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Characters and consequences of the evolution of tourism in Malta

The tourist phenomenon

One of the most important aspects that has recently been at the center of the geographical debate is the development of tourism¹, since it has had a series of repercussions on a social, economic², political and territorial level.

This process³ has manifested itself in different ways, since man has shown different interests over time; moreover it has been favored by the evolution of the means of transport that have allowed the progressive widening of horizons; the affirmation of an organization of tourist activity has also been significant, with the creation of specific reference figures such as tour operators.

The current different types of tourism reflect the many interests of contemporary man such as cultural tourism, food and wine tourism, experience tourism, religious tourism, seaside tourism that today make the tourist organization much more complex than in the past.

One of the themes that have characterized geographical research in the last decades has been the one concerning the development of tourism and its variegated effects in different territorial contexts.

A careful analysis of the tourism phenomenon must start from the assumption that an area, to become a tourist region to all effects, must necessarily have a good transport network that allows accessibility, but also movement within it. The other important aspect is that a territory, in order to enjoy the development

¹ “The tourist industry is seen, broadly speaking, as a means of replacing the old Services function. In fact the economic aims of our tourism drive are precisely to provide employment and foreign exchange earnings which had previously been supplied by the Services Departments”; see SPITERI L., *The development of tourism in Malta*, Malta, The Malta Chamber of Commerce, 1968, p. 44.

² About economic aspects of a territory, see HOGENDORN JAN S., *Lo sviluppo economico*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1990.

³ Regarding the development of tourism activity over time see cfr. BAGNOLI L., *Manuale di geografia del turismo–Dal Grand Tour ai sistemi turistici*, Torino, UTET Università, 2010, pp. 3-22.

of tourism, must not be penalized by negative events such as famine, disease, war that limit its appeal by preventing the affirmation and evolution of tourism.

Today the main tourist centers are located in Western Europe and in North America, where tourist activity is very widespread and has evolved in a radical way. It is also worth considering that in order for tourism to develop in a territory it is necessary to re-evaluate its image; for this purpose the most diverse factors can be decisive: for example, when a site becomes the location for a film, or an advertising campaign is launched by the mass media, but also posters, souvenirs, leaflets and even tourist guides capable of arousing interest in tourists so that they are incentivized to return. All phenomena occurring gradually and which are fundamental for the progress of tourism.

Geography has considered many aspects that have contributed over time to the development of tourism, and certainly among them the environmental and cultural⁴ heritage; the former refers to the beauty of landscapes such as islands, coasts, archipelagos, while the latter⁵ includes customs, ways and traditions⁶ that have faded over time to the point, in some cases, of disappearing.

Obviously the increase in tourist activity is mostly recorded during holiday periods or moments of relaxation, when the number of tourists is very high and tourist destinations are crowded.

It must also be considered that tourism⁷ is characterized by some positive and negative factors. The former, such as environmental⁸, psychological and cultural factors, are those that contribute to the development of the phenomenon; the negative factors instead refer to the degradation of the landscape, the decline of important activities such as agriculture, and social tensions, all elements that compromise the affirmation of tourism. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to stimulate tourism so that it has positive repercussions in economic terms on the territory.

⁴ Regarding the Environmental Heritage and their peculiar characteristics see CALDO C., GUARRASI V., *Beni culturali e Geografia*, Bologna, Pàtron editore, 1994, pp. 15-27.

⁵ Many studies have been carried out on the concept of population; see DEMATTEIS G., LANZA C., NANO F., VANOLO A., *Geografia dell'economia mondiale*, cit., pp. 70-88.

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⁷ BAGNOLI L., *Manuale di geografia del turismo – Dal Grand Tour ai sistemi turistici*, cit., pp. 3-4.

⁸ On the concept of an environmental system, geographers have carried out many studies, highlighting some of the characteristics; see cfr. MONEY D., *Ambiente ed economia – Atlante iconografico di geografia umana*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1974, p. 1.

Tourist activity can be facilitated also by the resources which a territory has, so that all cultural or environmental assets can be important for its development and for the increase in the number of visitors. The role of the main institutions in implementing policies that can stimulate tourism and have positive repercussions on the territory is also fundamental.

The geographers Plog, Miossec and Butler⁹ have studied the phenomenon of tourism by elaborating three completely different models that, however, have some points of contact, in particular regarding the four main phases that lead to the organization of the tourist activity: during the first man sees in a territory the elements that satisfy his standard of living; during the second phase man decides to go to a specific area and, as a consequence, he starts the organization of the tourist activity; the third phase is the one in which the development of tourism occurs; during the fourth phase, tourism records a considerable decline.

Geographers have also studied the different types of "tourist landscape", i.e. the landscape visited, the landscape organized and the landscape consumed. The landscape visited is the context that is visited by the tourist, the organized landscape is the one in which the tourist organizes his activity, while the landscape consumed is that used by tourists to meet their needs.

Tourism is then studied on the basis of three indexes: the tourist function index, the tourist density index and the tourist intensity index: these are numerical relationships that allow us to understand the relationship between the presence of tourists, residents in a territory and the territory itself.

By tourist function index we mean the ratio between the number of available beds for tourists and the number of residents; by tourist density index the ratio between the number of tourist presences relative to a determined period of time and the surface of the territory; by tourist intensity the ratio between total overnight stays and the resident population in the same year¹⁰.

We must also consider that the development of tourism¹¹ in a region is proportional to the economic resources that the institutions decide to invest in order to reevaluate specific areas, in order to make the most of the resources that the area itself offers.

⁹ BAGNOLI L., *Manuale di geografia del turismo – Dal Grand Tour ai sistemi turistici*, Torino, UTET Università, 2010, pp. 104-106.

¹⁰ BAGNOLI L., *Manuale di geografia del turismo...*, cit., p. 108-109.

¹¹ For an analysis of tourism in Malta see SPITERI L., *The development of tourism in Malta*, Malta, The Malta Chamber of Commerce, 1968, pp. 15-19.

In today's society we can identify two types of tourist figures: the responsible traveler and the mass tourist. The first one organizes his tourist activity by himself and poses problems of sustainability¹² relative to the territory; the second does not consider these problems and relies on travel agencies, very present in the current organization of tourism.

In the last decades tourist activity has developed considerably thanks to the advent of globalization, which can be defined as the sum of those phenomena that have determined changes in human and geographic relationships spreading homogeneous habits and consumption; this phenomenon has manifested itself in different ways, affecting the most diverse sectors; in fact, we can speak of the globalization of scientific technological knowledge, cultural globalization, geopolitical globalization and environmental globalization, economic globalization. Each of these types has manifested itself in different ways, influencing the socio-economic context.

This process has led to a period of considerable growth in tourism, thanks to the expansion of the transport network in almost all nations, especially in developed countries, i.e. those that play an important role both economically and politically. The different economic potential of the various nations obviously reflects on the amount of resources allocated to the development of tourism, sometimes leading to a sort of territorial competition¹³, which can be created for economic, cultural, linguistic and ethnic reasons.

In order to reduce this phenomenon and establish a phase of international stability, many nations have created multiple organizations in charge of international rebalancing.

The link between geography, history and tourist activity is inseparable, since it is impossible to disregard the study of the territory and the historical events that have marked it to understand the causes that have determined the tourist vocation, with the consequent dynamics of the population or of tourist presences, conditioned by the greater or lesser political stability.

¹² On the concept of sustainability see FERLAINO F. (a cura di), *La sostenibilità ambientale del territorio – teorie e metodi*, Torino, UTET libreria, 2005, pp. 41-48.

¹³ PALAGIANO C., *Linee tematiche di ricerca geografica*, Bologna, Pàtron Editore, 2002, pp. 165-190.

It is also opportune to reflect on the role of the mass media in promoting the tourist image of a territory through the enhancement of its landscape and its environmental and cultural heritage.

