

ENGLISH VERSION

Reclaiming Manoel Island: A Historic Opportunity

Malta stands at a critical crossroads where environmental sustainability, public health, and long-term national well-being must be prioritised. As academics and professionals, we urge the Government of Malta to rethink Manoel Island as a public natural space. This is an opportunity; not just as a legal obligation, but as a chance to reflect the country's urgent needs and current public priorities within nature-based solutions.

The Mediterranean basin, where Malta is centrally positioned, is recognised as a climate change and biodiversity hotspot. In the face of intensifying climate and ecological crises, the preservation of remaining green spaces is not optional; it is crucial. Manoel Island, uniquely located within one of Malta's most urbanised zones (Sliema and Gżira), represents a rare and irreplaceable socio-ecological asset.

Transforming Manoel Island into a public nature reserve and cultural heritage park offers co-benefits that align with planetary health principles which supports biodiversity, climate resilience, and community well-being. Urban green spaces are proven to:

- Support mental and physical health, reducing rates of obesity, stress, and depression,
- Improve air quality, urban cooling, and biodiversity preservation,
- Provide spaces for physical activity, recreation, and social cohesion.

As part of this vision, efforts should prioritise the planting and conservation of native (indigenous and endemic) trees, bushes, and plants which are best adapted to Malta's climate, support local biodiversity, and require fewer resources to thrive. This would not only enhance the ecological importance of Manoel Island but also reinforce its identity as a truly Maltese natural space. This initiative also offers opportunities for cultural ecological conservation, honouring Manoel Island's historical past, alongside afforestation and environmental stewardship.

When the development agreement with MIDI was signed more than two decades ago, Malta's socio-economic realities were different. While economic growth has improved quality of life in several areas, it has often come at the expense of our natural and architectural heritage. Today, as Malta enters a new phase of environmental responsibility, supported by initiatives such as the €700 million investment in the environment and the work of Project Green in creating pocket gardens and revitalised urban spaces, Manoel Island presents a unique opportunity to go further. While these efforts are commendable and much needed within our towns and communities, Malta also urgently requires larger, naturally preserved landscapes that are enhanced for ecological and public benefit but remain largely free from intensive human intervention. Manoel Island can become such a national park, which could be a living example of environmental restoration and public health promotion.

The concern that reclaiming Manoel Island would "cost taxpayers millions" must be reframed as a wise, future-oriented public investment. Those funds, if spent to preserve and regenerate Manoel Island, would yield long-term returns in the form of improved public health, tourism rooted in cultural and ecological assets, with enhanced urban resilience. Unlike luxury apartment developments accessible to a privileged few, a protected Manoel Island offers widespread, equitable benefits across generations. Investing in nature, mental health, and community space should be a national priority over private developments and therefore strikes as sound governance.

We, the undersigned academics and professionals, recommend that the Government of Malta:

1. Reassesses the Manoel Island concession considering unfulfilled contractual obligations by MIDI,
2. Reclaims the site for public ownership and use, under the stewardship of a publicly accountable environmental and cultural agency,
3. Designates Manoel Island as a protected socio-ecological zone, integrating ecological restoration, historical preservation, and community health outcomes.

This is a call to redefine development in a way that safeguards the planetary health concept and Malta's people.

VERŻJONI BIL-MALTI

Naghtu Manoel Island lura lill-Poplu: Issa l-Mument

Dan huwa mument deċiżiv għal Malta: Irridu naghtu prijorità lis-sostenibbiltà ambjentali, is-saħħa pubblika u l-ġid nazzjonali għalissa u għall-futur. Ahna, bħala akkademiċi u professjonisti, inhegġu lill-Gvern ta' Malta sabiex iqis mill-ġdid il-futur ta' Manoel Island bħala spazju naturali miftuħ għall-pubbliku. Dan huwa obbligu legali, imma din hija wkoll opportunità biex nindirizzaw il-htigijiet urġenti ta' pajjiżna u l-prijoritajiet pubbliċi attwali fil-kuntest ta' soluzzjonijiet ibbażati fuq in-natura.

