

## QualityCoast Award 2012 –Jury Report

Applicant	<b>GOZO &amp; COMINO</b>	Country	<b>MALTA</b>	Date Application	December 2011
Report	Marija Pejdic, Daniela van Elburg / QualityCoast Secretariat On behalf of the International QualityCoast Jury: Marlyse Cremers, Malta Foppe Seekles, Malta Albert Salman, the Netherlands. Local Jury Advisors / Experts: Gozo University Group (GUG), Karl Camilleri, Gozo, Marc Schembri, Gozo.			Date Report	June 2012
Category		Score	Excellence		
NATURE		<b>7.87</b>	<b>NO</b>		
ENVIRONMENT		<b>7.76</b>	<b>NO</b>		
IDENTITY		<b>8.73</b>	<b>YES</b>		
SOCIO-ECONOMICS		<b>8.02</b>	<b>YES</b>		
AVERAGE RESULT		<b>8.12</b>			
<b>AWARD 2012</b>		<b>QualityCoast GOLD Award                  for excellence in Identity and Socio-                  Economics</b>			

### GENERAL ASSESSMENT & COMMENTS

#### THE JURY EVALUATION PROCEDURE AND JURY REPORT

On the basis of all information provided by applicant, the QualityCoast Assessment team has prepared a draft Assessment report and a draft score sheet. This score is proposed by the QualityCoast assessment team, who has tried to give fair judgments on the basis of international references but also taking into account national constraints.

Jury members and Local Experts are identified and appointed, based on their knowledge of the applicant's territory and performance.

Local Experts are requested to consider information provided in the Application Form and in the draft Assessment Report, and to check, verify and validate or propose changes in the score given for each indicator.

Next, Jury members are invited to review the draft Assessment Report and score sheet, and to add their comments and recommendations. The Assessment report and score sheet are adjusted on the basis of this work, and this results in the Jury report.

It should be noted that the quantitative assessment is partly based upon policy intentions. Within the next two years the Jury would like to see that the Gozo's Government elaborates and implements them.

The QualityCoast Jury hopes that the applicant will give consideration to the Jury recommendations included in this report, and take measures in the following years, since the Jury recommendations will be taken in special consideration in any next application for a QualityCoast Award.

This Jury Report will be provided to the applicant and will be published in [www.qualitycoast.info](http://www.qualitycoast.info).

The QualityCoast Jury congratulates the applicant with the result.

This QualityCoast Award is a recognition for the high level of tourism quality and sustainability, in particular in terms of nature and landscape, environment, local identity and cultural heritage.

### **GENERAL JURY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to maintain and improve this high level, the Jury would like to make the following general recommendations to all QualityCoast Destinations:

#### **QualityCoast Ambassadors**

The value of the QualityCoast Award for you as a sustainable tourism destination will highly increase if you are able to find one or more prominent people who are prepared to be involved in the development of new, eco-friendly (or even sustainable) vacation products together with the EUCC, and to promote your destination as "QualityCoast Gozo Ambassador".

#### **QualityCoast Committee**

The Jury recommends to establish a local QualityCoast Committee in order to provide a think-tank and discussion platform for sustainable tourism on the implementation of the QualityCoast Jury Recommendations. A local QualityCoast Committee could also help promote synergies between stakeholders, based upon the principles of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) and contribute to the prolongation of the QualityCoast Award within two years. Within a next QualityCoast application in autumn 2013, the Jury would like to see involvement of the Committee and also to see the work of the Committee reported.

We suggest that this Committee would represent:

- the local government (highest possible level),
- the local business sector
- independent expertise on nature conservation and management
- independent expertise on cultural heritage and landscape interests
- independent expertise on environmental issues.

