

Chapter 23

Malta

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23.1 Introduction

The Maltese archipelago is made up of three islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino. It is located in the Mediterranean Sea with Sicily 93 km to the north, Africa 288 km to the south, Gibraltar 1826 km to the west and Alexandria 1510 km to the east.

Malta's population has evolved out of a traditional pyramidal shape to an even-shaped block distribution of equal numbers at each age cohort except at the top. Figures based on the 2011 Census indicate that, at end of 2013, 24.6 % of the total population, or 105,068 persons, were aged 60-plus (National Statistics Office 2014a). Table 23.1 provides a breakdown of the current total population aged 60 years and over for the year 2013. It highlights how the total number of persons aged 65 and over totalled 76,024 or almost 18 % of the total population. The largest share of the older population is made up of women, with 55 % of the total. In fact, the sex ratios for cohorts aged 65-plus and 80-plus in 2013 numbered 79 and 55 respectively. Amongst older cohorts, there is twice the number of women than men.

The advantage of women over men in life expectancy tables also means that, similar to international statistics, married men and widowed women are over-represented in later life. This has clear implications for social/health care policy, noting how by age 70 whilst the majority of women are widows, most men are still in married relationships. Such demographic statistics also highlight that older women tend to be in possession of lower levels of social and financial capital when compared to male peers. Indeed, despite the fact that women live longer, older

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Table 23.1 Total population by age (31 December 2013)

Age	Males	Females	Total	Percent of total pop.	Masculinity ratio ^a
All ages	212,424	212,960	425,384	100	99.7
60+	48,037	57,031	105,068	24.7	84.2
65+	33,632	42,392	76,024	17.9	79.3
80+	5851	10,591	16,442	3.9	55.2
60–64	14,405	14,639	29,044	6.8	98.4
65–69	14,289	15,206	29,495	6.9	94.0
70–74	7301	8580	15,881	3.7	85.1
75–79	6171	8015	14,186	3.3	77.0
80–84	3498	5874	9372	2.2	59.6
85–89	1759	3217	4976	1.2	54.7
90+	614	1500	2114	0.5	41.0

^aNumber of males per hundred females. *Source*: NSO (2014a)

women experience greater degrees of vulnerability. Many also find themselves constrained in a ‘caring’ straightjacket, as they tend to marry men older than themselves, who would need various levels of social and health support, whilst also caring for siblings and, at times, even grandchildren.

23.2 Provision and Participation

The 2011 Census reported a negative correlation between age on one hand and illiteracy and educational qualification/attainment on the other (Table 23.2) (National Statistics Office 2014a).

In 2011, the literacy rate stood at 93.6 % for persons aged 10-plus – 24,074 illiterate persons (6.4 %) (Fig. 23.1). The literacy rate was highly influenced by age, and hence, localities with high percentages of persons aged 65-plus exhibited higher illiteracy rates.

The illiteracy rate varied between 23.3 % for persons aged 90-plus to 10.3 % for those aged 60–69, continuing to decrease gradually to a minimum of 1 % for persons aged 10–19. It is noteworthy that whilst in younger cohorts more males than females are illiterate, the opposite is true in older cohorts.

Participation in older adult learning is located in a variety of avenues, ranging from formal to non-formal to informal learning possibilities. Formal learning avenues are highly structured and hierarchical. Courses are designed by expert-teachers to meet explicit requirements of accrediting bodies. Whilst higher education is responsible for the issuing of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, the further education sector provides curricula that generally lead to vocational skills and diplomas. In Malta, key formal learning avenues open to adults include the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), the Directorate for Lifelong Learning within the Ministry for Education and Employment (DLL), the Malta College of Arts, Science and

Table 23.2 Total Maltese population by age and educational status (2011)

