

The journey of Pope John Paul II to Malta: An analysis of his visit to Gozo and its impact on the local community

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HND in Tourist Guiding
(January, 2025)

Abstract

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Programme Level HND in Tourist Guiding	
Research/Project Title The journey of Pope John Paul II to Malta: An analysis of his visit to Gozo and its impact on the local community	
<p>Pope John Paul II's visit to Gozo in 1990 holds a significant place in Malta's religious and cultural history, being considered even as the greatest event in the history of Gozo. His Eucharistic celebration at the Shrine of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu underscored the profound spiritual connection between the Maltese people, their faith, and the Virgin Mary.</p> <p>The Pope's messages during this visit emphasized the importance of family and community solidarity, which resonates deeply with the values of Gozitan society. Furthermore, his acknowledgment of Malta's unique position at the crossroads of European and Mediterranean cultures highlighted the island's potential to influence broader regional dynamics in a post-Cold War era.</p> <p>In order to analyze the course of the visit and to try to capture the atmosphere of those days, the work will be based on available documents such as articles and videos from the time of the visit. Documents that were created later, like articles commemorating the visit, will be used to analyze the mark left by the visit in people's minds. Interviews with representatives of the Church and Gozitan residents will help us answer the question of what influence the Pope's visit had on Gozitan people's view of Poland and Polish people. Interviews with Gozitan individuals will address their personal feelings towards the Pope's visit and his message. Interviews with representatives of the Catholic Church will clarify the impact of the Pope's message on the Catholic community of the island.</p>	
Keywords historical, cultural, religious, solidarity	

Declaration of Authenticity



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Programme : Higher National Diploma in Tourist Guiding

Research Title : The journey of Pope John Paul II to Malta: An analysis of his visit to Gozo and its impact on the local community

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Vincent Zammit

Date

Student's Signature

Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank my husband who has supported me during the course of my studies and my beloved friend Julia Sciberras, who has comforted me with many kind words in moments of weakness or disbelief and was always there to hear my mock presentations and to give me a piece of advice.

Sincere thanks are also due to Tony Sammut who was always eager to share his extensive knowledge with me and was always helpful.

I would also like to give thanks to many skilled teachers whom I met during my studies and who guided me through that journey.



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1. Introduction

Many available sources claim that Pope John Paul II's visit to Gozo in 1990 holds a significant place in Malta's religious and cultural history, being considered even as the greatest event in the history of Gozo (Times of Malta, 2005). His Eucharistic celebration at the Shrine of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu underscored the profound spiritual connection between the Maltese people, their faith, and the Virgin Mary. The Pope's messages during this visit emphasized the importance of family and community solidarity, which resonates deeply with the values of Gozitan society (Vatican, 1990). Furthermore, his acknowledgment of Malta's unique position at the crossroads of European and Mediterranean cultures highlighted the island's potential to influence broader regional dynamics in a post-Cold War era (Aleteia, 2022).

Despite many sources describing the visit and its aftermaths, there are no real academic researches on the impact of the visit on the ordinary Gozitans.

This study seeks to analyze this historic journey, focusing on the Pope's activities and messages during his time in Gozo and their impact on the island's community.

1.1 Research Background

A lot of academic and scholarly works focus on John Paul II and his pontificate. But not many researches were created about his Gozitan experience. The topic seems to be relatively under-researched. There are several press articles, official Vatican documents, a video presenting his arrival to the Mgarr harbor and commemorative initiatives but no research on the impact of the event on the island and its people.

In conversations with local residents, interest in the topic of John Paul II is often expressed and they are all sharing positive feelings towards this pope. In addition, commemorative initiatives were held after the pope's death and even 30 years after the visit, it was recalled in the local media. These are just some of many signs suggesting that the visit and the pontificate is not only remembered but has rooted in the island's identity and ought to be researched.

Yet, the visit itself might be considered as just one of many journeys during the pontificate of the most travelled pope, it was a great event in the recent history of this idyllic island therefore its impact on the local community deserves to be researched.

1.2 Research Aim, Objectives and Question

Research Aim

This study aims to research the impact of Pope John Paul II's visit to Gozo on the island's community, focusing on how the event shaped local beliefs, identity and cultural memory. The author wants to understand if the Pope and his visit influenced Gozitans in any way and if yes, then how deep that influence was.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the Pope's message during the visit.
2. To identify and assess the reactions of the local community to the papal visit.
3. To identify the lasting influence of the visit and Pope's message on Gozitan culture and beliefs.

