



**MALTA'S NATIONAL STRATEGY
FOR THE
PROMOTION OF CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
AND
MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

Contents

I	Malta and the Alliance of Civilizations
II	National Strategy
II.1	Educational sector
II.2	Cultural sector
II.3	Internal rule of law
II.4	Tourism and town twinning
Annex I	Malta Declaration on Interreligious Dialogue, June 1997
Annex II	Expatriate Students in Malta

I MALTA AND THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

I.1 The Alliance of Civilizations

The Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism. The Alliance was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. In April 2007, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as High Representative for the Alliance. The AoC is supported by a Group of Friends – a community of over 85 member countries and international organizations and bodies that support the efforts of the Alliance of Civilizations to counter the rise of extremism and polarization.

Working in partnership with governments, international and regional organizations, civil society groups, foundations, and the private sector, the Alliance is supporting a range of projects and initiatives aimed at building bridges among a diversity of cultures and communities. The four main areas covered by the Alliance of Civilizations are: Education, Youth, Media and Migration.

Malta was welcomed as a member of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations on 21 January 2008.

I.2 Malta and Inter-Cultural Dialogue

The Mediterranean region has always been a meeting place for different cultures and civilizations. The history of the Mediterranean shows us how different cultures met, lived and fought with each other. In the heart of the Mediterranean, Malta is a country with evident Semitic and European roots. Malta's long history, characterized by foreign influences, has enabled the development of a rich culture which binds together different continents that can be as much complimentary as contrasting. This geographical positioning puts Malta in a unique position to act as a bridge not just between European cultures but also within the Mediterranean basin, as a meeting point between continents and their relative cultures, namely African, the Middle Eastern and European. Malta's culture, in fact, is clearly a result of all the influences the Island has been subjected to for centuries, reflecting the characteristics of the nations that have, for one reason or another, occupied, visited or conquered the Island, leaving behind a legacy that has become part and parcel of the Maltese heritage.

In the present day context, Maltese come in contact with visitors from very diverse cultures. This is also due to the nature of our economy, in which tourism plays a principal role. Emigration of many Maltese to more economically-developed countries in the past, and their return in more recent years, has further enhanced the locals' familiarity with foreign customs and their integration into our culture. More recently, the influx of immigrants from non-European countries is exposing the locals to new and diverse cultures. In the promotion of its culture portfolio, Malta wants to encourage a sense of belonging with the aim of encouraging understanding, tolerance and cooperation.

Intercultural dialogue implies a contemporary communicative process between people who do not seek to suppress identity, homogenise identities or impose a dominant culture. The democratisation process within intercultural dialogue calls for a knowledgeable understanding of one's culture and that of other cultures through creative transnational cultural cooperation projects which reach out and are developed within different communities.

This transnational collaboration between countries that are experiencing the same issues will help in forging not only stronger alliances between states but will present the possibility to increase the mutual understanding with other communities or minorities. It will also present all participating countries a common ground and understanding of how best to tackle the inter-cultural issue.

Malta hosts four international institutions which, through their work, foster intercultural dialogue and awareness, in the parliamentary and diplomatic spheres: (i) the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, which brings together Parliaments of all countries bordering the Mediterranean; (ii) the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, which, with Malta's accession to the European Union and with the financial support of the Arab League, is more than ever emphasizing the Euro-Mediterranean dimension by building bridges between Europe, North Africa and the Middle East; (iii) the Foundation for International Studies, which is a venue for the exchange of ideas, and for the collection, assessment and dissemination of information, acting as a co-ordination and documentation centre and as an initiator of projects. The Foundation has worked closely with several international academic, governmental and non-governmental bodies, and has provided administrative structures for various projects commissioned by or run in collaboration with the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The Foundation has been instrumental in initiating and organising a large number of international conferences, workshops and seminars both in Malta and overseas; (iv) the European Union-League of Arab States (EU-LAS) Liaison Office, the first of its kind, groups EU and Arab League experts who promote dialogue between Europe and Arab countries. It serves as a coagulating force in promoting a higher level of inter-regional political dialogue and understanding as underscored in the Communiqué of the first ever EU-LAS Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Malta in February 2008.

