



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty for Social Wellbeing

A Social Pact

ELECTORAL PROPOSALS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES
FOLLOWING CONSULTATION AMONGST STAKEHOLDERS
WITHIN THE FACULTY FOR SOCIAL WELLBEING

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National Social Pact

This has probably been one of the most wide-ranging consultation process in the Faculty where all the Faculty community had the opportunity to share their ideas on what they would like this Country to look like. This Country has gone through a lot this last year whether it's on the health, social, environmental or political level. As a Faculty, now that we are on the verge of a General Election, we would like to voice our concerns but also lay out a number of principles that we feel should serve you as a guide as you prepare your manifesto proposals. The need for quality of life which is not simply substantiated by money, state and wealth, is at the heart of our discourse. Unless we realise that there is more to life we risk imploding as a Country. Hence, we are appealing that no one is left behind, that discrimination and hate become something of the past, that our communities are nourished by love and respect and that social policy is at the heart of all that we do and decide. Not only that, we need to keep working hard so that we minimise the possibility of people being left by the wayside. This is the heart of our message, 'social justice', and as we move towards celebrating the 10th anniversary since this Faculty was established we would like to call out all politicians to respect and endorse the slogan that is guiding the Faculty this year, namely that we need to *'Hear' to engage*.

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

Dean

Faculty for Social Wellbeing



Introduction

The Faculty for Social Wellbeing has through its teaching, research, various projects, and scholarship, together with various collaborative initiatives, developed strong ties to the various communities that comprise the Maltese Islands and has been at the forefront of promoting the voices of the underprivileged and the 'underserved'. This connection puts it in an ideal position to synthesize the dissonant, difficult voices and experiences of multiple stakeholders and start looking towards the future for people in Malta and Gozo.

The forthcoming General Election will be a pivotal moment within Maltese, European and global history and provides a space within the next months to look both introspectively and proactively towards a post-pandemic future grounded in the key principles of social justice, democracy and sustainability as elaborated upon in the Faculty for Social Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2021-2024 which will also bring Malta in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Inequality in Europe was described in a 2017 OECD report as reaching its highest level, with the authors stating that "the 10% of wealthiest households hold 50% of total wealth; the 40% least wealthy own little over 3%" (p. 6).¹ Within Malta this has translated to over half of the wealth belonging to the top 10% of the population.² The share of workers at risk of poverty is on the rise, compounded by the effects of the ongoing pandemic and its aftermath.

Wellbeing indices, as noted by Pace and Briguglio³, show that Malta continues to experience challenges due to high obesity rates, large numbers of early school leavers, low uptake of tertiary education, as well as limitations in the workforce's skills-base. Various sectors also show that gender gaps persist, exacerbated by the large number of women who experience an unequal distribution of care and domestic work within households.³ While growth has been achieved in the Maltese economy, this has simultaneously caused detrimental effects, "including the depletion of natural resources, loss of cultural assets, and higher levels of waste, air, climatic noise and marine emissions among others" (para. 4). While at a European level, Malta does not fare too badly comparing closely to the EU 27 mean for quality of life indicators, there are still multiple domains where significant improvements can be registered.⁴

A €215 million wage supplement scheme for Maltese businesses was approved by the European Commission in 2020, which would remain in place for up to a year⁵. A 2020 survey by the Times of Malta⁶ reported that 41% of those working in the private sector were fearful of losing their job if the Coronavirus outbreak would continue for a further six months. The continuing fallout of the virus has meant that anxiety, uncertainty, and risks of precarity remain of primary concern.

1 M. Förster, A.L. Nozal and C. Thévenot, 'Understanding the Socio-Economic Divide in Europe,' OECD Centre for Opportunity and Equality, 2017.

2 <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2021-04-18/blogs-opinions/The-rich-getting-richer-and-the-poorer-6736232687>

3 https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/63521/1/The_lessons_weve_learned_through_COVID-Maria_Giulia_Pace_%26_Marie_Briguglio_2020.pdf

4 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Quality_of_life_indicators_-_overall_experience_of_life

5 European Commission. "State aid: Commission approves €215 million Maltese employment aid scheme to support sectors affected by coronavirus outbreak". Press Release. 24 April 2020.