Geographers, in particular, have repeatedly underlined the relationships between tourism and environmental and cultural heritage. First of all, it is necessary to remember that heritage is something that creates a profit or an advantage for man and can be of two types: environmental, in the case where it refers to the beauty of a given context, such as islands, coasts, archipelagos; cultural when it concerns the culture, traditions and customs of peoples and communities now extinct, preserving their memory. Furthermore, environmental heritage can be natural or artificial, while cultural heritage can be mobile or immobile. Therefore, the role of environmental and cultural heritage in the development of tourism is obvious, since it can be an instrument of tourist attraction able to guarantee economic advantages over a long period of time.

Obviously it is necessary to verify the optimal conditions or degradation in which the environmental or cultural heritage is located, given that, in the first case, it is immediately usable favoring consequently tourist activity; in the second case it is necessary to understand the level of degradation and subsequently implement reevaluation policies that are able to bring the asset back to its original condition.

This is not a process that can be implemented quickly, but requires considerable funding from the main institutions, but also the endorsement of all social and political components in the use of public money to re-evaluate the cultural and environmental heritage. Furthermore, after the recovery and re-valorization action, it is necessary to keep the cultural patrimony in good condition, so that its use by visitors can have positive effects on the economy.

Institutional policies must therefore consider the potential of environmental and cultural heritage and, at the same time, take into account their ability to attract tourists.

In many countries tourism is encouraged by the presence of a favorable climate, which, in some cases, allows the development of tourist activities throughout the year. The islands and archipelagos are a destination for beach tourism, which determines numerous advantages for hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, bed & breakfasts and other activities. Elsewhere, especially in the countries of Northern Europe, tourism is organized considering the climatic adversities that often characterize them, so tourism is based on the use of multiple

facilities such as museums, which can always be open and frequented, both during the winter and during the summer.

In general, understanding the dynamics that characterize tourist activity is very difficult, also because recently they have been subjected to many changes and, for this reason, it is important to consider all aspects of the tourist phenomenon, in order to comprehend all its characteristics¹⁴.

Tourism in Malta

One of the European nations that makes tourism one of the activities par excellence for the development of its economy is Malta, an archipelago (Fig.1) in southern Europe, a member of the European Union, located in the Mediterranean at about 80 km from Sicily, during its history has undergone the influence of all the different human groups with which it has come into contact. The official language is English, Maltese is commonly spoken, but Italian is also known, given its proximity to Italy.



Fig. 1. The Maltese territory¹⁵

¹⁴ DEMATTEIS G., LANZA C., NANO F., VANOLO A., *Geografia dell'economia mondiale*, Torino, UTET Università, 2010, pp. 198-216.

¹⁵ <https://giramundo.net/malta-cartina/>

The archipelago, formed by Malta and the islands of Gozo and Comino, is located at the center of the Mediterranean Sea, between Sicily and North Africa. The capital of Malta is Valletta, which is a reference point for all the small towns that characterize the Maltese territory.

The transport network is well articulated and allows easy movement in the various areas of the islands; Malta also has an international airport that connects it with the main European countries.

The currency used is the Euro, making Malta part of the European Union¹⁶ now.

From a morphological point of view, the island is characterized by the presence of mainly sedimentary rock that has different characteristics in western and southern areas compared to the eastern and northern ones. The hydrographic network is limited to a few small streams but lakes are completely absent. The Mediterranean climate, according to the classification of Koppen, is characterized by very hot and dry summers and mild winters.

The development of production activities is modest, making it necessary to import many products from other countries.

Tourism is one of the most important aspects in the economy¹⁷, thanks to the presence of numerous valuable architectural structures¹⁸, places of leisure and cultural centers and a mild climate that allows the deseasonalization of tourist flows.

Due to its strategic position, the island has undergone a whole series of cultural influences. Maltese history has been characterized by various events that

¹⁶ "Malta has been particularly conscious of its international obligations in the field of cultural heritage"; see *State of the Heritage report – The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage*, Malta, The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, 2004, p. 9.

¹⁷ "Tourism is not a single industry. It is a complex network of public and private interests. A key success factor for MTA will undoubtedly be its ability to manage relationships with key stakeholders in the national interest. MTA will provide clear direction to the industry in a scenario where stakeholders may have potentially conflicting interests"; cfr. *Malta Tourism Authority – Annual Report & Financial Statement 2002*, Malta, Malta Tourism Authority, 2002, p. 16.

¹⁸ One of the most important monuments of Valletta is Mediterranean Conference Centre: "we have seen from the foregoing account that the Holy Infirmary complex was built at different periods over a span of more than two centuries (1574-1780) and, therefore, the arrangements of the wards and their accommodation varied from time to time"; see CASSAR PAUL, *From The Holy Infirmary of the Knights of St John to The Mediterranean Congress Centre at Valletta*, Malta, 1983, p. 16.

have seen many peoples of ancient times as protagonists, such as the Romans, the Phoenicians¹⁹, the Arabs, the French and the English; the famous Knights of St. John famous, have left evidence of their presence in buildings and fortresses that recall their exploits. Some of the most important historical events emerge from the huge artistic heritage and libraries present in the libraries or archives of the island, rich in texts related to the Island. There are several studies on the history and geography of the Maltese territory, for example those of Carmelo Cassar, who analyzed the Maltese context in all its facets creating a real geographic and historical background related to the main socio-cultural aspects of the island, with particular reference to the period of time between the prehistoric and the Middle Ages. He also considered the role of the Knights, especially those belonging to the Order of St. John²⁰. Other studies have analyzed the antiquity of Malta, in particular the Bronze Age when human groups arrived on the island, introducing different uses and customs, but also innovative techniques in the construction field through the use of different materials. "Neolithic man seems to have died out in Malta about 3,000 BC and the islands remained uninhabited for about a thousand years, then other immigrants arrived, they were familiar with the use of copper and bronze. The man of the Bronze Age was able to cut smaller pieces of stone for the construction - it was now easier to bring a small stone into the proposed house than when the entire tribe had to stick out to help drag a door²¹". Many exhibits relating to this period are preserved in museums, where materials were collected that could help geographers and historians in furthering their knowledge of the history of the island. More significant are the testimonies related to the different historical phases that have marked the island: the first was characterized by the arrival of the Arabs who occupied the island from the 10th to the 11th century; the second from the arrival of the Normans of the Angevins and Aragonese who invaded the Maltese territory between the eleventh and sixteenth century from the Kingdom of Sicily, the third phase since the advent of the knights from around 1530 to the end of 1700; from the 19th century onwards Malta became a British colony. After gaining independence in 1964, in 2003 she became a member of the European Union.

The presence of these different peoples has marked the Maltese culture, which over time has been enriched considerably.

¹⁹ "The Phoenicians, famous seafarers and merchants who colonised the islands in the early seventh century before Christ, must have surely taken advantage of such a strategically placed peninsula"; see *Forst St Angelo Heritage Experience – An information booklet published on the occasion of Forst St Angelo's Open Day, 17 June 2012*, Malta, Heritage Malta, 2012, p. 16.

²⁰ CASSAR C., *A concise History of Malta*, Msida (Malta), Mireva Publications, 2000, p. XIII.

²¹ WILKINSON R. G., *A pocket history of Malta*, Malta, Criterion Press, 1950, p. 8.

In the past, in fact, "Malta was essentially an autonomous island with its own language, its customs and archaic economy, and for centuries it has managed to preserve its form of civilization.

In stark contrast to this isolation, an accidental change of government in the sixteenth century brought a completely different civilization and a new way of life to the shores of Malta.

Malta has integrated itself into the maritime routes of the central Mediterranean and also its culture has been transformed²²".

The events that took place and, above all, the numerous colonizations, have made the island of Malta a focal point for the flows that over time have crossed the Mediterranean. On the basis of the events of the past it is possible not only to reconstruct the causes and motivations that determined the development of the Island but, at the same time, to refer to the many difficulties that the nation faces today, for example the problem of migrants that characterize the current policy that causes divergences with other countries of an ideological, economic and political nature.