	60–69	70–79	80–89	90+	% of 60-plus
Educational attainment					
No schooling	647	2504	2424	363	5.8
Primary	29,912	16,678	7030	974	53.5
Lower secondary	14,909	6391	2196	378	23.4
Upper secondary	3377	1309	445	85	5.1
Post-secondary non-tertiary	1762	756	250	31	2.7
Tertiary	4416	1864	716	79	6.9
Educational qualification					
No qualifications	37,697	22,779	10,918	1592	71.5
Secondary school leaving certificate	2422	1238	409	67	4.1
Ordinary levels	5510	2018	501	91	8.0
Advanced levels	1431	457	163	31	2.0
City and Guilds	2807	1142	354	50	4.3
First Diploma	26	–	–	–	0.03
National Diploma	15	4	–	–	0.02
National Higher Diploma	27	1	–	–	0.03
University level diploma or certificate	1268	500	151	13	1.9
First (Bachelor's) degree or equivalent	1854	925	398	46	3.2
Postgraduate diploma or certificate	468	167	62	8	0.7
Master's Degree	607	179	63	8	0.8
Doctorate	192	82	42	4	0.3

Source: NSO (2014a)

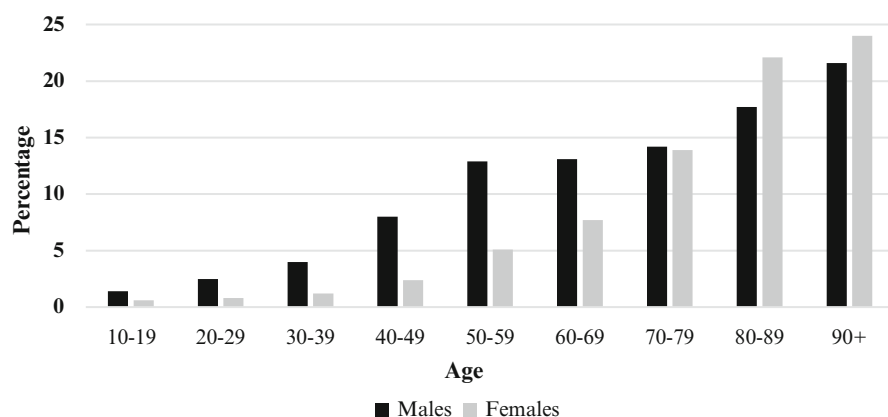


Fig. 23.1 Illiteracy by age and gender (Malta, November 2011) (Source: National Statistics Office (2014b))

Technology (MCAST), and University of Malta (UOM). In many ways, the situation is highly inadequate. Only 2 % of Maltese older adults aged 60-plus participate in formal learning avenues. It is also disquieting that older learners in these institutions constitute very low percentages of the total student population, such as 0.5 % in the case of the University of Malta (2014, personal communication). One relative exception is the Directorate for Lifelong Learning where students aged 60-plus constitute 13 % of the total student body. The Directorate for Lifelong Learning has been organising day and evening courses for learners from the age of 16 upward for a considerable number of years. It offers several different courses, mostly in the evening, covering academic, craft, leisure, information technology, and aesthetic subjects.

The reasons for the low participation of older adults in formal education are various. Many retirees left school at a relatively early age largely due to socio-economic imperatives, lack of opportunity to pursue education beyond the basic levels, and especially in the case of women, cultural mores that envisioned the role of women as one of domesticity. Such experience is unlikely to engender an avid desire to pursue further formal study later in life, and many even developed a phobia toward learning:

I applied with immense trepidation. My parents thought that school was a waste of time for girls, and when my parents were reluctant to buy me some books I needed, my teacher advised them to keep me at home. I was ten years old ... I am very apprehensive of the whole learning experience. I needed, and still need, a lot of encouragement to attend classes...but remembering that I will be assessed gives me jitters. (undergraduate theology student, 67 years old, cited in Formosa 2010a: 69).

Another barrier is that higher and further education institutions are not passionate about late-life learning and opening their doors to older learners. Older adult learning does not bring in grants or offer much career training paths in vocational centres. It tends to be ignored and not be given any priority in marketing exercises. Educational and gerontological institutions alike are quick to accept uncritically the 'failure' and 'medicalized' models of lifelong development where older adults are casted as passive 'clients' and 'patients' rather than learners. The result is a lack of serious interest in older adult learning in favour of research enterprises that seek to legitimise higher education norms as solely as a career-training enterprise linked to social and health welfare reforms. However, one success story is found within the course 'Teaching older adults' as part of the course leading to a Masters in Adult Education (University of Malta) which, in 2010, was opened to the public (Formosa 2010b, 2012b). Four older adults read the course with other students, and contributed actively to each lecture session. It is hoped that more opportunities are provided to older adults to participate in higher and further education.