**DETAILED SCORE**

<b>NATURE</b>	<b>7,87</b>
1. NATURE CONSERVATION	7,82
2. CONTACT WITH NATURE	8,44
3. GREEN POLICIES	7,36
4. OPEN LANDSCAPES	8,22
5. LIGHT & NOISE MANAGEMENT	7,53
<b>ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>7,86</b>
6. BLUE FLAGS & BEACHES	7,38
7. WATER MANAGEMENT	9,36
8. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION	7,75
9. WASTE & RECYCLING	7,18
10. CLIMATE & ENERGY	7,64
<b>IDENTITY</b>	<b>8,73</b>
11. CULTURAL HERITAGE	9,00
12. TERRITORY & TRADITION	9,60
13. LOCAL IDENTITY	8,00
14. HOSPITALITY & SATISFACTION	8,35
15. HUMAN RIGHTS & JUSTICE	8,70
<b>SOCIO-ECONOMICS</b>	<b>8,02</b>
16. TOURISM	7,98
17. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	8,23
18. BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT	6,36
19. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	9,43
20. HEALTH & SAFETY	8,11

## DETAILED COMMENTS & OPINIONS

### NATURE

#### NATURE CONSERVATION

About 20% of the land surface of Gozo and Comino is protected nature area. Although the total percentage of protected areas is not very high, it includes different areas of international importance for nature conservation, such as "Qawra-Dwejra" – a UNESCO site, which combines interesting geology, both on land and under the sea, and rich diverse wildlife and habitats, including typical species for the Maltese islands. The "II Qattara" area is Natura 2000, Bird Sanctuary, Nature Reserve and since 2011 has been declared also as a Tree protected Area. Special Area of Conservation, " Ta' Cenc" area - Natura 2000 (150 ha), including Ta' Cenc Cliffs (2ha) Natura Reserve and IBA.

Gozo has very good policy intentions and implements various good measures for nature conservation, restoration and management. Some examples of recently implemented measures are: the replanting of trees in erosion sensitive areas in several places across the island (such as in Chambray Area) and removal of silt from dams in valleys. Further improvements under the Eco-Gozo Action plan include: continue with tree planting across the island to establish orchards and groves in erosion sensitive areas; upgrade of government facilities that house trees and plants of genetic value and open these facilities to the public and researchers; establish the Dwejra marine area as a Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) & designate additional marine SACs and set up of on-going monitoring activities with the help of local NGOs and diving schools.

#### CONTACT WITH NATURE

Nature Trust Malta in collaboration with the Eco-Gozo Action Plan is focusing on environmental education through the Green Flag Eco-Schools programme. About half of the schools in Gozo, including primary and secondary ones, have participated in the Green Flag Eco-School programme. Apart of it, educational information is being delivered through various NGO programmes and initiatives on an occasional basis. Currently there are no visitor centres in Gozo. A Visitor Center at Dwejra area has been planned - an application regarding this Center is already submitted. Numerous websites providing information on natural values or areas are available on the internet.

Various opportunities exist for hiking and biking in nature, marine wildlife observation as well as availability of guided nature excursions and tours. Country walks are already well delineated through the publication of booklets and brochures which are available to the general public. Many tourists visiting Gozo go on their own initiative for such activities since Gozo is being well promoted for this type of tourism.

#### GREEN POLICIES

Measures for nature protection and restoration are advocated by both the National Environmental Policy and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (both are drafts). The planned objectives include:

- maintaining of healthy ecosystems,
- restoration of at least 15% of the ecosystems that have been damaged,
- develop green infrastructures that will allow areas alienated from each other by road networks and urbanization to be linked again and hence curb habitat fragmentation, this objective includes also improving the ecological coherence of Natura 2000, via integration into the broader landscape,
- improve adaptation to climate change,
- integrated flood management, and others.

#### OPEN LANDSCAPES

The percentage of non-built up land area is high (about 65% for Gozo). Concerning the % of the coastal strip free from buildings, for Gozo & Comino it is 68.7 sq km (500m inland buffer area), 22.5 sq km Development Zones (as per current schemes), 0.8 sq km (3.6% of 500m inland buffer area) - only the official development zone areas have been taken into consideration for this calculation and hence any development outside scheme (ODZ) is not included.

In the marine domain there are no human-made structures.

A number of rural sites in Gozo have been identified as degraded areas. Though no detailed study have been undertaken in this aspect, a number of areas have been identified as candidate sites for rehabilitation of damaged landscapes.

#### LIGHT & NOISE MANAGEMENT

20.2 % of area is covered by GCLP dark Zone Policy.

There is no international airport but a helicopter field and aquaplane / seaplane (harbour of Mgarr).

