

Gozo – Gozetanian territories.

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The view of investigation

The intention of the investigation is to define those qualities of built and un-built spaces which provide for a rather rich framework of living-conditions, appropriate for various transformations, always guaranteeing the integration of work into conditions of everyday life and, his way, offering the qualities of “spaces of dense interconnection, embedding functions locally” which has been lost in western European countries because of the influence of industrialization and of globalization.

The territory and people

The territory of Gozo-island is “so small”, inhabitants use to say. They express, that the system of communication on the island is dense, that people know each other, that they know what is going on, in-dependently from newspaper and television – however, having their own regional televison-programme. Knowing each other is a major part of the culture. It has been said that people still find their husband or wife in the village of origin, or, at least, coming from Malta or Gozo – even, if times of being abroad in foreign countries have changed the living circumstances, even if marriages of people from the same origin are founded in foreign countries where they have met accidentally ...Gozetianians come back to their island, as do Maltese people, not at least in order to enjoy the pleasures of a big family.

The cultural traditions and social bindings are the major force of making the island what it is: a territory, well known and intensively occupied by people for uses of living and working including leisure. Leisure is not separated from other land uses, but coincides with other everyday activities, as growing plants, meeting, talking, competing , f.e. about bird hunting (as sport which has its origins in the need for earning one’s livelihood from the nature, has been cultivated from medieval times by elite-Sicilian influences and has developed to a meanwhile widely spread sportive activity.

Agriculture had been the source for providing every good for a long time, before small trade and mechanical industry has entered the island before 1900. Agriculture is still a broad economic and social basis for Inhabitants to live on. Relative to the influence of agriculture, there is a wide ranging mixture of jobs and of daily routines, determining everyday life.

The social situation is rather well balanced. The following information has been given kindly by Father Jo, during an informal interview with him on the 20 February in Villagg Tal Fanal, Ghasri: There is hardly to speak of “poverty”. As “poor” are only those ones regarded who have the burden of bringing up their children as single parents and do not have equal advantages of “big settled families”. They live in flats, f.e. south of the town of Viktoria, and differ, this way, from the 73% of population who own property and use it as an economic basis for living. Lower middle class dominates on the basis of various incomes, most of them supported by individual activities of agriculture. Lower middle class is also widely involved in earning money through tourism, during the summer part-time. Other members of the middle-class combine jobs in government on one side with the individual workshops which keep the economy of the island so rich: workshops as joineries, sewing rooms, carpentries, etc. These people are sufficiently taking part in the land-market. Thus, the lower middle class builds the socio-economic basis on which the much smaller middle class has been enabled to build up their economic existences in form of pharmacies, consultancies for different purposes, offers of trade of different kind with an

unspectacular but solid amount of individual property ownership. This social level again is topped by a few rich people who own businesses, are lawyers or solicitors and have a bigger part of property ownership in form of concentrated sites of valuable land in their hands.

The cultural landscape and the economy

Natural landscape, agricultural and settled areas are part of the cultural landscape and its land use by inhabitants and tourists. Both, inhabitants as well as visitors are a risk for maintaining and continuing the values of the cultural landscape. However, both the groups carry the economy of the island. This very general conflict has to be dealt with by evaluating the settled areas in their relationship to landscape and small-spatially integrated open spaces. However, it is very clear that inhabitants and visitors, with different reasons of interest, have the same intention: to enjoy the still visible relics of historical traditions and its integration in modern life on the island. Herewith, the real strength of the economy is lying.

Criteria and method of evaluation

Evaluating the settled areas in their relationship to landscape and to small-spatially integrated open spaces means to point to the strengths and weaknesses of urban structure and urban spaces under the influences of those forces which are driving the economy. No small-spatially integrated economies will become a risk for existing values, because the variety of elements and functions, enriching each other in close spatial relationship and corresponding with each other, will even more be a very good basis for continuing the existing traditions, compatibly with current demands from inhabitants and tourists. It is only the large concentrations of mono-functions which have proved to have been a danger to western European traditions of socio-economic spaces and will be a danger to the island, if resulting uses do not care about being well integrated into local units of "spaces of interconnection". Interconnection has – in general – a multi-level structure of spatial and socio-economic dimensions. However, relative to a location, it has to fulfill the demands of people to offer opportunities for the integration of communication, services and basic spatial practices into every day life conditions of the local and regional urban context. This means: Space, as a resource, has to be taken seriously into consideration. Simple exploitation of a location will not lead to anything but to destruction of values. This point of view and the resulting criteria and method go back to the philosophy of Henri Lefebvre about "The production of space". He refers to the importance of spatial practices as a key to concepts and perception of space. Using this philosophy as a basis, usability and changeability of urban area conditions proof their importance for "spatial practices". These conditions cannot any better be fulfilled but in small-spatial arrangements of elements and functions buildings contexts for interconnection.