Non-formal learning consists of structured events organised by local authorities and the voluntary sector that offer learning programmes ranging from creative to educational to informational. Programmes organised by local authorities are popular with older adults who do not want the pressure of credit courses but who still value the expert-teacher as a source of knowledge. The voluntary sector is the essence of learning by doing, as well as seeking and providing educational opportunities

through their particular ethos. It is within the voluntary sector where the largest majority of older learners are situated and which holds most benefits for participants. Many older adults provided vivid testimonies of the benefits that learning brings as they emphasised their appreciation of learning for its own sake:

I discovered abilities that I never knew I had. I now feel fulfilled. When learning I feel alive ... I suffer from arthritis and bad back pain. Attending the University of the Third Age helps me to overcome my pain, mentally at least. The joys of learning help me to forget my physical ailments ... When my husband died I needed a new lease of life. Learning how to sew and knit gave me what I needed ... Learning gave me confidence and more self-esteem. (various interviewees, cited in Formosa 2010a: 73)

Voluntary bodies have limited income and depend on volunteers for survival, so that those contacted claimed that it was not possible for them to keep up a database of. One exception is, however, the University of the Third Age (U3A). U3As can be loosely defined as socio-cultural centres where older persons acquire new knowledge on a range of significant issues. The University of the Third Age in Malta – or as it is called in Maltese *Universita' tat-Tielet Eta'* [U3E] – is the only local voluntary institution that caters solely to the learning interests of older adults. This is possible because the University of Malta subsidises the rent of its premises, as well as for the fees of lectures and a full-time coordinator. Membership can be easily acquired by those who have passed their 60th birthday and are willing to pay a nominal fee of €12. The U3E operates from four centres – namely, Floriana, Sliema, Kottonera, and Ghajnsielem in Gozo. The Gozitan centre was established in 1999 as a result of collaboration between the Ministry for Gozo and the University of Malta, whereby transport for learners to reach the lecturing centre is provided by the former. The U3E centre in Kottonera was the result of another collaborating venture, this time with the Parliamentary Secretariat for Active Ageing. U3A members tend to be in the 60–74 age band, with both membership and participation falling steadily with increasing age. Female members outnumber males (3:1), with the ratio increasing when one focuses solely on course attendance (5:1). Members also tend to reside in Southern and Harbour Regions (Table 23.3).

One recent learning initiative with older persons that sought to engage learning as a catalyst for improved levels of active citizenship amongst older adults in the community is described by Borg and Formosa (2013, 2016). The goal of the learning programme was to put forward a number of complex generative themes – namely, capitalism, poverty, globalisation, social exclusion, income security, and disability-

Table 23.3 U3E members by centre and gender (academic year 2013/2014)

U3A centre	60–69	70–79	80–89	90-plus	Total	Total	
						Males	Females
Floriana	265	179	73	10	527	153	374
Sliema	55	23	17	1	96	42	54
Kottonera	22	4	4	1	31	11	20
Ghajnsielem	24	32	7	2	65	6	51

Source: Formosa (2015)

so that “learners and teachers engage together in new possibilities and de/re/constructions of knowledge” (Burke and Jackson 2007: 176). The ensuing sessions were immensely productive and vibrant, succeeding in bridging ‘reflection’ with ‘action’ through the formulation of manifesto for intergenerational solidarity for the community in which the programme took place. The learning programme resulted in three key contributions. First, learners discussed how living in a world where nations are no longer in total control of their destiny, as international governmental organisations, ranging from the World Bank to the World Trade Organisation, have assumed the role of influential policy and economic drivers. Secondly, participants became aware that modern societies are witnessing the emergence of a more aggressive form of capitalism, one that contrasts with the more controlled and regulated capitalism of the 1950s and 1960s. And finally, participants shared their experiences that demonstrated how social and health care services are increasingly driven by a market-based approach that is leading to the erosion of the welfare state on which many people depend and, as a result, the exacerbation of social exclusion.

