



# MALTESE RESPONSES TO TOURISM

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**Abstract:** This study of residents' responses to tourism in the Maltese islands adopts a contextual rather than tourism-centric approach, with responses related to the sociocultural and political setting as well as to tourism development. Scattered published sources are brought together and analyzed to develop a new research agenda. Several forms of response among the Maltese are examined, including attitudes to tourism's general and specific impacts, and protest action against its schemes. The study shows that after the mid-80s some people's views about the industry became more negative. Consideration is given to likely influences on the continuities and changes in responses since the 60s. **Keywords:** Malta, contextual study, community attitudes, environmental groups, environmental policies. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** La réponse maltaise au tourisme. Cette étude des réponses des habitants au tourisme à l'archipel de Malte adopte une approche contextuelle plutôt que centrée sur le tourisme, avec des réponses liées aux cadres socioculturel et politique aussi bien qu'au développement du tourisme. On rassemble et analyse diverses publications pour développer un nouveau programme de recherches. On examine plusieurs sortes de réponses pa les Maltais, y compris leurs attitudes envers les impacts généraux et spécifiques du tourisme et leurs actes de protestation contre ses projets. L'étude montre que l'opinion publique au sujet du tourisme est devenue plus négative à la fin des années 80. On tient compte des influences probables sur les continuités et les changements dans les réponses depuis les années 60. **Mots-clés:** Malte, étude contextuelle, attitudes de la communauté, groupes écologistes, politiques écologistes. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Too much research is carried out within a tourism-centric and de-contextualized theoretical paradigm. Hence, this paper seeks to demonstrate the merits of adopting a contextual approach to the study of community responses to tourism. The case is made by undertaking a critical synthesis of research on the reactions to the industry among residents of the Maltese islands. The analysis evaluates how broad socio-economic, cultural, and political processes in Malta have influenced, and have also been affected by, these responses. Tourism is examined as only one of many influences. Historical continuities and changes in responses are considered since the advent of mass tourism in the

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islands in the 60s. Within this overall setting, there is examination of several different forms of responses among the residents. First, there is consideration of their attitudes to the industry's overall and specific impacts. Second, attention is paid to public concern and protest about environmental issues partly affected by tourism. Lastly, there is discussion of the development of related environmental policies and regulations, and of how the population has responded to them. Based on this analysis, suggestions are made for a new agenda of questions to consider in future research on reactions to the industry in Malta.

The microstate of Malta is 100 km south of Italy in the central Mediterranean. Tourism's rapid growth on these tiny islands means that it has had substantial impacts. This analysis of Maltese responses to tourism relies on secondary published sources, drawing together and interrogating previous sociological and anthropological studies by native and overseas researchers as well as surveys by national public agencies. The use of these sources illustrates how previously published, scattered information can have considerable relevance for research on this theme. It is shown that such material may be evaluated using a more holistic approach in order to ask new questions and to reinterpret previous findings. The resulting new research agenda might not have emerged if already published material had been neglected and if the analysis had applied tourism-centric perspectives without sensitivity to the wider setting.

## RESPONSES TO TOURISM

Some studies of local responses to tourism examine them largely in relation to the area's progress through an assumed development cycle (Allan, Long, Perdue and Kieselbach 1988; Smith and Krannich 1998). They reflect Doxey's (1975) suggestion that as the industry increases, residents' reactions become steadily more negative, moving from euphoria to apathy, annoyance, and then antagonism. This idea has been extended by other researchers, notably Butler (1980) who proposes a resort cycle moving through five stages of discovery, involvement, development and consolidation, decline, and rejuvenation or stabilization, depending on attempts to ameliorate the adverse impacts. It is proposed that rising number of tourists and their changing types over the cycle can increase negative resident perceptions. While Butler recognizes the influence of other factors, some researchers apply this model without giving detailed attention to socioeconomic, cultural, and political influences on local attitudes. For example, Ioannides uses the model, together with "the experiences of various Mediterranean insular regions", to develop a "conceptual framework for examining the agendas of various stakeholder groups at each stage of a resort's development". This longitudinal framework is premised on the notion that stakeholder attitudes to tourism and sustainable development may shift according to a destination's development stage. Hence, when mass tourism has set in, such as on the Greek island of Cephalonia, local reaction to its development is mixed:

Although the local residents begin to recognize certain social and environmental problems, they are also willing to put up with tourism in its current mass-market form because of the real and perceived benefits it may provide. Only certain NGOs, including "fringe" environmental activists, oppose future development (2001:64, 69–70).

This industry-focused model is useful heuristically to prompt thought about tourism's effects on attitudes, but it could distort interpretations if attention is not also paid to other influences (Horn and Simmons 2002:142). Yet the model's longitudinal character encourages consideration of temporal changes in localities rather than describing them as frozen in time.

Community responses to tourism are best understood when examined in relation to the varied relationships affecting them. Research abstracting responses from their context and history may lose a fuller understanding of processes and meanings, and this can lead to misinterpretation. Examinations of responses in a local context should avoid retreating to the unique. There are reflexive and recursive intersections between localized influences and more general and even global forces, including capital accumulation, commodification, and consumerism (Britton 1991; Milne 1998). As Harvey put it: "universality must be constructed in dialectic relation with particularity" (1996:362). In her study of the Greek island of Mykonos, Stott argues that the "history, social organization and cultural principles of a society will determine the flexibility or inflexibility in response to or development of the tourist industry" (1979:89). The contours of such responses will be understood better when related to how residents actively construct their identities in relation to global forces. As Black concludes from a study of tourism in Malta, local cultures should not be

viewed as lacking an internal dynamic and become blank screens upon which to project ideas about a "lost past" and to reflect upon the social ills of the developed world. In the meantime, the voices of the people upon which all these ills are supposedly working often remain completely absent (1996:116; 1990).