6 Grech, H. "One-third of private sector workers fear losing their jobs". Times of Malta. 19 April 2020.

Maltese sociologist Michael Briguglio, in an opinion piece published in the Malta Independent⁷, described how:

“Different workers are being impacted differently by the current crisis. To mention a few, there are differences between teachers who can work from home and waiters who cannot; between unionised and non-unionised workers; and between the 63,000 workers covered by the government’s monthly wage supplements and the 110,000 who are not.” (para. 4)

“In addition to [the European Commission’s wage supplement scheme] and other initiatives, the government also announced the introduction of benefits such as a subsidy of up to 2.5% of interest for the first two years on business loans affected by COVID-19, and up to 80% of rents for workers who lost their jobs or who are on unpaid leave, self-employed persons whose income has dropped drastically, and victims of domestic violence.” (para. 13)

Briguglio further noted how, although current expenditure by the government is necessary for stimulating the economy, it is also important to consider the potential future consequences of such policy decisions – some of which might be as yet unknown.⁷ He emphasised that “Malta cannot afford to have so many persons experiencing economic hardship amid uncertainty” (para. 17).⁷ Briguglio’s analysis therefore makes a case for the need for the government to look beyond the financial issues brought about by the pandemic, and taking into account social wellbeing considerations.

Tackling increasing inequalities requires a threefold exercise: (1) Revisiting old assumptions that have been demonstrably proven not to benefit the common good. (2) Create mechanisms and strategies to understand the short and long term effects of Covid-19 and mitigate the negative impacts. (3) Look towards the future with hope and creativity to build a better society for all.

The next election, which follows a unique period in history at both a global and national level, presents an unprecedented opportunity for the people of the Maltese Islands to re-evaluate the social relationships that exist between the State and the people; to revisit those relationships which are no longer serving as conduits for social, economic, and environmental wellbeing; and to hold accountable those structures and policies that have proven incapable of promoting the common good and its implementation throughout society.

To this end as the Faculty for Social Wellbeing we would like to propose the following Social Pact for all political actors within Malta to engage, address, disagree, review, improve with and build upon.

⁷ Briguglio, M. “A Social Pact for Worker’s Day”. The Malta Independent. 30 April 2020.

Rationale

Developing a public policy “social pact”, defined as “a formal and public policy contract between the government and social partners about industrial relations, labour market or welfare policies” (para. 1),⁸ necessitates a strong coalition of activists, academics, scientists, local government, and civil society actors. Drawing from the expertise and professional networks of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing (FSW), the Faculty proposes such a social pact to present an inspiring policy vision while also offering a sustainable strategy to realize it.

It is important that a social pact for the future of the Maltese Islands takes into consideration the concerns of those working in the community, who often suffer the consequences of environmental degradation⁹; and focus considerable energy on the long-term impact and the implicit effects of current policies on future generations.

Social justice starts only when every citizen “has a say in their future, and such participation is only possible when political institutions enable it” (p. 78)¹⁰. Therefore, democracy plays a crucial role in the formulation and implementation of a credible social pact that embraces the rights of the Maltese population to environmental, social, and economic wellbeing.¹¹ Furthermore, it is essential that elected authorities use scientific evidence as a basis for their environmental, economic, and social policies, while striving to achieve broad national consensus on the issues that pertain to the holistic wellbeing of the people of Malta.

Within this Social Pact, differing elements have been selected, reviewed, and questioned in order to extract themes and areas that require urgent political action. While this document does not claim to comprise all the problems in the vast and ever-evolving social field, the themes, issues and recommendations listed in this document can provide a useful starting point for various entities charged with social development of the Maltese Islands.

The document has purposefully occupied a middle ground in identifying salient issues and problematizing them while refraining from overly complex and detailed plans to address such issues. The rationale behind such a decision is to ensure the readability of the document which aims to sensitize readers and foster discussion about the issues it seeks to raise. Secondly this document is not intended as a ‘technical manual’; it does not aim to provide costed, timed solutions to each and every issue raised, not least in order to avoid discussions degenerating into technical disputes while relegating into the background the issues and principles that require decisive action. The Faculty for Social Wellbeing remains as ever available to discuss further and debate technicalities as well as to research and suggest solutions on each proposal mentioned within this document. The FSW is there to create a safe space for open discussion.