Informal learning refers to day-to-day incidental learning where people are not necessarily aware of the ongoing learning processes. Informal learning occurs in a wide range of locations ranging from libraries to dance clubs, generally through self-directed strategies where learning typically begins with a question, a problem, a need to know, or a curiosity. The sparse literature on older adult learning in Malta places emphasis on non-formal learning experiences, and to date, there has been no discussion of the informal practices (Formosa 2010a, 2012b). The fact that national statistics on cultural activities (ranging from dance classes, membership in band clubs, participation in local council activities) put adults aged 25 and above in one age bracket – and that no data is available on the frequency of older persons visiting museums, theatres, cinemas, exhibitions, and art galleries, or who follow television and radio programmes for learning purposes – precludes an age-relevant insight on informal learning. Learning within the family, church and workplace, as well as intergenerational learning, constitute other lacunae in local research. Yet, a number of secondary sources do throw light on some aspects of informal learning in later life. One key avenue is travel, a practice that has become more popular with older persons in recent years. The connections between travel and learning are widely recognised by older learners:

Our hobby is travelling. But ‘hobby’ is not the best word to describe it because we do not travel for sun and sea escapes. We indulge in ‘travel’ because it opens one’s mind, you learn so many things. The same can be said of the Louvre. I visited it two times and wish to visit again ... Every country can stimulate your mental faculties, not just Italy and England, but even countries such as Slovakia, Tunisia, and Cyprus. (older adult, 80 years old, cited in Formosa 2010a: 74)

One final concern related to the provision and participation of older adults in learning concerns pre-retirement learning. It is unfortunate to note that pre-retirement learning is more the exception than the rule, and where it occurs, participants also complain of the didactic and authoritarian style of most presentations which imbues them with some level of concern and anxiety, rather than a positive view of

retirement as a catalyst for successful ageing. Hence, it is positive to note that the Parliamentary Secretariat for Rights of Persons with Disability and Active Ageing is in the process of organising nation-wide pre-retirement learning programmes, a much needed resource to age successfully.

23.3 The Politics of Older Adult Learning

In Malta late-life learning arises as the responsibility of various state ministries which is anything but well-coordinated. The result is that the range of available opportunities for later life learning are neither easily accessible nor clearly formulated. The manner in which older adult learning is planned and implemented fails in providing attention to learning as a means to strengthen communities and aid citizens maintain a sense of purpose. Indeed, while it is positive to note the emphasis on the need to provide learning opportunities for older cohorts, it is unfortunate that international policy documents are more driven to espousing the ‘human capital’ and ‘vocational’ values of late-life learning rather than its ‘humanist’ potential (Formosa 2013). The UN and EU visions for older adult learning are neo-liberal and economic in their foundation, where the solution to the problem of ageing becomes finding a way for older people to be economically useful. It is assumed that older adults find social value only by becoming part of the pool of surplus labour when, in actual fact, there is little evidence to support the usefulness of a strong human capital theory for older persons. An ‘economistic’ rationale dominates, so that late-life learning is not promoted for its possible ‘empowering’ and ‘transcendental’ potential, but only as a means to render the post-industrial societies ‘competitive in the face of the transitional and multinational corporations’ ability to reap the advantages of economies of scale through the expansion of international capital mobility’ (Borg and Mayo 2005: 18). Taking in consideration that productive policies are biased in favour of persons with dominant types and extensive volumes of cultural capital, one concludes that what the UN and EU offer to late-life learning is a ‘model of knowledge economy for some’ as opposed to ‘a model of a knowledge society for all’ (Borg and Formosa 2013).

