

ECO-GOZO

A BETTER

GOZO



Proposed action
2010 - 2012

ECO-GOZO
A BETTER GOZO

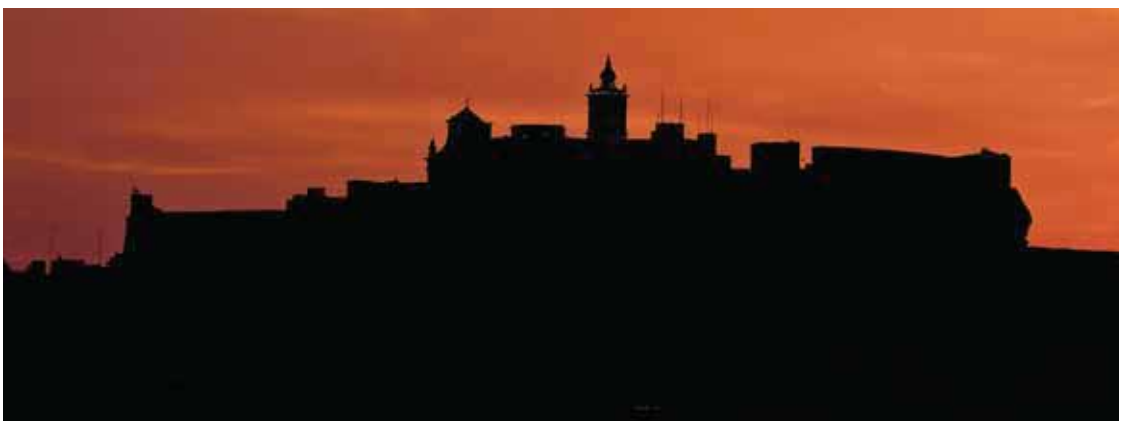


MINISTRY FOR GOZO

November 2009

our vision

Gozo will become an eco-island by 2020, supported by a keen and committed sustainable community. We want to see quality of life in Gozo improving further through education, economic development and social progress. Gozo will strive to reduce its carbon and water footprints. We want to protect the Gozitan lifestyle, the island's environment, resources, culture and identity, and see that all these play a significant part in attracting more visitors and investors to the island.



INDEX

1 INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 ECO-GOZO IS A QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	7
1.2 A PEOPLE'S VISION – THE ECO-GOZO VISION DOCUMENT	7
1.3 A NEW PHASE OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION	10
2 FOUR MAIN PRIORITY AREAS – ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, SOCIETY & IDENTITY	11
2.1 ECONOMY	11
2.1.1 TOURISM	13
2.1.2 TRANSPORT	14
2.2 ENVIRONMENT	15
2.2.1 AGRICULTURE	16
2.2.2 NATURAL HERITAGE	17
2.2.3 AIR QUALITY	18
2.2.4 ENERGY	18
2.2.5 WATER	19
2.2.6 WASTE	20
2.3 SOCIETY	20
2.3.1 EDUCATION	21
2.3.2 HEALTH	22
2.3.3 SPORT	23
2.3.4 SECTORIAL ISSUES	24
2.4 IDENTITY AND CULTURE	25
2.4.1 CULTURE AND THE ARTS	26
2.4.2 CULTURAL HERITAGE	27
2.4.3 VOLUNTARY SECTOR	28
3 THE WAY FORWARD	29



1 INTRODUCTION

The eco-island vision foresees a sustainable, and therefore, a secure future for the island of Gozo. It is a vision rooted in the island's potential and the capabilities of its people.

Eco-Gozo is Government's declared objective for the island – one of the seven strategic targets set for the country in the ambitious 'Vision 2015 for the Maltese Islands'. This target is clearly set in the Prime Minister's declaration that Government 'will transform Gozo into an ecological island, a model of sustainable development'.

Long-term success for the island of Gozo can only be assured if the island embarks on the path of sustainable development – that is, development and progress taking place in Gozo, needs not only beneficial from the economic perspective but also from the environmental and social viewpoints. The success of Gozo's economic growth needs to be measured in the long-term.

At the same time we must ensure that our focus remains on real progress rather than mere economic advancement, thus, while achieving results on the re-focusing of Gozo's economy, we need to increase our support for a healthy, inclusive society, protection and proper management of our environment, the preservation of our cultural heritage and the strengthening of our island identity.