Research Questions

The central question that author poses is: **What was the impact of Pope John Paul II's visit on Gozo's community, and how has it influenced the island's religious and cultural identity?**

The additional questions are:

1. What were the main messages of Pope John Paul II during his visit?
2. How did the Gozitans feel about the visit and what was their reaction to it both, at that time and in subsequent years?
3. Was the visit remembered and did it influence cultural and religious identity of the island's community?
4. How did the Pope and his visit influence Gozitans' view of Poland and Polish people?

2. Literature Review

Numerous sources, including the Vatican's own records and local Maltese media, highlight the visit's deep spiritual significance. The homily delivered by John Paul II in Gozo emphasized themes of faith, family, and community, resonating strongly with the local community (Aleteia, 2022). The Times of Malta and other local media recount the enthusiasm and warmth with which Gozitans received the Pope, underscoring a shared moment of unity and spiritual renewal (Times of Malta, 2005).

While George Weigel's *Witness to Hope* (1999) does not specifically cover the Pope's visit to Gozo, it provides valuable context for understanding the broader significance of John Paul II's journeys. Weigel portrays these visits as opportunities for the Pope to strengthen Catholic identity globally, with particular attention to smaller, devout communities, like the one in Gozo. His travels were seen as "sacramental moments," reaffirming the faith of local populations and connecting them to the universal mission of the Church.

The context and background of Pope John Paul II's visit to Malta, particularly Gozo, in 1990, are deeply rooted in the island's rich Catholic heritage and its historical connection to St. Paul. The Pope's visit emphasized Malta's longstanding Christian faith, which has thrived for centuries, and highlighted the need for Maltese people to continue demonstrating God's love, as revealed in Jesus Christ, to their neighbors. His warnings about the secularized culture and the "false culture of appearances" reflect his concern for maintaining genuine faith amongst modern societal changes (Aleteia, 2022). Video reportages presenting how the visit looked like. We can see the arrival to Mgarr, and the Pope in the key points during the visit such as mass at Ta' Pinu or meeting with people in Gozo Cathedral. In the reportage from *Ghawdex Illum* we are presented with interviews with people who were involved in the visit, that were recorded both at the time the visit was happening and 30-years later. This is an interesting inside perspective on how the visit was prepared, what are the emotions amongst the ones involved and what difficulties they had to face to make the dream come true (Ghawdex Illum, 2020).

Based on the existing sources, articles, books and video reportages, one can reconstruct the visit, the preparations to it and understand the overall experience. But these sources tend to focus more on the official perspective and telling the history. Based on books such as *Witness to Hope*, we can understand the message of John Paul II's pontificate, the reason for his numerous travels and the meaning of his faith. We can better understand his influence on the Church and the World. However, all of this sources seems to be lacking perspective of ordinary people. With reading books and watching reportages it's rather impossible to understand peoples' feelings and the long lasting impact the Pope and his visit had on them. In order to capture these there is no better method than to talk to the people who has experienced the visits and witnessed the saint Pope travelling through the streets of their home island and holding the mass in the sanctuary.

3. Methodology

This work uses the qualitative research approach in order to analyze the impact of John Paul II's visit to Gozo, basing on a triangulation method. That method combines data from articles, television reportages and interviews. This strategy, based on multiple sources of different types, aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the event and its impact from different perspectives. In this thesis the author is trying to learn about personal experiences, feelings and believes of the local people. Such a non-material object of research seems to be only graspable by interviews and conversations with those who participated in the event.

The selection of articles will be based on their credibility, focusing on reputable sources such as major Maltese newspapers and journals. The search will target articles focused on the Pope's visit to Gozo, its preparation, execution and the long lasting effects of the trip. Data extraction will involve identifying themes related to the visit's impact on the local community, religious practices, and cultural heritage. Relevant television reportages will be sourced from YouTube, specifically uploads of Maltese and Gozitan TV content covering the Pope's visit. The analysis will focus on the visual and narrative portrayal of the visit, public reactions, and any significant events highlighted in the coverage. Attention will be given to the tone, emphasis, and overall narrative constructed by these reportages.

Semi-structured and structured interviews will be conducted with Gozitans who were adults or old enough to remember the visit, who grew up on the island after the visit as well as representatives of the Church in Gozo. These interviews aim to capture personal recollections, perceived impacts, and insights into the visit's significance. The questions will be asked in 1 to 1 semi-structured conversations as well as in form of structured interviews.