### *Southern European Context*

Holistic insights can be furthered by considering local situations in their regional context. Southern European countries are characterized by some similarities, but also by marked diversity. While they have generally modernized more slowly than in Northern Europe, in recent decades change has been rapid; "changes over a few generations while in Continental Europe the changes evolved over centuries" (Sapelli 1995:13). One notable development has been the rise of consumerism (Pridham 1994:81). Despite rapid recent change in these societies, religion, the family, and certain traditional values often remain as key features. Since the 50s and 60s, parts of Southern Europe's littoral have developed as a mass tourism "pleasure periphery" for Northern Europeans. This form of tourism has often evolved historically through a dash for quick money to solve economic problems or ambitions, both

national and familial (Pridham 1999:101; Williams 1997, 2001). The industry has contributed to patterns of uneven development between and within regions (Dunford 1997; Hadjimichalis 1987). The limited research indicates that residents' responses to these changes vary within Southern Europe, influenced by the distinct localistic cultures and differing histories (Pridham 1994:81).

Barke's study of Spain's coastal regions offers a valuable illustration of how specific contexts affect local responses to tourism. He identifies circumstances in these regions from the 60s that discouraged major explicit conflict despite the sudden and massive increase in international tourists. One circumstance was the "historical association in the minds of many Spaniards between the growth of tourism, the overall growth of the national economy, and the massive increase in material prosperity for many groups" (1999:256-7). They also tended to feel themselves and their home area to be superior, and this self-confidence helped them absorb change without fundamental disturbance to their cultural values. Further, Barke suggests that the Spanish had evolved mechanisms to cope with the influx of outsiders; in particular they retained, re-created, or initiated their own spaces that reflected their individuality and are distinct from tourist spaces.

A few Southern European studies emphasize how historical changes in a locality influence the inhabitants' reactions to tourism. For example, Morris uses a diachronic analysis of community responses in Spain's Costa Brava since the 50s, examining two types of adjustment: local policies for tourism planning and the opposition to this planning and to related developments. He identifies two indicators of early endorsement of the industry as the pro-development plans for Lloret de Mar and for Castelló d'Empúries, and the very limited opposition to these plans when they were publicly exhibited. Morris concludes that the early reception given to tourism in the Costa Brava was generally welcoming and positive. However, he depicts the responses as evolving temporally "from receptive to critical and selective. This does not precisely fit any tourist cycle, but follows a sequence of its own, colored by the type of local culture and the changes which may occur in the political structure of the country" (1996:84). Shifts in these reactions are related to changes since the 50s in the scale and geographical spread of the region's tourism and also in values and attitudes in Spanish society. Among the broad influences on these shifts has been Spain's rapid urbanization and industrialization in recent decades which has encouraged new attitudes to the land, environment, and conservation. Hence, it is recognized that responses may evolve independently of changes in tourism due to the contemporaneous evolution of society.

#### *Published Sources on Malta*

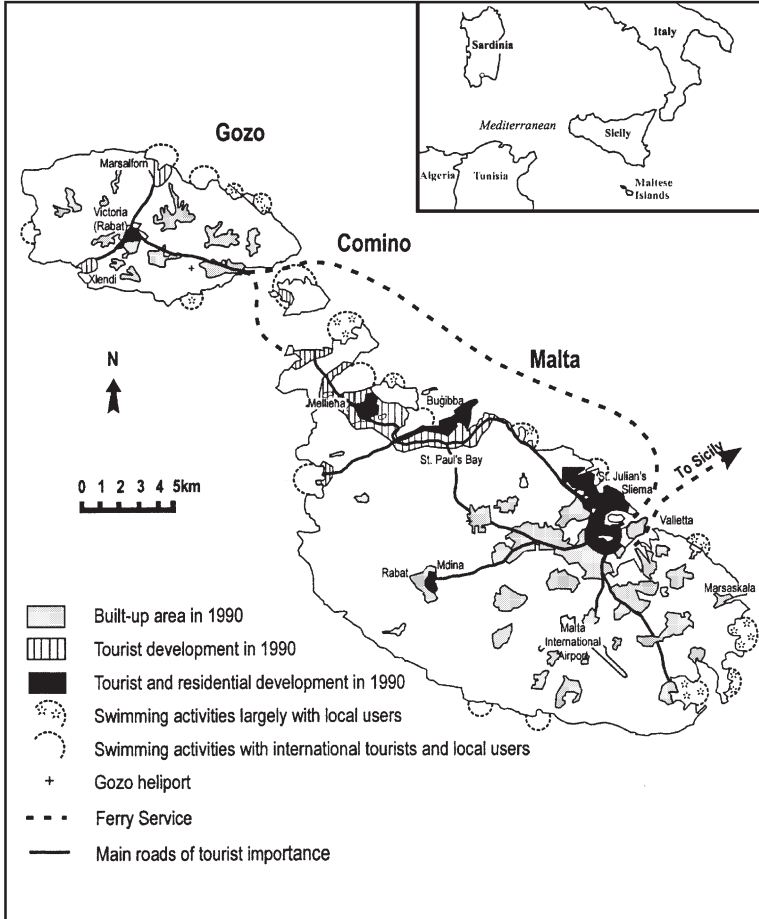
Responses to tourism among the Maltese are examined by drawing together three types of previously published sources in order to illustrate their potential value to prompt new questions and re-interpretations of existing research. First, studies from various disciplines on

Malta's economy, society, environment and politics. Use is made of work by native authors, although it is paradoxical that few focus directly on tourism and its societal effects, despite the industry's prominence. Such insider perspectives are important and can help to avoid oversimplified "views from afar". Among the non-Maltese authors, Boissevain's contributions stand out. He has published several articles on Maltese experiences, although they are widely scattered and only a few are in tourism publications. He lived on the islands between 1956–1958 and 1992–2001, and he visited almost annually between these periods, which has enabled him to chronicle reactions to tourism since the 50s. His ethnographic-anthropological immersion in the local culture helped him to develop a "cultural biography" of this society, and assisted in his attempt "to evaluate the impact of tourism in Maltese terms rather than my own" (Boissevain 1977a:535–6; Sansone 2001:1). His interest in all aspects of society also aided avoidance of identifying tourism as the cause of changes that actually were affected more by other influences (Cohen 1979:29; Nash 1996:164).