Eco-Gozo is a vision for an island to become ever more beautiful, inspiring, welcoming, thriving, inclusive and successful. A healthy and successful place to live in, in equilibrium with the environment. This is essentially what eco-island will strive to achieve.



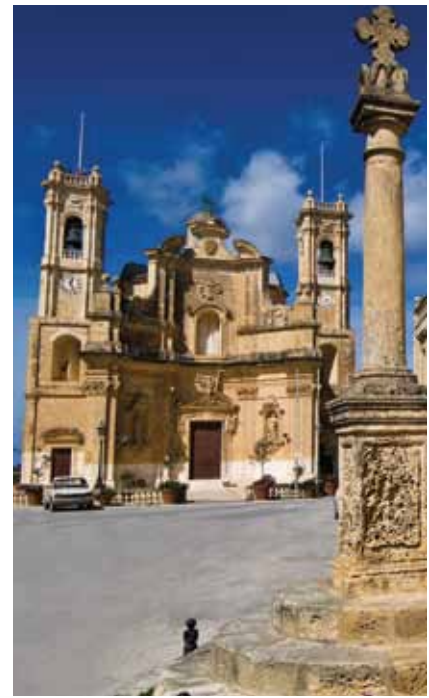
1.1 ECO-GOZO IS A QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Eco-Gozo is not merely thinking green, but a vision to achieve a stable and healthy environment for a better quality of life. It is therefore not a quest to bring about environmental improvement on the island in isolation, but to think constantly of the environment in whatever we do as that fundamental element which determines our health, our well-being and what makes the island so special.

Sustainable Development implies a thriving economy in the long term, a society at peace with itself and its environment, and an environment which provides us with all that we require, without degenerating. Sustainable Development starts off from an awareness of our surroundings and of the impact of our actions, translates into sensible choices, and results in achieving our goals with a long-term vision, with minimum impact and maximum benefit for Gozo and its people. Sustainable Development, like eco-Gozo, may still sound abstract to many, but it is essentially a simple concept. It is not a way of not doing, but doing in a way which does not impair either people, or the environment.

1.2 A PEOPLE'S VISION – THE ECO-GOZO VISION DOCUMENT

The eco-Gozo vision document, which is to be published shortly, is a collective exercise in foresight by an island population which has seen Government, Local Government, individuals, experts and organisations sharing their ideas for a better future for the island of Gozo. It is a



compendium of ideas coordinated by Government, but which is not made up of Government's sole opinion, but that of the island's people.

This document is truly an unprecedented collective effort by hundreds of people comprising professionals, operators in the field, private citizens, volunteers, experts and policy makers. It is also the product of a near year-long consultation process launched by the Ministry for Gozo, in which all stakeholders were presented with the opportunity and the means to come forward with their ideas on how to improve life on the island and render it more sustainable. The vision document provides a long-term vision for the achievement of the eco-island ideals, namely, the quest for Sustainable Development.

The resolution of an ideological direction towards Sustainable Development into a multi-sectoral action plan made up of tangible recommendations and tasks is not easy and can never be fully comprehensive. The eco-Gozo vision document is intended to resolve the complex and as yet relatively abstract 'eco-Gozo vision' into a set of practical recommendations which strive to improve the island on different levels, and in different sectors related to sustainable development, namely, the environment, the economy, the social dimension, culture and identity. The document's approach is to simplify what is understood by sustainable development by resolving this notion into the different sectors identified from the onset as the main tenets of the eco-Gozo vision, namely:

- quality investment for more sustainable jobs
- a better quality of life
- a society exerting less pressure on the environment

a wholesome natural and cultural environment
 a caring society for all
 sustaining the island's identity

Under these main headings, the document sets out recommendations for the sectors which are considered crucial for the continued development of the island. These themes are given below:

OBJECTIVE	THEMES
Quality Investment for more sustainable jobs	Economic Development, Employment and Investment Environmental standards in Industry Tourism Transport
A better quality of life	Education Health Sport
A society exerting less pressure on the environment	Air Quality Energy Water Waste
A wholesome natural and cultural environment	Agriculture Natural Heritage Marine biodiversity Coastal areas Mineral resources Creative arts and entertainment Culture and Cultural Heritage
A caring society for all	Children and Families Youth Persons with disability Elderly Other social issues
Sustaining the island's identity	Urban environments Landscape management Rural culture Voluntary Sector



1.3 A NEW PHASE OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The eco-Gozo vision document, produced through the information collected during the extensive public consultation phase held in 2008-2009 and the subsequent work outlined in the preceding section will now be subjected to another phase of public consultation, which will continue to consolidate it as a totally bottom-up and long-term vision document which renders it quite unique. It presents a vast and holistic vision by the people of Gozo for their island, and will invariably need to be implemented over a long-term period.