I.3 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

With the aim of promoting and disseminating the Alliance of Civilizations initiative at the national level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the national focal point for the Alliance of Civilizations, endeavours to foster the teaching of the principles and values of the Alliance of Civilizations through its efforts to communicate, on a timely and on-going basis, with the pertinent line Ministries and other institutions, so that the Alliance of Civilizations, and its initiatives, may be better known. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will also coordinate the process of evaluation and assessment of the fulfilment of these aims over a set period of time.

II NATIONAL STRATEGY

Introduction

Malta's national strategy for the promotion of cross-cultural understanding and management of cultural diversity is based on a four-dimensional approach, focussing on the educational sector, the cultural sector, the internal rule of law dimension as well as tourism and town twinning. The main actors are: the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport; the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs; and the Parliamentary Secretariat for Information, Tourism and Sustainable Development within the Office of the Prime Minister. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs acts as coordinator/focal point vis-à-vis the Alliance of Civilizations.

II.1 EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

II.1.1 Curriculum

The National Minimum Curriculum principles 2 and 8 on 'Respect for Diversity' and 'An Inclusive Education' promote education in value orientations with the aim to fostering tolerance, understanding, and respect among peoples, groups and individual persons. Such orientations are reflected in school programmes of study and pedagogy based on intercultural relations, interpersonal communication, and attitudes of openness to different life perspectives and experiences. Examples of such programmes of study and learning approaches are evident in subjects as Personal and Social Development (PSD) and Social Studies. Relevant topics dealt with comprise:

1. Personal and Social Development

Form 2

Values and Diversity: helping students identify values they own; identifying that different people have different values; understanding the importance of tolerance and diversity.

Form 3

Rights as a Citizen: defining the meaning of living in a democratic society; identifying rights and obligations as free and independent persons within our country.

Tolerance of ideas: considering the role of tolerance in being a responsible citizen; recognising stereotypes and prejudices in relation to other cultures.

Intercultural Awareness: identifying different rights and obligations in other cultures; establishing constructive and non-oppressive relationships with people from other cultures; identifying methods on how to be more interdependent between cultures.

2. Social Studies

Form 4

The Individual as a Social Being: social and interest groups, ethnic groups and cultural identities; social networks and social mobility; classes.

Socialisation and social control: norms, values and laws; sanctions; solidarity and conflict; deviance.

II.1.2 Pre-Service Training

Training in Education Promoting Respect and Diversity (ERD) is a compulsory part of teacher pre-service academic study. Both the training courses for Primary and Secondary teachers include eight hours of such training in the core subjects. Teaching practice, which includes training and is also part of the final examination, has teaching for diversity as one of its aspects.

The Department of Primary Education within the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta periodically organizes a 15-hour course introducing concepts related to intercultural competence and communication. The course is aimed at kindergarten assistants and teachers currently working with three to eight-year-old children. The aims of the course are for participants to understand the concept of intercultural competence, reflect about their own culture (behaviour, attitudes); develop their intercultural competence and participate/learn about suitable activities for the development of intercultural competence with young learners.

Specific Course for Primary, Secondary Area, and PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education):

- Learning, Identity and Difference

An Optional Course:

- Anti-Racist Education
- Research Methodology Courses sensitize the teacher-researchers to notions of difference and their representation: e.g Emancipatory Research

Post-Graduate Course in Diversity & Regional issues:

- MEd in Responding to Student Diversity
- MEd in Euro-Mediterranean Comparative Education

Faculty Projects re Diversity & Intercultural Communication:

2004-07: **DTMp: Differentiated Teaching Module** – primary: preparing trainee teachers to respond to student diversity

2003-06: **COALA: Communication and Language** promotion in training preschool Teachers

2005-07: **SPICES: Social Promotion of Intercultural Communication Expertise and Skills**

Faculty Programmes:

- Teaching for Diversity (learning styles)
- Prison Education
- Culturally Responsive Education the objectives of which are:
 - *To establish culturally responsive education as an interdisciplinary teaching and research area at the Faculty of Education.*
 - *To organise activities within the Faculty and the wider education community to raise awareness of the importance of recognising, understanding and engaging with culturally diverse others.*

- *To generate and disseminate new knowledge and publications in relation to culturally responsive teaching.*
- *To develop a network of international links on culturally responsive education.*
- *To develop teacher education curricula and educational materials that respond to the interests and needs of culturally diverse students.*

II.1.3 In-Service Training by the Training and Staff Development Branch of the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department

In-service courses are organised by the Training and Staff Development Branch of the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department every July and September for all teachers. Topics related to specific themes such as human rights have been offered for Social Studies and Personal and Social Development (PSD) teachers. One specific course entitled 'Education against racism, xenophobia and discrimination' was offered in 2006.

In January 2007 a training session focusing on Intercultural Pedagogy and Intercultural Mediation was organised for all PSD teachers (Primary and Secondary) and Guidance Teachers. This entailed the methodology of intercultural learning, why it is important to have an intercultural way of thinking, when this is necessary and how to put it into practice.

Two Council of Europe workshops were also organised:

- a. 24-27 April 2007 - '***A Route to Equality and Fairness in School***'. It targeted College Coordinators, the Senior Management Team of all Schools, Education Officers, Subject Coordinators and Teacher Trainers. It addressed the issues of Gender, Disability, Discrimination and Xenophobia. It aimed to equip all stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills to prepare students to leave school with an awareness of the importance of equal opportunities, of the prejudices others may face due to their gender, age, ethnic origins, sexuality or physical abilities, and awareness of their obligation not to discriminate;
- b. 15-18 April 2008 – ***Creating Opportunities for Developing Intercultural Dialogue***. It targeted Teachers, Heads of Department, Heads of School, Education policy makers, Educational psychologists, Education Officers, University students. It addressed the issues of Minorities and Migrants, Inter-religious Dialogue, Cultural Dialogue and Human Rights. It aimed to:
 - a. raise awareness of the need to engage in intercultural dialogue as a transversal competence that needs to be tackled across the curriculum in order to promote cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation ;
 - b. promote dialogue as the way forward in enhancing mutual understanding and confronting differences through a culture of non-violence ;
 - c. promote intercultural education as a means of achieving sustainable tolerance and peace, and therefore preparing individuals for living in a multicultural society ;

- d. share and disseminate good practice ;
- e. identify practical ways of engaging in intercultural education that enhances intercultural dialogue ;
- f. give cultural diversity a more positive connotation than it has today.

II.1.4 Democratic Citizenship School Project

From October 2003 up to the present day staff professional development sessions were held in both primary and secondary schools to disseminate the ‘Democratic Citizenship School’ Project and to include it in the School Development Plan. It is based on the principles of the Council of Europe’s project for Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and Human Rights Education (HRE) - *Learning and Living Democracy* - that is:

1. active participation
2. *valuing diversity* (the concept of pluralism)
3. *human rights values* (rights and responsibilities)

The fact that since 2004 more immigrants have been reaching Malta from North African shores, the ‘*valuing diversity*’ aspect has been taken very seriously in a number of schools where students are being enabled to develop a sense of respect, cooperation and solidarity among cultures. Positive measures and initiatives aimed at raising the awareness of the student population regarding culture, religion and history of immigrant refugees or minority groups have been included in the School Development Plan. Schools aim to instil in students the value of acceptance and respect towards diversity. With this principle in mind there have been a number of significant initiatives in schools:

- the integration of multi-cultural ethnic groups and immigrants in school was among the topics chosen for discussion during the Comenius Projects of 2001/2004
- Global Education Week celebrated in collaboration with the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity, more commonly known as the North South Centre, of the Council of Europe, during the third week of November. Secondary schools in Malta have been participating in this Global and Development Education Project since 1999. Good examples of Maltese schools’ participation in this European Programme are the seminars ‘*Youth for Change*’, ‘*Youth against Conflict – Youth for Peace*’, ‘*Together for a World Without Poverty*’, ‘*Learning for All, everywhere now*’, ‘*Acting Together for a Just World*, and ‘*6 Billion: One Humanity*’ held in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 respectively.
- Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) – Malta Outreach programme in schools carried out in schools for the past 5 years. It includes talks by refugees, artistic workshops about human rights, role plays to appreciate the needs and fears of individuals concerned and students visiting the local mosque. The aim of the project is to give students the opportunity to interact with people from different ethnic backgrounds and to recognise such differences as a strength. Students were able to come into contact with aspects of African culture.

- the celebration of specific citizenship calendar days like e.g. Human Rights Day, Day of Tolerance and Non-Violence, World Refugee Day as a whole school approach.
- special assemblies during which children are helped to reflect on famous personalities who have contributed to anti-racism and human rights e.g. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King etc.
- the commemoration/celebration of Memorial/World/International Days as a whole school approach and also cross-curricular e.g. Human Rights Day, International Day of Tolerance, World Children's Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, World Peace Day.
- visits to the Mosque.
- immigrant children attending Maltese schools are given the opportunity by the class teacher to talk about their culture and country of origin.

II.1.5 Drama

The Drama Unit within the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department periodically carries out a citizenship project for Secondary Schools in which racism, prejudice and discrimination were targeted. The subject is introduced through the theme of bullying, and through Forum Theatre, followed by a discussion.

II.1.6 Strategies and measures envisaged for the future

- Relating the school and curriculum reforms to the problems and challenges of cultural diversity in society in accordance with the international conventions, recommendations and declarations thus incorporating the teaching about intercultural and human rights education in the school curricula.
- Bridging schools through partnerships – this can be physical or virtual. So far, many schools in Malta have limited their partnerships with European schools. This dimension needs to be extended outside Europe.
- The participation in the Network of Mediterranean States National Human Rights Education Coordinators which is currently being established. The objective of this network is for National Coordinators from Turkey, Spain, Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Malta to meet and develop projects and resources that can be used in schools and by teachers concerned to bridge cross-cultural divides defusing intercultural tensions and contributing to a culture of peace. Ideally this network will work to reach the North African countries, where human rights education hardly exists in schools.
- Encouraging the development and use of appropriate materials to support the intercultural approach in the training of teachers and in school in order to give a 'truer' picture of the different cultures of their students.

II.2 CULTURAL SECTOR

A preliminary list of framework initiatives is being presented below, some of which have already been implemented while others are being proposed within the wider context of the (draft) National Cultural Policy which will be entering the public consultation phase shortly.

II.2.1 Launch of the website www.diversemalta.com

The website is the first webportal that brings together all the diverse communities in Malta and the Maltese abroad. The website also provides information on NGOs actively committed to the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in Malta.

The project offers individual pages about each community taking part in the project. The public can access practical information on upcoming events and contact information for each community. They can also learn about each organisation's mission and historical background. The website is also a unique opportunity for the Maltese communities spread around the world to keep the Maltese and the diaspora informed about events and activities in their Country.

Besides being a unique opportunity for communities and cultural associations to increase their visibility, [diversemalta.com](http://www.diversemalta.com) provides visitors with information about language courses offered by these entities. In addition, the site provides information about different religious services in Malta.

The management of this site is currently being jointly catered for by St. James Cavalier Centre for Creativity and the Culture and Audiovisuals Unit (MEDC).

www.diversemalta.com was officially launched on 30th January 2009.

II.2.3 Education

The Culture and Audiovisuals Unit shall be coordinating with the same Education authorities and the National Statistics Office to gather statistics on the level of diversity already existing in the educational system. In particular, we would like to go beyond the diversity-by-nationality indicator and to identify other areas of diversity such as religion, ethnicity, first or second generation Maltese nationals, etc.