To fully understand what has determined these tensions, it is necessary to refer to a combination of History and Geography: they are in fact two disciplines that are apparently distinct and separate but in reality are closely related to each other, from the moment that one helps to understand the other better.

In the past, Maltese fortifications played a fundamental role in the defense of the territory; among the most important structures used for this purpose by the Knights we can cite for example Fort Sant'Angelo a Birgu and San James Cavalier in Valletta²³, built in strategic places on the Island, from which you could see the arrival of the enemies and prepare the counterattack.

The position of Maltese fortifications²⁴ also plays an important role in contemporary society, as it is fundamental for the development and growth of

²² WILKINSON R. G., *A pocket history of Malta...*, cit., p. 2.

²³ In Valletta there are many monuments that testify to the history of the city and between most important monuments there is the Holy Infirmary: "The Holy Infirmary as seen from the St. Lazarus Bastion, at the time when it was used as Garrison Hospital"; see CRITIEN A., *Holy Infirmary Sketches*, Malta, Lux Press, 1946, p. 8.

²⁴ "In early times fortification, in its simplest form, probably consisted of walls round a town or camp, made of earth or masonry, or, like the early German *bollwerk* of trunks of trees backed with earth

economic activities, such as tourism, whose development has had positive repercussions in the economic and social revival of the last decades. To this end, the policies adopted by the institutional bodies are positive, as are the actions of associations that aim to promote and spread the island's tourist image in an ever more marked way. The primary objective is in fact to create the conditions so that the tourist activity of the island does not have an independent character but, on the contrary, manages to reconnect with the most important economic activities, so that the various development policies are fully realized. Activities such as tourism, in fact, not only have an individual value, but can be fundamental for creating socio-economic conditions aimed at revalorizing the entire territory.

The creation of new job opportunities has attracted people of different nationalities, who go to Malta both during the winter and the summer; there are also numerous foreign students who decide to attend the local university. One of the great merits of Maltese policies has been that of having contributed to the development of tourism by exploiting not only the splendid landscapes of the island, but also its valuable architectural structures and its cultural heritage, all elements that have made it a privileged destination for many tourists.

In the process of the promotion of tourism of a territory one of the most difficult goals to achieve is certainly to create the conditions for the tourist activity to be vital and therefore profitable not only during the summer, but also during the winter period; this is not at all simple, since during the winter the main obstacle is represented by the generally rainy climate that certainly does not favor the practice of outdoor tourism²⁵.

Obviously this is not the case on the island of Malta, since in general the climate is favorable both during the summer and during the winter. The only months in which there could be small problems for tourism are those of January and February, when the rain and the adverse weather conditions could prove to be a negative factor.

Another problem is related to the frequent conditions of deterioration of the historical architectural heritage, which therefore requires recovery for the purpose of valorisation.

(hence the term *bulwark*). They presented a simple form of obstacle, with the sole idea of giving shelter to those within"; see *History of the fortifications of Malta*, issued by the General Staff, Malta Command, Malta, Daily Malta Chronicle, 1920, p. 9.

²⁵ BAGNOLI L., *Manuale di geografia del turismo*, cit., pp. 61-90.

In the case of Malta, the environmental and cultural heritage has undergone processes of recovery that have allowed it to be enjoyed by many tourists, constituting one of the most significant elements for the development of tourism.

There are many prestigious structures in Valletta²⁶, the capital of the island, but also in Birgu and Mdina, where it is possible to admire various religious buildings such as churches and convents.

The presence of a rich cultural heritage²⁷ has had important economic repercussions on the Island stimulating the development of all those services that are at the base of tourism itself, such as hotel accommodation and catering. It should be noted that in Valletta many of these structures belong to Italians who have decided to start their activities in Malta, based on their cultural and gastronomic traditions.

Even commercial activities have expanded over the years, playing a fundamental role for the economy of the island. The location of these activities is not chosen by chance, but favors the areas most visited by tourists.

The case of the Maltese capital is emblematic to fully understand all those processes that have led to a revaluation of many structures of the past based on the interests and trends of today's society.

The island has become a place of excellence as a cultural attraction, since there are many structures that are currently used as cultural centers in which to celebrate congresses, hold conferences, seminars or set up art exhibitions. Tourists often show great interest in these sites, fascinated by their history promoted through cultural events organized by various associations. So the tendency to use the ancient revalued in a modern key has been a key element for the growth of Maltese tourism.

Obviously, to fully understand the mechanisms that have allowed the evolution of tourism on the island, we must not only consider aspects of a purely

²⁶ "Valletta is a UNESCO World Heritage site because of the percentage of authentic buildings and because of the richness of its heritage"; see SANTE G. (a cura di), *Restauri e riscoperte di scultura del Barocco Romano a Malta – Capolavori per l'Ordine dei Cavalieri di San Giovanni, Sante Guido e Giuseppe Mantella per la parte introduttiva, Sante Guido e Alessandro Cosma per le schede e la bibliografia*, Malta, Sta Venera, Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and Midsea, 2005, p. 14.

²⁷ *State of the Heritage report – The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage*, Malta, The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, 2004, pp. 3-5.

territorial nature, but also man's great ability to create incentives and tourist promotion situations.

In this case the reference is to the Maltese tourist image that is promoted through the use of posters, leaflets, souvenirs, as well as through mass media and tourist guides, whose primary objective is to arouse interest in tourists. Another significant aspect is linked to the enhancement of small historic centers, one of the trends that have affected not only the island of Malta, but also several European nations, creating conditions for considerable growth.

Often the historical centers and the small centers are in a condition of great degradation and, for this reason, the institutional policies are fundamental to trigger a process that aims above all at an action to recover the good, bringing it back to an optimal condition close to that original guaranteeing its good status in a future perspective; these are processes that have been implemented in Malta both in terms of monuments, but also with reference to entire parts of the city, as happened in the capital, which has been modernized in total respect of the traces of the past, so much so that it is was the European Capital of Culture 2018.

The revitalization of the historical centers contributes both to the development of economic activities and to the increase of modern facilities, so that not only the tourists, but also the inhabitants, benefit from it. In Malta, a rehabilitation work was carried out to meet the cultural interests of the tourists but also to the expectations not only of adults but also of the young with a view to leisure.

Many nightclubs have been created, such as pubs, where young people have the opportunity to spend pleasant hours. In this sense, one of the favorite destinations for Maltese and foreign young people is Paceville, which presents a massive concentration of premises for Maltese nightlife.

So Paceville and Valletta are two sides of the same coin, in the sense that they are two poles of tourist attraction, but with completely different characteristics, also because they attract different age groups; but, of course, there are many other centers of aggregation located in the other cities of the island, from north to south.

If we wanted to make a comparison between Malta and Sicily we would see that the tendency to create meeting places is quite widespread even in Sicily, especially in small urban centers which, being similar to Malta, have seen a radical increase in the development and re-functionalisation of the territory, with the consequent revaluation of the historical centers.

The main difference between the Maltese and Sicilian context is that Sicily is a large island, rich in landscapes and monumental beauty, while Malta has smaller dimensions. The historical link between the two islands still exists today, based on commercial relationships that have repercussions on the processes of cultural contamination that also involves food and wine.

The examination of the dynamics of tourism in Malta reveals a notable increase during the 20th century, notwithstanding the numerous problems that the island had to face: to remember is in fact the phase of the reconstruction of the post-war period, between 1946 and 1950, a period in which tourism played no role in the economic development of the country. The turning point came in November 1958, when the Maltese government laid the groundwork for a program of development of this activity, taking into account the fact that, as several scholars have observed, international tourism determines a real export income and is one of the main sources that create jobs and new development opportunities²⁸.

The element that has pushed Malta to an appreciation of tourism in recent decades has been the realization that this activity represents the most important sector in the globalized reality, to the point that it has progressively registered a worldwide growth²⁹.