8 European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). “Industrial Relations Dictionary: Social pact”. 2019.

9 N. Haeringer, ‘Gilets Jaunes: tackling climate change means addressing inequality and building resilience’, 350+, December 2018, <https://350.org/gilet-jaunes-tackling-climate-changemeans-addressing-inequality-and-building-resilience-to-climate-change/>

10 Adler, D., Wargan, P. and Prakash, S., 2019. Blueprint for Europe’s Just Transition’. The Green New Deal for Europe.

11 D. Schlosberg, ‘Three dimensions of environmental and ecological justice’, European Consortium for Political Research Annual Joint Sessions, Grenoble, pp. 6-11.

Environmental Practices

Wellbeing in the Maltese Islands is highly dependent upon the environmental impact of authorities' policy decisions, including soil degradation¹², the earth overheating¹³, oceanic acidification¹⁴, and the irreversible depletion of biodiversity and the disappearance of species after species from the planet¹⁵.

- Invest in biodiversity initiatives within the Maltese Islands.
- Develop wilding initiatives.
- Support evidence-based and non-tokenistic efforts to “green” Maltese infrastructure.

Addressing fossil fuel use in Malta requires an approach similar to that of reducing carbon emissions in Europe's economies, as described by Adler and colleagues:¹⁰.

“It also means scaling down aggregate energy use in order to enable a rapid transformation to an economy that respects planetary boundaries. This must be done in a fair and progressive manner that enhances, rather than restricts, human well-being.” (p. 27)

- Ensure the rigorous enforcement of ODZs, avoiding the use of loopholes and unnecessary exceptions.
- Limit the issuing of building permits at any given time to give reprieve to residents and tourists who visit the island.
- Reduce the Islands' carbon footprint.
- Shift energy demands to renewable forms of energy in a progressive and socially just manner.

Adler and colleagues¹⁰ also note that European countries must address the demand for energy, by investing in the “maintenance, recycling, repair, and restoration of environmental and infrastructural resources” (p. 27).

- Legislate and support the maintenance, recycling, and repair of medium-to-long term item usage.
- Prohibit, tax and disincentivize the short-term use of harmful materials such as plastics.

12 P. Panagos et al., 'The new assessment of soil loss by water erosion in Europe', *Environmental Science & Policy*, vol 54, pp. 438-447. See also 'Agri-environmental indicator – soil erosion', Eurostat, November 2018,

13 N. Christidis, G. S. Jones and P. A. Stott, 'Dramatically increasing chance of extremely hot summers since the 2003 European heatwave', *Nature Climate Change*, vol 5, 2015, pp. 46–50.

14 IPBES, IPBES Secretariat, *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science- Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: 2.2.5.2.1 Ecosystem structure*, Bonn, Germany, 2019

15 Ibid., 2.2.5.2.4, 'Species populations'.

The over-reliance of the Maltese Islands on automobiles as the primary form of transport has had several negative impacts on the wellbeing of residents, from increased air pollution to a road network that seeks to accommodate vehicles at the cost of all other forms of transportation and even at times human interaction. The true cost of car ownership to the Maltese Islands is far beyond what is being paid for by individual car owners.

- Promote alternative forms of transportation including e-bikes, bicycles, and scooters.
- Tax and disincentivize car usage, while incentivizing public forms of transport
- Overhaul, invest in and incentivize public transportation usage.

The social pact must also focus on creating opportunities to “reverse biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and other forms of environmental breakdown”¹⁰ (p. 27). The agricultural community in Malta is in crisis, a fact which must be addressed by appropriate investment:

- Invest in locally practiced “regenerative farming and fishing practices”¹⁰ (p. 27).

Reviewing the Formal and Non-Formal Educational System

An overhaul of the educational system is needed to tackle multiple issues within the Maltese Islands, from outdated gender norms, racism, a dearth of critical thinking and a high level of early school leavers.

An obsessive focus on grades-based performance has resulted in an overly prescriptive educational system that does not allow for the professional discretion, adaptations and amendments that students require in order to be effective citizens and contributors to the workforce. Additionally, it has imposed upon the teaching profession a plethora of administrative burdens that do not necessarily provide a higher level of pedagogical service.

- Give teachers autonomy and move away from rigid and out-of-date curricula.
- Reduce unnecessary paperwork and administrative burdens from the teaching profession.