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY**

- Gozo has good policy intentions for nature conservation improvements, which are stated in the National Environmental Policy and the Eco-Gozo action plan. Within the next two years the Jury would love to see them further elaborated and implemented.
- The Jury recommends due attention to nature & green management practices, and in particular to the management practices related to the pruning of trees. Having said that, the Jury has been pleased to consider that the management on Gozo may be more favorable than on the main island Malta.
- The Jury recommends to keep improving the communication and information provision to both residents and tourists, including different languages: explaining an appropriate behavior while visiting natural areas is necessary to raise awareness about nature values and the importance of conservation.
- Bird watching is a much requested and not yet developed visitors activity, which deserves due attention and appropriate support from the government.
- The Jury recognises that the situation concerning hunting and bird trapping activities compared to many years ago has been approved. Improvements include e.g. that the hunting and trapping season has been significantly curbed in line with EU regulations and monitoring by both Government and local and international NGOs. Still there are concerns raised on the issue and specifically in relation to the development of touristic hiking and biking activities. The Jury recommends due attention to the control and proper enforcement of regulations concerning hunting and bird trapping.



## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **BLUE FLAGS & BEACHES**

The preparation made for a Blue Flag (which appears to be successful for Ramla l-Hamra bay in 2012), is most welcomed. The bathing water quality has "Excellent" status according to the EEA / EU Bathing Water Directive. The frequency of beaches cleaning is high particularly during the peak season.

### **WATER MANAGEMENT**

The fresh water shortage is generally considered a big problem in Gozo and Malta as a whole. Water is mostly obtained from boreholes and the desalination plant. Some studies on harvesting of rainwater are ongoing, but until now there seems to be no changes in the existing system.

Some measures to improve water management have been successfully implemented during the last years. The distribution of Aerator Water Saving kits to each household, has resulted in saving of ca. 50% of the water consumption from taps. The implementation of the Valley cleaning programme has a two-fold positive effect for the water management scheme: the farmers can use the harvested water for irrigation purposes, thus water extraction is reduced and this results in increased percolation of water into the aquifers. There is also flooding during the rain seasons in Gozo.

The Eco Gozo action plan 2010-2012 proposes more water management initiatives as: re-use rainwater in households and prevent flooding, use of water from WWTP (waste water treatment plant) for agriculture, landscape, and industry purposes.

### **SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION**

The public transport is still not very popular in Malta and Gozo. In the past year improvements are made through the introduction of the new bus service system. 70% of the Arriva buses are new and all of them are Euro V standards. All buses have lower emissions and the service itself is offering more frequent pick-ups with more routes. The Eco Gozo action plan proposes different measures for sustainable transportation, such as: introducing of an electric cab system for Victoria, hybrid and electric cars, further promotion of the use of bio-fuels as a commitment towards using alternative sources of energy for transport purposes, and the introduction of pedestrian zones in towns and villages, including also raising awareness on economic and social benefits of pedestrian zones. The annual circulation fee in Malta is designed around CO2 emissions. The Government has also introduced incentives in the past two years for people to change their vehicles to more cleaner and efficient ones. In Gozo a lower fee is charged for Gozitans to use public transport. This is paid through public service obligation - paid by the Government to the public transport service provider.

An important issue is the ongoing discussion on the pros and cons of a tunnel between Malta and Gozo. The carrying capacity of the island and the unique character of Gozo are addressed.

### **WASTE & RECYCLING**

All local councils provide bring-in sites, where people in each locality can dispose separated waste and also one collection per week of separated waste (except glass). However, local councils do not pay for this service. According to the legislation of Malta, any entity which trades products in Malta, introduces packaging on the market, which leads to an obligation to collect and recycle such packaging. These entities transfer their obligation to either one of 2 companies: Green Pak or Green MT (authorized recovery schemes). The fees depend on the tonnage that has to be collected for recycling purposes. On the other hand, these two companies have reached an agreement with the government whereby they collect the separated waste of each locality (for recycling purposes) through both bring-in sites and door-to-door collect, for free. This is because any amount has already been collected by commercial entities. Moreover, these companies distribute a number of free recycling bags in each locality. These are very positive developments.

With regards to waste and recycling under the Eco Gozo action plan, Gozo will benefit from a mechanical biological plant for the treatment of municipal solid waste. In addition, the Ministry for Gozo, the Waste service and Local Councils will work together to increase the proportion of recyclables collected in Gozo to an established target above the national targets.