The five years between 1964 and 1969 were certainly interesting, a period when there was a notable increase in tourists coming from Great Britain: this was mainly due to two factors, namely the enhancement of the Maltese tourist image in England and, at the same time, a whole series of monetary advantages related to the pound sterling³⁰.

One of the fundamental characteristics of Maltese tourism development concerns the fact that it has manifested itself and intensified in two different contexts of the island: on the one hand the areas of greatest cultural and scenic importance, concentrated in the Sliema area, on the other the rural contexts, the holiday areas and those in which the fishermen³¹ lived.

The development of the tourist sector implies the need to face a whole series of problems related in particular to the concept of sustainability, on which

²⁸ BUSUTTIL S., *Tourism in Malta*, Malta, The Department of Economics and AIESEC, 1970, p. 2.

²⁹ DWYER L., FORSYTH P., DWYER W., *Tourism Economics and Policy*, Bristol, Channel View Publications, 2010, p. 1.

³⁰ BUSUTTIL S., *Tourism in Malta*, cit., p. 3.

³¹ Ibidem.

numerous studies have been made, as well as numerous debates in the geographical area. Some scholars have focused on the concept of sustainability considered by the perspective of economists: the latter have certainly underlined the great steps forward made by the tertiary sector, highlighting the changes that it has brought about in the socio-cultural field; however, they did not consider the environmental problems and, consequently, the possible negative effects that tourism can have on the surrounding environment³², such as the degradation of the landscape or the loss of primary activities such as agricultural ones.

The most popular form of tourism in Malta is beach tourism, which obviously grows exponentially during the summer, when the number of tourists increases and the island becomes one of the most popular destinations for visitors.

The bathing season begins in June to extend, sometimes, even until October.

This allows tourists to choose, over a period of time, the period to be used for holidays, both in the traditional high season months, i.e. July and August characterized by high temperatures, and in the months of September and October, less hot, but more humid, and to enjoy lower rates.

Among the most evocative places of the Maltese island certainly stands Mdina, where it is possible to visit different ancient structures such as the Carmelite convent, but also the National Museum of historical art, very suggestive places that testify the glorious past of Malta³³. Among the most interesting buildings we must include religious ones, such as churches, monasteries and convents, which are the object of recovery processes and sometimes of a modern re-functionalization; in fact, there are many that host hotels and restaurants. This process was sometimes carried out through contracts stipulated between the Maltese government and private entrepreneurs who have invested in hotel accommodation and catering. The modern hotel facilities and restaurants have been located mainly along the coast in order to facilitate access to the sea of tourists³⁴ and, at the same time, allow them to admire the Maltese landscape beauties.

³² BRIGUGLIO ET ALII, *Sustainable Tourism in Islands & Small States: Issues and Policies*, New York, Pinter, 1996, p. 8.

³³ PALAGIANO C., *Linee tematiche di ricerca geografica*, cit., pp. 286-288.

³⁴ "During 2001, the Malta Tourism Authority focused much of its efforts on establishing a new framework within which the Maltese tourism industry can be managed and developed in a sustainable manner"; see *Malta Tourism Authority – Annual Report & Financial Statement 2001*, Malta, Malta Tourism Authority, 2002, p. 6.

The dynamics of tourist flows

The increase in tourist flows during the period between 1989 and 2000 was noticeable, as shown by the following data³⁵, which show a progressive growth equal to 46.7% of tourists on the Maltese islands. (tab. 1 and fig. 2).

In particular, the trend was positive between 1989 and 1994 with an expansion of the flows from 828,311 units to 1,176,223 (42%), and then recorded a slight contraction, equal to 5% per year in the two-year period 1995-1996. The trend of tourist flows between 1997 and 2000 was positive, when there were a total of 1,215,712 tourists. Significant repercussions on the economic plan and in particular on the evolution of the main commercial activities with the expansion of the distribution apparatus thanks to the opening of shops and supermarkets, and with an improvement of the structural requirements, fundamental for both tourists and residents³⁶. In that time, it also increased the number of cruise ship passengers (which are not included in the tourists' arrival data) increased from 54,528 units to 56,624 with an increase of 3.8% compared to 1989.

Tab.1 The dynamics of tourist flows. 1989-2000.

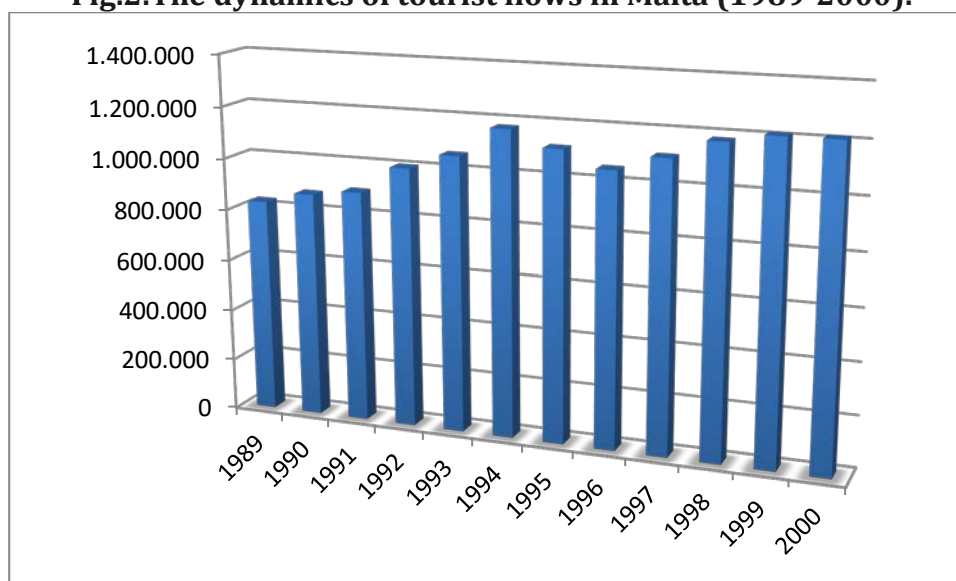
Years	Tourist flows	Change %
1989	828.311	
1990	871.776	5,2
1991	895.036	2,6
1992	1.002.381	12,0
1993	1.063.213	6,0
1994	1.176.223	10,6
1995	1.115.971	-5,1
1996	1.053.788	-5,6
1997	1.111.161	5,4

³⁵ *Malta Tourism Authority 2000*, Malta, The Corporate Communications and Business Development Division of the Malta Tourism Authority, 2001, p. 51.

³⁶ *National Tourism organisation - Malta – Annual report & accounts 1992, A Landmark Year for Malta's Tourism Industry*.

1998	1.182.240	6,4
1999	1.214.230	2,7
2000	1.215.712	0,1

Fig.2. The dynamics of tourist flows in Malta (1989-2000).



Source: Malta Tourism Authority 2000 data processing.

Already in the mid-90s, therefore, the tourism industry was one of the cornerstones for the economy of the entire country contributing significantly to the increase in GDP³⁷.

If we analyze the data relating to tourist flows per month (Table 2), it emerges that January was the month with the lowest number of visitors, which then progressively increased from February onwards to reach the peak in the summer season, mainly in the months of June, July and August; from September onwards the influx of tourists regressed until December.

³⁷ National Tourism organisation Malta – Annual report and accounts 1993, p. 3.