II.2.4 Religious diversity

In terms of Religion and Education, it is felt that more needs to be done in broadening the religious content of the curriculum in the spirit of the 1997 Malta Declaration, UNESCO Interreligious Dialogue Meeting, and in particular of the recommendations proposed under article 10 (v) reproduced below:

“10 (v) In the field of education, the participants recommend to the religious communities that, with the help of UNESCO they:

- a) promote studies on the image and perception of ‘others’ in religious texts: on this basis, guidelines should be established for the presentation of other beliefs within the education systems of each of the religious communities or associations working to bring people closer together;
- b) promote research on the ways in which communities have used religious texts to justify conflicts, and in parallel thereto, publish other sacred references urging tolerance and mutual respect;
- c) disseminate publications of common interest published in UNESCO’s Member States.”

II.2.5 Structuring National Coordination for Cultural Diversity

In view of the experience gained during the 2008 European Year for Intercultural Dialogue, the establishment of a National Commission for Cultural Diversity which can recommend and manage measures related to cultural diversity in the fields of education, the media (including support for Inter-Cultural Dialogue in public broadcasting), heritage and the arts, employment, local government and civil society, amongst others, needs to be seriously assessed and, if feasible, carried out. The Commission should bring together government branches with direct interest in cultural diversity (MEDC, MSOC, MFA) as well as key representatives from NGOs and the University, and should be empowered to assist in the screening of policies from an Inter-Cultural Dialogue perspective. This measure is also being recommended under the new (draft) National Culture Policy, as contributing both to fostering an inclusive culture as well as providing a framework for transnational cooperation.

II.2.6 Consultation and Stakeholder participation

As a continuation of point II.4 above, and as a follow-up to the concluding conference for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue organised at St. James Cavalier on the 30th of January 2009, there is scope in using the proceedings of the conference’s four workshops to define in more detail the framework for the work of the aforementioned Commission.

There is also scope in integrating a network of NGOs, artists and culture practitioners in the work of this Commission, focussing on the development of community and social outreach programmes through art and cultural programmes. Holding an annual national forum on the theme of intercultural dialogue, similar to the one held in January 2009, can also help in widening the reach of the Commission’s and the connected networks’ work in this area and maintaining inter-cultural dialogue and the promotion and appreciation of cultural diversity high on the national social and cultural agenda.

II.3 INTERNAL RULE OF LAW

The Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs is the Ministry responsible for the integration of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. A description is herewith compiled illustrating a roll of measures/projects/initiatives already taken, currently in place or planned to be organised supporting immigrant populations falling under the Ministry's responsibility. Embracing policy in relation to the domestic aspect of illegal migration and asylum is governed by such main principles, as (i) safeguarding the national interest by means of security measures and border control, (ii) providing fair, just and humane treatment of migrants while, (iii) establishing standard procedures and practices for dealing with asylum seekers. Such measures are being taken in order to include persons applying for international protection in Malta, namely: asylum seekers, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and to support their proper integration and equality as participating citizens in Malta.

The Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs fully supports the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum which was formally endorsed by the European Council in December 2008, specifically: to take account of the priorities, needs and reception capacities and to encourage integration. Moreover, the Pact provides for the voluntary re-allocation of beneficiaries of international protection from Member States subject to disproportionate pressures. The implementation of such a measure is important in that it would better enable Malta to properly integrate those beneficiaries of international protection who remain on the island.

II.3.1 Legislative Framework

Government seeks to adopt all instruments proposed by the European Parliament and the Council in order to ensure harmonised standards of protection leading to a Common European Asylum System. During negotiations Government will seek to ensure that whilst appropriate protection standards are accorded to asylum seekers, the relative legal instruments would also take into account the difficulties faced by Member States subject to asylum pressures. The instruments pertaining to the first phase of the European Asylum System namely Reception Conditions Directive (2003/9/EC), the Asylum Qualification Directive (2004/83/EC) and the Asylum Procedures Directive (2005/85/EC) directive have been transposed into national legislation that is the Refugees Act and the subsidiary legislation adopted thereunder.