### **CLIMATE & ENERGY**

The big part of the energy supply in Gozo is currently obtained from a diesel plant. Different measures are being taken to increase the share of renewable energy use. E.g. during the last years, the Ministry for Gozo installed additional photovoltaic panels which were funded from the savings in electricity bills arising from replacement of the existing energy supply. Furthermore, under the Eco-Gozo initiative and in collaboration with the University of Malta people are currently receiving free consultations on how to convert their houses to be energy efficient. The government proposes several initiatives, included in the Eco-Gozo action plan: identify optimal sites for small onshore wind farms and develop small onshore wind farms, utilize rooftops of public buildings and other spaces such as public car parks for renewable energy projects involving solar energy, carry out energy audits on all public buildings including the Gozo Administration Centre, convert all lighting system in offices and public places to energy saving lighting. Attention is also given to awarding of companies, households, villages and streets committed to energy-saving with a Green Award.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY

- In respect to water availability, beside desalination, which is expensive and energy intensive, the Jury recommends to conduct studies on the (dis)advantages of other technologies as well as to the possibilities of grey water use.
- Since the sustainable transportation system cannot be improved or changed immediately, starting with a pilot project to raise the public awareness could be a good way to enhance emission reduction, some examples could be: more widespread information provision about the already taken positive action (since last two years) to give incentives to people for the changing of vehicles to more cleaner and efficient ones, more education activities at schools, promoting alternative source of energy, promoting biking not only as a sport activity but also as a sustainable transport, placing an exhaust tester to test the engines of cars before driving onto the ferry to Gozo.
- A tunnel construction is still under discussion. We cannot forward an official opinion, but there are possible advantages and disadvantages. The advantages would be efficiency of transport, especially for businesses and workers/students/families of patients who need to cross every day. The Jury recommends not to forget the possible impacts of a tunnel on the nature and the landscape, the flora and fauna, the number of cars going to Gozo and the overall local identity. The Jury recommends a carrying capacity study as an element of the Environmental Impact Assessment, together with an Economic Impact Assessment, making clear the effects of alternative connection improvements. The Jury asks attention for the potential conflict between the Eco-Gozo Strategy and the proposed tunnel connection.
- More information on garbage management in vulnerable nature areas could improve the behaviour of visitors.
- The Jury recommends to explore the natural potential of Gozo and Comino in terms of renewable energy, especially considering solar energy. New technics for generating of renewable energy for separate buildings are now available also at the University of Malta.

## LOCAL IDENTITY

### CULTURAL HERITAGE

Gozo has a very rich cultural heritage with a number of historical and cultural sites: archeological sites, fortifications, chapels, churches and museums. Here we can mention only several examples. The *Ġgantija temples*: a megalithic temple complex erected during the Neolithic Age (3600-3000 BC), are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The complex is among the world's oldest temples. Gozo's oldest village *Gharb Ta' Dbiegi*, where are still made many interesting handcrafts. The center of preservation of traditions *Santa Lucija*, which is winner of the EDEN Award. Different annual festivals and public events are organized.

The government implements different measures to support cultural heritage.

### TERRITORY & TRADITION

Characteristic for Gozo are the villages with traditional architecture (12 village cores) which have retained in their surroundings also the traditional way of cultivation of agricultural products on small parcels of land. The 2007-2013 Rural Development Program supports through different measures traditional ways of cultivation and sustainable agriculture. Also the Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands contains different measures to protect cultural heritage and landscape.

### LOCAL IDENTITY

Identity in general is a strong point of Gozo.

Numerous local products (not yet certified), different dialects in each of 14 locations are typical for Gozo. Most of the local food and dishes are 100% organic. The local food production is one of the targets of "Gozo Eco-island 2020".

### HOSPITALITY & SATISFACTION

Assessment of satisfaction of the destination as reported in tourism evaluation website shows a good satisfaction. Moreover, Gozo plans to continue improving the tourism situation on the island but also to develop rural and sustainable tourism.

### HUMAN RIGHTS & JUSTICE

Gozo is considered a safe destination. The UN Global Gender Gap Report 2011 shows a relatively low performance. The younger generation seems more open and free to speak compared to the elder one.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY

- The Jury recommends to pay attention to the promotion of local food among visitors and at international level. It is considered essential to preserve and manufacture authentic food supplies such as the local cheese (Gbejna), olives, olive oil etc., which has already been done by local companies/farmers.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMICS**

### **TOURISM**

Gozo with its nature, cultural and historical sites, and numerous annual festivals is an attractive destination for foreign and local tourists. Tourism is an important sector of the economy of Gozo. Improvements in the last two years fall with the general improvements that have been registered vis a vis the objective of making Gozo as an eco-island by 2020, which sees as one of its measures the promotion of sustainable tourism and the conservation and restoration of natural habitats.