The second type of source employed is published reports on large-scale, questionnaire-based surveys of residents' views on tourism that were conducted by national public agencies in order to inform their policies. Three surveys are used. The surveys in 1992 by the Secretariat for Tourism (1993) and in 1996 by the Planning Authority (1997) used interviewer-administered questionnaires, and the respondents were identified from electoral registers. There were 523 respondents in 1992 and 3,508 in 1996. The third survey conducted in 2000 by the Malta Tourism Authority resulted in 1,047 replies to a questionnaire posted to 5,000 households. However, these used short questionnaires that provided respondents with only restricted opportunities to explain their opinions, and they varied in the questions asked, hindering evaluation of whether opinions had evolved over time. Finally, use is made of two English-language daily newspapers (*The Times of Malta* and *The Malta Independent*) over a two-year period from early 2000. Both were important vehicles for Malta's élites to discuss national issues in the public sphere.

### *The Maltese Context*

*Economy, Society and Politics.* Trends in Maltese responses to tourism need to be considered in relation to the evolving socioeconomic, cultural, and political context. The country consists of the islands of Malta, Gozo, and Comino (Figure 1). Its land area is only 316 km<sup>2</sup> (Mizzi 1994:2), and in this restricted space live 378,000 people, giving it one of the highest population densities of any country. Malta has an area of 245 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 348,000. Gozo is much smaller, with about 30,000 inhabitants, while Comino has under ten permanent residents (Schembri 2000:35). The archipelago is tied to Europe in many ways, including through its geographical location, Catholic religion, and strong economic and sociocultural links due to centuries of control by other European countries (Mizzi 1994:2; Pirota 1994:103). Malta is also engaged in negotiations to join the European Union.



Adapted from Planning Authority (1991)

**Figure 1. The Maltese Islands**

Nevertheless, its language has links with the Arab world and the islands are on Europe's geographical margins, being just 290 km from Libya (Beeley and Charlton 1994:112; Inguanetz 1988:154). While most inhabitants feel part of a European cultural region, there is often ambivalence towards the European Union. Membership of the union is thought to offer increased affluence, security, and "modernity", but there is anxiety that it threatens national sovereignty, local integrity and "tradition", and Catholic morality (Mitchell 2002:12, 242).

The islands have a long history of being run as a military fortress, by the Knights of St. John and France, and then by Britain, from whom the islands received their independence in 1964. Prior to the run-down of the British bases from 1962, the economy was largely based on the military and naval bases (Mizzi 1994:2). By 1979, these bases had closed and a new economic structure was needed. Development options were

severely reduced by the small size of the islands, their insularity from major markets, and their very limited natural resources, but light manufacturing (such as textiles, clothing, and electronic components) and tourism have become major sources of employment (King 1979; Lockhart and Mason 1989:3).

Life and social activity still tend to revolve around the family. The Catholic church and territorial bounds of the parish are other important reference points in daily life. Social research in 1991 indicated that generally "the Maltese have retained their traditional value system. Just as in the eighties they still cherish marriage and the family, the Church and religion" (Abela 1994:257). Similarly, Mizzi argued that "religion and the family still remain the pivotal points of Maltese society" (1994:7). But there have been numerous changes in this society since its independence. Rising living standards have had a big influence and, despite economic wealth being generally below that of Northern Europe, there has still been a marked growth in consumerism. Rising incomes have encouraged a preference to live outside the older, densely built-up urban centers. This, together with an expanding population, has resulted in a boom in house construction that has substantially extended the built-up area and thus reduced the amount of already scarce open space (Beeley and Charlton 1994:112).

A high proportion of residents now own cars, and many have other material goods that previous generations only dreamed about. According to Abela (1994:267), in the early 90s the population had a marked materialist orientation, although some also had post-materialist concerns, including fears about the environment. A further influence on Maltese society has been its increasing exposure to external media, such as satellite television with its news channels and Italian soap operas (Inguanez 1994:351). Politics is pursued with great vigor and it cuts into many spheres of society. There is intense rivalry between the two main political parties, which draw strength from a culture of patronage where patrons provide favors for their political supporters. As elections have often been won by a small margin of votes, elected governments have sometimes found it difficult to pass and enforce laws that they otherwise might favor because this might cost them crucial votes in the next election (Boswell 1995:290; King 1979).

*Tourism Development.* One influence on dispositions to tourism has been the industry's development path. From the early 60s, the government gave this industry a high priority in its attempts to "replace the gap in the economy left by the run-down of the military strategic base" (Italconsult 1965:preface). Malta's tourism is socially constructed primarily as a sea and sun product, and it is characterized by mass tourism infrastructure. The general tourism trend has been of upward growth, but latterly at a decreased rate (Planning Authority 2000:14). In 1959, the islands attracted only 12,583 international tourists, but by 1970 this had risen to 170,853 (Malta Tourism Authority 2000b:72). By the mid-70s, the annual influx already exceeded the local population, and the landmark of one million tourists was reached in 1992, representing just over 12 million guest nights. This was a major presence on a small island with a population of only about a third of a million. By 1998,

arrivals had further increased to 1,182,240, but guest nights had fallen to 11,325,000 (Malta Tourism Authority 2000b:72). In that year, estimated international tourists peaked at 55,269 each day in August (Planning Authority 2000:31). According to the Malta Tourism Authority, almost one-fourth of the economy and slightly more than one-fourth of full-time equivalent jobs in 2000 depended on tourism (Ministry of Tourism 2000:12). However, the industry relies heavily on a small number of overseas tour operators and a few source markets, notably Britain, and this dependence means that tour operators can depress the prices paid to local hotels.