Characteristics - urban structure and urban spaces

Entrances – harbors and temporary accesses

The island can only be approached to by ship. There are two possibilities to do so: Harbors and temporary accesses at individual locations within the landscape of the coastal sites. Only the developed harbors give continuous access to the interlinked network of roads and streets: Marsalforn, Mgarr, Xlendi. The bays are only to be accessed from the inner network of roads: Ramla Bay, Dwejra Bay and the Inland-Sea. The temporary local accesses at the coastal sites shall be protected from further

development of roads, only to be reached by boat and clearly defined in their extension for the access of tourists.

Corridors - traffic

The network of roads leads into and through villages and towns, interlinking the settled areas in North-South and East-West-directions. As there are very few-by-passes, the corridors are still offering the attraction of leading “into” and “out of” an urban area, clearly defining the expansion of the settled areas in relationship to the East-, West-, North-, South-directions. This system can easily be perceived and serves for a very good orientation on the island. Locations have been maintained to be legible relative to “inner” and “outer” settled areas. Therefore, by-passes should not become established around villages; traffic should be reduced in total (f.e. by keeping the settled areas on the existing level), in order to be carefully guided into and through the villages and towns. Alternative means of transport, like horse-driven vehicles and bikes should be encouraged to operate in areas of tourism and in inner urban areas of the main town of Victoria.

Specific places, like the Cita-delle in Victoria, need specific access for mass-parking of cars, especially of busses, on sites to be spatially well integrated into the urban spaces.

Spatial framework of valleys - terraces

The valleys in between hills with their view-points of churches mark another very strong spatial framework somehow crossing the corridors almost orthogonally in some parts. The valleys are framed by the terraces of the hills. On the hills, the settled areas start to be situated from a certain height which leaves the lower parts of the hills to the rivers and to wild landscape immediately alongside the riversides (dry in summer). The terraces in between are agriculturally cultivated between rubble walls, if the ground is fertile enough. Their cultivated landscape builds part of the entrances into towns and villages or defines “interim spaces” between settled areas. These areas make transparent, how intensively agriculture is still carried out and how important it is as a part of every-day-activities. Also, the terraces show clearly to be perceived orders of obviously very productive, man-made influences on the landscape are, nevertheless, most compatible with the natural characteristics of the island. These spaces should be maintained in order to remind of the value of thorough methods of small-spatial contributions to agriculture. The agricultural use should be continued for the benefit of supply with fresh vegetables and for the benefit of the local economies which stand for “local cultures”.

Viewpoints - landmarks

Churches, towers of different use and origin and elevated building contribute to the framework of valleys by defining a setting of unique locations which give another type of large-spatial orientation to the island. They can be perceived by view and by sound (bells). They seem to be corresponding to each other from hill to hill, determining the spatial contexts where people live. This structure of landmarks on top of hills is very much symbolizing the social connections of town, villages and districts. Although boundaries might have changed over time, the landmarks still signify clearly where people “belong to” and, therefore, have to be maintained with highest priority for continuing local identities.

Town - Victoria

Almost in the middle of the island, the town of Victoria, builds a clear centre on the island. Its highest point, the Cita-delle, is to be seen from far. The radial roads, leading through the town, build a clear network, interlinked by public places. The sequences of places, build nodes of communication and of public and private activities with a lot of staying qualities, but also with disturbances by traffic, especially busses. Therefore, busses should have their own parking area with easy pedestrian access to the main places. Biggest visual attraction is provided by the continuous change between narrow streets, views onto corner-buildings and opening public places. It has to be maintained as part of an interlinked system of spaces to be used by everybody, for 24 hours. Car-access should be guided, but possible. "Pedestrian areas", as expression of urban area modernization through calming down traffic on one side and bundling it on the other side should not become established, in order to continue the vivid patterns of "southern spatial practices", relative to a mixture of land uses. Individual areas show their own characteristics, however, a social segregation could not be stated on the first and second view. Also the centre with the market-places provides sill for a well integrated mixture of uses, yet fortunately without a bigger concentration of functions, f.e. for trade or tourism. Further concentrations of functions, f.e. tourism and traffic shall strictly be prevented in the centre.