3.1 Outline

This research utilize a qualitative research approach using triangulation to explore the impact of Pope John Paul II's visit to Gozo. The research process is structured into the following key stages:

1. Research design:
The qualitative approach, utilizing a triangulation method was chosen to draw data from three primary sources: articles, television reportages and interviews. This choice ensures multi-perspective analysis of a subject that is impossible to be measured by numbers, with quantitative approach, due to its nature as the author is studying people feelings, believes and views.
2. Data Collection:
 - Articles:
Sources such as Maltese leading newspaper and Vatican sources where selected based

on their relevance to the Pope's visit and Gozitans' view on Pope John Paul II. The articles has been studied to extract historical facts, people reactions captured at the time when the events took place and general opinions given by opinion leaders such as journalists and clerk people.

- Television Reportages:

There isn't much of these sources available but those that are were chosen to capture the reaction of the crowd.

- Interviews:

Semi-structured and structured interviews with Gozitans were conducted in person and via email. These interviews are the source of data on personal experiences, feelings and opinions. Interviews took place between October and December of 2024.

3. Criteria for Sample Selection:

- The sample was chosen to provide a diverse and representative set of views and feelings on Pope John Paul II's visit to Gozo. The main focus was on individuals and sources that could provide meaningful data on the event itself and its impact on the local community.
- When it comes to interviews, the target population was Gozitans, people who were raised on the island or were present on the island during the visit and after it. The main focus was on people who were old enough to take part in the event but the opinion of younger representatives was also valuable as they could provide insights into the event's lasting effects that they experienced during their upbringing process. Additionally, articles from newspapers and Vatican documents along with television reportages were used to provide more overall view and complementary data.
- Inclusion criteria for interviews were:
 - o Gozitans who participated in the visit
 - o Gozitans who were brought up in Gozo after the Pope's visit
 - o Participants who agreed on taking part in the interview
 - o Representatives of the Gozitan church
- Exclusion criteria for the interviews were:
 - o Individuals with no memory and no knowledge of the visit and its aftermath
 - o Individuals who were unwilling to share their opinions

All of the participants were informed of the purpose of the interview and consented to taking part in the project. In order to ensure their comfort they were assured that no personal data will be included in the work and that the privacy and confidentiality is guaranteed.

Inclusion criteria for articles and video reportages:

- o Topic of John Paul II's visit to Gozo in 1990
- o Trustworthy sources

Exclusion criteria for articles and video reportages:

- o Related to the pontificate of John Paul II but not related to the his Gozitan experience
- o Unreliable sources or sources with bad reputation

3.2 Ethical considerations

When it comes to ethics a few steps were taken by the author to ensure ethical approach.

1. Each and every interview participant was informed of the purpose of the interview.
2. Each and every participant was asked if they agree on their words to be used for the purpose of this work. In case the consent wasn't given, the interview wasn't held.
3. Taking under consideration different political and religious views of the participants, the author didn't form any questions or statements that could be taken as a judgmental or biased.
4. For the same reason, confidentiality has been guaranteed to the participants, ensuring that their personal data will be anonymized and they won't be traceable.
5. Transparency was also guaranteed, meaning that each and every participant was informed of the topic of the paper, main hypothesis and was free to ask any questions regarding the work, methodology and the sources that has been used in this work.

The above steps taken by the author ensured the ethical approach.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

Pope John Paul II was the first ever Pope to visit Malta and its smaller island, Gozo. It was a long awaited event and a lot of effort has been put into making this dream come true. As Archbishop Mons Gużepi Mercieca recalls it was a dream not only for a regular people from the Island but also for himself. The question "Will the Pope come to Malta?" was often being asked by Maltese and Gozitan people expressing a great will of the nation to bring the leader of the Church to their land. The Archbishop used to encourage the Pope to visit the country, as he recalls himself, multiple times saying to the Pope "Ejja Malta", which means "come to Malta". Although, John Paul II never said "no" it wasn't an easy process as he would respond to the Archbishop with words "Let's wait" accompanied with a friendly gesture. When the dream finally started to transform into reality, the whole nation and the Archbishop himself were extremely happy and the uproar was all over the islands. (Ghawdex Illum, 2020)

The dream came true in May of 1990.