From the recommendations contained in the vision document, the Ministry for Gozo has identified a series of actions which it believes are the most urgent to be implemented in the short-term period between 2010 and 2012. These actions are listed in the present document and are expected to bring about the first impetus for the realisation of the eco-Gozo vision. During the forthcoming public consultation, Government will provide the forum for a discussion on the array of actions chosen for this short-term period.

This time around, the consultation process is expected to be shorter and markedly different from the preceding one. The first consultation process concentrated on obtaining stakeholders' views on the future of Gozo and its sustainable development. These views have now been consolidated into a comprehensive vision document. During this second consultation process, stakeholders will be invited to provide their views on the list of actions believed to be the most urgent. Government is also expecting to obtain information on the relative priority for the implementation of the other recommendations whether in the medium or long term, and also to enter into discussions with stakeholders who will volunteer to implement certain recommendations.



2 FOUR MAIN PRIORITY AREAS – ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, SOCIETY & IDENTITY

The eco-Gozo vision document proposes a very extensive plan of action both in terms of time and scope. It touches basically on all aspects of life and activity on the island. Therefore, prioritization, together with ensuring that no sector is overlooked through overshadowing by other sectors, both gain prime importance. Action on the eco-Gozo vision implementation will therefore be distributed into four main priority areas, namely Economy, Environment, Society and Identity.

This approach is also essential to ensure that action is led efficiently, and progress is monitored and measured effectively. As stated earlier, it will also guarantee that action in none of these sectors will be forfeited to the benefit of other sectors.

2.1 ECONOMY

Economic sustainability is fundamental for both continued development and the setting of adequate safeguards for the physical and cultural ethos of the island of Gozo. The Gozitan regional economy in terms of per capita output and income is smaller than that of the island of Malta. The reasons for this disparity could include the productivity of workers in the Gozitan economy, the rate of employment in Gozo out of the working age population, and the share of the working-age population within the total population in Gozo.

Gozo has limitations in attracting foreign direct investment, arising from issues ranging from double insularity to an apparent mismatch between the needs of the industry and the skills availability of the workforce on the island. The island also has particular strengths to attract investment, particularly in the form of a competent, flexible workforce and an overall high quality

of life. Gozo's distinctive characteristics and Government's commitment to move forward with the eco-island vision call for a different approach for job creation on the island.

In this regard, Government proposes to:

Create a multi-floor complex to be used as a small eco-friendly business park having the necessary infrastructure to attract offices in financial services, ICT, and related technology companies.

Set up a one-stop-shop in Gozo where potential investors and company officials can meet with regulators, inland revenue officials, employment and training officials, and Malta Enterprise Gozo Desk in one location.

Carry out a human resources supply and demand analysis in Gozo so that the needs of industry are met, and focus on the promotion of selected activity for Gozo.

Create additional schemes and modify existing ones to enable positive discrimination towards investment in Gozo.

Assess the level of the IT connectivity required by Gozo to support a healthy level of activity in this sector.

Conduct a Gozitan graduate study to find out where Gozitan professionals are working and establish the skills/resources they have to offer in order to contribute towards the development of Gozo.

Plan for higher employment diversification in Gozo.



2.1.1 TOURISM

Gozo is a unique place. It boasts a distinctive culture, history, and nature among which current and prospective World Heritage Sites. This heritage is coupled by an unspoilt rural landscape, a particularly tranquil way of life, hospitable people, and an authentic gastronomy.

Tourism is one of the strongest sectors in the economy of Gozo as it provides a major stream of revenue which positively impacts on the social and economic well being of the Gozitan population. In the past, Gozo together with Malta, had been promoted as the traditional ‘sun and sea’ resort. Efforts have been made in recent years to promote Gozo as a distinct tourism destination and create other niche markets to enhance tourism sustainability for Gozo and to mitigate the problem of seasonality.