In many ways, the local provision of learning opportunities for older adults fails in meeting the key priorities of social levelling, social cohesion and social justice. Rather than simply enabling people to adapt to and reintegrate within the existing system, one hopes that future initiatives in late-life learning embrace a transformative edge that empowers groups to confront the inequitable system with a view to change it. This is because, as Freire underlined more than four decades ago,

There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire 1970: 34 – italics in original)

The following issues discuss the ways in which older adult learning in Malta continues to marginalise the most vulnerable and socially excluded sector of the older population.

Elitism Confirming international research, there lies a positive correlation between middle-class background and participation. It is true that most learning opportunities are either free or demand only a nominal fee, and require no academic qualifications. Yet, the way most provision for late-life learning is organised – especially with respect to subject content and teaching styles – typifies a strong middle-class bias. The emphasis on liberal arts subjects, delivered by experts, means that (well-educated) middle-class elders perceive late-life learning as an opportunity to go back to an arena in which they feel confident and self-assured of its outcome and development. The working-class community, on the other hand, generally has limited schooling experience and a life history characterised by poverty and social exclusion, so that it enters later life permeated with a habitus of ‘necessity’ (Bourdieu 1984). The U3E is a clear case in point (Formosa 2000, 2007, 2009, 2012a, 2013, 2014). Despite its positive functions, the Maltese U3E is far from an example of democratic learning as its practice is highly biased in favour of the needs of middle-class urban older persons. Only one member among the 2005/2006 student body listed her past work as an elementary occupation, with a significant number of members – 209 or 29 % – having held professional roles (NSO 2006). Indeed, the U3E holds a useful function for middle-class retirees in their effort to maintain and improve their position in the class structure (Formosa 2000, 2009, 2010b, c, 2012c). As previous identities and statuses associated with one’s occupational position are erased and become meaningless, retirement acts as a ‘status leveller’ by putting persons from different class backgrounds closer together in the hierarchical social space. Retirement forces middle-class persons into an arena of role ambiguity, enforcing a dependence on the state welfare system, and decreasing their ‘social worth’ to the extent that their position in the ‘social space’ changes from that of ‘achievement’ to one of ‘ascription’. To offset such a levelling experience, middle-class older persons enrol in new arenas for moral and practical support, as well as to reassert their previous class position. Membership in the U3E provides members the possibility of acquiring the label of ‘cultured’ with respect to the rest of the older population. In the way that books and paintings are used to impress viewers, U3E membership becomes employed as a strategy of ‘distinction’ to obtain and compete for social honour – thus, serving as a reproductive and domesticating educational agent, and functioning as a perpetuator of ‘symbolic violence’ by imposing ‘middle-class’ meanings as legitimate.

Gender The application of a ‘gender’ lens finds elder-learning in Malta discriminating against both women and men (Formosa 2005, 2010b). On one hand, older women in Malta are less likely to have received workplace learning, received an apprenticeship, hold educational qualifications, and be in receipt of an occupational pension. Cultural constructs put a large proportion of older women in the army of informal carers who either support sick and disabled relatives, especially husbands and aunts, or as carers of their grandchildren whilst their children and sons/

daughters-in-law work full time. One can never overemphasise the ‘double standard of ageing’ – that is, the severe difficulties that older women face as the result of the combination of ageist and sexist prejudices. Again, there is extensive research on the local U3E underlining such a point (Formosa 2005, 2012c). The U3E overlooks the unique barriers faced by older women such as their low expectations that they can participate successfully in educational pursuits, difficulties reaching learning centres due to inadequate transport amenities (the large majority of older women in Malta do not own a driving license), and problems in finding time for educational pursuits when caring is so time-consuming. Fieldwork located a ‘masculinist’ discourse within the U3E where women are generally silenced and made passive through their invisibility (ibid.). Indeed, one could say that the learning experience provides a too firm stand on providing learning *to* women instead *for* women. On the other hand, this is not the same as saying that the U3E is a man’s world. Despite the ‘masculinist’ agenda, its membership body is characterised by a high proportion of women learners. The low percentage of older men signals strongly that for some reason the U3E is not attractive to them. The U3E is promoted through avenues – such as during health-related programmes on the broadcasting media or through leaflets at health-care centres where most of the clients are women. Health promotion courses at the U3E, despite being open to all, tend to include a bias towards women-related health issues such as weight-loss and osteoporosis. The U3E is thus miles away from having courses that are interesting to male lifestyles such as health and cooking programmes called *Pit Stops* or *Cooking for men* as is the case in Australia (Golding 2014).

