Agribusiness	18	85.7	3	14.3	21
Gozo	91	52.9	81	47.1	172
<b>Total</b>	<b>1318</b>	<b>58.4</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>2257</b>

(Source: based on data supplied by the MCAST Administration Office)

This data seems to indicate that female emancipation in educational matters has made long strides forward. Yet, there is still room for more gender equity, especially in particular subject areas that are still too polarised on a gender basis.

### *The 'north-south' divide and education*

With regards to the connection between access to education and the various regions of the Maltese Islands, a certain pattern is seen to emerge. The observer is faced with the 'north-south' divide, which manifests itself in many aspects of Maltese life. This geo-social divide concerns the subdivision of the largest island of the Maltese archipelago, Malta, into two large regions. Gozo is considered as a separate entity due to its own peculiar situation, which is dictated by its size, economic and social activity, as well as insularity.

Regarding Gozo, Cutajar (1997, pp. 76-77) observes that Gozitan students are more likely to depend on state-run schools than their Maltese counterparts. As a matter of fact there are about seventy private schools in Malta to the odd half-score in Gozo. In addition to this, when Gozitan students choose to go on to tertiary education, they would either need to travel to Malta to attend university on the main island, or else attend the University of Malta Gozo Centre, where they are offered only a limited number of courses. Besides the fact that human and material resources in the education system are limited, subject options at secondary and post-secondary levels are also restricted. This situation leads to access to limited job opportunities.

The study in question establishes that younger and more educated females in Gozo seem to be more disposed than Maltese women to participating in the formal labour market, and remain in it for longer periods of time (Cutajar, 1997, p. 19). This observation infers that in the northern districts of Malta there may be more educated

females who take up a job in the formal economy and keep it for a longer time span.

Regionality is thus tied to particular idiosyncratic elements, such as particular assets or, more often than not, the lack of them. No country is completely homogenous, and thus regional differences within countries are quite evident in many parts of the globe. Notwithstanding the smallness of the country, Maltese regional variations and situations are very much in evidence, and differences between them are sometimes quite stark.

Education is an essential element in modern developing societies, and with laws enforcing school attendance up to Form V or 16 years of age, the Maltese State aims at universalising education opportunities, and making them accessible to all. Yet, it is an examination of the situation beyond obligatory school age that gives an indication of how such education opportunities are affecting the emerging younger members of Maltese society.

Reference to data dealing with post-secondary education helps one get a glance at regional differences in education among members of Maltese society. The study of post-secondary student populations is thus relevant as there is no legal compulsion. Motivation to embark on further education depends on other influences, such as social environment, family background and support, together with peer group influence and personal motivation, as well as employment opportunities in the surrounding areas.

From data gathered by the Statistics Unit of the University of Malta (quoted in Workers' Participation Development Centre (WPDC), 1996, p. 22), the Inner Harbour Region in the early 1990s had the least number of sixth-form students per 10,000 population when matched with the national average. Thus, in 1991, only 26.3 per 10,000 population were engaged in post-secondary studies as compared to a national average of 34.6 per 10,000 inhabitants. By contrast, the Northern Region scored 43.3 per 10,000 and the Western Region placed highest with 52.7 per 10,000. Gozo was third from top with 32.6 sixth formers per 10,000 people (even though this was still below national average).

This north-south regional variation seems to have been sustained even a decade later. Thus, from a study conducted on University Junior College first-year students in 2001-02, it was revealed that 16.8 per cent of the students were from the Southern Harbour District, with another 15 per cent being from the South Eastern District. Together, these made up 31.8 per cent of the whole population. On the other hand, the Northern Harbour District on its own accounted for 29.9 per cent of the whole intake. The rest came from the Western District (20.3 per cent) and the Northern District (17.9 per cent). Students from the Western and Northern Districts formed 68.1 per cent of student population. Gozo, having its own sixth-form, was not represented at the Junior College except with a possible 0.1 per cent (Bezzina, 2002, p. 132).