Tourism in Gozo is mainly characterised by two segments, namely foreign and domestic. Day trips account for the majority of international visits. Gozo commands a higher share of repeat business than Malta, with 40% of tourists returning to Gozo as opposed to the 30% returning to Malta. Yet the quantity of tourist arrivals remains an issue for the island; this coupled with the great problem of seasonality of the industry, is limiting growth in investment and interest in taking up a professional career in tourism. Occupancy rates in Gozitan hotels averages at 40% per annum.

The tourism strategy for Gozo should be designed to embrace the eco-Gozo strategy. This requires significant investment in niche areas in line with the eco-Gozo vision.

Government proposes to:

Carry out a market analysis to identify the most appropriate type of Meetings, Conferences and Incentives travel to Gozo, which would be compatible with the eco-Gozo vision and to synergise the different components of the island’s product available for this sector.

Create infrastructure for additional temporary yacht berthing facilities and support the cruise liner market whilst exploring the possibilities for permanent and new berths.

Launch and promote the website portal www.visitgozo.com

Resume an international marketing campaign on Gozo as a unique diving destination.

Develop the Gozo tourism brand on the basis of the eco-Gozo strategic direction and increase efforts in marketing Gozo as a distinct tourism destination.

Include tourism awareness in the eco-Gozo schools programme (in the primary and secondary schools).

Adopt a regional agro-tourism policy specifically for Gozo and as a niche industry for Gozo.

Support and market existing high-quality festivals and cultural events at an international level as part of government's strategy to market Gozo as a distinct destination and as an added value to the national tourism product.

Promote the introduction of fishing experience offers to tourists while in Gozo.



2.1.2 TRANSPORT

For Gozitans, the transport issue is not only related to land public transport but also, and in a very important way, inter-island transport. Government is in the process of reforming the national public transport with the aim of improving the service of land transport in Malta and Gozo. The ferry service between the two islands has improved substantially over the years. However, this does not mean that double insularity issues have been completely solved.

In Gozo, the state of affairs for private car ownership may be worse than in Malta as the public transport system is less popular. With the aim of improving the transport infrastructure, in the past years substantial parts of the arterial road network have been upgraded and more work in this field is in the pipeline. It is however evident that Government cannot depend entirely on a technological fix to solve existing problems; the 'lifestyle' of the existing transport system in the Maltese Islands, needs to be modified radically.

For this priority area, government proposes to:

Set up an electric cab system for Victoria.

Create pedestrian precincts in towns and villages and raise awareness on the economic and social benefits of pedestrian zones.

Introduce hybrid and electric cars in its fleet and also promote the use bio fuels as a commitment towards using alternative sources of energy for transport purposes.



2.2 ENVIRONMENT

Within the conceptual model of Sustainable Development, the environment functions with a dual role. As in environmentalism, it is the subject of attention and protection – it is the valuable object to be safeguarded and handed down in better shape to future generations. Yet, within the framework of sustainability, the environment is also that commodity which belongs to all without exclusion, and which determines the quality of life of the people living within it.

The environmental considerations related to the small island of Gozo have spurred the eco-Gozo vision. The size of the island offers an opportunity to implement a set of focused initiatives intended to guarantee a better and healthier lifestyle in Gozo stemming from a nourishing environment.



2.2.1 AGRICULTURE

For millennia, agriculture has been one of the most important social and economic activities of the island. Its sustainability adds to the uniqueness of Gozo's identity and has its direct effect on the landscape, the employment and the agro-tourism sector.

Sustaining this sector is of vital importance for the preservation of the rural character of the countryside. Agriculture in Gozo provides a number of value-added quality food products, based on traditional techniques and practices. However this vision is also intended to address improper agricultural practices, including imbalance in nutrient flux, lack of integrated pest management, disposal of waste and uncontrolled use of fertilisers, which do not blend well with the eco-Gozo vision.

Government proposes to:

Set up an Agricultural Research, Development and Innovation Centre in Gozo.

Study and encourage the best irrigation regimes for particular crops, new irrigation systems and irrigation methods so as to come up with practical recommendations

that may help farmers achieve quality produce with a more efficient use of water and educate farmers in respect of crop water requirements.

Launch a project to advice on the sensible use of pesticides and provide for the safe disposal of pesticide containers and linked materials.