II.3.2 Protection against racism and xenophobia

Important steps have been taken by Government to update its anti-discriminatory legislation covering race as well as ethnic and religious grounds considered as affirmative action taken to develop policy addressing emerging phenomena of modern societies. A Bill was published in the Government Gazette No. 18,345 – 25th November, 2008, amending the Criminal Code (Chapter 9) of the Laws of Malta making general provisions applicable to offences which are racially aggravated or motivated by xenophobia. The punishment established for any offence to be increased by one to two degrees when the offence is racially or religiously aggravated or is motivated wholly or partly by xenophobia. This Bill will therefore enhance the provisions against racism and xenophobia in Maltese legislation.

II.3.3 Training of Policy Officer in discrimination awareness

A policy officer within the Policy Development Directorate of the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs attends training conducted by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality which is working towards raising awareness on the six grounds of discrimination identified by the EU: (Age, Race, Gender, Religion or Belief, Disability, and Sexual Orientation). The objective of this training is to sensitise participants on the grounds of discrimination. Following training, participants will be in a better position to establish good practices which can be adopted by developing policy creating a culture of equal opportunities for all in this area.

II.3.4 Reception (Open Centres) and Integration

The operations of open centres is being strengthened by investments in personnel and services in order to assist in the crucial first steps in integration once third country nationals arriving in Malta irregularly are released from detention. The Organisation for the Integration and Welfare of Asylum Seekers, which falls under the remit of the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs, was set up with a view to assist asylum seekers/beneficiaries of international protection by providing language training, assessment of skills and other services meant to facilitate their integration into mainstream society. Efforts have also been made to tackle the particular situation of vulnerable persons. In this regard residential services have been opened within the community. The Maltese authorities are fully appreciative of the invaluable contribution extended by the various NGO's working in the areas of illegal immigration and asylum. Full cooperation is extended to such entities to enable them, as far as possible, to fulfil their particular mission and projects.

II.3.5 Accommodation

Efforts have also been made to respond to migratory priorities through targeted resources such as accommodation to tackle the particular situation of vulnerable persons. Assisting the integration process of beneficiaries of international protection in this area includes the provision of accommodation centres and residential services are provided within the community in addition to the granting of financial allowances. Beneficiaries of international protection are also informed with information on their rights and obligations as persons forming part of the Maltese society.

II.3.6 Work and training

Refugees are entitled to employment as well as to participate in any of the training programmes organised by the public employment service (Employment and Training Corporation). Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are entitled to a work permit in Malta, which is a prerequisite for access to the labour market.

II.3.7 Rights enjoyed by beneficiaries of international protection in Malta

Immigrants who are duly recognised as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have the right to work and are also eligible to receive social assistance, free medical care and free education.

Moreover, refugees enjoy the possibility of family reunification and they may be issued with a Convention Travel Document. Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection may be issued with a Travel Document on humanitarian grounds. By way of policy persons given such status have access to healthcare, education and work permits.

II.3.8 Training of staff

Training was provided to the officials and members of organisations involved in the sector. A Twinning Light programme with Greece tackled several aspects of the Asylum Acquis and reached a very wide audience including NGO's. Moreover, training was also provided to local authorities by Netherlands officials under the ARGO programme.

II.3.9 Language Component

Education is considered as the vehicle contributing to integration and social cohesion. Although no specific courses are held in Malta, persons benefiting from international protection may apply for courses organised by Maltese State educational institutions. Moreover, such persons are also entitled to attend training programmes and educational activities organised by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC). The University of Malta, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, and the Institute for Tourism Studies may waive fees in respect of a limited number of deserving persons enjoying international protection. Refugees who have resided in Malta for a period of five years are also entitled to receive a maintenance grant. In closed centres, language training is provided by means of the project COPE and it is tailored to the needs of the target population. In open centres, language training is mostly offered by Voluntary Organisations, which also targets the needs of the population. However, some residents of open centres attend language classes offered to the general population, in which case a mainstream approach is normally undertaken.