A tracer survey of university graduates carried out in the 1990s (Baldacchino et al., 1997) also demonstrates regional disparities. The sample of graduates itself reflected



### Socio'logical Aspects of the Maltese Islands

the great differences and variations existing in the different localities of the Maltese islands. The study, for example, gave a graduate density for Balzan-Lija-Attard of 16.2 per 10,000 inhabitants, which was three times higher than the national average of 5.5. These three localities form part of the Western Region. Other regions with graduate densities higher than the national average nearly all come from the northern areas of Malta. On the other hand, graduate densities under the national average were generally found in the south of Malta. Thus, the Cospicua-Vittoriosa-Senglea-Kalkara area had only 0.6 graduates per 10,000 population. Other localities did not turn out to have much better rating, even though the numbers were not as low. For example, the Valletta-Floriana-Marsa-Pietà-Hamrun area had 2.3 university graduates per 10,000 inhabitants. Gozo had 4.7 university graduates per 10,000 residents (pp. 61-62). Such data continues to reinforce the north-south divide in the sphere of Maltese education, with Gozo falling under the national average even though geographically it is to the north of Malta.

For the purpose of the 'north-south' divide, it is more fitting to adopt the official classification used for statistical purposes (Tables 8 and 9), where the harbour area is classified as Southern Harbour District and Northern Harbour District (see for example NSO, 2003). Students coming from the South Harbour District constituted 12.4 per cent of the whole first-year intake for 2003-04. On the other hand, students coming from the Northern Harbour District made up 27.7 per cent of the whole population under examination. The South Eastern Region, which ranked fourth in the Maltese Islands as regards the amount of people it contained, placed fifth at the Junior College with 15.8 per cent of students. The remaining regions are usually associated with the 'north' of Malta (excluding Gozo which has its own state sixth-form). Thus, the Western Region, which placed third in the national ranking for the amount of people in it, also

**Table 8. The Regions making up the Maltese Islands as based on the Census of the Population and Housing of 1995**

Inner Harbour Region	Outer Harbour Region	South Eastern Region	Western Region	Northern Region	Gozo & Comino
Blata l-Bajda	Birkirkara	Birzebbuġia	Attard	Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq	Comino
Cospicua	Fgura	Għaxaq	Balzan	Buġibba	Fontana
Floriana	Fleur de Lys	Gudja	Buskett	Burmarrad	Għajnsielem
Senglea	Ibraġġ	Kirkop	Dingli	Għarghur	Għarb
Guardamangia	Luqa	Marsascala	Iklin	Madliena	Għasri
Gżira	Mrieħel	Marsaxlokk	Lija	Magħtab	Kercem
Pietà	Pembroke	Mqabba	Mdina	Melieħa	Munxar
Hamrun	Qormi	Qrendi	Mtarfa	Mgarr	Nadur
Kappara	San Giljan	Safi	Rabat	Mosta	Qala
Kalkara	San Gwann	Żejtun	Siggiewi	Naxxar	Rabat
Sliema	St. Andrews	Żurrieq	Żebbuġ	Qawra	San Lawrenz
Marsa	Sta. Venera			S. Pawl il-Baħar	Sannat
Santa Luċija	Swieqi				Xagħra
Msida	Tarxien				Xewkija
Paola	Żabbar				Żebbuġ
Ta' Xbiex					
Valletta					
Vittoriosa					

(Source: based on *Census of Population and Housing Malta 1995*, Central Office of Statistics, 1997)

occupied third place in the 2003-04 Junior College intake with 19.8 per cent of the students. The Northern Region was fifth in the national ranking, but fourth in that of the Junior College, with 18.3 per cent of the students deriving from there. Adding up all the students coming from the regions considered to form part of the North of Malta, the percentage totals 65.8 per cent of the student population. Students deriving from the 'southern' part formed 28.2 per cent of the whole first-year student intake (Bezzira, 2002). It needs to be pointed out that the three most populated localities (Birkirkara, Qormi and Mosta) form part of the 'northern' zone. This is yet another indication that there is a realistic 'north-south divide', at least in what concerns purely academic education aimed at university courses.