Provide advice to farmers on how to achieve an ecological balance on the farm in terms of nutrients, water and energy.

Encourage the rebuilding of rubble walls and deter land abandonment by providing incentives to encourage its use for agricultural purposes.

2.2.2 NATURAL HERITAGE

Gozo is justifiably renowned for its rich archaeological, historical and cultural heritage; however, to this list must be added its natural heritage for although small in size, Gozo is endowed with a variety of habitat types, a diverse fauna and flora, and an interesting geology. These constitute the natural heritage of the islands, which is just as worthy of study and preservation as the rest of the nation's patrimony.

Noteworthy elements of Gozo's natural heritage include numerous endemic species and subspecies of plants and animals, including some found only on Gozo, that are of evolutionary and biogeographical interest; species of flora and fauna with a restricted Mediterranean distribution, including some that are internationally protected; a number of locally rare and threatened species for which Gozo presents some of the last remaining localities; and a variety of Mediterranean habitats that are particular local variants and which blend with the geomorphology of Gozo to give a landscape that is quite unique.

Government proposes to:

Undertake projects for the planting of trees to establish orchards and groves in erosion-sensitive areas and increase by at least 1% the tree cover per year until saturation of suitable sites is reached.

Upgrade government facilities that house trees and plants of genetic value and open these facilities to the public and researchers.

Remove silt from dams in valleys and achieve at least a 2% reduction in the number of valley units that require intervention per year.

Establish the Dwejra marine area as a Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and designate additional marine SACs and set up ongoing monitoring activities with the help of local NGOs and diving schools.

2.2.3 AIR QUALITY

In general, Gozo enjoys a good level of air quality. However, specific areas that are subject to heavy traffic at particular times of the day and others that are close to construction or quarrying activities may not enjoy such good air quality.

The monitoring and improvement of air quality is fundamental to the eco-Gozo vision. Research shows that poor air quality principally affects respiratory and cardiovascular systems. In Gozo, the main sectors contributing to air pollution are transport and quarrying.

Government proposes to:

Provide an efficient public transport system in Gozo.

Address excessive emissions generated by older generation cars, especially heavy duty vehicles.

Explore abatement measures which can be implemented by quarry operators.

2.2.4 ENERGY

The generation of energy is often directly associated with the concept of eco-initiatives and is another central issue to the eco-Gozo vision. Energy consumption in the Maltese Islands is derived from imported fossil fuels. NSO statistics indicate that energy consumption has been on the increase for the past eight years. Sources which are environmentally-friendly and non-polluting can be considered as alternatives to fossil fuels. Gozo, due to its small scale, can have most of its energy generated through green sources which may include micro-wind turbines, on-shore wind farms, biomass/energy from waste and solar energy.



For this priority area, Government proposes to:

Identify optimal sites for small onshore wind farms and develop small onshore wind farms with a limited number of turbines.

Utilise rooftops of public buildings and other spaces such as public car parks for renewable energy projects involving solar energy.

Install additional photovoltaic panels at the Ministry for Gozo funded from savings in electricity bills arising from replacement of the existing energy supply.

Carry out energy audits on all public buildings including the Gozo Administration Centre.

Convert all lighting systems in offices and public places to energy-saving lighting.

Provide free consultation to people on how to convert their houses to be energy efficient.

Award companies, households, villages and streets committed to energy-saving with a 'Green Award'.

2.2.5 WATER

The rainy season in the Maltese islands is considered to start in September. Excluding the months of May to August, the mean monthly rainfall over the last two decades for Gozo stands at 68.88 mm. Consequently, fresh water is very scarce on the island and therefore the efficient use of the resource for domestic, industrial and agricultural use must be ensured. This vision addresses the protection and improved use of such water and may be one of the more difficult measures to attain.

Government proposes to:

Identify areas where reservoirs could be constructed so as to collect rainwater and prevent flooding.

Promote the collection and use of rainwater in households and enhance the implementation of systems for the re-use of water and distribute a water savings kit to each household.

Promote a cost-effective utilisation of treated sewage effluent for secondary uses such as agriculture, landscaping and industry.

Study the optimal use of water in agriculture in conjunction with the Gozo Experimental Farm project. Use water produced by the Waste Water Treatment Plant for agriculture purposes.