Mass tourism's economic imperatives have encouraged a marked spatial polarization. Much of the infrastructure is concentrated in the resorts of Sliema and St. Julian's in the main conurbation, and in Buġibba, a previously thinly populated coastal area. Other accommodation sprung up in small settlements, such as St Paul's Bay and Marsaskala on Malta and Marsalforn on the island of Gozo (Figure 1). The latter island's double insularity restricted the expansion. Prior to the establishment of planning controls, much development occurred haphazardly and had disfigured the landscape. There have also been deficiencies in the provision of water supplies, sewerage systems, and road upgrading and maintenance (Lockhart 1997). While many hotels and self-catering apartments built before 1988 are of a low standard, after that date government policy has been to approve new hotels only of 4- or 5-star quality (Cleverdon 2000:95; Horwath and Horwath 1989:148). Since the early 90s new construction was regulated by a new Planning Authority and a land-use Structure Plan, although there have been problems of enforcement (Briguglio and Briguglio 1996:177; Ministry for Environment 1998). Nevertheless, planning controls have helped to concentrate development in the main resorts: between 1989 and 1998 the share of tourist accommodation in Buġibba/St. Paul's Bay rose from 30.4% to 33.7%, and in St. Julian's from 13.2% to 16.8% (Planning Authority 2000:19).

#### *Attitudes to Tourism's Overall Impact*

Attention now turns to responses to tourism's overall impact in the context of the sociocultural and political influences and the development patterns that have been outlined. Some influences have tended to encourage a more positive outlook. According to Black, the population's ability to cope with tourism has been enhanced by their resilience and adaptability, as they

have neither simply absorbed the behavior and consumption patterns of their guests, nor have they taken to "mirroring" what is expected of them. They feel, and indeed seem to be, well-equipped to negotiate their relationship with foreigners and to exercise some choice and control as to where the lines of influence become drawn (1996:133).

Language provides one means by which they have created a social distance. While most residents are multilingual, speaking English, Italian, and Maltese, they often use the latter when they wish to exclude foreign-



ners: "In a situation where the country is over-run by tourists for much of the year, it achieves a kind of closure from the rest of the world, allowing the Maltese to speak among themselves, without being heard" (Mitchell 2002:63). In coastal Spain, Barke (1999) similarly identifies the inhabitants' adaptability as a major influence on their overall response to tourism.

Acceptance of the industry may also have been encouraged by the long history of foreign rulers, notably the fairly recent and reasonably friendly relations with the British. Inguanez observes that "Maltese culture was formed by the constant interaction with foreigners. This is one of the principal reasons why interaction with tourists did not have a great 'culture shock'" (1988:157). The long British presence meant that the populace had learnt to deal with service relations: "The transition from serving military to serving tourists is one of degree, not of category. The Maltese maintain their independence, even as waiters and chambermaids" (Boissevain 1977a:536; 1989:153). According to Inguanez: "Malta's traditional contacts with foreigners during its long history of dependent existence has engendered in the Maltese culture a strong element of brokerage skills even in the social and cultural spheres. These skills, and consequent attitudes, have served as a shield against a massive culture shock" (1994:351). The British association further means that most inhabitants have a good working knowledge of English, and this market has remained the largest source of tourists. Nevertheless, there have also been ambiguities in the responses. Black argues that:

When tourism was first developing many Maltese held rather ambivalent attitudes towards foreigners; particularly towards the British and the Italians. While feeling some resentment and suspicion towards outsiders due to centuries of external domination, many people, especially those among the elite, also made constant claims of identification with the cultures of more powerful outsiders (1996:121).

Other influences have had particularly complex and perhaps contradictory effects on people's overall responses. For instance, it has been suggested that the high population density meant the residents had "acquired the social skills necessary to cope" with the large tourist influx (Boissevain 1977a:536). But, at the same time, this high population density may have encouraged a less positive reaction, because it intensifies the tourist presence and demonstrates more amply the industry's negative impacts. Baldacchino highlights the importance of "smallness" for Maltese society, although he warns against portraying this "smallness" as a purely physical phenomenon: "Population size, land area or any other factor are *conditions*, not *attributes*. They only influence contours; they are not themselves elements of causation" (1997:64). He contends that small islands tend to be characterized by social visibility and intimacy, a close proximity of politicians and government to their electorate, and intense political rivalries, all of which are likely to affect their residents' overall reaction to tourism.

From the 60s to the mid-80s, many residents appear to have tolerated mass tourism's unwanted effects because of their perception of its sub-

stantial economic benefits. For example, Boissevain suggested in the mid-70s that “the average Maltese, when he thinks about it, considers that tourists are in part responsible for the increase in his standard of living”, and also that they “see tourists as beneficial to their notions of progress and development” (1977a:532, 537; 1977b). Such supportive views up to the mid-80s were also encouraged by many people being able to recall the island’s colonial period, the presence of the British military, and the struggle to find jobs to replace those in the earlier fortress economy and to avoid having to emigrate (Busuttil 1994; Inguanez 1988:156; Mallia 2000:16). Further, in this earlier period, the scope for friction with tourists based on envy was perhaps reduced by the standard of living being higher than in some other Mediterranean countries, so that “the contrast between the life style of tourists and Maltese was not particularly striking” (Boissevain 1977a:536; Lockhart and Mason 1989:3). Boissevain concluded in the mid-70s that the populace considered “they are in control and can cope with the effects to their way of life that their temporary guests are having or are likely to have in the foreseeable future” (1977a:537; Vella 1994).

While there have been significant continuities in residents’ attitudes to tourism into the 90s, Boissevain and Theuma contend that from the mid-80s these attitudes changed for some people. They explain that “Until the mid-1980s, most Maltese unreservedly welcomed tourists. They accepted that maximizing tourist arrivals and the resulting overcrowding, discomfort, rampant building and environmental destruction was necessary for economic development”. However, “In the 1990s, as tourist arrivals topped one million annually, the Maltese began to feel oppressed by the effects of this *laissez-faire* pressure on the social and physical environment”, and the resulting increased physical congestion became less acceptable, with pressure on public transport, extra traffic, and more crowded beaches (1998:97).