While recognising recent efforts at making schools more accessible and inclusive, further efforts are required to:

- Make education more accessible to students from various socio-economic sectors.
- Invest in opportunities for outdoor education.
- Give prominence to physical education to tackle obesity.
- Ensure that all LSEs have a level of education and training equivalent to teachers'.
- Add subjects and lessons on mental health and how to foster wellbeing in students, particularly as they become adults.
- Promote extracurricular activities by reducing the amount of work required to be done at home.
- Investigate, regulate and reduce the phenomenon of private lessons within the Maltese Islands.

Respecting and Promoting Diversity

The diversity of the residents on the Maltese Islands is a reality that requires several paradigm shifts including at a policy level. Reducing the latent level of personal and systemic racism experienced in various interactions between people in Malta is a key concern to ensure the wellbeing of all those who are currently reside in Malta.

- Create initiatives to empower community leaders to be advocates and ambassadors of social wellbeing within their communities in collaboration with local government and other national agencies or institutions, as well as with the nongovernmental sector.
- Set out a sufficiently detailed social media ethics policy for key civil servants to ensure mechanisms for accountability and effective enforcement.
- Create strategies to identify and work with different communities within Malta, to better understand their distinct cultures and needs.
- Create culturally appropriate opportunities to learn, to share knowledge, and to participate in society.
- Create various awareness campaigns to promote inclusion.

Fostering Community

A sense of community is an important factor in wellbeing, underscoring the essentially communal rhythms of human life in Malta and throughout the world. Supporting communities by providing opportunities for communities to form, to mobilize, to make their views known and to empower individuals within the community, is vital for the healthy functioning of society.

- Provide free, safe community spaces where communities can meet with low barriers to entry.
- Provide community development workers to various localities within Malta, particularly those with low socio-economic development.
- Provide greater resources and devolve more responsibilities to local councils.
- Invest in community projects such as community histories and small projects around the community.
- Support local councils with the expertise required to manage their localities effectively.
- Promote the use of neglected spaces for community events and organizations.

Services to communities should not be given on a one-size fits all basis as the needs of various communities differ. Additionally, services provided by government should be co-created and co-led with community representatives and organizations.

- Create a new model for service-provision which is tailored to the needs of the community, instead of being housed in macro-entity/ies.

Civil Society

Investing in civil society and allowing it to expand is key in ensuring a healthy democracy, enabling a meaningful oversight of the stewardship of public resources and the common good. Civil society participants represent voices that are sometimes absent in public discourse, including minority groups, diverse sub-cultures, and faith traditions presenting opportunities to enforce the right to self-expression without retaliation and hate speech. Additionally, civil society organizations often fill in gaps in service provision that government service tends to be too slow to cater for. Without these organizations, vulnerable people within the Maltese Islands will not be provided essential services. To continue delivering these vital services, support and funding is required from the government.

- Reduce bureaucracy, waiting times to register a voluntary organization.
- Strike a correct and empowering balance between the need for voluntary organisations to be spared excessive bureaucracy and costs to raise revenue, with the need for financial transparency.
- Provide expert human resources and funds for organizations to cover administrative requirements and costs when carrying out projects.
- Provide administrative support and resources for small organizations to carry out their missions.
- Provide funds on a rolling basis instead of once-a-year.
- Provide additional funds for areas of interest.
- Provide support for organizations to become more sustainable in raising funds.
- Create a transparent mechanism for private-public partnerships and remove arbitrary private-public partnerships that favour organizations with political connections.
- Finalize legislation on social enterprises.
- Reduce MFSA fees for non-profit organizations providing loans and other resources to people challenged by poverty.

Public Service

The public sector is of key importance to ensure that the machinery of government works in an organized and efficient manner. Apart from being the public face of government, the public sector has a large effect on the citizen's experience when dealing with the various public entities. Investing in customer care and reducing bureaucracy is vital to ensure that evidence-based policies are implemented successfully.

- Invest in the customer care experience to ensure that the citizen is treated well, does not experience unnecessary delays and is given clear and adequate advice.
- Greatly expand and strengthen mental health initiatives within the public sector to cater for the wellbeing of civil servants.
- Retrain and re-assign and, public service employees who have been appointed as political favours.
- Ensure transparency in the appointments to key positions, based on expertise and prior experience in the field.
- Create a public database of persons of trust, consultants, with their wages and the nature of their expertise and services.

Addressing the mandate of National Commissions and their remit, including whether there is the need for a reform of the ways in which they operate to streamline effectiveness, providing them with the adequate resources to carry out their mission and creating a support structure to help them carry out their mission.