Restore reservoirs at Administration Centre and Government farm.



2.2.6 WASTE

The waste management policies in Malta emerge from 'A Solid Waste Management Strategy for the Maltese Islands' published by the Government in October 2001. The policies included Sustainable development, Proximity principle and self-sufficiency, Precautionary principle, Polluter-pays-principle, Waste hierarchy (waste prevention/reduction, re-use, recycling, recovery, disposal), Best practicable environmental option, and Producer responsibility.

A revision of the 2001 Strategy which was published as a consultation document in January 2009 recognises Gozo as having a strategic dimension to serve as a pilot area where projects can be implemented and subsequently mirrored in Malta. In this regard, innovative waste strategies will be applied in Gozo with a view to create business opportunities whilst also enhancing Gozo's image as a tourist destination and its self-sufficiency from a waste management perspective.

Government proposes that:

The Ministry for Gozo, Wasteserv and Local Councils will work together to increase the proportion of recyclables collected in Gozo to an established target above the national targets.

A mechanical biological treatment plant for the treatment of municipal solid waste and manure is established.

Compost for use in agriculture and/or landscaping projects is produced from waste.

2.3 SOCIETY

Sustainable Development can hardly be defined as sustainable if it does not result in a tangible and long-lasting improvement in quality of life. Eco-Gozo is an opportunity to further integrate education, health, the family and all social actors with the ultimate aim of fostering a society which is inclusive towards everyone.

Gozitan Society at large, will play a fundamental role in bringing about the change and the improvement necessary for the eco-island project to succeed. The great foresight and commitment to change shown in the public consultation now needs to be translated into action for the effective implementation of the vision recommendations and the continued development of the eco-Gozo idea.



2.3.1 EDUCATION

Educational institutions in Gozo play a vital role in the socio-economic development of the island. While the levels up to secondary school provide the basic education to children and young people and prepare them for adulthood, it is MCAST, post-secondary schools, and the University (whether in Malta or in Gozo) that provide the skills and education for careers. MCAST is essential in providing training skills while the University Gozo Campus needs to become an ever-more strong and visible extension of the University of Malta in Gozo, and continue to be a relevant force in the socio-economic development of Gozo.

While awareness on eco-Gozo at primary and secondary levels facilitates the achievement of an eco-Gozo vision from an environmental perspective, post secondary education is the pillar to a sustainable economic and social framework in the longer term.

In this priority area, Government proposes to:

Set up a permanent environmental science education centre in a rural area.

Establish a permanent forum between the Ministry for Gozo, the University of Malta, Malta Enterprise, the Employment and Training Corporation and educational institutions in Gozo with a view to planning for the future demand of human resources skills.

Set up a permanent briefing programme for guidance teachers in Gozo to keep them informed on Government's employment strategy for Gozo.

Inform and update career teachers with labour market needs, the national employment strategy as well as the educational and training courses available.

Develop the MCAST facilities and expand its course offerings in Gozo.

Upgrade the technological infrastructure to facilitate internet use in Gozo and facilitate the proliferation of wide public Wi-Fi access.



2.3.2 HEALTH

Gozo is committed to the implementation of the European and Health Strategy 2004 – 2010 and its subsequent follow up, which typically present a vision on addressing environmental and health issues in a more integrated way. The Maltese Government's objective in improving the health status of the population of Malta and Gozo is:

“ to add health to life by increasing years lived free from ill-health, reducing or minimising the adverse effects of illness and disability, promoting healthy lifestyles, physical and social environments and overall improving quality of life”.

The eco-Gozo vision will strive to help counter and prevent conditions which do affect the Gozitan population, such as obesity, smoking, and alcohol and substance abuse.

Government proposes to:

Draw up a Master Plan for the Gozo General Hospital in order to meet the needs of the population for the next 25 years.

Digitise medical records at the Gozo General Hospital.

Strengthen the health promotion capacity in Gozo and launch a Healthy Eating Awareness campaign.

Carry out an intervention programme for obese children or children at risk.

Set up a working group to monitor, plan and implement the national alcohol and substance abuse strategies in Gozo in collaboration with operators on the island.

Enhance health promotion activities and strengthen web-based awareness on substance and alcohol abuse.