Tab. 2. The dynamics of tourist flows - Arrivals per month from 1989-1995

Year	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
January	28.580	29.209	28.052	37.053	37.573	42.726	40.874
February	35.504	38.361	34.051	48.812	48.135	55.504	53.314
March	57.388	54.044	55,557	62.836	66.409	90.203	83.923
April	58.836	76.786	60.582	86.991	90.286	100.541	112.079
May	83.933	82.270	87.329	104.200	99.134	115.576	105.120
June	87.202	91.543	90.914	102.513	99.572	111.667	110.028
July	104.353	105.997	110.116	119.205	131.238	151.926	134.477
August	110.210	116.082	125.752	134.150	143.063	145.011	140.557
September	94.703	101.309	105.825	110.812	122.389	126.406	121.307
October	80.674	83.613	91.988	90.209	107.000	115.496	102.732
November	50.261	52.087	57.589	56.462	67.944	66.392	59.971
December	36.667	40.475	47.281	49.138	50.470	54.775	51.589
TOTAL	828.311	871.776	895.036	1.002.381	1.063.213	1.176.223	1.115.971

Source: Malta Tourism Authority 2000

Tab. 2.1 The dynamics of tourist flows - Arrivals per month from 1996 to 2000

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
January	39,174	36,497	38,194	44,691	44,717
February	54,801	51,872	55,808	59,207	55,487
March	84,033	82,611	78,546	91,637	82,066
April	90,540	105,614	109,113	104,886	117,640
May	97,541	117,477	115,642	116,919	112,802
June	101,061	98,609	113,375	118,230	120,703
July	123,643	135,073	145,047	149,477	152,763
August	139,943	149,251	158,643	159,169	155,321
September	115,557	115,329	126,920	129,315	132,526

October	96,794	101,081	111,306	115,377	111,747
November	59,273	63,789	71,410	73,390	68,067
December	51,428	53,958	58,236	51,932	61,873
TOTAL	1,053,788	1,111,161	1,182,240	1,214,230	1,215,712

Source: Malta Tourism Authority 2000

This trend reflects the predominantly seaside character of tourism on the Island, which obviously attracted many visitors during the summer and a little less during the autumn and winter, when the number of arrivals was mostly represented by students who came from many parts of the world, they went to study at the University of Malta thanks to the various European training programs, such as Erasmus. Even today, the University of Malta, in fact, attracts a large number of students of different nationalities thus favoring the enhancement of the island also on a cultural level.

As regards the countries of origin of tourists over the period 1989-2000, the net prevalence of Europeans must be observed as shown in the following table³⁸ (Table 3):

Tab. 3 Area of origin of the tourist flows. Arrivals 1989-2000

Year	Austria	Germany	Italy	Netherlands	Norway	Sweden
1989	7.920	91.717	53.223	17.338	3.011	3.746
1990	12.109	130.200	64.039	22.228	6.917	4.968
1991	14.127	136.452	64.008	23.653	1.159	1.958
1992	13.481	153.531	76.045	28.589	4.566	2.154
1993	15.314	176.077	85.671	32.831	4.043	2.013
1994	19.000	200.281	98.746	45.328	4.925	7.171
1995	20.095	187.761	97.384	45.526	6.942	8.537
1996	15.909	184.110	89.439	48.928	6.745	9.891
1997	17.913	193.020	90.190	52.238	6.478	11.329
1998	23.741	203.199	90.558	56.534	6.711	14.150
1999	29.027	212.430	92.726	65.345	10.024	19.065
2000	28.119	204.749	92.522	64.168	9.136	20.051

Source: Malta Tourism Authority 2000

³⁸ Malta Tourism Authority 2000, cit., p. 54.

As can easily be deduced from these data the countries of the major tourist flows to the Maltese islands between 1989 and 2000 were in order Germany, Italy, Holland, Austria, Sweden and Norway. In particular, the flows of Germans increased from 91,717 to 204,749 (+ 123%); the Italians from 53.223 to 92.522 (+ 74%), the Dutch from 17,338 to 64,168 (270%), the Austrians from 7,920 to 28,119 (+ 255%), the Swedes from 3,746 to 20,051 (+ 435%) and the Norwegian from 3,011 to 9,136 (+ 203%). There are also numerous tourists coming from other European countries such as the United Kingdom and France, but also from Libya, and from North America³⁹.

The progressive increase in tourist flows has led to an expansion in the number of accommodation facilities, favored by the main Maltese institutions⁴⁰ also through the development of new auxiliary services able to add value to the entire tourist activity⁴¹.

At the beginning of the '90s the Maltese receptivity was made up of mainly 3 and 4-star hotels with just a few 5-star hotels; then there were rooms and accommodation in private apartments; but already in 1999 the accommodation capacity had progressively widened with a prevalence of medium-sized hotels (table 4).

Tab. 4 Accommodation facilities in Malta by category. 1999-2000.

Hotels	1999	2000
5 Star Hotel	8	8
4 Star Hotel	33	34
3 Star Hotel	53	52
2 Star Hotel	30	30
1 Star Hotel	6	5
Unclassified	3	3
TOTAL	133	132

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ DEMATTEIS G., LANZA C., NANO F., VANOLO A., *Geografia dell'economia mondiale*, cit., pp. 205-210.

⁴¹ *National Tourism organisation Malta – 1994 Annual report and accounts*, p. 8.

The price policy adopted by the accommodation facilities located in the coastal areas of greater attraction compared to those practiced in hotels located in inland areas is different. Over the years, facilities for catering have also expanded with the opening of restaurants, fast food restaurants, sandwich shops, bars, cafeterias and places where you can taste typical products. Processes of this kind have contributed to the revaluation of the entire island of Malta, making it a favorite destination for tourists of different nationalities.

The years 1997-1998-1999 saw the full realization of the Maltese territory in full swing. It is enough to consider the organization of events and the numerical and qualitative increase of commercial activities, processes that have gradually intensified and which have led to an economic improvement still underway today; the capital Valletta has become an important port junction and a point of reference for the entire Mediterranean.

In the 2000's the process of globalization directly affected the Maltese territory and the various activities that sustain the economy with the emergence of three fundamental aspects: a new management of customer relations, global competitors with evolving game rules and global distribution networks⁴².

Particular attention was paid to the tourist sector, subject to changes that cause continuous oscillations, both in a positive and negative sense. As a consequence, in Malta, the changes in trends were analyzed and, in some cases, anticipated, so as to create a real restructuring of the tourism industry⁴³ with the involvement of all the components of the territory, in particular the government, central, local authorities, the private sector⁴⁴ in order to revive the tourist activity throughout the country.

This process has proved decisive for the development of local marketing through strategies followed by the MTA (Malta Tourism Authority), referring in particular to the diversification that characterizes the international market, in such a way as to improve the value of the tourist activity in its many aspects⁴⁵. In this

⁴² *Annual Report and accounts, 1998*, National Tourism Organisation, Malta, p. 7.

⁴³ *Malta Tourism Authority – Annual Report & Financial Statement 2000*, Malta, Malta Tourism Authority, 2001, p. 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ BAGNOLI L., *Manuale di geografia del turismo...*, cit., pp. 59-90.

regard, we tried to expand the tourist season, especially during the low season, in order to obtain positive effects on the economy⁴⁶.

The strengthening of the role of tour operators on an international level has been fundamental, through the establishment of a network of relationships at a global level, so as to establish both greater cooperation, but also a more targeted and more incisive exploitation of Maltese tourism resources⁴⁷.

The evolution of tourist flows after 2000 has been constant, as can be deduced from the data indicated below (Table 5).

Table 5. The dynamics of tourist flows (2000-2018)

Anni	Flussi turistici	Variazione %
2000	1.215.712	
2001	1.180.145	-2,925
2002	1.133.814	-3,925
2003	1.126.601	-0,636
2004	1.157.684	2,759
2005	1.170.624	1,117
2006	1.124.235	-3,962
2007	1.243.510	10,609
2008	1.290.856	3,807
2009	1.182.489	-8,394
2010	1.338.840	13,222
2011	1.415.019	5,689
2012	1.443.415	2,006
2013	1.582.153	9,611
2014	1.689.810	6,804
2015	1.783.364	5,536
2016	1.965.928	10,23
2017	2.273.837	15,66
2018	2.598.690	14,28

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

The examination of tourist flows by month reveals that once again the summer months that record the most conspicuous numbers of arrivals (tab.6.0 and 6.1):

⁴⁶ Malta Tourism Authority – Annual Report & Financial Statement 2000, Malta, Malta Tourism Authority, 2001, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

Tab. 6.0 Tourist arrivals between 2000 and 2004 by month.