In explaining the shifting attitudes after the mid-80s, Boissevain and Theuma highlight growing concern about the industry’s contribution to the loss of scarce open space and other natural resources. There was growing unease about the consequences of government policies from the late-80s that gave a new priority to “quality tourism” (Horwath and Horwath 1989; Markwick 1999). One result of these policies was the development of large-scale, luxury facilities involving marked losses of natural resources. Boissevain and Theuma argue that

quality tourism’s infrastructural requirements include luxury hotels, golf courses and marinas. These consume more natural resources than mass sun, sand, and sea tourism for which the infrastructure was already in place. Recent public protest about threats to Malta’s environment have *all* concerned new projects aimed at attracting up-market tourists (1998:98–99).

Boissevain also describes how the encouragement of “quality” after the mid-80s had adversely affected attitudes to the industry through additional promotion of cultural tourism that added to pressures at some historic and cultural sites (1994a, b; 1996a, b). These pressures were already growing due to a general rise in tourist interest in heritage

and culture (Ioannides and Holcomb 2001). Expanding arrivals in the historic town of Mdina meant that some residents became increasingly dissatisfied during the 90s. "The constant exposure to increasing numbers of tourists and the effects this has on their lives and surroundings is creating a hostile attitude to tourism among a growing segment of Mdina's residents" (Boissevain 1996b:227). Boissevain and Theuma also suggest that the large, up-market developments and growing interest in the islands' cultural, heritage, and rural features had hastened a decline in space for the population's leisure pursuits. Hence, during the 90s, residents "are experiencing what amounts to a sense of loss. Their leisure space is being taken away, again, as it was under the British colonial establishment which withdrew large areas of choice countryside from the public" (1998:114-115).

#### *Attitudes to Specific Tourism Impacts*

Maltese attitudes to specific tourism impacts have been affected by diverse sociocultural and other influences. These views are discussed in some research studies and are also examined in surveys in 1992 by the Secretariat for Tourism (1993) and in 2000 by the Malta Tourism Authority. The latter included two questions: "What are the benefits to Malta and the Maltese society arising from tourism activity?" and "What are the problems created by tourism in Malta?" Responses were unprompted, with blank spaces for comments. In the 1992 survey, respondents indicated whether they considered tourism's effects to be "good", "bad", or of "no effect" for each of ten identified aspects of Malta's heritage and society (Table 1). As these two surveys employ different approaches, they are not used to assess historical trends.

When the 2000 survey asked respondents to name any specific tourism benefits, easily the most frequently mentioned were economic gains (85% mentioning it) and increases in jobs (50%). The

**Table 1. Perceived Effect of Tourism on Maltese Heritage and Society<sup>a</sup>**

Aspect	Perceived Effect (%)			
	Good Effect	Bad Effect	No Effect	Don't Know
Archaeological Sites	91.0	1.1	2.9	5.0
Entertainment	83.0	2.3	8.2	6.5
Local Crafts	81.6	1.1	10.3	6.9
Maltese Culture	80.5	5.2	5.7	8.6
Maltese Cooking	73.2	5.9	14.1	6.7
Traditional Customs	68.3	11.7	14.0	6.1
Recreational Pursuits	61.8	10.9	18.9	8.4
Public Decency	17.8	51.1	27.9	3.3
Family Cohesion	15.7	21.2	56.2	6.9
Morality	14.3	23.9	51.1	10.7

<sup>a</sup> Source: Secretariat for Tourism (1993).

unprompted emphasis on economic returns was probably influenced by the country's reliance on tourism and its precarious economic condition at independence. Employment is a persuasive benefit in a country where there are vivid memories of widespread unemployment (Mitchell 2002:158). The next most cited benefits were the effects on cultural exchange (28% mentioning it), followed by national recognition abroad (13%). Their importance reflects the country's small size, related interest in the world outside, and its search for identity as an independent state after long colonial rule. In 1979 Boissevain and Inglott suggested that it was a source of some pride and self-confidence for the population that outsiders visited their country and admired surroundings and customs that they themselves sometimes took for granted. They also argued that "The genuine admiration of tourists has helped the Maltese appreciate their own cultural heritage and added another dimension to their search for a national identity". More particularly, tourism "has obliged the Maltese to formulate more clearly for themselves what they are and what they stand for—to think more consistently about their own culture instead of merely taking it for granted or imitating foreign tastes" (1979:281, 277; Boissevain 1979:132). When the 1992 survey asked if tourism had improved the national identity, as many as 72.1% replied "very much", 13.6% "not so much", and only 5.5% thought it had "hindered" it.

In 1979, Boissevain and Inglott presented tourism as a factor contributing to a "renaissance of Maltese culture" (1979:277). It was suggested that "The way foreigners have genuinely admired Maltese monuments, arts, craft, music, and even rural parish feasts, has caused many citizens to view these in a new light" (Boissevain 1977a:534). More recently, it was argued that tourist interest in the rituals and pageantry of local parish celebrations or "festas" had been one influence making these events more acceptable to the island's middle-class elite, who had previously tended to look down on them (Boissevain 1993:159; 1996a:114–5). Many respondents in the 1992 survey also considered that the industry was beneficial for their heritage and traditions. Table 1 shows that high proportions felt that it had a "good" effect on the islands' archaeological sites (91%), local crafts (81.6%), "culture" (80.5%), cooking (73.2%), and "traditional customs" (68.3%). Here it should be noted that the indigenous term for "culture" (*kultura*) refers to things from the past that endure in the present—such as heritage, arts, and national patrimony (Mitchell 1996:209). This notion is somewhat distinct from contemporary societal change, with the Maltese being less positive about tourism's effects on aspects of these recent changes. Of course, people's opinions on their heritage and traditions are more complex and nuanced than indicated in this brief survey, just as tourism's actual impacts on them have been variable (Bonanno 1994). For example, Markwick's recent assessment of Maltese hand lace-making suggests that while tourism has contributed to the industry's revival, it has also debased certain product characteristics and had some adverse socioeconomic impacts on the producers and their communities. She concludes that "The evolution of handicrafts in Malta in response to the tourist market is

therefore a complex, multilinear, and bidirectional process" (2001:48–9, 44–5).