- Provide support to commissions and create mechanisms for synergistic pursuit of social goals.

Reviewing the Criminal and Justice System

A key pillar of any functioning society is its judicial and criminal system. Without means of adequate redress, and a sense of trust in the fairness, speed and effectiveness of judicial remedies, dispute resolution will become a private matter that will not ensure the fairness and adequacy of formal proceedings.

- Increase the speed at which judgements are provided.
- Support the judiciary with the infrastructure required to provide speedier resolutions.
- Criminalize and curb delaying tactics by legal representatives and their clients.
- Consider less formal and speedier processes such as tribunals for issues which are of a less substantial nature.
- Provide better resources for legal aid lawyers to ensure appropriate legal advice is given.
- Introduce less formal and speedier processes such as tribunals for issues which are of a less substantial nature.

Reforming the role of prison in Malta, to include a greater focus on social wellbeing. Security concerns cannot come at the expense of fundamental access to social wellbeing, as part of a trajectory towards rehabilitation. It is also essential to promote the presence of civil society activists in this sensitive area, by investing in service provision from non-governmental sources.

- Introduce the role of a CEO with a team of managers that will manage the various aspects of running a correctional facility.
- Ensure that prison personnel are well trained and duly qualified, particularly those in senior leadership roles.
- Reduce the incarcerated population by utilizing and optimizing the institution of bail, and reinforce electronic monitoring
- Avoid short sentences and utilize other forms of punishment that are proportionate but do not necessarily involve incarceration.
- Allow incarcerated persons unfettered access to lawyers.
- Invest in rehabilitative programs such as those provided through youth workers and upscale the current psycho-social initiatives.
- Introduce a care plan, from the initial moments that an incarcerated person enters prison.
- Refurbish the prison.
- Provide high level educational opportunities for incarcerated persons without having the certifying body be the CCA.
- Improve Prison industries to reflect work found on the outside.
- Carry out periodic audits on the treatment and wellbeing of prisoners.

- Remove solitary confinement for prisoners and from the criminal justice system.
- Provide mental health support for prison staff.
- Invest more resources in prison personnel.
- Further nurture an environment of rehabilitation led by restorative objectives, instead of fear and intimidation which perpetuate social abjection.
- Remove unnecessary and arbitrary favours to incarcerated persons.
- Introduce harm reduction kits for all substances available for private purchase, which are not monitored by law enforcement.
- Create employment opportunities for persons who have been incarcerated.
- Provide funds and invest in programs that aid the reintegration of formerly incarcerated people into society.
- Create halfway houses and open prisons.

Mental Health and resilience

The value of mental health and resilience, as crucial for a society's capacity to flourish, is uncontested throughout the relevant literature. Every member of society has a shared role in creating thriving communities that uphold quality of life by targeting challenges to mental health and concerns due to precarity and exclusion. When challenges arise, access to sources of support are essential, as is concurrent investment in the skills, social networks, and access to resources that are needed to counteract vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities have been particularly exacerbated due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

- Create a stronger mental health infrastructure.
- Create treatment centres within the community.
- Support equitable representation in the national workforce of all warranted professionals in the sector, including psychologists, psychotherapists, youth workers and others.
- Upgrade thoroughly the current facilities for mental health treatment.
- Invest in providing free service provision from an early age for mental health.
- Carry out strong awareness campaigns to keep educating the public at large regarding mental health.
- Aid persons who are engaged in substance abuse to have access to qualified and non-judgmental mental health professionals.
- Provide opportunities for integration for persons suffering from mental health issues within society.
- Make sure that the structures and practices of education and prevention as well as hospital and community care are reformed in line with best practice as supported by evidence and the foremost expertise.

Dignified Employment

Employment is a key opportunity to ensure social mobility. Employment should be dignified, sufficiently paid, and protected with at least the minimal statutory guarantees. This is particularly important to new and emerging forms of work, such as the so-called “gig economy” which can, if unregulated, promote exploitation and precarity in the name of flexibility and freedom.

- Provide basic minimum guarantees including but not limited to minimum wage, vacation and sick leave to all workers, particularly those engaged in the gig economy.

Every country has an informal economy. The impact of such an economy is lost taxation revenue, lack of protection for workers, and possibly the funding of illicit activities. Disincentivizing the informal economy while promoting initiatives for employees and employers to join the formal economy is of fundamental importance.