Third Ageism The movement for older adult learning in Malta celebrates and promotes its ethos at the expense of older and more defenceless people – namely, those in the fourth age. It is assumed that only mobile and healthy elders are capable of engaging in educational classes, and no effort is made to reach out to those persons who due to various physical and mental difficulties are precluded from reaching classroom settings. At the same time, the field is devoid of efforts to link older adults with younger and older peers in intergenerational education. The underlying assumption here is that children, the middle-aged, and old-old persons (circa aged 75-plus) have little, if any, contributory potential towards third-age learning. Late-life education follows Laslett’s (1989: 4) definition of the ‘third age’ as a “period of personal fulfilment, following the second stage of independence, maturity, responsibility, earning, and saving, and preceding the fourth age of final dependence, decrepitude and death”. As a result, the goal is to target older adults who are young-old, able-bodied, and mentally fit. However, there are significant numbers of young-old persons facing mobility and mental challenges. Even at a relatively young age, many a times well before statutory retirement, many older adults experience complications from strokes, diabetes, and neurological diseases so that their functional mobility and intellectual resources become seriously limited. Moreover, old-old persons who experience significant mobility and mental problems, even to the extent of having to enter residential and nursing care homes, may still harbour and strive for a ‘third-age’ lifestyle.

23.4 Conclusion

Malta must aspire toward ensuring that access to learning throughout the life course is perceived as a human right, while strongly guaranteeing adequate learning opportunities in later life as a central objective in both government and local council policies. On a national level, there is an urgent need for a national policy on lifelong learning that includes a sound emphasis on later life. This framework must be guided by a rationale that reinstates lifelong learning in the values of social levelling, social cohesion, and social justice (Formosa 2002, 2011, 2012d). It is the duty of the state to secure sufficient provision and sufficient resources for late-life education, where financial support is significantly reweighted in favour of part-time provision. On the other hand, on a more local policy level, one has to make sure that Local Councils lobby the central government to be awarded an explicit role and responsibility in the planning, coordination and financing of age-related services including adult and late-life learning. In partnership with third sector agencies, Local Councils must take the role of learning hubs that bring all the “providers (public, private, and voluntary) together, to coordinate resources ... and promote learning among older people” (McNair 2009: 17). Local Authorities must join forces to prepare an explicit policy statement on older learners that sets and monitors targets for participation. There warrants as broad a range as possible of community learning opportunities for older adults through collaboration between education and other regional services ranging from health and social services to leisure organisations. Financial support and fee policies should be designed to help those with least initial schooling and income. The coupling of national and local policies should lead to short- and long-term goals and objectives in late-life learning. The most urgent issues include:

Widening Participation Providers must think out of the box so that late-life learning initiatives attract older adults with working class backgrounds, older men, elders living in rural regions, and housebound elders.

Formal Learning There is a need for the higher education sector to play a key role in encouraging new types of adult learning through all phases of the life course, including when older people move from full-time employment to other flexible forms of work.

Pre-retirement Education Society has an obligation toward its citizens to provide them with learning that help them plan for their third and fourth ages, that include a discussion of psychological and social strategies that lead them to improve their quality of life.

E-learning Contrary to conventional wisdom, ICT learning has much potential to improve the quality of life of older persons. In this respect, older adult education must put more effort to embed in their learning strategies in the Web 2.0 revolution.

Intergenerational Learning Such learning fosters harmony among generations. Other benefits include augmenting social capital, stimulating active citizenship, and sharing societal and professional resources among generations.

Fourth Age Learning Since learning is a human process that should also be directed towards frail older persons and informal carers. Learning initiatives must be made available, free of charge, to family relatives and volunteers involved in the care of older persons.

Only by meeting the above objectives that it will become possible for late-life education to prioritise the ‘democratic-citizen’ over the ‘future worker-citizen’ as the prime asset of post-industrial societies.

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