

## **Islands, waste, and the inescapable connection with the economy –**

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Waste generation is not a contemporary phenomenon. It is its sheer volumes, diversity and material complexities that have made waste a seemingly ubiquitous and insurmountable challenge to the current society. The waste problem has become complex enough to demand sophisticated technologies, specialist attention and necessitate more financial resources to be directed to it.

Malta, with its 316 km<sup>2</sup> and a high population density is not foreign to waste related problems – the considerable hitches that the siting of waste treatment facilities presents, the export dependent recycling market coupled with an average waste generation per capita that continues to distance itself from that of the EU present considerable challenges.

Waste generation is intrinsically connected with the economic processes which characterise the economy. Waste generation intensifies when industrial activity intensifies. Therefore, to shift towards a 'clean' economy, that is, an economy that is not riddled with waste externalities, waste needs to be accounted for when economic policies are drawn. Applying this to national accounting figures will also provides us with a more realistic picture of the progress registered.

Although this appears to be complex it is simple double entry accounting. For example, the tourism industry, which is often lauded for its income generating and employment multipliers, is also characterised by high waste generating figures. Such a case can be drawn from 5-star hotels which are generally associated with luxury and, as a result, higher waste figures. A simple examination of purchasing records notes that in one month such hotels purchase almost 11,000 of 30ml HDPE toiletry bottles which will inevitably end up in the waste stream. Distribution of mineral water to hotels residents also results in an additional 60,000 bottles per annum in the waste stream.

Food waste also demands attention. Food plays an important role for the tourism industry. When abroad, people tend to want to try local delicacies which, if not to their liking, are discarded. One of the favourite modes of serving within the industry are buffets. These, however, generate 3-times as much post-consumer food waste as a-la-carte dining.

Quantifying waste figures provides perspective - while the industry is applauded for its income generating aspects, the waste that it generates and the impact this leaves on society at large cannot be ignored since they also mean financial costs that could be directed elsewhere.

An economy that wishes to shift to towards increased sustainability must make this calculation for every industry. While increasing Gross Value-Added figures provide a confidence boost, a more realistic picture of the economic development registered is provided when waste figures are accounted for. The quantities of waste generation depend on the efficiency of that industry and the interest it has to maximise its resource use and minimise waste. Ultimately, unless tackled by the horns (and at source), waste problems will continue to afflict this island without cessation.

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