MONTHS	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
JANUARY	44.717	44.053	37.325	40.852	49.262
FEBRUARY	55.487	55.892	53.339	55.739	51.132
MARCH	82.066	85.108	85.198	73.582	65.999
APRIL	117.640	107.799	91.141	102.741	92.166
MAY	112.802	115.647	106.060	108.748	105.402
JUNE	120.703	120.475	109.121	115.367	114.879
JULY	152.763	150.510	142.487	145.849	134.366
AUGUST	155.321	152.944	152.082	149.036	177.097
SEPTEMBER	132.526	131.216	125.320	119.695	129.425
OCTOBER	111.747	106.855	114.166	101.859	129.027
NOVEMBER	68.067	60.498	62.496	58.453	67.744
DECEMBER	61.873	49.148	55.079	54.680	41.185
TOTAL	1.215.712	1.180.145	1.133.814	1.126.601	1.157.684

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

Tab. 6.1 Tourist arrivals between 2005 and 2008 by month.

MONTHS	2005	2006	2007	2008
JANUARY	53.125	50.524	51.736	63.850
FEBRUARY	44.393	47.301	50.547	57.335
MARCH	71.277	64.341	71.279	90.504
APRIL	88.279	97.785	101.792	104.892
MAY	112.559	102.737	109.027	131.354
JUNE	113.931	109.037	117.421	129.378
JULY	135.751	131.806	147.700	149.491
AUGUST	178.319	164.304	176.372	178.570
SEPTEMBER	133.591	121.955	143.698	139.794
OCTOBER	129.334	116.426	139.932	126.941
NOVEMBER	69.652	71.536	82.474	73.608
DECEMBER	40.413	46.483	51.532	45.139
TOTAL	1.170.624	1.124.235	1.243.510	1.290.856

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

In fact, in July and August there is a real peak of arrivals, corresponding to the summer season when the island is a major tourist attraction, with a gradual decline in the months from September onwards.

In most recent years, little has changed with regard to the distribution of tourists' arrival in Malta during the various months of the year, as can be seen from the data indicated below (Table 7.0- 7.1).

Tab. 7.0 Values related to the number of tourists arrivals in Malta (per month) between 2009 and 2013

MONTHS	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
JANUARY	51.450	55.013	64.092	61.353	64.887
FEBRUARY	51.199	53.135	65.661	61.788	61.442
MARCH	71.129	76.431	100.203	80.142	89.286
APRIL	101.557	100.657	120.817	122.979	133.173
MAY	108.165	128.639	130.355	133.648	155.366
JUNE	113.930	137.525	138.733	147.361	162.879
JULY	135.773	160.321	162.994	174.805	181.899
AUGUST	172.438	195.115	191.570	199.430	218.271
SEPTEMBER	130.244	151.021	153.989	163.251	176.370
OCTOBER	124.150	146.716	147.886	151.794	173.306
NOVEMBER	72.484	79.297	83.817	85.491	99.928
DECEMBER	49.970	54.970	54.902	61.373	65.345
TOTAL	1.182.489	1.338.840	1.415.019	1.443.415	1.582.153

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

Tab.7.1 Values related to the number of tourists arrivals in Malta (per month) between 2014 and 2018.

MONTHS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
JANUARY	69.525	74.280	84.817	104.069	124.769
FEBRUARY	65.299	74.189	81.005	103.899	122.433
MARCH	97.800	101.160	115.519	140.922	167.197
APRIL	148.188	152.101	164.885	199.586	233.520
MAY	166.497	173.589	190.586	215.373	256.879

JUNE	177.446	180.082	193.038	226.333	257.545
JULY	197.389	206.626	225.339	251.066	289.183
AUGUST	235.094	246.485	253.330	284.844	313.875
SEPTEMBER	185.438	192.550	206.920	235.881	271.439
OCTOBER	177.961	196.692	215.119	240.113	265.419
NOVEMBER	102.940	113.042	140.404	162.530	175.170
DECEMBER	66.232	72.568	94.966	109.222	121.259
TOTAL	1.689.810	1.783.364	1.965.928	2.273.837	2.598.690

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

As regards the area of origin of the flows, it should be noted that the European countries, already providing the majority of visitors, have progressively been added to by others such as Denmark, Hungary, Finland, Russia, the United Kingdom, but also the US, as revealed by the data indicated below (tab.8.0, 8.1 and 8.2):

Tab. 8.0 Tourist arrivals in Malta by nationality between 2004 and 2009

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
AUSTRALIA				-	-	15.780
AUSTRIA	24.030	26.393	23.540	20.384	19.825	21.217
BELGIUM	31.434	28.730	29.077	26.456	29.619	23.746
DENMARK	20.039	22.665	23.947	27.986	23.985	21.268
FRANCE	87.129	82.607	73.400	75.149	81.152	71.931
GERMANY	135.138	138.217	125.810	130.049	150.793	127.374
HUNGARY	-	-	-	-	8.327	7.848
ITALY	102.169	92.406	112.548	113.651	144.456	161.736
IRELAND	-	-	15.378	28.130	30.489	24.328
LIBYA	12.831	10.662	9.198	9.259	9.403	14.282
NETHERLANDS	38.446	37.102	37.833	34.783	36.920	33.418
NORWAY	16.351	15.515	15.167	15.313	16.489	6.470
FINLAND	6.759	8.261	10.575	12.438	12.632	9.697
POLAND	-	-	-	-	7.079	7.139
RUSSIA	19.697	16.647	21.770	22.909	23.412	17.239
SPAIN	-	-	20.660	37.428	49.497	45.298

SWEDEN	25.705	26.112	23.964	31.545	32.409	29.347
SWITZERLAND	22.846	20.274	21.403	22.023	21.994	21.039
UK	452.880	482.615	431.339	482.404	454.356	398.472
USA	18.720	18.136	16.970	20.423	18.021	13.944
OTHERS	141.854	144.268	111.654	133.180	119.998	110.916
TOTAL	1.156.028	1.170.610	1.124.233	1.243.510	1.290.856	1.182.489

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

Tab. 8.1 Tourist arrivals in Malta by nationality between 2010 and 2014

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
AUSTRALIA	15.961	17.495	21.228	23.208	23.616
AUSTRIA	19.908	19.647	19.827	25.739	27.567
BELGIUM	24.296	31.742	27.279	28.948	31.399
DENMARK	28.830	33.203	34.065	33.839	35.017
FRANCE	86.516	103.629	107.893	116.533	125.511
GERMANY	126.193	134.306	137.500	147.110	143.053
HUNGARY	7.747	7.867	7.092	12.992	17.143
ITALY	219.663	201.774	202.200	233.777	262.631
IRELAND	25.185	26.886	27.731	30.224	30.722
LIBYA	15.864	6.273	17.217	34.621	30.770
NETHERLANDS	33.425	38.897	39.191	41.486	44.697
NORWAY	15.006	13.146	14.152	18.752	18.977
FINLAND	11.922	7.457	7.590	6.878	8.341
POLAND	12.070	13.557	20.085	23.889	34.722
RUSSIA	22.727	24.191	31.563	40.048	34.220
SPAIN	67.842	63.088	60.223	53.278	42.285
SWEDEN	37.123	39.977	41.557	45.600	46.313
SWITZERLAND	21.522	25.046	25.758	28.702	31.797
UK	415.099	438.783	441.275	454.659	487.714
USA	16.418	16.499	18.027	19.502	22.402
OTHERS	115.524	151.555	141.961	162.368	190.912
TOTAL	1.338.841	1.415.018	1.443.414	1.582.153	1.689.809