- Strive to regulate the informal economy and provide financial incentives for informal workers to move into the formal economy.
- Analyse and remove all bottlenecks for employees/employers wishing to move into the formal economy.
- Investigate and fine harshly, employers who exploit the vulnerability of workers to break employment law. Introduce robust safeguards that make it safer for workers to report abuse by employers.
- Employers who are found to be guilty of harassment should be penalised accordingly.
- Dismantle barriers to access for disempowered and marginalized minorities such as prohibitive legal fees when trying to access the courts to enforce their rights.

Affordable Housing for All

The affordability of house prices and rents for much of the population is under threat. Crucial steps forward have been taken by introducing an amount of regulation in the private renting market while, for the first time, obtaining through registration, basic data about the sector. This is a welcome, though insufficient, basis for planning. An important change has been made in transferring the burden of the pre-95 houses from the landlord to the taxpayer and in limiting the security of the tenure to the currently occupying generation.

However, this has raised the spectre of the 20% of households that rent, steadily changing status to leases that rarely go beyond one, at most three, years. This must be a nightmare for families and their children, who thrive on stability, yet are faced with more and more of the opposite. Another question mark on family stability is the new policy to give social housing, and possibly also what is being called affordable housing, only for a period of five years. This may be just and appropriate for households that can improve their situation within five years, though this does not protect them from the dangers of frequent uprooting from their accustomed communities. Policies to respond to such threats should include:

- Incentives and other measures that succeed in making long leases, of well more than a decade, to be the rule for families.
- Deep thinking about measures to make sure that families whose improved incomes move them out of social housing have a 'next step up the ladder' which is realistically affordable if they are ready to do their bit.
- Meanwhile making sure that the supply of social and subsidized housing is not depleted or used for profit and speculation, by ensuring that such protected affordable housing can never be sold at open-market prices.
- A commitment to never allow social and affordable housing, its planning, development and administration, to be allowed to be subjected to private interests, in a free market that is motivated by the quest for profit and of an ever-accelerating transfer of assets and spaces from the many to the few.
- Political leaders to make sure that the voices of tenants (especially those on lower incomes) have a platform and are listened to, in policy and legal matters, enacting measures that empower this currently silent and vulnerable section of society. Encourage and support the creation of Tenants Groups.
- The selling of Maltese land to foreigners and the immigration of workers into our country should be subject to limits that should not be allowed to go beyond the point, shown by monitored data, when it starts threatening housing affordability.

Enacting Evidence-based Policies

Policies are an important instrument within the Government's arsenal to address common good issues and give direction. As such, they must be directed by long-term objectives for the wellbeing of the nation, rather than short-term political expediency. Serious policies include a considered impact vision for the future, and are created through a rigorous process of research and consultation.

- Enact policies that are evidence-based and consultative with the key stakeholders.
- Ensure that the consultation is effective and not merely a box-ticking exercise.
- Publish the results of prior inquiry before enacting a policy.

Resources and expertise from the University of Malta enrich and give perspective to the policy decisions being considered by Malta's elected officials. Through research opportunities, policy can be more firmly grounded on empirical and validated data.

- Create a consultative instrument that facilitates communication between the University of Malta and Parliament.
- Involve the University of Malta and other experts in the development and implementation of projects.
- Policies should not be a stand-alone exercise with the resulting contradictions and lacunae. A comprehensive plan for entire national policy should be created by each political party at the beginning of each legislature with contributions from each ministry.

Addressing Markers of Wellbeing

Including indicators for wellbeing in its social, economic, and environmental dimensions as part of policy decision making and assessments of success. The relational qualities that define wellbeing must be treated with full seriousness and care, and not simply as an adjunct to economic gains. Progress is increasingly measured using new measurement tools that incorporate measures of wellbeing, more strongly emphasize human rights, and move away from a dependence on criteria of economic growth.

The combination of scientific evidence and markers of well-being should provide the basis for cooperative exercises in national discernment, to help us, as a nation, to clearly perceive the differences between development, growth and enterprise on the one hand, and the promotion of private interests and environmental manipulation on the other hand. Policies and actions that are harmful to the common good must be firmly excluded, while ones conducive to the common good are to be boldly promoted. We need to:

- Develop Wellbeing indicators that credibly measure quality of life and social inclusion, which necessitates a shift away from focusing on GDP to a broader focus on individuals, communities, and their needs.
- Identifying best practices and other enablers at the national and local levels, that promote the advancement of quality of life and wellbeing. Incorporate these enablers among the measures of the advancement of well-being.
- Invest more money on researching gaps in social wellbeing and quality of life issues.