On Tuesday, 26th May 1990, Pope John Paul II departed from Grand Harbour Valletta aboard the vessel SES San Frangisk and set off on his first-ever and only visit to Gozo (Independent, 2020). Arriving at Mgarr, the Pope made his way to Ta' Pinu Sanctuary, where he was greeted by a large crowd at 10 a.m. Inside the sanctuary, the Pope prayed in front of the miraculous painting of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu on his knees. In the sanctuary square, he held a concelebrated Mass accompanied by a

number of Gozitan priests. During the function the Pope gave an inspiring homily about the Virgin Mary and the family. Pope emphasized devotion of the Maltese and Gozitan people and their veneration of Mary and her central role as a protector of families. He urged families to pray together and embrace God's will to build strong, spiritually rooted communities in order to face challenges of modernity, moreover he underlined that families are the cornerstone of the society. The Pope also encouraged Gozitan and Maltese families to look to the Virgin Mary in hard times (Vatican, 1990). After the mass, the Pope blessed the gold stellarium, donated by the rector of the sanctuary, Mgr Benedict Camilleri, and placed it on the painting of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu (Times of Malta, 2005). After the main event in the sanctuary, the Pope visited the Sacred Heart Seminary and spent time with a number of priests and seminarians. As Mons Mario Grech, who was deacon in the time of the visit and had a chance to meet John Paul II in the Seminary, recalls, Pope did not stand out but rather behaved like one of them. An ordinary man from the people. As an example he says that their rector used to be very strict with preparing them for the meal with Pope. He would teach them how to behave and how to handle cutlery but when the meal started, the Pope himself was very relaxed and broke all the rules that they were taught by their rector. This is an example of how the Pope was able to win people over, get along with them and create connections. Even as the head of the Church, he did not exalt himself above those who were taking their first steps on the path of priesthood (Ghawdex Illum, 2020).

As the last place on his itinerary, he visited the Gozo Cathedral, from where, he bid farewell to the inhabitants. The pope then made his way back to Mgarr and then to Malta, leaving the Gozitans with the memory of one of the most remarkable days in the history of the island (Times of Malta, 2005). The visit of Pope John Paul II, a global religious figure, to the small island of Gozo marked a historic event in the local narrative. It underscored Gozo's importance within the Catholic world, bringing unprecedented attention to the island and highlighting its religious significance (Times of Malta, 2020). Reflecting on the warm reception given to Pope John Paul II, it is clear that his motto "Totus Tuus", which means "Totally yours" in Latin, resonated deeply with the Gozitans. It worked well with their devotion to Our Lady of Ta' Pinu. The inspiration for this motto came from the writings of **Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort** who was a French priest and theologian known for his teachings on Marian devotion. In his work *Treatise on True Devotion* Saint Louis-Marie emphasized the idea of surrendering oneself entirely to Mary to grow closer to Christ. John Paul II was deeply touched by this work and adopted *Totus Tuus* as a personal and spiritual motto. Not only the motto helped to create the connection between him and the locals but also the Pope's true affection towards them and his engagement with them during the visit (Times of Malta, 2020).

The Pope's devotion to the Virgin Mary, mirrored in the Gozitan's veneration of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu, created a profound spiritual connection during the visit. This shared admiration of Mary

underscored the visit's religious impact, reinforcing the Marian cult's significance both to the Pope and to the Gozitans (Times of Malta, 2005).

All of the interviewed people admitted the great significance of the papal visit, pointing up that it was an unprecedented event in the history of Gozo. They are also stating that most of the people they know feel the same way and it was a common thing amongst the Gozitans to attend the visit. For those who were old enough to participate in the visit as aware adults, it was an emotional and touching experience. Amongst the numerous positive feelings they are mentioning pride, joy, happiness and the feeling that something special is happening. The representative of the clergy would also mention that the visit was inspiring and that the feeling he felt was reverence. The common feeling for the local community seems to be a sense of appreciation and pride.

The overall experience can be summed up as an exciting and extraordinary event attended by numerous Gozitans and Maltese people. Being part of the enthusiastic crowd, cherishing Pope and waiting for his blessings. Regardless of the inconvenience of seeking for a spot in the crowd people felt the atmosphere of unity and feeling alive all together.

While the descriptions of feelings during the visit and the overall experience are rather in the same tone, the assessment of long-term effects is where the differences could be seen. Some lay people are still very optimistic about the influence of Pope's visit on the local community while others point out that it only really had a deeper impact on those religious ones. The ones who are more enthusiastic about the impact of the visit are naming the unity and feeling of pride that has strengthened amongst the locals in the result of the Pope's journey to Gozo. But even these people are noticing that the effects have weakened with time.

