

# The Role of the Gozo Regional Development Authority: Some Opinions from the Socio-Economic Perspective

Dr Gordon Cordina  
E-Cubed Islands  
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# A Proposed Mission for the Authority

*To evolve Gozitan regional distinctiveness into sustainable economic and social development*

Translated into **Phased Objectives**

- Short term: Remediation, consolidation, sustaining growth
- Medium term: Developing distinctiveness and territorial attractiveness
- Long term: Paragon in regional development

# Key Potential Deliverables for the Authority

## 1. Creation of jobs is the first priority

- Limited employment opportunities in Gozo resulting in an increasing number of Gozitan workers, estimated around one-third of labour force, who seek employment opportunities in Malta causing a brain drain in Gozo
- The share of graduates in Gozo population was is higher than that for Malta, indicating human resource economic potential
- Reversal of drop in younger population is crucial to attract business investment

## 2. Gozo's attractiveness as a place to live, work, rest, heal, learn and create is to serve as the basis of all economic and social activity

- Proper spatial planning is key to developing territorial attractiveness
- The quality of life needs to be promoted through the right behavioural attitudes from the resident and the visitor populations

# Key Potential Deliverables for the Authority

## 3. Creation of higher value added activities

- Increase the productivity and salaries in sectors in which Gozo is already strong
- Develop new sectors that are compatible with the development vision and provide synergies with other activities

## 4. Incentivise growth of micro firms towards business efficiency and competitiveness

- The average size of a firm in Gozo is half that of Malta. Of the Micro firms in Gozo in 2010, only 1% graduated to Small by 2015, while 30% ceased operations altogether

## 5. Enhance Physical and Virtual Connectivity

- Connectivity is the basis of all socio-economic relationships, and is essential to sustain human development especially in small peripheral territories

# Proposed Operating Principles for the Authority

- **Relevance**, well-grounded in the assessment of current and future needs
- **Realistic**, starting from ongoing scenario and initiatives and targeting ambitious but attainable potentials
- **Balanced**, addressing all deliverables to maximise synergies
- **Right-sized**, targeting specialisation with sufficient diversification
- **Sustainability-focused**, from the financial, environmental and social perspectives
- **Innovative**, building upon Gozo's distinctiveness and uniqueness
- **Subsidiarity-driven**, fostering partnership and collaboration to ensure critical mass and remove wasteful fragmentation
- **Results-focused**, to ensure efficiency and effectiveness

# Regional Development Authorities in the EU

- Tried and testing governance mechanism to mobilise regional actors to formulate policies and implement actions to the best possible effect
- Operating within the context of and consonant with national and supra-national frameworks to maximise the opportunities available while averting threats
- There are at least 130 Regional Development Agencies across the EU
- Of the 31 Island Regions that are statistical units, around 10 have regional development agencies
- Potential for Gozo Regional Development Agency to learn from and contribute to cases of best practice, tapping into an established network

# Some Concluding Thoughts...

Gozo is worth saving and developing for present and future generations

- Distinctive lifestyle, diversification of tourism offering, potential for social and economic activity that is typical of the EU vision for the role of the Island typology

The status quo is not tenable...*it never is*

- The younger generation is voting with its feet, as globalisation of economic and social relationships is compounding the peripherality of small islands
- Behaviours which may have served well, or have been at least tolerated, in past are now threatening the viability of Gozo

Gozo has the potential to succeed

- A historical fact that has been proven time and again, *but sacrifices were needed*
- Innate resilience can turn distinctiveness into sustainable technology-based development
- There is a shared will and ambition to make this happen: *this needs to permeate society*