Malta tinsab f'nofs il-Mediterran, reġjun li nafu li qed iħoss l-impatt serju tal-bidla fil-klima u t-telf tal-bijodiversità. Quddiem krizijiet klimatiki u ekoloġiċi dejjem jikbru, m'għadx għandna l-lussu li noqogħdu naħsbuha għandniex bżonn inħarsu l-isparzi naturali li għad fadal. Manoel Island, li tinsab f'nofs iż-żona urbanizzata ħafna ta' Tas-Sliema u l-Gżira, hija gawhra soċjali u ekoloġika li mhux se nsibu oħra bħalha.

It-trasformazzjoni ta' Manoel Island f'riserva naturali pubblika u park ta' wirt kulturali toffri bosta benefiċċji marbutin mal-prinċipji tas-saħħa tal-pjaneta: issostni l-bijodiversità, ir-reżiljenza klimatika u l-ġid tal-komunità. Nafu li spazji naturali fi nħawi urbani:

- Isahħu s-saħħa mentali u fiżika, u jnaqqsu l-obeżità, l-istress u d-dipressjoni,
- Itejbu l-kwalità tal-arja, jiffriskaw l-atmosfera fi nħawi urbani, u jħarsu l-bijodiversità,
- Joffru spazji għal attività fiżika, mistrieħ, u koeżjoni soċjali.

Bħala parti minn din il-viżjoni, għandu jingħata prijorità t-tħawwil u l-konservazzjoni ta' siġar, arbuxelli u pjanti indigeni u endemiċi li huma l-aktar adattati għall-klima ta' Malta, jappoġġjaw il-bijodiversità lokali, u jeħtieġu inqas riżorsi biex jikbru. Dan mhux biss isahħaħ l-importanza ekoloġika ta' Manoel Island iżda jsahħaħ ukoll l-identità tagħha bħala spazju naturali tassew Malti. Din l-inizjattiva tagħtina l-opportunità li nħarsu l-wirt kulturali u ekoloġiku tagħna, naghtu ġieħ lill-passat storiku ta' Manoel Island, u nwettqu proġetti ta' tħawwil ta' siġar u kura tal-ambjent.

Meta Malta ffirmat il-ftehim ta' żvilupp mal-MIDI aktar minn għoxrin sena ilu, ir-realtajiet soċjali u ekonomiċi ta' Malta kienu differenti ħafna. Għalkemm it-tkabbir ekonomiku tejjeb il-kwalità tal-ħajja f'diversi oqsma, dan ħafna drabi sar b'detriment għall-wirt naturali u arkitettoniku tagħna. Illum Malta għandha responsabbiltà ambjentali akbar minn qabel u qed jittieħdu inizjattivi importanti bħall-investment ta' €700 miljun fl-ambjent u l-hidma ta' Project Green biex jinholqu għonja fil-bliet. F'dan il-kuntest, Manoel Island toffri opportunità unika biex nagħmlu l-pass li jmiss. Għax filwaqt li dawn l-isforzi huma meħtieġa u ta' min ifaħħarhom, Malta teħtieġ ukoll spazji kbar u miftuħa b'valur ekoloġiku li jibqgħu kemm jista' jkun ħielsa minn intervent uman intensiv. Manoel Island tista' ssir park nazzjonali, eżempju ħaj ta' restawr ambjentali u promozzjoni tas-saħħa pubblika.

L-inkwiet li biex nieħdu lura Manoel Island "lill-poplu se tiswieg il-miljuni" għandna nħarsu lejha mod ieħor bħala investment pubbliku għaqli u maħsub għall-futur. Jekk il-fondi jintefqu biex lil Manoel Island inħarsuha u nagħtuha ħajja ġdida nkunu qed ninvestu fit-tul f'saħħa pubblika aħjar, f'turizmu sostenibbli bbażat fuq il-wirt kulturali u ambjentali, u f'reżiljenza urbana aqwa. Kontra l-iżvilupp ta' appartamenti lussużi maħsubin biss għal ftit nies ipprivileġġati, Manoel Island protetta toffri benefiċċji ġusti u mifruxa għal generazzjoni wara l-oħra. Il-prijorità nazzjonali għandha tkun li ninvestu fin-natura, fis-saħħa mentali u fl-isparzi tal-komunità u mhux li nwarbu biex isiru żviluppi privati. Dan ikun eżempju ta' tmexxija għaqlija ta' pajjiżna.