II.4 TOURISM & TOWN TWINNING

By its very definition tourism can be described as a socio-economic activity that is based on intercultural exchanges and experiences of various communities and groups. The clearest example of this experience can be seen in the manner in which history, the arts and gastronomy are presented to tourists as a characteristic of local identity and uniqueness.

The aspect of intercultural understanding and diversity has long been seen as an important factor in the development of attractions and itineraries where the interpretation and authenticity of these two visitor-related products played an important function.

The National Strategic Objectives for Structural Funds (NSRF) specify, under Strategic Objective 1 (Sustaining a growing and knowledge-based, competitive economy), among other themes, that: “Sustaining the tourism industry and promoting culture through access to finance SMEs, Conserving and promoting Malta’s cultural heritage and Enhancement and promotion of Malta’s Tourism offer”.

The objectives of developing a National Strategy for intercultural understanding are to create an attractive, authentic and unique product for tourism. These are based on the implementation and action plan outlined in two particular documents:

1. The Tourism Policy for the Maltese Islands 2007-2011.
2. A Methodological Guide for the Development of Territorial Cultural Systems
3. Subsidiary legislation 363.06 para 26 (LN 195-1999) – Town Twinning
4. L.N. 195-1999: Local Councils Act, 1993 (Act No. XV of 1993); Local Councils (Association) (Amendment) Regulations, 1999

as well as:

II.4.1 Tourism Policy for the Maltese Islands 2007-2011

The Tourism policy drafted in 2007 and which refers to the period until 2011 makes several references to the aspect of culture, namely with respect to maintaining and conserving environmental and socio-cultural resources, being the key elements of the Maltese Islands’ tourism product. To achieve these objectives, a number of issues which relate to governance, competitiveness, sustainability and macroeconomic matters are taken into account, among which: (i) Issue 3: Developing tourism in a sustainable way to ensure an improved quality of life through the conservation and maintenance of environmental and socio-cultural resources; (ii) Issue 8: Malta’s cultural heritage will continue to be protected, conserved and presented for all to appreciate and enjoy. The pertinent Ministry is also working on a number of culture-related projects that can serve as centres for attracting foreign students and artists.

II.4.2 Subsidiary legislation 363.06 para 26 (LN 195-1999) – Town Twinning and L.N. 195-1999: Local Councils Act, 1993 (Act No. XV of 1993); Local Councils (Association) (Amendment) Regulations, 1999

In both the legislation as well as the subsidiary legislation there is the opportunity for local councils to twin themselves with other localities throughout the EU27; the legal reference to this effect states thus:

“A local council shall have the right to make twinning arrangements with any city, town, village or other locality in any other country; provided that any twinning between a city, town or village and another locality in any other country shall require the approval of the Minister which shall be given after the association has given the Minister its opinion on such proposed twinning.”

Twinning of localities can be defined, in terms of the benefits to intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural understanding, as offering the opportunity to learn about the daily life of the citizens in the European countries, opening a communication road, and exchanging experiences among them. The result and the objective is to start joint projects on topics of common interest, such as local integration, environment, economic development and cultural diversity.

Tourism is one of the more obvious means to sustain this objective effectively since it involves the exchange of persons between countries for educational as well as for cultural purposes. The policy that is being developed at present to create local tourism plans for Malta and Gozo will be useful in creating the mechanism to further enhance the principles of town twinning.

II 4.3 LN 144 (2009) Local Councils Act (CAP 363)

The enactment of the legal notice which also regulates the twinning agreements (Regulation 7(2)) specifies that the reason for twinning is to:

“Encourage our citizens to meet and experience different culture thus promoting and strengthening respect, culture, solidarity between the two localities, and also in the field of trade and industry.”

This clause, therefore, leaves no doubt that the primary beneficiaries for these agreements are the residents of those local councils involved in these agreements. It is through these socio-educational networks that such agreements can help promote the cross-cultural understanding and the management of cultural diversity.