The interesting thing is the view on strengthening the faith. The older generations seem to be more in agreement about the positive influence of the visit on the faith of the community while the younger are more skeptical. The difference might be caused by the fact that the first ones saw the community before, during and after the historical event while the second group grew up after the visit so they only know the past from the tales of their ancestors.

Another difference is noticeable when it comes to assessing the awareness of the visit amongst the representatives of the younger generations. The ones who were adult during the visit tend to be more skeptical in that field and to classify 'the younger' generation as one group. The younger ones on the other hand are dividing that group into different categories, stating that people who grew up in the 90's and early 00's are more likely to seek for the information and are more interested in the visit itself and in Church's matters in general. In opinion of all of the interviewed, the youngest are not interested at all. Most of the interviewees didn't consider Pope's nationality as a factor that was in any way important to the people. They would rather mention that the locals were aware of the fact that John Paul II's was of a Polish nationality, some of them even knew his lay name, Karol Wojtyła, but they didn't consider

that as something that matters. He was seen as a head of Church and a spiritual father of the faithful. Some of the interviewees stated that the visit made them look at Polish people with sympathy. They were also mentioning the Polish Solidarity movement that fought with communism and of which the Pope was a great supporter. That comes as no surprise as the visit happened shortly after the revolution in Poland and the Pope was one of the spiritual fathers of the changes. He is considered as a key character in the fight with the oppressive political system. Yet, his nationality didn't seem to matter to the Gozitans.

The visit instilled a strong sense of community solidarity and pride among the Gozitans. Witnessing such a significant figure celebrating their faith and culture fostered a collective identity and a reinforced sense of community. The Pope's presence and recognition offered the Gozitans a unique moment of shared joy and unity, which has been remembered and cherished in the years that followed. In addition to the profound impact of Pope John Paul II's visit on Gozo, the island commemorates his influence with two statues, serving as enduring symbols of his legacy. These statues not only represent the Pope's significant role in Gozitan religious life but also stand as testaments to the deep connection forged during his visit.

It is important to note that even though the Pope's Polish nationality has awakened warm feelings towards his compatriots among some Gozitans, it was not a universal feeling. Only some of the interviewees stated that John Paul II's Polish roots has influenced their feelings towards Poland and the Polish community. Others mentioned that the visit had no significant influence on the Gozitans' view of Poland and Polish people. This distinction highlights the diverse perspectives within the community regarding the broader cultural and international impact of his pontificate.

5. Final Arguments

Based on the available sources and the interviews conducted with Gozitans it's fair to say that the John Paul II's visit to Gozo in 1990 marked an important event in the island's history. However the long lasting impact on the community might not be clearly visible for the members of that community, it is important to notice that the event is still remembered and reportages and articles commemorating it were created even 30 years after it happened. The people of Gozo erected two statues of the Pope in important locations in order to pay homage to him, right after the visit and after his death. That emphasizes the importance of the John Paul II to the community. In the conducted interviews they expressed opinion that this was their favorite pope.

Feelings accompanying the community during the visit can be described as joy, pride, feeling of being important and being noticed along with the sense of unity amongst the residents of the island. Everyone felt like they are taking part in a historical moment of a great importance to themselves and their island. The moment that would be marked in the history. Even though the enthusiasm has declined with time and the impact on the religiosity of people maintained mostly among those very dedicated to God it seems like the Pope's visit left indelible mark on the Gozitan heritage.

What the pope left to the people of Gozo was not only the feeling of pride and importance but also his deep spiritual message. The teaching about the importance and the central role of family, about facing the challenges of modernity and about dedication to the Virgin Mary was warmly accepted by the people. What pope said was something that was already rooted in the Gozitan heritage and in the souls of people living on that small island. That commonality of opinions enhanced the connection between the people and the pope.

John Paul II's nationality seems to had little to no influence on Gozitans view on Poland and Poles. No sources are actually mentioning about it and from the interviews we can understand that the local community was aware of the recent events in Poland at that time and they were aware of the Popes nationality. However that didn't really influenced their views in a significant way.

5.1 Conclusions

The visit of Pope John Paul II to Gozo in 1990 was an important moment in the island's history that has left an indelible mark on its community, culture, and religious life. In this work, the author looked into the impact of the visit showing how it not only influenced the religious devotion and cultural identity of Gozo but also created a unique bond between the island and the Pope. The warm reception of John Paul II, strongly related to his message expressed with his "Totus Tuus" motto, the veneration of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu and emphasizing the role of family, showed the common spiritual values shared by Pope and the Gozitans.