Aħna, l-akkademiċi u l-professjonisti hawn taħt iffirmati, nirrakkomandaw li l-Gvern ta' Malta:

1. Jerga' jeżamina l-konċessjoni ta' Manoel Island fid-dawl tal-obbligi kuntrattwali li ma twettqux min-naħa tal-MIDI,
2. Jieħu lura s-sit biex ikun tal-poplu u jintuża mill-poplu, taħt it-tmexxija ta' aġenzija ambjentali u kulturali responsabbli lejn il-pubbliku,
3. Jiddikjara Manoel Island zona soċjoekoloġika protetta, u jintegra inizjattivi għar-restawr ekoloġiku, il-ħarsien tal-wirt storiku, u s-saħħa tal-komunità.

Din tagħna hija sejha biex nibdew naħsbu fuq l-iżvilupp bħala mod kif inħarsu s-saħħa tal-pjaneta u ta' daww kollha li jgħixu Malta.

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1	Kurt Borg	Senior Lecturer
2	Paul Calleja	Senior Lecturer
3	Aaron Aquilina	Lecturer
4	Adrian Gatt	Engineer, Activist
5	Adrian Grima	Associate Professor
6	Adriana Camilleri	Lecturer
7	Adriana Pace	Lecturer, Physiotherapist
8	Alan Deidun	Professor
9	Albert Gatt	Professor
10	Aleksandar Dimitrijevic	Activist
11	Alessio Magro	Associate Professor
12	Alex Grech	Professor
13	Alfred Sant Fournier	School Consultant
14	Andrea Dibben	Lecturer
15	Andrew Camilleri	Researcher
16	Angela Deguara	Lecturer
17	Anna Borg	Associate Professor
18	Annalisa Scerri	Lecturer
19	Anne-Marie Callus	Associate Professor
20	Anthony Dimech	Lecturer
21	Anthony Joseph Frendo	Emeritus Professor
22	Arnold Cassola	Senior Fellow
23	Bernard Micallef	Professor
24	Beverly Agius	Doctoral student
25	Brigitte Theuma	Administration work
26	Carina Gerada Sinnott	Educator / Counsellor
27	Carmel aka Charles Pace	Visiting Snr Lecturer
28	Carmel Borg	Professor
29	Carmel Serracino	lecturer
30	Carmen Sammut	Prof.
31	Caroline Galea	Ms
32	Caroline Portelli	Administrator
33	Charlene Jo Darmanin	Perit
34	Charló Camilleri	Professor
35	Charmaine Attard Bezzina	Senior lecturer 2
36	Christian Colombo	Associate Professor
37	Christian Darmanin	Mental Health Officer
38	Christina Agius	Senior Lecturer
39	Claire Abela	Lecturer
40	Claire Azzopardi Lane	Academic
41	Claire Brincat	Lecturer
42	Clara Chetcuti	Senior Research Officer/ Dr
43	Clare Azzopardi	Lecturer
44	Claude Ebejer	president of environmental organisation
45	Claude Mangion	lecturer
46	Claudia Bartolo Tabone	Medical Laboratory Scientist / PhD Student
47	Claudia Borg	Associate Professor
48	Claudia Gauci	Lecturer
49	Claudine Borg	Lecturer