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

Tab. 8.2 Tourist arrivals in Malta by nationality between 2015 and 2018

	2015	2016	2017	2018
AUSTRALIA	27.207	32.611	35.875	45.859
AUSTRIA	30.246	24.319	29.624	39.029
BELGIUM	35.937	41.759	73.429	70.191
DENMARK	38.527	43.263	45.729	41.709
FRANCE	127.953	144.804	176.370	213.299
GERMANY	141.855	156.786	193.033	226.962
HUNGARY	17.719	20.988	26.875	28.294
ITALY	282.815	315.223	363.668	390.607
IRELAND	35.382	33.175	36.177	40.721
LIBYA	6.651	3.415	2.845	3.359
NETHERLANDS	44.962	52.642	64.000	57.355
NORWAY	14.989	12.940	15.268	15.257
FINLAND	15.611	20.656	20.327	16.452
POLAND	46.231	70.563	89.335	96.362
RUSSIA	21.584	16.370	22.883	28.944
SPAIN	47.237	55.023	75.511	99.046
SWEDEN	48.261	47.104	53.949	54.902
SWITZERLAND	35.293	40.504	44.065	45.572
UK	525.996	559.987	560.893	640.570
USA	25.887	26.454	35.758	47.170
OTHERS	213.023	247.343	308.223	397.030
TOTAL	1.783.366	1.965.928	2.273.837	2.598.690

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

From an analysis of the total number of arrivals, it emerges that the type of tourist activity in the Maltese archipelago has not undergone striking variations⁴⁸.

On the other hand, the increase in the number of receptive structures that have progressively expanded (Table 9.0, 9.1 and 9.2), with a prevalence of medium-high hotels, is significant:

⁴⁸ Malta Tourism Authority.

Tab. 9.0 Accommodation facilities in Malta by category. 2000-2004.

Hotels	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
5 Star Hotel	8	8	11	11	11	13
4 Star Hotel	33	34	37	44	45	47
3 Star Hotel	53	52	45	47	51	51
2 Star Hotel	30	30	25	19	19	18
1 Star Hotel	6	5	5	-	-	-
Unclassified	3	3	-	-	-	-
	133	132	123	121	126	129

Source: Malta Tourism Authority Licensing Administration Section

The data shown here⁴⁹ allow us to understand the trend of the variation in the number of hotels over time. In particular, between 1999 and 2004, the number of 3, 4 and 5-star structures increased, while the number of the more modest ones with 2 or 1 stars progressively decreased.

Between 2005 and 2011 there was a decrease of mid-class hotels, but a slight increase in luxury 5-star hotels, as shown in the data below (Table 9.1).

Tab. 9.1 Accommodation facilities in Malta by category. 2005-2011

Hotels	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
5 Star Hotel	13	13	14	15	16	15	15
4 Star Hotel	44	44	42	41	41	42	43
3 Star Hotel	45	49	48	45	46	45	45
2 Star Hotel	16	15	13	11	11	10	10
1 Star Hotel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unclassified	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	118	121	117	112	114	112	113

Source: Malta Tourism Authority Licensing Administration Section

From 2012 to 2018 there has been a progressive increase in 2 and 3-star properties, an index of a structured tourist demand that corresponds to an adequate offer able to attract the different types of tourists (tab. 9.2).

Tab. 9.2 Accommodation facilities in Malta by category. 2012-2018.

Hotels	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
5 Star Hotel	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
4 Star Hotel	43	42	44	41	44	41	41

⁴⁹ Tourist accommodation – Malta plus Gozo; Source: MTA Licensing Administration Section.

3 Star Hotel	42	42	55	56	52	51	58
2 Star Hotel	9	9	21	20	21	22	24
1 Star Hotel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unclassified	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	109	108	135	132	132	129	138

Source: Malta Tourism Authority Licensing Administration Section

Among the most important accommodation facilities are also rooms, tourist villages and hostels. The first can be divided into first, second and third class plus two other categories, namely comfort and standard: these are different types of rooms that fit the needs and budget that tourists intend to spend. The data reveal a remarkable variability, since their total number reached 65 in 1999, before moving to a minimum of 33 between 2007 and 2009 and increasing in recent years reaching 51 and 57 respectively in 2017 and 2018⁵⁰. The progressive decrease in the number of tourist villages is also interesting, from about 50 in 1999 to 30 between 2002 and 2013 and to 1 today⁵¹. The dynamics of the hostels are different, passing from 3 in 1999 to the current 24⁵².

Among the most relevant data that must be considered regarding the evolution of tourism, especially considering the use of accommodation facilities, are certainly those relating to available beds, which in 1993 amounted to 36,567 in accommodations with a hotel-type license and to another 6,411 beds licensed in self-catering accommodation; as a result, the total number of licensed beds on the islands in 1993 stood at 42,978⁵³.

4-star hotels offered 8,125 beds, equal to 38.8% of the beds in hotels; 3-star hotels 8,898 beds, accounting for 42.6% of the total; 2 and 1star hotels another 2,320 seats; finally, another 1,581 beds were offered by pensions and youth hostels⁵⁴.

In the following years, the number of beds in hotels gradually changed, as revealed by the data below (Table 10.0, 10.1 and 10.2).

⁵⁰ Tourist accommodation – Malta plus Gozo; Source: MTA Licensing Administration Section.

⁵¹ Tourist accommodation – Malta plus Gozo; Source: MTA Licensing Administration Section.

⁵² Tourist accommodation – Malta plus Gozo; Source: MTA Licensing Administration Section.

⁵³ National Tourism Organisation Malta – Facts and figures, 1993, p. 11.

⁵⁴ National Tourism Organisation Malta – Facts and figures, 1993, p. 11.

Tab. 10.0 Analysis of beds in the period 1999/2003 (January) with reference to the specific types of hotels on the island

BEDS					
	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan
Category	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Hotels					
5 Star Hotel	2.878	2.902	3.750	3.750	3.738
4 Star Hotel	10.461	10.931	11.821	15.045	15.341
3 Star Hotel	8.369	8.396	7.191	11.016	11.548
2 Star Hotel	2.097	2.153	1.575	1.261	1.258
1 Star Hotel	210	159	159	-	-
Unclassified	468	660	-	-	-
	24.483	25.201	24.496	31.072	31.885

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

Tab. 10.1 Analysis of beds in the time span 2004/2011 (January) with reference to the specific types of hotels on the island

BEDS								
	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan
Category	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Hotels								
5 Star Hotel	5.040	5.040	5.688	6.220	7.080	7.402	6.986	6.986
4 Star Hotel	15.928	15.315	15.148	14.970	14.343	14.343	14.743	14.986
3 Star Hotel	11.074	10.272	10.788	10.637	9.840	9.980	9.790	9.748
2 Star Hotel	1.174	1.059	916	810	721	721	671	671
1 Star Hotel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unclassified	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	33.216	31.686	32.540	32.637	31.984	32.446	32.190	32.391

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

Table 10.2 Analysis of beds in the time span 2012/2018 (January) with reference to the specific types of hotels on the island

BEDS							
	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan	1 Jan
Category	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Hotels							
5 Star Hotel	6.986	6.986	7.210	7.210	7.210	7.210	7.284
4 Star Hotel	15.091	15.402	14.848	14.832	16.253	14.379	15.318
3 Star Hotel	8.814	8.174	10.825	11.687	10.433	10.081	10.486

2 Star Hotel	599	579	1.474	1.438	1.460	1.477	1.626
1 Star Hotel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unclassified	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	31.490	31.141	34.357	35.167	35.356	33.147	34.714

Source: Malta Tourism Authority

The data reported here shows a considerable increase in the availability of beds between 1999 and 2004, with a shift from over 24,000 to just over 33,000; from 2004 to 2018 the number fluctuated between approximately 31,000 and a little more than 35,000 reached in 2015⁵⁵. Obviously these are total values calculated on an annual basis. In the case of a more specific analysis, it is necessary to take into account the type of hotels on the island during the time period considered.

As regards the number of beds in rooms and hostels in the same time frame, it should be considered that rooms offered 1,401 beds in 1999, which increased to 789 in 2007; subsequently, from 2008 to 2018, they increased progressively to reach a quota of 1388 beds (in 2018)⁵⁶. The hostels offered 148 beds in 1999 and then reached 1,135 in 2009 and 2,274 in 2018 (with a peak of 2,350 in 2017)⁵⁷.