When the 2000 survey asked respondents to name specific problems resulting from tourism, the largest proportion (21.6%) mentioned pressure on Malta's infrastructure. In practice the industry has stretched the provision of public utilities. For example, increased demand for scarce water has had to be met through reverse osmosis plants that use costly energy, although tourism is estimated to account for only 8% of water consumption and 8% of energy use (Ministry for Environment 1998; Ministry of Tourism 2000:9). Growth in tourist numbers, especially in the resorts in summer, also puts pressure on an old sewerage system with limited capacity, and occasionally this results in sewage leaks.

Several problems mentioned in the 2000 survey are linked to congestion resulting from this growth. For example, 15.1% of respondents commented on "overcrowding" due to tourism. Increased traffic and parking difficulties were mentioned by 17.8%, and 5.1% commented on pressure on the roads. Perceptions that congestion was exacerbated by tourists are also seen in comments concerning heightened pressure on public transport (13.3% of respondents) and also beach problems, which often relate to crowded beaches (12%). According to the Ministry of Tourism, "Summer volumes exert increased demand on public transport with the result that queues are more evident (particularly for routes to tourist destinations), causing social discomfort" (2000:23). The Planning Authority also claims that "local residents are finding beaches somewhat crowded" (2000:42). However, in a study of Mellieha in the north of Malta, Black (1996) suggests that residents do not usually clash with tourists over beach space, partly because they prefer swimming off rocks rather than in the few sandy bays and because some use boats to reach more remote swimming areas. Figure 1 shows the swimming areas used largely by the Maltese and others used by international tourists and locals, based on a Planning Authority survey (1991).

In the 1992 survey, residents commented on tourism's effects on ten listed aspects of Maltese heritage and society. Table 1 shows that the aspects most frequently seen as adversely affected relate directly to contemporary ways of life rather than to heritage, with these being public decency (51.1% felt the effect was "bad"), morality (23.9%), and family cohesion (21.2%). Hence, moral standards and family life were identified as the worst affected, probably reflecting the values of a society where the family and church are prominent. These responses accord with Mitchell's suggestion that there was much preoccupation in the early 90s with "an apparent 'crisis' at the centre of Maltese life", due to erosion of the family and of "traditional" morality (2002:89). He also indicates that tourists "are regarded as good for business, but their presence is seen by many as morally problematic, as particularly the younger tourists introduce Maltese to 'modern' ways" (2002:89, 63). The 1992 survey suggests that many Maltese felt that certain social problems were worse due to tourism, but it does not indicate how much they attributed these problems to this industry compared to

other influences, such as rising affluence, television and films, changing attitudes to religion, and expanded education. For example, there was a view in the early 90s that "By watching Italian television, they were exposed to its overt sexuality and again to images of eroded and immoral family life" (Mitchell 2002:115).

### *Environmental Concern and Policies*

The development of tourism has been one influence on Maltese attitudes to the environment, with these attitudes in turn having consequences for the industry's development. The connections between this industry and environmental concern are often indirect and are always mediated by the interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, and political processes in society. Thus, it is important to consider public concern about environmental issues particularly relevant to tourism, and whether protest activity has emerged related to this concern. It is also important to examine the development of environmental policies affecting tourism and how residents have reacted to them.

*Environmental Concern.* The emergence of environmental concern among the Maltese is generally quite recent. Writing in the mid-90s, Borg stressed that interest in such matters "is a recent phenomenon and it only now seems to be gaining ground" (1995:120). Mizzi also argued then that awareness of these issues "is still not widely prevalent amongst the Maltese" (1994:7), and Abela concluded that it "is still in its early stages" (1994:262).

The many changes in Maltese society help to explain why by the mid-90s there had been some increase in pro-environment beliefs. Borg mentioned the effects of growing affluence, reduced unemployment, more widespread education, and a calmer political climate. He also identified a shift from "traditional" to "modern" environmental attitudes. "Traditional" views are depicted as having been shaped by the hard toil of the farming community, and being based on the premise that nature has to be worked by humans before it has real value. From this perspective, man-made features signify hard toil, and thus they are of value and are respected, while natural ones are not. There are few qualms about completely altering the face of nature to produce or extract something of perceived value. For Borg, the "nonchalance towards appropriating for oneself anything which nature occasionally makes available" was reflected in the popularity of bird hunting and trapping and the frequent dumping of refuse in the countryside (Borg 1995:120–121, 115–117; 1997). He also suggested that the emergence of "modern" environmental values had been encouraged by the islands' advancing urbanization, which had distanced people from agrarian life and from attitudes to nature fostered through the hardships of gaining a living from the land. Thus, sections of the population increasingly valued nature in the "modern" terms of its aesthetic and heritage qualities. However, while the Maltese themselves use the discourses of "tradition" and "modern", there is a danger that such terminology can be a mode of symbolic domination by which "tradition"

is discarded as somehow “backward” and holding back the historical trajectory of “the West” (Mitchell 2002:13–15).

Another influence on the emergence of environmental concern has been the growing consumption of land and other natural resources due to building development. The Maltese may more easily accept the loss of these resources for the construction of housing rather than for tourism facilities if they consider that the former has more direct community benefits. However, new housing has contributed much more to the reduction of open space on these small islands than has new tourism development (Planning Authority 2001; Ministry of Tourism 1999). But it is difficult for residents to gauge tourism’s relative contribution to the loss of land, partly due to complexities in property use, with some new apartments and houses being used by international tourists and returning emigrants, and by Maltese as a second home. Despite this difficulty, this industry has been an additional cause of concern about rampant encroachment by new construction on the islands’ limited open space.