Intersectionality

Resilience, marginalization and vulnerability cannot be understood from a single lens such as gender, poverty, migrant status or disability. Often these multiple identities that promote or limit resilience are frequently inhabited by the same individual or community group. Understanding this multi-faceted reality will allow for more theoretically correct, and longer-lasting impacts in services provided by government.

- Use intersectionality as a lens for analysis and for creating policies to truly acknowledge the multi-faceted and numerous spaces and identities, individuals and communities inhabit.

Conclusion

Making wellbeing a reality for all

Rising inequalities, a pandemic that has no immediate end, general anxiety and several political issues loom heavily on the future of the Maltese Islands. In many spheres of social wellbeing, political action has relied heavily on allowing issues to escalate into crises before taking at times half-hearted measures to address the issue at hand putting us far out of reach of the Sustainable Development Goals. It has been argued by commentators that such short-sightedness seems to be an endemic feature of Maltese political thought and action and yet this mode of understanding and reacting to the world around us has not brought tangible benefits to the many but just the few.

This involves a renewed Social Pact that augurs that political actors and organizations from civil society to political parties and eventually government shift definitively from a reactive mindset to a proactive mindset. Such a shift would entail thinking clearly, honestly about controversial and divisive issues. It does not require sheepish assent but requires an educated citizenry demanding the best and holding elites from all spheres including business and politics to account. It requires that problems are not ignored and are not compartmentalized into 5-year time frames and pandering to the lowest common denominator to gain a steroidal increase in votes.

Underlying such a shift in the way politics in all its form is conducted and understood requires a mindset shift on the role of politics within society, particularly how structural power engages with those who are often left out of important conversations. Welfare policies, through improving health, education, social care of the vulnerable, housing etc., have been prime instruments for better wellbeing. But they have often been shackled by ideas that were insufficiently proactive and empowering. The Faculty for Social Wellbeing vociferously calls for change to our conceptual models and to embark on a radical new journey as a country that transitions from welfare policies that are narrowly conceptualized, paternalistic and based on weak evidence (if any), to welfare policies that robustly support empowerment and wellbeing.

This journey will require that we make the betterment of all members of society the central and functional aim of all politics. It is simply not enough that we keep on calling for cosmetic changes under banal calls for unity when the necessary path required for the flourishing of our society is difficult, painful and fraught with dangers that we cannot yet conceive. We therefore call on all political actors to dig deep and bring forth the courage required for the moral leadership that this country desperately requires. A leadership that takes cognizance of public opinion but is not swayed unnecessarily by populist sentiments especially when they threaten the wellbeing of disempowered minorities. We ask that the hard choices are made, choices that have painful costs but which guarantee the survival and sustainability of a community-centred and dignified way of life, that respects and promotes nature.

We ask finally that all political actors channel and ground their patriotic and nationalistic instincts in the long-established principles of social justice, and seek continuously to find the common good. A common good that is hotly debated, vigorously-contested, ever-changing and hard to capture. While mistakes may be made along the way, if the goal being sought is the right one, course correction will be a natural part of the process, not an extraneous and highly irregular affair. We augur that the next ten to fifty years of Maltese statehood keep on

building on all the positive that our forebears have endeavored and sacrificed to build while at the same time, daring to dream greatly and anew.

As the Faculty for Social Wellbeing approaches its 10th anniversary, we are thankful for the privilege of being able to look back on a decade of search and discovery. By working closely with people from various sectors, industries, professions, communities, and families in the Maltese Islands, the Faculty is now better positioned than ever before to deliver on its basic commitment, to promote meaningful wellbeing in society. Throughout our work we have discovered multiple intersectionalities that promote or weaken individuals and communities' resilience and have opened new opportunities for dialogue, generating unprecedented data, and restoring the primacy of democratic participation in policy and research. For these reasons, this document reflects the collective voices of our Faculty community - a coalition of students, researchers, academics and administrators, willing to work hand in hand with all stakeholders and leaders, in support of social wellbeing and its powerful implications for the present and future of Malta.