**Table 9. The localities found around the harbour area arranged into Northern and Southern Harbour Districts**  
(for statistical purposes as described in this chapter)

<b>Southern Harbour District</b>	<b>Northern Harbour District</b>
Bormla	Birkirkara
Fgura	Gżira
Floriana	Hamrun
Kalkara	Ibraġġ
Luqa	Msida
Marsa	Pembroke
Paola	Pietà
Santa Luċija	Qormi
Senglea	San Ġiljan
Tarxien	San Ġwann
Valletta	Santa Venera
Birgu	Sliema
Xgħajra	St. Andrews
Zabbar	Swieqi
	Ta' Xbiex

### *Information and Computer Technology*

Information technology has become an integral part of modern industrialised societies. Indeed, modernisation and development are measured against the widespread use of ICT in a particular society. Malta has not kept back in this field of development. Schools have been chosen to teach computer technology, as it is believed that the earlier persons become exposed to ICT, the easier it will be for them to integrate fully into a modern, technologically advanced society (Table 10). Education in Malta has sought to initiate computer awareness from primary school level, where ICT is a cross-curricular tool. It is a fact that Malta has a high ratio of computers to students. In secondary schools, students are able to choose Computer

Studies as a core curriculum option, besides their exposure to Information Technology (IT) (Government of Malta & European Commission Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs [JIM], 2003, p. 29).

**Table 10. Internet coverage in schools (2002)**

Primary Schools	Dec-02	
	Number	%
Total number of students	19980	100.00
Students with Internet in classroom	10347	51.79
Students with Internet in school	13664	63.39
Number of schools	77	100.00
Number of schools with Internet connection	52	67.53
Secondary Schools		
Total number of students	18925	100.00
Students with Internet access	17951	94.90
Number of schools	36	100.00

(Source: adapted from Table 15 in JIM, 2003, p. 60)

Not only is exposure to computer technology becoming ever more widespread, but the use of Internet is also on the increase. For example, while in December 2000 there were 8.8 per 100 persons who were Internet subscribers, by December of the following year, these had risen to 13.3 per cent. Then in December 2002, the percentage had again increased to 16.7 per cent, and to 31.3 per cent the following December (JIM, 2003, p.29). It is assumed that Internet is also used for research and educational purposes, and this leads one to think that more Maltese are becoming aware of yet more diverse ways of learning.

This does not mean that at present ICT is available to all Maltese, and it is a sure fact that many households do not afford this technology, yet numbers are rising and its availability in schools does help to partially make up for its scarcity in households with financial difficulties. Moreover, it has been revealed through a recent survey that 62 per cent of women are not interested in having access to Internet, and 50 per cent do not want a computer. In addition, women who would like a personal computer amounted to only 16 per cent, and those who would like access to Internet, but said that they could not afford it, reached 17 per cent (JIM, 2003, p. 29).

### *Lifelong education*

In contemporary society, many have come to believe that education should not be restricted to the younger generations. Everyone should continue to keep up-to-date with developments in a world that is continually changing. Deskilling is a common development in societies, and it is through education that this eventuality can be controlled and counter-balanced. In Malta there are many institutions (including non-state establishments) that offer educational courses for adults. Such courses range from those with a high cultural content to those more specifically academic (refer to

Zammit Ciantar, 1996, pp. 94-97 for a list of such educational establishments).

The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) has also been set up to help in the learning of new skills and subjects that will help individuals fit into the world of work. Its training services include apprentice schemes, traineeship schemes, training courses, training schemes and grants, and a Night Institute for Further Technical Education (JAPP, 2001, p. 39).

An interesting example of what lifelong education entails is the University of the Third Age. Students from 60 years of age onwards can attend this institution. At the beginning of the academic year 2000-2001, for example, there were 612 females and 238 males. These came from various walks of life: 41 per cent of the total derived from the professions, with another 9.8 per cent coming from the civil service. Legislators, senior officials and managers constituted a further 6.6 per cent of the total student population. The north-south divide also emerges in the University of the Third Age. The bulk of students came from the Northern Harbour District, with the southern districts comparing less favourably with the rest of the northern districts (National Statistics Office, 2003, p. xix).

### *Conclusion*

Education is an intriguing subject, and is frequently in the limelight in political, social, economic and even religious discussions. This is because it is a powerful means of socialisation. Schools today fulfil many of the needs of society; consequently society keeps them under constant scrutiny to secure an efficient output. Schools are accountable to those who finance them, and ultimately it is society itself that puts up the money for their upkeep. Society and its members thus expect the best from the education system for the benefit of the younger generations and society as a whole.

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