

## **Zooming on Sustainability Conference 13-15/05/2009**

### ***Workshop 1 – Environmental Sustainability***

Chairperson: Martin Bugelli (DG for Information, Local Government and Public Consultation)

Keynote: Marie Louise Mangion (Tourism and Sustainable Development Unit – OPM)

Rapporteur: Frederick Abdilla (MEUSAC – Consultation Unit)

Marie Louise Mangion started her presentation with a message from Maltese children highlighting the fact that everyone is important and that everyone can make a difference to achieve a better environment for all.

This in turn should lead to the understanding that whatever we do and every decision we take will have an effect on future generations. Their well-being depends on the decisions we take today.

Can we afford to do more mistakes in regards to natural environment protection?

Marie Louise Mangion started off by giving a general background to Malta. She mentioned the fact Malta is a very small island with a very high population density, few natural resources (mainly sun, sea, stone and salt), and the fact that Malta, being an independent country cannot rely on other big countries to sustain itself.

She then spoke about mistakes that Malta as a country did in regards to natural environment protection, especially in the 70's and 80's. For example: The areas of Qawra and Bugibba are all built up and now, we as a country are realising it is very difficult to revamp it for tourism purposes. She also mentioned the examples of St. George's Bay and developments on garigue areas and other natural habitats.

Nowadays we are realising that in shaping up economic policy, it would be wise to consider environmental and natural resources factors, and give more attention towards improving the quality of the environment we live in. Besides, we are also realising that sustainable development is not just a source of increasing our GDP levels but also a way of increasing the well-being and standard of living of the local community.

Marie Louise Mangion then spoke on Malta's Tourism Policy. The principle of sustainable development is now enshrined in this policy. The means balancing economic growth with social equity and environmental protection.

### **How are we applying this policy?**

Malta is applying this concept through the Rural Tourism Concept.

Among other things, we have to:

- find a way through which such rural areas do not rely on big unsustainable real estates to generate money, but rather to preserve and promote traditional aspects whilst improving the basic infrastructures.
- Interact with residents because they truly know what their locality stands for in terms of natural environment protection.
- Enhance local produce.

This also makes economic sense to tour operators. Tourist agencies are now realising that sustainable development can truly make good business.

As an example, Marie Louise Mangion mentioned the Federation of Tour Operators who are saying that they will not work with hotels that do not reach a certain environmental standard and satisfy certain sustainability criteria. The main reason behind this is that customer expectations in this regard are high. According to a recent study, 87% of British tourists that it is important that their holiday does not damage the environment.

Marie Louise Mangion then spoke on how Local Councils can contribute to sustainable development:

- by supporting initiatives that could improve the general air quality
- by promoting the minimisation of waste (Reduce, Reuse , Recycle)
- by utilising renewable resources
- by conserving water
- by protecting and managing the marine environment.]

Most importantly local councils need to ensure that they have adequate resources for implementation and enforcement.

Marie Louise Mangion then spoke briefly about the way forward in this regard. She spoke about the importance of knowing what resources are available and to be informed. She rounded up her presentation by saying that Sustainable Development is dependant on the day to day decisions that we make. Decisions made today will affect generations of tomorrow.

Martin Bugelli then opened up the floor for any reactions.

Nigel Holland (LC Floriana) spoke about the Local Councils' limited powers and the fact that they almost always have to resort to government agencies to take certain decisions. Martin Bugelli said that although this was a valid point, it was beyond the scope of the workshop to discuss issues on a political level. He said that in the case of Malta, Local Councils are still relatively young and possibly more time needs to pass until the government starts giving them more legislative powers.

Mario Salerno (Kirkop) spoke about the idea of an ecological village project that his council is undertaking. The idea is to turn Kirkop into a completely self –sustainable eco-village by 2025. This can be done by for example installing photovoltaic panel on schools and local council buildings. They are also planning to collect rainwater by excavating a big quarry to build a reservoir and channel all the collected water to it. He talked on the various challenges that his council is tackling in order to make this project a reality, mainly financial restraints, and the fact that it is very difficult to make the community think globally and act locally.

Alessio Veronese then gave a short presentation on noise pollution. He said that noise pollution is rarely mentioned in the context of environmental sustainability, but nonetheless this is a very common and dangerous problem. He went on to discuss the Physics of Noise, by defining it as an “undesirable sound”. He explained how noise cannot occur without a source, an elastic medium and a receiver. He also spoke briefly on the negative effects that noise has on humans, mainly: problems of sleep, harmful psychological effects, and lack of concentration.

