

Unit 1 - Gozo Today

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Preamble: This first unit brings a brief overview of the Island's physical and human geography, including a brief historic overview of the economic activities in Gozo. Various means of access to, and across the island as well as some of the major places of interest have been interspersed with information on the Island's customs and unique language.

'For over 5,000 years people have lived here, and have changed and shaped the land, the wild plants and animals, the crops and the constructions and buildings on it. All that speaks of the past and the traditions of the Islands, of the natural world too, is heritage.'

Haslam, S. M. & Borg, J., 2002. 'Let's Go and Look After our Nature, our Heritage!'. Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries - Socjeta Agraria, Malta.



Location: Gozo (*Għawdex*) is the second largest island of the Maltese Archipelago. The archipelago consists of the Islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino as well as a few other uninhabited islets. It is roughly situated in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, about 93km south of Sicily, 350 kilometres due north of Tripoli and about 290 km from the nearest point on the North African mainland.

Size: The total surface area of the Islands amounts to 315.6 square kilometres and are among the smallest inhabited islands in the Mediterranean. With a coastline of 47 km, Gozo occupies an area of 66 square kilometres and is 14 km at its longest and 7 km at its widest.

Climate: The prevailing climate in the Maltese Islands is typically Mediterranean, with a mild, wet winter and a long, dry summer. The average temperature for winter is 12 degrees Celsius and covers the period between December and March. Summer is rather long, dry and sunny, with August typically being the warmest month. The average temperature for summer is 25 degrees Celsius and covers the period between April and November. Precipitation occurs almost solely as rain with a clearly marked seasonal rhythm. The average annual rainfall over the past 50 years amounts to around 530 millimetres, which is registered during an average of 85 days with rainfall per year.

The name Gozo

The name 'Gozo', meaning 'joy' in Castilian, was given to this small island by the Aragonese who took over the Maltese Islands in 1282. Over the years the island has inspired many names. In 700BC the Phoenicians called it "Gwl" or 'Gaulos', meaning round ship, a name that was retained by the Greeks and translated by the Romans as 'Gaudos' or 'Gaulum'. The Moors, who ruled the Maltese islands around a thousand years ago, and who strongly influenced its Semitic language, referred to it as 'Gaudoich' preceding the current name 'Għawdex' (pronounced Aw-desh), which is used today by the local inhabitants. In a legendary context it is often called the 'Island of Calypso' referring to the Greek mythological location of Ogygia, home of the beautiful nymph Calypso. In Homer's epic poem, The Odyssey, Calypso keeps the Greek hero Odysseus as a prisoner of love for 7 long years.

Population: Based on the 2005 National Population Census, the population of Gozo stands at about 31,000, with one fifth of its inhabitants (6414) living in its capital Victoria, also known as Rabat. The remainder of the population is distributed among the surrounding thirteen villages with Għasri having the lowest population. The crude birth rate was 7.93, considerably lower than that of 9.59 for Malta. The town with the highest birth rate is San Lawrenz (15.93) and that with the lowest is Xewkija (4.89).

Language: As applies to the whole of the Maltese Archipelago, the national language of Gozo is Maltese (*Malti*). However, here the language is spoken in a distinct dialect that curiously differs slightly from one village to another.

The Maltese language is the only language with Semitic, North African origins that is written in Latin characters. Maltese is commonly thought to derive from the language of the ancient Phoenicians but also the influence of the Arabs is clearly visible in the roots of this unique language. Place names and numbers are the most obvious examples of Arabic influence on the language. In time, Maltese has taken on Southern European Romance influences, particularly from Italian and French. Throughout the latter part of the last century, Maltese was also influenced by the English language. English is now the second official language, and is spoken widely and fluently.

Religion: Religion is predominantly Roman Catholic. The village parish church is the nucleus of local life and there are over 40 churches and chapels scattered around the island. Gozo has its own Diocese and its Seminary since 1864. The Bishop of Gozo has his seat at the Gozo Cathedral in Victoria.



Gozo Coat of Arms

The shield depicts three slightly pointed hills in black, the centre hill higher and in front of the other two hills. Above the shield is a mural coronet with five eschaugettes and a sally-port in gold. Simultaneously with this emblem, Gozo earned its popular nickname the Island of the Three Hills probably derived from the hilly view when observed from mainland Malta (source: <http://www.gozo.gov.mt>).

Administrative divisions: Victoria (*Rabat*), Gozo's capital city is situated at the centre of the island, and is surrounded by thirteen villages: San Lawrenz, Għarb, Għasri, Xagħra, Munxar, Sannat, Fontana, Kerċem, Żebbuġ, Xewkija, Nadur, Għajnsielem and Qala. Since 1993, these villages and the capital city have been designated as local councils (meaning municipalities). Local councils form the most basic form of local government and there are no intermediate levels between it and the national level. It can be noted from the map showing the Local Councils in the Web-GIS that some areas of the island do not fall within their jurisdiction. These areas include the Gozo Crafts Village and the Xewkija Industrial Estate. Also the small islet known as Fungus Rock (Ġebbla tal-General) does not form part of the island's 14 Local Councils.



Roads & transport: Gozo can be reached by crossing from Malta in two ways; either by Ferry or by Seaplane. The most common is the Ferry service between Mġarr Harbour in Gozo and Ċirkewwa Harbour in Malta, with a basically roll-on/roll-off schedule (more detailed information including timetable visit <http://www.gozochannel.com>). Harbourair Malta provides a daily scheduled Seaplane Service, operating between Mġarr Harbour and the Sea Passenger Terminal in Valletta (<http://www.harbourairmalta.com>).