The large size of the recent, up-market tourism projects has particularly emphasized the role of tourism in the depletion of natural resources. As already described, it has been contended that in recent years all substantial public protest about environmental threats has involved these major projects. The large, new luxury hotel schemes have gained an increased profile as they are often conspicuously located in prominent coastal sites (Ioannides and Holcomb 2001). Golf course proposals have also struck a cord with long-standing fears about a scarcity of fresh water, due to the demands of these courses for water. It was argued by their opponents that golf courses would change rural landscapes and ecology, reduce public access to open countryside, and take away farming land (Markwick 2000:518–519). Ioannides and Holcomb speculate at a social bias behind some concerns about prestige tourism schemes. Tourists using other facilities are

not unlike...its residents; most visitors are middle- and working-class people who appreciate local facilities and services and may indeed be envious of Maltese social cohesion and family supports

but if more up-market tourists are attracted then residents might

learn to be more obsequious and, in what has been called the demonstration effect, may desire the trappings and lifestyle of affluent foreigners (2001:246).

*Protest about the Environment.* Mizzi talks of “the more active role of environmental pressure groups which have been ‘sprouting’ like mushrooms since the late 1980s” (1994:12). These organizations had been active in clashes during the 90s with developers, business, and government over a number of the new, large-scale projects involving luxury facilities. For example, Markwick (2000) describes how opposition to a proposed golf course and refurbished five-star hotel at Rabat involved an alliance including the Society for the Study and Conservation of Nature (now called Nature Trust) and Birdlife Malta. At the same time, such groups have sometimes sought wider legitimacy and support for

their case for environmental protection by arguing it will enhance the islands'. A local representative of Friends of the Earth contended: "I don't see any use in having five-star hotels and then having a zero-star environment. The environment is very important since tourists want to have open spaces, fresh clean air and good roads" (The Malta Independent 2001a; Xuereb 2001). The needs of tourism have also been used by these environmental organizations to help justify their opposition to major projects. For example, the President of Nature Trust criticized golf course proposals on the grounds that "If we continue to destroy our natural Mediterranean habitat we will end up with nothing to sell to the tourist" (Schembri 2002). Despite the continuing damage inflicted by tourism, some tourism association leaders have also argued the case for environmental "upgrading" and even limits on the amount of new accommodation, usually on the basis that this is needed to improve the industry's profitability (De Barro 2002; Times of Malta 2001a, 2002).

The activities of pressure groups may have helped to raise environmental awareness among the population. It is suggested that "The NGOs have contributed to a new awareness of surroundings previously taken for granted and subordinated to the requirements of economic development"; and that the "heightened confrontation between the NGOs and tourist developers both followed from and stimulated deeper thinking about the impacts of tourism" (Boissevain and Theuma 1998:114). Further, Mizzi argues that "It is beyond doubt that the role of environmental pressure groups in Malta is becoming more important in environmental policymaking" (1994:14). One reason why they have gained more influence over policymakers is that some government ministries and agencies lack technical expertise about ecological issues (Mallia 1994:686).

The pattern of pro-environmental values and activism has emerged only quite recently, and this is similar to trends elsewhere in Southern Europe (Pridham 2001; Weale et al 2000). Yet there may be influences on this timing that are very distinctive to Malta. For example, Sultana (1994:171) argues that the difficult economic transition from a fortress economy helps to explain why postmaterialist values—including interest in environmental issues—were not more prominent by the early 90s. It has also been suggested that the islands' long history of colonial dependence, where many of the economic and political conditions affecting the populace were outside their own influence, had fostered a sense of "national powerlessness". This legacy of "powerlessness in attacking their own problems" might possibly help to explain why the populace has not responded sooner to the islands' environmental problems (Zammit 1984:16, 31–39).

*Environmental Policies and Regulations.* Environmental issues have featured more regularly in political debates and in government policies since the mid-80s, and in turn these policies have affected the tourism industry. Mallia argues that until the mid-80s the environment was not really on the political agenda. Election manifestos in the 60s and 70s had largely ignored it, but "All the 1987 election manifestos had prominent sections dealing with the environment" (1994:693, 696). In 1988,



an Act was passed which included the intention to create a plan providing strategic direction for land-use decisions, including decisions about tourism developments, and this Structure Plan and the Planning Authority to enforce it were finally in place in 1992. The 1991 Environment Protection Act enabled protective regulations to be enacted and it required an Environmental Impact Assessment for developments, including tourism schemes, likely to have “substantial” ecological impacts (Briguglio and Briguglio 1996:176; Mizzi 1994:10-11). *Alternativa Demokratika* (the “Green” political party) began as a coalition of environmentalists, former members of the Malta Labor Party and others, and it first contested elections in 1992. Although it has failed to win any parliamentary seats, it actively lobbies and uses the media in order to keep environmental issues on the political agenda (Mizzi 1994:12; The Malta Independent 2001b).

There are now numerous environmental and land-use controls affecting tourism, and in some respects they have made a substantial difference. For example, while the building of tourist accommodation continues apace, it has largely been kept within the Structure Plan’s development zones (Planning Authority 2000:9). However, the population does not always respond positively to these controls, with a “great amount of time and energy...devoted to finding ways and means of evading them” (Mallia 1994:698). According to Briguglio and Briguglio, “enforcement problems are now probably the main reason why environmental degradation still takes place at what to many is an unacceptable level” (1996:177). Thus, even in the 90s some hotels and other tourism facilities had been constructed or extended without the required approvals. There are still many “temporary” structures on the coast that are used for domestic tourism and leisure purposes built without planning permission, often on public land. These “boathouses” are constructed using varied materials and they are used as stores for fishing equipment, beach huts or even holiday homes (Planning Authority 2000, 2001). Their owners are caught in a clash between their own long-established leisure patterns, some increasingly influential aesthetic values, and governmental land-use regulations. When the Planning Authority has occasionally sought to demolish some of these structures, there has been considerable resistance, not least because it has been felt they are a soft target compared to other buildings constructed with dubious legality but which are owned by people who are better connected. A spokesperson for the occupants of some illegal “boathouses”, who were due to be evicted, “accused the Planning Authority of using two weights and two measures with the small and big fry, by regularizing only the position of the big fry who built on state-owned land without a permit, as, he argued, it did in the case of the Hotel Solemar” (Deidun 2002; Times of Malta 2001b). Difficulties in enforcing such regulations are also sometimes due to inertia or poor coordination between government departments, insufficient officials for enforcement, drawn-out legal proceedings against offenders, and derisory fines for those prosecuted (Mallia 1994:698; Mizzi 1994:22).