Villages – Districts – Lone standing buildings

The structure of settled areas is distributed over the upper terraces of the hills and reaching down into the valleys of the harbors Marsalforn, Mgarr and Xlendi. All settled areas show a clearly defined position accompanying the overland-roads and being extended around crossings. Therefore most of the villages can be called "road-villages". However, the "leading-through"-effect is counterbalanced by public places near to the "entrance" and the "exit" of the villages (f.e. Zebbug). Also, system of calm side-streets completes the network of streets for the benefit of maintaining the locally specific character and its uses there. As the whole island seems to be settled only at locations of locally specific advantages; this refers also to the wider contexts of villages being split up into districts and, further outside, also lone standing buildings. This fragmentation allows the view on and the access to the agricultural fields in between and builds, this way, a very useful and complex structure of land use which should be maintained and continued. The idea of the "compact city" should not be taken in order to justify a further densification of settled land. Individual plots may be built up again in order to fill wholes in between buildings. The unit of densification over time is the plot including adjacent agricultural land.

Entrances to towns and villages

Alongside the overland-roads, most of the buildings have immediate access from the road, if the height of hills and terraces allows this. If a terrace excludes the immediate connection between building and overland road, the building has its individual access from a side street, in most of all cases being integrated spatially into the settled area, and positioning the "back-side" of the building facing towards the slope of the hill onto the lower terraces and onto the inwards leading main road. These integrations are framed by wild or cultivated landscape or agriculture towards the edges of the settled area. Mostly a monument with a symbol of Christianity signifies the entrance of the village. Herewith a very interesting phenomenon becomes obvious: the villages which surround the town of Victoria only show such a monument towards the side of the village which is closely connected to Victoria (and probably its main catholic church at the Cita-delle). The other side of the village, f.e. leading towards the sea, does not

show such a sign. Again, we find an indication for a very dense system of communication on the island, originally and still up to today probably related to the churches, their hierarchies among each other and their communities. The perception of these entrances is very important for understanding the cultural life and therefore should be maintained for visitors and inhabitants. Any additional by-pass would destroy the system of legibility and should therefore be prevented.

Historical heritage – coordination of built and open spaces

The historical heritage of the settlement structure is very much influenced by the subdivision into relatively small plots, owned and used by the middle-class. Its heritage consists of the following elements: sharing the advantage of a road by narrow and deep plots, intensifying the density of built form and land use on the plot over time, organizing living around central working areas in the ground-floor, having a “back-space” which is also used for working or storage. Outside this dominating mass of plots, mostly at the edges of settled areas, bigger yards serve for agricultural uses. Inside the mass of typical plots, yards represent a higher level of land use, either for public purposes (exhibition hall) or for private housing of a higher level. Only, since other than local inhabitants use the island, these characteristics have been transformed, mostly at the edges of contexts, by rows of villas or lone standing buildings to be owned and used for weekends and holidays by f.e. Maltese people. However, Maltese people have started to buy small traditional houses in former villages. Only mass-tourism has influenced the settlement structure by large contexts of new apartments which do not have the clear distinction of “front” and “back”-side any more and are not any more connected within the system the economic land uses. However, recent contributions of filling gaps in villages have shown that tourism can successfully be integrated in older structures by using the yard as a form of distinguishing “front”- and “back”-sides for new land uses (s. Ghasri, Villagg Tal Fanal). This way, the originally economically reasoned coordination of built and un-built spaces receives a new interpretation and supports the original structures to survive within and despite of transforming influences through tourism.

Potentials – The development of the cultural landscape

The development of the cultural landscape depends very much on the maintenance and continuation of spatial contexts which are defined by experience and by spatial practices as “units of use, communication and socio-economic meaning”. This importance can be found in a lone standing building with the respective land-uses around, it can also be found in any fragment of settled areas, in a whole street, in a village and in parts of the town. However, it builds up as an image, representing the whole island symbolically, but can only be found in reality relative to clearly identifiable units of use. It has to be admitted positively: Even the hotel Ta Cenc and recent urban extension by apartments between the village Sannat and Ta Cenc build such clearly defined units of use, realizing the logic of the new market of tourism.

Thus, the message is: to keep the individual units of use, whatsoever kind of, as small as possible.

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