2.3.3 SPORT

In line with the “Medium Strategic Plan for enhancing Sport Culture in Malta 2007–2010”, one of the eco-Gozo strategy’s primary objectives is the achievement of a better quality of life. It is widely recognised through various research sources that a healthy diet combined with adequate physical activity can prevent the main avoidable risk factors in the development of a wide array of diseases. Physical activity is one of the cornerstones of a healthy lifestyle.

In Gozo, football is the only strongly-developed and structured sports activity. There is a football stadium, a Gozo Football Association that is affiliated with the Malta Football Association and various clubs and football nurseries in the local villages. Other official clubs and associations, promote other forms of sport, among which Billiards and Snooker, Athletics, bocci, horse racing, Baseball and Waterpolo.

Apart from these official clubs and associations, other sports initiatives or structures include five small fitness centres, a Skola Sport and the Gozo Seminary Sports Complex.

The Gozo Sports Complex which is run by Government was opened in the late eighties and is situated very close to the island's secondary and post-secondary schools.

Government proposes to:

Develop a public indoor swimming pool which will make significant use of renewable energy.

Create an official track around Gozo that could be promoted both within and outside Gozo.

Identify and set up potential sites for camping in Gozo.

Undertake a healthy lifestyle promotional campaign through schools and the mobilisation of all community actors, particularly through the eco-Gozo school programme also promoting the importance of recreational activities for children.

2.3.4 SECTORIAL ISSUES

The vision document on eco-Gozo focuses also on a number of sectors, namely children, families, youth, persons with disability and the elderly.

The family's role is society's backbone, especially since families shape up the children of today and the adults of tomorrow. Government is committed to better address the issues which directly affect families so that the Gozitan family would be in a better position to provide the adequate social environment to its members and dependants for the collective benefit of society.

Moving from an attitude of reacting to environmental challenges to one which is pro-active towards attaining sustainability such as contributing to increasing the ecological balance (through for example creative, eco-friendly technologies and business practices) requires the fundamental contribution of young people. It is for this purpose, that the eco-Gozo vision recognises youth as a pivotal stake holder in the implementation of this vision. The realisation of the scope of this vision necessitates that the drive towards ecological modernisation is embedded in Gozo's kaleidoscopic social reality, including the life-world of young Gozitans in all its manifold dimensions.

The disability sector in Gozo is already equipped with support services originating from both private and public sectors, yet, more action is required in this field to improve further both quality of life and inclusion of persons suffering from disabilities of different degrees. Only 2.5% of the people living in Gozo are actually born with a disability and the rate of disability increases with age. This vision seeks to address the issues that are faced by these individuals in order to help them integrate in society, and enjoy all the benefits it offers, thereby promoting a caring society within the eco-Gozo vision.

Government proposes to:

Introduce the Homestart project for vulnerable families in Gozo.

Provide more childcare facilities in Gozo, in-house childcare facilities, after-school programmes and vacation caring facilities.

Consolidate child protection services in Gozo and evaluate the introduction of the Foundation for Welfare Services in Gozo.

Set-up a regional youth council in Gozo.

Create a role for young people in supporting the creation of sustainable communities in collaboration with local councils.

Monitor alcohol and tobacco consumption by minors in Gozo

Extend the range of services offered at the Adult Training Centre One-Stop-Shop to provide mainstream Government services more effectively.

Develop disability-friendly facilities on www.eco-gozo.com and other Ministry for Gozo websites.

Develop new services, even on a voluntary basis, to cater for elderly who are at risk of social exclusion.

Publicise among newly-retired people the possibilities where they can provide a voluntary service.

2.4 IDENTITY AND CULTURE

Islands are known to be special incubators of a strong identity and a particular cultural temperament. Gozo is no less – it boasts a strong cultural heritage and a steady output of cultural fare. Its population possesses a strong island identity which gives the island's mere 30,000-odd population, a character which goes beyond mere demographic numbers or the size of the island.

The culture, heritage and identity of the island of Gozo need to be safeguarded. Moreover, in the context of sustainable development, they need to be made to play a significant role in developing the islanders' potential further, and attract quality tourism to the island.