Within the island, transport is provided by buses from Mġarr Harbour to the main bus terminus in Victoria and from here to all towns and villages in Gozo.

(<http://www.gozo.gov.mt/pages.aspx?page=896>)

Taxi stands are also found in Victoria and Mġarr. It is also very easy to go around the island in hired cars, motorbikes or bicycles. As can be seen from the road network information layer provided in the WebGIS, there is a star-shaped network of main roads linking central Rabat to the surrounding villages. Furthermore, the relatively short travel distances make trekking and hiking in Gozo a most worthwhile venture.

Urban development: From an infrastructural and urban development point of view, Gozo is generally still less developed than the main island, Malta. However, its environmental resources are acknowledged to be under constantly increasing pressure from development. One of the main impacts of this development is a rapid growth in urbanization. Urban areas are increasing rapidly in the main villages and with some of these villages it is already difficult to cut a clear line where one village ends and another starts. The urban sprawl from the capital city to the adjacent villages in the south of the island is clearly evident from the thematic map provided in the WebGIS.

Economy: Gozo's main sources of income come from tourism, agriculture and fishing. Both tourism and agriculture are intimately inter-related with the environment and therefore it is very important for Gozo to find an equilibrium that is sustainable.

Tourism: Over the years, the tourism industry has increased in Gozo, bringing about an increase in hotels, apartments and guest houses. It is important to note that even old and authentic farm houses are being leased as holiday residences, with additions such as swimming pools and other recreational facilities. The majority of hotels, restaurants and guesthouses are found in Marsalforn and Xlendi.



Agriculture & Fisheries:



Throughout the ages, Gozo has upheld a tradition of a gainful agricultural, pastoral and fishing industry. The villages of **Żebbuġ** (meaning olives) which are found in both Malta and Gozo bear witness to the once thriving business of olive oil making. Under Arab rule, olive trees were replaced by citrus trees. Vine growing and wine making, still popular today, was already famous in Roman times and by the 14th century there already existed a thriving market for cotton, an industry which continued well into the 19th century. Today, the island's local agricultural produce includes tomatoes, potatoes, onions, cabbages, barley, clover, olives, melons, grapes, citrus fruits, figs and prickly pears. Livestock rearing is also considered as an important agricultural activity. Up until the mid

20th century, one could come across flocks of sheep and goats roaming the streets of Gozo. Nowadays, high yielding cows provide a more financially viable option. A few goats, however, are still kept for the home-making of the famous Gozitan cheeselets (**ġbejniet**).



Being an island, the fishing industry has been cared for since generations and although it is a small industry compared to agriculture it is still considered important. Marsalforn and Xlendi together with Mġarr Harbour, are Gozo's main fishing villages.

The agricultural and fishing industry also support a number of cottage industries such as honey making, carob and prickly pear products, home-made goat cheeselets, smoked fish, homemade wine and wool products.

Some local agricultural produce:

<i>Ceratonia siliqua</i>	Harruba	Carob
<i>Citrus spp.</i>	Ċitru (Iarinġa, lumija)	Citrus
<i>Ficus carica</i>	Tina	Fig
<i>Olea europea</i>	Żebbuġa	Olive
<i>Opuntia ficus-indica</i>	Bajtra tax-xewk	Prickly pear
<i>Vitis Vinifera</i>	Dielja	Vine

Places of Interest: The location of some of the main attractions of the island is included in the information layer 'Gozo Place Names' in the WebGIS.



Cittadella: a small fortified town situated on a hill overlooking Gozo's capital town Rabat.



Ġgantija Temple Complex: one of the most important archaeological sites from the temple period in the Maltese Islands is found in Xagħra.

Dwejra Bay: hosts the Azure Window, Inland Sea and Fungus Rock and is found in the locality of San Lawrenz.



Ramla l-Hamra: Gozo's most famous beach with its beautiful golden-reddish sand. In Gozo, the rare Sea Daffodil is only found on the coastal dunes of ir-Ramla.

Ta' Ġurdan Lighthouse: offers a 360 degree panorama experience of the island.



Thematic Map for Unit 1

The Thematic Map associated with Gozo Today in the WebGIS is made up of the following information layers:

Gozo Councils: polygon map showing the distribution of Gozo's 14 Local Councils as well as the areas which do not fall under the jurisdiction of any of these Local Councils

Gozo Urban areas: polygon map showing the island's built-up areas

Gozo Primary and Secondary Roads: segment map of the island's main transport infrastructure

Gozo Place Names: point map which points to the centre of the respective Local Councils as well as to the above mentioned places of interest on the island

Gozo Councils: a point map with the names of the Local Councils

Layers	Type	Visible	Selectable	Attribute data (short name)	Attribute data (description in full)
Gozo Councils	Polygon	Yes	Yes	Council	Local Council 1=Yes/0=No
				Area_km ²	Surface area in km ² of Local Councils only
				Urban_km ²	Urbanized area in km ²
				Perc_urban	Percentage urban area
				Pop_1995	Population (1995 census)
				Pop_2005	Population (2005 census)
				Pop_Dens	Population density per km ²
Gozo Urban Areas	Polygon	Yes	Yes		
Gozo Primary and Secondary Roads	Segment	Yes	Yes	Length_Km	Total length of Primary and Secondary Roads
Gozo Place Names	Point	Yes + show labels	Yes		
Gozo Councils Names	Point	Yes	Yes		

Useful Weblinks

<http://www.gozo.gov.mt>
<http://www.islandofgozo.org>
<http://www.gozo.com>
<http://www.aboutmalta.com>
<http://www.guidetomalta.net/gozo-comino.htm>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gozo>
<http://www.visitmalta.com>
<http://www.gozochannel.com>
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