50	Clive Zammit	Senior Lecturer (Retired)
51	Clyde Ellul	IT Team Leader
52	Colin Calleja	Professor - Dean Faculty of Education
53	Conrad Thake	University Professor / Architect
54	Cynthia Debono	Public Health Scientist
55	Daniel Attard	Senior lecturer
56	Daniel Vella	Senior Lecturer
57	Daniela DeBono	Professor
58	Daphne Anne Caligari Conti	Mrs
59	David Aloisio	Academic & Writer
60	David Saliba	Professor
61	David Vella	Lecturer
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63	Deborah Williams	Senior Lecturer
64	Denise Camenzuli	Lecturer
65	Dr Joseph Axiaq	Lecturer
66	Edgar Galea-Curmi	Lecturer
67	Edward Warrington	Professor
68	Elena Deguara	Lecturer
69	Elise Galea	Lecturer
70	Elizabeth Tabone	Retired
71	Elton Grech	Teacher
72	Francesca Spagnol Gravino	Senior lecturer
73	Francesca Tranter	Practitioner lecturer teacher mentor choreographer
74	Francois Mifsud	Senior lecturer
75	Francois Zammit	Doctoral Student
76	Frank Camilleri	lecturer, professor
77	Frank Farrugia	Ing
78	Gabriel Zammit	Curator, writer
79	Gian Paul Gauci	PhD Student
80	Gilbert Calleja	Academic
81	Gilbert Gravino	Medical doctor
82	Gisella Orsini	Lecturer
83	Giselle Mangion	Senior Lecturer
84	Giuseppe Massa	Lecturer
85	Glen Bonnici	Assistant Lecturer.
86	Godfrey Baldacchino	Professor
87	Gordon Calleja	Professor
88	Ġorg Mallia	Professor
89	Greta Ellul Xuereb	Lecturer
90	Ian Falzon	Senior Lecturer
91	Ibtisam Sadegh	Lecturer
92	Immanuel Mifsud	Lecturer & author
93	Isabelle Zammit	Senior Lecturer
94	Ivan Attard	Visiting assistant lecturer
95	Ivan Mifsud Bons	Teacher and Librarian
96	Ivan Riolo	Lecturer
97	Jackson Said	Professor
98	Jacqueline Zammit	Senior lecturer
99	James Bugeja	Senior Teaching Associate
100	James Ciarlo	Researcher, climatologist
101	James Corby	Professor

102	James Decelis	Senior lecturer 2
103	Jasmine Spiteri	PhD candidate
104	Jeanette Borg	Senior Lecturer, MCAST
105	Jeannie Cuomo	Counsellor
106	Jean-Paul De Lucca	Academic
107	Jeremy Coleman	Lecturer
108	Joanne Vella	Counsellor
109	Johann Galdies	Scientist
110	Johann Zarb	Lecturer
111	John Baldacchino	Professor
112	John Paul Cauchi	Senior Lecturer
113	Jonathan Borg	Resident Lecturer
114	Jonathan Sammut	Lecturer
115	Jordan Lee Gauci	Systems Engineer
116	JosAnn Cutajar	lecturer
117	Josef Florian Micallef	Senior Lecturer
118	Joseph A. Bartolo	Ing
119	Joseph Formosa	Lecturer
120	Joseph Gravina	Lecturer
121	Joseph Tanti	Senior Lecturer & Drama Psychotherapist
122	Julia Alegre Mouslim	Educator
123	Julienne Schembri	Dance and Somatics Movement Educator
124	Jurgen R. Gatt	Lecturer
125	Justine Somerville	Assistant lecturer
126	Karen Tanti	Educator
127	Karl Baldacchino	Researcher
128	Karl Cortis	Lecturer
129	Karyn Scerri	RSO
130	Kathrin Schoedel	Associate Professor
131	Katrin Dautel	Senior Lecturer
132	Keith (Kit) Azzopardi	Lecturer
133	Keith Muscat	Mentor
134	Keith Sciberras	Professor
135	Kenneth costantino	Senior Lecturer
136	Kenneth Scicluna	Lecturer
137	Krista Bonello	lecturer
138	Krista Ripard	Learning Support Educator
139	Kristian Zarb Adami	Professor
140	Kristina Borg	Artist, researcher and activist
141	Kristina Christensen	Post-doctoral researcher
142	Kurstin Gatt	Senior lecturer
143	Kurt Micallef	Research Support Officer
144	Kurt Xerri	Lecturer
145	Lara Dimitrijevic	Activist/lawyer
146	Lara Sammut	Resident academic
147	Laura grech	Lecturer
148	Leanne Ellul	Writer, lecturer
149	Lidia Ryabova	Scientific Officer
150	Liliana bartolo	Quality rep
151	Lino Briguglio	Senior Fellow
152	Liza Caruana-Finkel	Researcher
153	Lorleen Farrugia	Lecturer