Gozo's particular identity has always been that which made the island so attractive to foreign settlers, day trippers and tourists alike. Not too far from the Maltese identity yet very Gozitan in its very own way. Yet, Gozo does not exist in a vacuum, and though the Gozitan lifestyle has been the centre point in tourist marketing, the modern fast-paced culture has slowly crept in threatening particular characteristics and authentic village traits and traditions. It is in this spirit that the eco-Gozo vision aims at fostering the Gozitan identity while enhancing the long standing eco-friendly manners by which rural life in Gozo was always conducted. This, coupled with the rich cultural texture and love for the arts will be supported within the eco-Gozo strategy.



2.4.1 CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Creativity is the foundation for the development and maturity of a culture. The objective on Gozo should be to focus on the quality of the cultural content, to be able - through the cultural offering on the island - to enrich the experience of visiting Gozo and create quality attractions to Gozitans, Maltese and tourists.

Gozo boasts a creative arts scene which is possibly, per capita, stronger than that on the mainland. The island also boasts artists of a considerable level, in numbers which are striking for such a small population. A Gozo Cultural Council exists on the island with the purpose of setting the parameters of a cultural policy specific for Gozo. Gozo's cultural events need to be marketed better and Government needs to start capitalising on using existing cultural events to market Gozo as a quality destination.

Government proposes to:

Promote Gozo's cultural identity through awareness campaigns.

Create an all-year-round cultural programme of events in Gozo particularly during winter months.

Promote www.gozoculture.com as a web-portal through websites such as www.visitmalta.com, www.visitgozo.com, www.islandofgozo.org, www.gozo.gov.mt and www.eco-gozo.com.

Organise and support cultural, musical and literary activities at historical sites which are compatible with conservation values required by these sites.



2.4.2 CULTURAL HERITAGE

Gozo possesses an unexpectedly enormous, unique and rich cultural heritage spanning the good part of 7000 years. The various civilisations that have occupied the Maltese islands have influenced Gozitan culture developing unmatched characteristics ranging from language, gastronomy and the way of life to physical artefacts and archaeological sites. Historical places are currently used mostly for tours and visits by history enthusiasts. A wider audience should be targeted. Historical places may be used for compatible recreational activities dependant on the status of the surroundings.

Government proposes to:

Implement the recommended tasks as indicated by the Cittadella Masterplan with reference to restoration.

Create a prehistory heritage trail in Xaghra.

Take initiatives to expose the Gozitan Prehistoric culture internationally.

2.4.3 VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Voluntary work in Gozo is a precious resource. The high level of voluntary engagement on the island is one of the distinctive features of Gozitan society. Whether acting on an individual basis, in groups that have an informal structure or others with formal structures, people offering a service on a voluntary basis play a vital, though not always recognised, role in promoting an inclusive society, an appreciation of the cultural and natural heritage and the long-standing traditions and values of the island.

The voluntary and NGO sector in Gozo is perceived to be a very healthy one and provides unique opportunities for a better quality of life on the island, particularly with respect to services or activities where economies of scale prohibit their development on a commercial basis.

This vision recommends the exploration of Public-Voluntary Organisation partnerships and assistance to voluntary groups/organisations so that maximum benefit can be reaped from the experiences and human resources that are available in the voluntary sector.

Government proposes to:

Foster the creation of support groups for vulnerable segments of the population and support existing ones.

Support and facilitate the services provided by NGOs and informal voluntary groups that provide services to vulnerable groups.

Invite interested expatriates living in Gozo to contribute to the implementation of aspects of the eco-Gozo vision

3 THE WAY FORWARD

The eco-Gozo vision document provides an unprecedented exercise outlining the long-term path to Sustainable Development on the island of Gozo. It is clear that all must be on board – even on the individual level – for this eco-Gozo project to arrive to fruition. Creating the appropriate synergy between Government and Civil Society, and empowerment at the level of the individual, will ensure this successful outcome for eco-Gozo. In particular, the setting up of structures to bring together the public and private sector will play a critical role in pushing for the implementation of eco-Gozo and monitoring its progress on the ground.

Government will ensure that it contributes as much as possible to provide the resources required for the implementation of this vision. The vision recommendations will invariably need to be prioritized according to the needs of the island and the resources available. Apart from financing, Government will ensure that the necessary structures are established and that the networks required are built.

By means of the eco-island project, Gozo will become a better place, for Gozitans and for the whole nation.

This is everybody's project – where everyone has a role and where everyone is set to gain. With as wide an ownership as possible, eco-Gozo will definitely live up to the promise of delivering a better Gozo.