Particularly significant for the development of the tourism phenomenon has certainly been the improvement in the Island's accessibility, thanks to the strengthening of the connections by sea and by air. As has been mentioned, the presence of an international airport and an airline carrier offers connections with major European cities, allowing the arrival of tourists even from distant countries.

The connections by sea with Sicily facilitate a particularly significant proximity for tourism.

The entry of Malta into the European Union in 2004 has led to multiple advantages for the whole island, since relations with other member countries have intensified radically, especially as regards tourism. The result has been profound transformations related to the social structure that have registered very significant evolutionary processes.

Tourism has also been promoted through mass media, which have contributed in a radical way to make known the natural and cultural beauties that

⁵⁵ Malta Tourism Authority.

⁵⁶ Malta Tourism Authority.

⁵⁷ Malta Tourism Authority.

the area offers, so as to attract the largest possible number of visitors, who generally tend to visit the most evocative places of the Island, not neglecting the gastronomic aspect, trying the local culinary specialties, appreciated by tourists, also considering the cultural influences linked to the history of Malta that contribute to the variety of Maltese cuisine which reveals elements of the Sicilian, but also of the North African one.

The awareness of the fundamental role of tourism in economic development has also led to the enhancement of the capital Valletta which was, in 2018, the European Capital of Culture, but also of the different Maltese locations that polarize the tourist flows with the provision of accommodation facilities, catering and leisure.

The data for the last few years are quite comforting, as Maltese tourism continues its phase of ascent with the arrival of tourists from all over the world. Great steps have also been taken in the process of recovery and upgrading of some Cultural and Environmental Heritage of the Island, which together with the natural and cultural heritage make Malta one of the strategic areas of the Mediterranean, a favorite tourist destination for visitors from all over the world.

Malta does not exert an attraction only on tourists, but also on those who decide to live there permanently; being a small island, in fact, allows a very good quality of life, unlike that found in more chaotic places.

In general, Maltese living conditions are quite favorable and appreciated also by Italians, in particular by the Sicilians who see the neighboring island, almost as a small Sicily for many common characteristics, such as gastronomic traditions and rituals in religious festivals (Fig. 3):



Fig. 3. The illuminations for one of the religious festivals held in Malta

Both in Sicily and in the Maltese area, religious festivals are characterized by lights, fireworks and the presence of bands, traditions that have remained intact in both nations over time. The same applies to the village festivals that are organized in small towns in Sicily, on the occasion of which some of the most important culinary traditions are promoted. In Malta the same happens in particular in Mdina⁵⁸ which, being the ancient capital, attracts the participation of both the Maltese and tourists.

In the Maltese territory two types of tourist activity can be distinguished: on the one hand cultural tourism, which refers to monuments and historical buildings, on the other the modern predominantly seaside one, which takes place in the most famous areas of the island.

Of the first form of tourism activity the privileged locations are Valletta and Mdina (Fig. 4), while the second mainly takes place in the areas of Sliema and Paceville.

⁵⁸ On some important aspects of Mdina's history see DE LUCCA D., *Mdina – A history of its urban space and architecture*, Malta, Said International, 1995.



Fig. 4. The walls of Mdina

The ancient Maltese capital offers a rather evocative view and, at the same time, numerous structures of the past⁵⁹ some of which, appropriately recovered, have been revalued and used today in a modern way. Mdina is therefore a destination for a type of "historical" tourism⁶⁰, which has highlighted its great potential and made it famous. Among the most important buildings that have undergone revaluation processes stands the ancient Carmelite convent⁶¹ (Fig. 5), whose cellar now houses a restaurant:

⁵⁹ Numerous studies have been carried out on the concept of city; see DAGRADI P., CENCINI C., *Compendio di geografia umana*, Bologna, Pàtron Editore, 2003, pp. 277-322.

⁶⁰ In Malta there are many structures that testify to the past of the island, in particular the Holy Infirmary: "what has survived of the external structure of the Holy Infirmary presents an austere and sober appearance"; see CASSAR P., *The holy infirmary of the knights of St. John - "La Sacra Infermeria"*, Malta, The Mediterranean Conference Centre, 1983, p. 76.

⁶¹ On the Carmelite convent of Mdina see GALEA MICHELLE M., *The Carmelite Convent, Mdina - History, architecture and works of arts*, University of Malta, May 2008.



Fig. 5. Church and ancient Carmelite convent of Mđina

Maltese policies have therefore considered the territory of Mđina⁶² not only in relation to what the city has represented in the past, but also for its potential and its future prospects. Despite the historical relevance⁶³ of the ancient Maltese capital, it has, however, some limitations in urban development, which has only affected neighboring Rabat.

On the island of Malta, in addition to the historical centers, there are also agglomerations that have arisen and developed recently, such as San Ġuliano, which stretches out to the sea, much appreciated by young people who regularly frequent public places. Many commercial activities are concentrated in San Ġuliano; bars, hotels, restaurants and places of entertainment such as discos.

⁶² The territory of Mđina is characterised by many monuments and among them stands out the National Museum of Natural History: “the National Museum of Natural History is housed in an eighteenth - century palace in Mđina. The original building was the seat of the medieval *Universita*, or local Maltese government, which enjoyed a limited degree of autonomy in the internal administration of the island during the late Middle Ages”; see BORG JOHN J., *The national museum of natural history - Mđina*, Sta Venera, Heritage Books in association with Heritage Malta, 2007, p. 5.

⁶³ One of the most important phases of the history of Malta is the phase of the Carthaginians: “the Phoenicians were unable to keep their possession and colonies; and being obliged to rely for their defence upon foreign mercenaries they were several times conquered by Assyrian and Persian invaders”; see DE BONO P., *A brief compendium of the history of Malta*, compiled in Italian by Judge P. De Bono; translated into English by D. Fallon, Malta, Daily Malta Chronicle, 1903, p. 5.

It is therefore a very popular area especially during the summer, while in winter it attracts a good number of young people, especially on Saturday nights. The bathing area is particularly renowned (Fig. 6), one of the most appreciated areas:



Fig. 6. The beach of San Giuliano

The tourist activity in San Giuliano therefore has a different character compared to that of Valletta or other historical centers of the island. Over time, Maltese tourism has had periods of development alternating with more complex phases, so we try to intensify the activity itself in relation to the socio-economic context concerned. Understanding the dynamics of tourism is essential to understand what can really intensify it, considering at the same time the problem of environmental sustainability. Beyond the inhabited centers there are many places that exert a certain charm, such as the famous Golden Bay beach (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Golden Bay beach

During the summer it is the most popular place for seaside tourism due to its proximity to hotels and restaurants and its accessibility to public transport.

Very close are also the two neighboring islands of Gozo and Comino (Fig. 8), easily reachable by ferry and rich in historical and artistic heritage.



Fig. 8. One of the most striking views of Comino

In conclusion, we should make some considerations on the evolution of tourism in Malta. First of all, from the investigations carried out and the trends that have been recorded, today there is a twofold aspect: on one hand the increasingly radical affirmation of the implementation and organizational modalities of tourism that are profoundly different from the past, aimed at satisfying the tourist; at the

same time, beyond the purely historical aspects, it is also important to underline the fact that tourism has been the main instrument for the diffusion of new activities and has triggered a process of great renewal for the whole Island, a process that has manifested gradually more and more markedly, above all near the seaside areas.

This phenomenon is not destined to fade but, on the contrary, has excellent prospects for future development⁶⁴. This allows us to fully understand the role and relevance that tourism has taken for the entire Maltese context not only in reference to the flows of foreigners who spend their holidays there, but also to those who have decided to live there.

⁶⁴ On the concept of development see FURTADO C., *Teoria dello sviluppo economico*, Bari, Laterza, 1972.

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