He then presented a case study of a road on Milan which is very busy and has a very heavy traffic flow especially in the mornings. He explained how the Comune di Milano conducted an acoustic map of the area by using a phonometer.

Alessio Veronese then spoke about an instrument that has been designed, which is capable of neutralising noise.

Nigel Holland then asked if there are any instruments that can limit the noise created to a selected area. He talked about how Floriana has to endure a lot of noise pollution because of national events and festivals, mass meetings etc that are all held in the locality. Alessio Veronese that said, that yes, this is possible, and that more studies are being done by experts to improve the instruments that are currently used.

Martin Bugelli closed off the workshop by stressing the importance of local councils to implement measures related to environmental sustainability on a community level. In turn, this will also contribute to a better quality of life on a national level.

## ***Workshop 2 - Cultural Sustainability***

The first workshop was chaired by Ms Maria Schembri, *Head of Funding Unit, MEUSAC*, and the keynote speaker was Mr Toni Attard, *EU Projects Coordinator at the St James Cavalier*.

The second workshop was also chaired by Ms Schembri, while the keynote speaker for this workshop was Ms Davinia Galea, *Chief Executive at the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts*.

Following a presentation given by each of the keynote speakers at the respective workshop, the floor was opened for discussion. The following are the main findings of the discussions:

- For a project to be sustainable, the Community must believe in it – “*how can you sustain something which you don’t believe in*”? Thus, it is important to focus on what the Community needs - prominence must be given to this and not to tourism as tourism is only part of the formula. One must get the views of the stakeholders whilst pointing out the economic, social, physical and environmental aspects of the project.
- A link must be found between the past, the present and the future. Most of the time, emphasis is made on sustaining past traditions; however one must understand that people change and traditions also change – old ones die, whilst new ones come along. The idea is to take the past and reinvent the new.
- A change in perception is required – one can easily transform a site aesthetically but how do you change the social perspective? In order to do this the Community must be involved in the project.
- The need of ensuring and enhancing the respect for the individual – a society which is sustainable is one which can go forward together.
- One of the roles of local councils is that of stewardship – making the Community passionate about things.
- The importance of being open to culture – if someone is not open to a certain type of culture, this will be reflected in the way that that person leads the Community.
- In creating a project or regenerating an existing structure, one must ensure that the structure is sustainable i.e. one that can be carried forward by future generations. Hence the importance of thinking long term. With a long term vision, one can transform any site into a centre of culture. In relation to this the participants of the first workshop were shown a number of places in Europe (in Glasgow, London, France and Denmark) which have been transformed from dump areas into cultural centres – here the focus was on transformation rather than restoration; whilst in the second workshop Ms Galea gave a presentation on a particular historic building in Malta (Fort St Elmo) and discussed what can be done with the site – whether this should be restored or transformed; and if transformed, what it could be transformed into.

Such transformations attract people to these places thus giving a life and soul to the place. To achieve this one must think outside the box without allowing money and space limitations to inhibit one’s thinking.

### *Workshop 3 - Socio-Economic Sustainability*

In the second session, the presentation by Dr. Andrew Azzopardi dealt with three main points which were:

- The definition of sustainability
- Defining governance
- The role of the community

Following the presentation, the floor was opened for discussion. The following are the main findings of the discussion:

- During the workshop, it was expressed that they are trying to include a sense of stewardship especially in a locality where there is an environment with low self-esteem, disadvantaged people etc.
- As regards to why people are shifting and moving out of a community, the working group thought that there is the need to address the reasons why people are moving out.
- Another thing mentioned following this argument was the issue of integration in a locality. For instance, the integration of foreign residents in a small village or town could add tremendous value.
- Another example of positive integration is happening locally in day care centres for the elderly, whereby an old person within this day care centre teaches his/her profession/trade to the other members of the centre.
- In this working group, it was added that with a flourishing economic base, you still need economic governance.
- Furthermore, when speaking on sustainable development, it is more a question of education to ensure that citizens live a sustainable life.
- The French delegation shared some examples how they illustrate sustainability through education. One example is that the Local Council develops a Youth Council, whereby two youths from each school in the locality are represented to educate them to encourage others to be active citizens.
- Moreover, in France, some localities have a town hall that sets the example for the community in the area. For example, projecting the idea of having low energy use.
- Finally, the working group mentioned the importance of creating a healthy sector, as well as having a strong ownership. Ownership also means participating and eventually being heard.