One key obstacle to implementing planning controls on tourism is

the political culture whereby there are ties between individuals and politicians involving obligations to grant favors and support, with these ties cemented through the collective memory (Manduca 2001; Mitchell 2002:151; Tabone 1994:236). These clientelistic relations may work to assist some individuals to by-pass planning controls. Because of this system of patronage, the official policies "may end up as a tattered patchwork of conflicting client demands" (Mallia 1994:700). But care needs to be taken not to judge these clientelistic practices simplistically, based on a prevailing model of "modern", "rational" state development. A further obstacle to environmental policies has been that when they affect a significant group of people they may not be pursued vigorously by either main political party. For this might cost them votes, and previous elections have been won by a small electoral margin (Boswell 1995:290; Vella 1994:55).

A notable influence behind the stricter environmental policies and related bureaucratic reforms in the 90s has been the Nationalist Party's attempts to strengthen the case for European Union membership, with this party being in government for much of the period (Markwick 2000:523; Mitchell 2002:156). The question of whether to join this union has been the single most important political issue over the past decade, with the Malta Labor Party broadly sceptical about its benefits. The centrality of this issue has meant that pro-environment policies can be opposed by some because they associate them with preparations for European Union membership. The policies may thus be rejected as they are perceived as "imposed" by foreign influences, as reflecting a new form of colonialism, or as suggesting that the nation lacks confidence to develop its own approach (Vassallo 2002).

## CONCLUSION

The study has used a contextual as opposed to a tourism-centric approach to assess continuities and changes in Maltese responses to tourism since the 60s. It was considered most unwise to assume that residents' attitudes were influenced largely by the area's progress through an assumed tourism development cycle (Horn and Simmons 2002). Consequently, the population's reactions were examined in relation to the industry's development, but also to their experiences, beliefs, and practices that substantially mediated how they responded. The influences on these responses included "traditional" beliefs in moral standards and family life, an ambivalence towards European "modernity", the legacy of British colonial rule and the search for national identity, the economic difficulties of the recent past, rising living standards, and a developing awareness of environmental issues. Such influences were examined for several forms of residents' response to the industry, including attitudes to its overall impact and its more specific impacts, and public concern and protest about environmental issues most relevant to tourism.

The study evaluated scattered, previously published sources in order to illustrate the potential value of such material in enabling researchers to ask new questions and to reinterpret previous findings. Based on

these sources, and by using a more holistic approach, a new agenda is outlined here for future research on Maltese reactions to tourism. This agenda may be used for subsequent studies based on primary fieldwork, including in-depth ethnographic and anthropological examinations of the webs of local economic, sociocultural, and political relations. Specifically, six issues could helpfully be explored subsequently.

First, research is needed into the extent to which views among the populace on differing specific impacts of tourism have affected their broader outlook on the industry. There is evidence that the residents were often receptive and supportive about tourism's general impact due in particular to its economic benefits. But recent research indicates that from the mid-80s there were attitudinal changes for some related to more intense tourism pressures, notably because of a loss of open space and natural resources and due to activity impinging more directly on their own activities. There has also been much concern among the population about the erosion of some "traditional" values through the potentially morally-corrupting processes of "modernity", of which tourism could be part. But it is not fully clear how much these views about tourism's more specific impacts might have been reflected in altered general dispositions to the industry. The present study focused on connections between tourism and environmental concern, but this should not be taken to imply that the environment is the key issue shaping overall attitudes to the industry. Instead, more research is required to evaluate its relative importance.

Second, there is a need for better understanding of the degree to which the inhabitants' increasing environmental awareness can be attributed to the effects of tourism pressures. For example, it is not clear whether the Maltese consider this industry to be a major cause or a secondary influence on the loss of open space and reduction in other scarce natural resources. Further, do most residents share similar concerns to those held by the members and activists in environmental groups in relation to the large-scale, up-market tourism schemes? Third, attention should be paid to attitudes to protecting environmental and heritage resources in order to enhance the islands' touristic appeal. How do residents feel about the competing claims of politicians, tourism industry leaders, environmentalists, and other groups about the custodianship, protection, and presentation of these resources? (Sant Cassia 1999:258). How do they respond to the introduction of environmental protection and "enhancement" in relation to a "modern" visual aesthetic, introduced partly because of tourism? It would also be useful to know how their responses differ when these measures adversely affect "traditional" valuations, beliefs, and practices, such as by restricting bird hunting and trapping and the use of "boathouses"? Still more, do they feel that these measures will benefit all the populace equally? Fourth, while the "late" timing of the growth of pro-environment attitudes in Malta is not dissimilar to that of some other Southern European countries, it is unclear the extent to which there have been more distinctive influences at work. For example, it would be useful to examine whether this timing was influenced by a sense of

post-colonial “national powerlessness”, as well as how views about new environmental regulations have been incorporated within divergent opinions and political conflicts about the gains and losses from joining the European Union.

Furthermore, it will be helpful to examine Maltese reactions to different forms of tourism, including major resorts, up-market and large-scale development schemes, at historic monuments or in historic urban centers, in the countryside and also domestic tourism. These forms are developing in different ways and at different rates in the country, they have complex and often ambiguous impacts, and the responses to each may vary greatly. Finally, it is recognized that there has been no discussion of the differing perspectives among the Maltese by gender, age, social stratification, neighborhood, and other characteristics. It is important to examine these differences in order to understand more fully the varied aspects of residents’ responses to tourism. **A**

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