154	Luca Caruso	PhD Candidate and former RSO2
155	Luke Fenech	Teacher
156	Luke Fiorini	Lecturer
157	Luke J. Buhagiar	Academic
158	Luke Sultana	General Practitioner
159	Malcolm Caligari Conti	Dr Ing
160	Manuel J. Ellul	Former student
161	Marco Galea	Lecturer
162	Margaret Camilleri	Dr
163	Margaret Westby	Lecturer
164	Maria Attard	Professor
165	Maria Frendo	Associate Professor
166	Maria Jourdan	Lecturer
167	Maria Pisani	Professor
168	Mariana Grima	RSO
169	Marie Briguglio	Professor
170	Marie Claire Gatt	Ecologist
171	Mariella Schembri	Lecturer
172	Marija Grech	Lecturer
173	Marija Mangion	Academic
174	Marija Vella	Transcultural Counsellor
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178	Mario Aquilina	Professor
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180	Marisabelle Camilleri	Senior lecturer
181	Mark Sagona	Academic
182	Mark Scerri	Senior Lecturer
183	Mark Theuma	Senior Lecturer
184	Mark Vella	Lecturer
185	Martin Musumeci	Head of Department, Senior Lecturer
186	Martina Haber	PhD candidate
187	Mary Anne Lauri	Professor
188	Mary Grace Vella	Academic
189	Matthew Agius	Lecturer
190	Matthew Mamo	Lecturer
191	Maureen Cole	Lecturer
192	Maurice Said	Senior Lecturer
193	Mauro D'Amato	Senior lecturer
194	Maya d'Ugo	Researcher
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196	Michael Briguglio	Associate Professor
197	Michael Buhagiar	Lecturer
198	Michael Grech	Lecturer
199	Michael Spagnol	Associate Professor
200	Michelle Attard Tonna	Academic
201	Miguel Azzopardi	Research Support Officer
202	Moira Scicluna Zahra	Senior Lecturer
203	Nadia Anastasi	Retired teacher
204	Nadine Sciortino	Lecturer
205	Natalino Fenech	Lecturer

206	Natasha Galea	Lecturer
207	Nathalie Grima	Casual Lecturer and Sociologist
208	Nathan Gatt	Environmental conservationist
209	Nic Quinlan	Hs official
210	Nico Conti	Lecturer
211	Nikki Petroni	Visiting Lecturer
212	Noel Agius	Lecturer
213	Omar N'Shea	Lecturer
214	Oriana Mazzitelli	Postdoc researcher
215	Patrick Attard	Senior Lecturer
216	Patrick Galea	Manager, CEER; Musician
217	Paul Camilleri	Lecturer
218	Paul Herrera	Research Support Officer IV
219	Paul Pace	Professor
220	Paula Guzzanti	Senior Lecturer in Dance Studies
221	Peter Mayo	Professor
222	Phyllisienne Vassallo Gauci	University Lecturer
223	Pierre Schembri Wismayer	Professor
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227	Ranier Bonnici	Lecturer
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235	Robert Buttigieg	Senior lecturer
236	Robert Govus	Lecturer
237	Robert Louis Fenech	Researcher
238	Rose Piccinino	Senior Lecturer
239	Rosienne Farrugia	Associate Professor
240	Ruth Ancilleri	Lecturer
241	Ruth Falzon	Professor
242	Ruth Grech Marguerat	Senior Lecturer
243	Ryan Vella	Researcher, PhD
244	Sandra Portelli	Senior lecturer
245	Sandro Caruana	Professor
246	Sandro Debono	Senior Lecturer
247	Sara Rita Accettura	Assistant lecturer
248	Saviour Bonnici	Expert in Maltese biodiversity
249	Shaun Grech	Affiliate Associate Professor
250	Simone Azzopardi	Lecturer
251	Simone Cutajar	PhD student, Researcher
252	Simone Galea	Lecturer
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254	Stefano Moncada	Professor
255	Stephanie Formosa	Lecturer
256	Stephen Farrugia	Lecturer
257	Thea Lynn Cesare	Dr

258	Theresa Hoban	Lecturer
259	Thomas Dimech	Senior lecturer
260	Timothy George Pace Lupi	Lecturer
261	Valeria Vanesio	Lecturer
262	Veronique Vella	Lecturer
263	Vicki Ann Cremona	Professor
264	Vickie Gauci	Lecturer
265	Victor John Saliba	Lecturer
266	Vincent Caruana	Lecturer
267	Yana Mintoff	Activist and Author