The maritime tourism, which is an issue in the whole Mediterranean, is also an issue in Gozo. There is potential to increase the maritime tourism in Gozo. Part of the Gozitan population also believes that it would be beneficial for the local economy to improve the facilities for maritime tourism. The government has planned a vast increase of the mooring capacity in several projects in Malta (Grand Harbor, The Strand Sliema, etc).

Another issue is that the number of summer houses owned by Maltese, non - residents of Gozo, is quite large. Disadvantage is that those houses are not in use during a part of the year. A creative approach might be of help, also to get off-season visitors to Gozo.

### **DESTINATION MANAGEMENT**

Through the establishment of the Directorate for Tourism and Economic Development to the Ministry of Gozo more effort has been done to improve the management of the destination. The Directorate put many efforts to co-ordinate actions with all stakeholders involved. The Directorate liaises continuously with the Gozo Tourism Association and the Malta Tourism Authority which also has a section dedicated to Gozo established on the island. The Gozo Tourism Association is also represented on the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development.

A detailed destination management plan is not available. However, the Eco-Gozo action plan (2010 - 2012) identifies in the area of tourism some niches in which Gozo can develop further and proposes the following measures:

- launch and promote the website portal [www.visitgozo.com](http://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;
- include tourism awareness in the Eco-Gozo school programmes;
- adopt a regional agro-tourism policy 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.

### **BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT**

The Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), which is the national regulatory authority for the Maltese Islands has developed an eco-certification scheme for tourists accommodations, which is internationally recognized. One hotel in Gozo: the five star Ta' Cenc hotel in Sannat has received the MTA eco-certificate. And the second five star hotel of Gozo - the Kempinski Hotel in San Lawrenz has been awarded with the Green Key.

The Directorate for Tourism and Economic Development is going to embark together with the Malta Tourism Authority on a project for 2012 in order to commit destination management companies to invest more in Gozo with respect to meetings, incentives, conferences and events.

### **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

There are various platforms which strive to enhance participation in local policies. A Gozo Regional Committee within the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development has now been established for some years. This committee includes the Gozo Business Chamber (GBC), the Gozo Tourism Association (GTA), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local councils and local union representatives. And nearly all government departments have a front office within the Ministry for Gozo.

### **HEALTH & SAFETY**

Air quality is generally good because there are no significant sources of air pollution except from the transport and quarrying sector.

Lifeguard service is present in some of the main beaches to ensure the safety of visitors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY

- The tourism business could be further encouraged to apply for awarding with eco labels, which will increase the green image of the destination.
- The Jury recommends to carry out studies about the tourism carrying capacity of the destinations, paying attention to energy consumption and waste disposal. This is important to ensure that further tourism development will be realized in a good way.
- The Jury recommends to stimulate low season tourism by considering some new forms of tourism, such as: maritime tourism / yachting, health tourism, eco/agro tourism / permaculture, cultural tourism, spiritual/historic tourism.
- Now there is a specific intention for further development of maritime tourism, it is important that the process of choosing locations for marinas etc. is supported by appropriate studies and is made transparent to the public.
- A positive and convincing communication strategy may be helpful to increase public acceptance of the Eco-Gozo action plan. The Jury recommends also increasing the efficiency in implementation of measures and policies under the Eco-Gozo action plan in order to improve the current status of the destination and realize the goal to become an eco-island by 2020.
- It is encouraging that representatives of the younger generation, like e.g. the Gozo University Group, are interested in discussions about the future of Gozo. In connection to the jury recommendation to establish a QualityCoast committee (page 2), the Jury recommends to invite a representative from the younger generation in this committee.
- The Jury recommends to encourage the tourism business sector (hotels, restaurants, food and service providers) to participate in actions for sustainable development. It is also important to help local businesses to exchange good practice experience with other (international) businesses. This will give the possibility to find ways to decrease tourism impact on environment and nature, which is mainly caused by increased water and energy consumption, waste generation and transportation, and also to provide better services and preserve the local identity. The tourism business sector will also profit economically from this.