The Pope's visit brought a sense of pride an importance to the Gozitans. This feeling has stayed with the people even after many years. The event sparked the feeling of unity and joy and at the time making the whole community feel special and seen.

In conclusion, Pope John Paul II's journey to Gozo was not only the religious function but it evolved into a landmark event that celebrated and enriched the island's religious and cultural heritage, while nurturing a sense of community that resonates with the Gozitans to this day.

5.2 Recommendations

Further research might be conducted focusing on the relation of religion and political views of the interviewees to their answers and feelings about the pope's visit and its long lasting impact. Another point to add would be more interviews with higher level representatives of Maltese Church as well as interviews with the youngest generation of Gozitans, young adults and teenagers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 : Interviews

Joseph – 65 years old – structured interview

1. **Did you attend John Paul II’s visit to Gozo in 1990?**
 - Yes, I did.
2. **What were your feelings during the visit?** *(If you answered "yes" to question 1.)*
 - Well, it was a huge event. One of the biggest events I remember in Gozo. The Pope came to us for the first time so everyone wanted to see him. I felt like something special is happening.
3. **How would you describe your overall experience during that visit?** *(If you answered "yes" to question 1.)*
 - I went to Ta Pinu to see him. It was me, my wife and our son he was 3 years old at that time. I remember that were a lot of people there, everyone was there.
4. **How do you think the visit influenced the Gozitan people? Did it have any lasting impact on the community?**

- It's hard to say. People remember that visit, they put monuments for the Pope, one in the citadel and one in Victoria near the street to Ta' Pinu. They for sure like him more than the other Popes.
5. **Do you think John Paul II's visit strengthened the religious faith of Gozitans? Why or why not?**
 - For those religious, I think yes. He came to visit us as the first Pope so that make people fell more important and seen by the head of the Church.
 6. **Do you think younger generations in Gozo are aware of the visit and its significance?**
 - I don't know, you need to ask someone from younger generation.
 7. **Do you think John Paul II's visit influenced Gozitans' views of Polish people?**
 - Not really, we just knew he was the Polish Pope but that's it. We heard about the Solidarity movement in the 80's and we knew that Pope is from Poland but that's mostly about it.

Regina – 58 years old – structured interview

1. Did you attend John Paul II's visit to Gozo in 1990?
Yes, I did. It was a big moment for me, and I couldn't miss it.
2. **What were your feelings during the visit?**
I felt very emotional. I was happy, proud, and even a bit nervous because it was such a special event. Seeing the Pope in person was something I'll never forget. I also attended the Pope Francis's visit to Gozo but it didn't feel the same.
3. **How would you describe your overall experience during that visit?**
It was amazing. There were so many people, and everyone was excited but also respectful. The whole island felt alive. It felt like something really important was happening, and I was proud to be there.
4. **How do you think the visit influenced the Gozitan people? Did it have any lasting impact on the community?**
It really brought people together, even if only for a bit. Everyone felt a bond. There was a strong sense of hope and joy. That feeling didn't last long, but those who experienced it remember it as something special.
5. **Do you think John Paul II's visit strengthened the religious faith of Gozitans? Why or why not?**
Yes, I think it did for many. The Pope was very inspiring, and his words touched people. Even those who weren't very religious felt something special that day. Of course, over time, some people went back to their normal ways, but the memory of the visit stayed.
6. **Do you think younger generations in Gozo are aware of the visit and its significance?**
Not really. Some might know about it from school or their families, but I don't think they understand how important it was. For us who were there, it was unforgettable, but for them, it's just history.
7. **Do you think John Paul II's visit influenced Gozitans' views of Polish people?**
Yes, I think so. Before the visit, we didn't know much about Poland or Polish people. Afterward, we saw them in a good way because the Pope was Polish, and we admired him so much. It made us think more about their country and their struggles. I remember that the visit happened

about the time when there was a revolution in Poland where they were fighting against communist government.

Mario – 62 years old – structured interview – priest

1. **Did you attend John Paul II's visit to Gozo in 1990?**

Yes, as a young priest, it was a deeply moving and unforgettable moment for me.

2. **What were your feelings during the visit?**

I was overwhelmed with joy and reverence. Seeing the Pope, a man of such faith and leadership, was incredibly inspiring. It felt like a blessing not just for me personally but for all of Gozo. We waited for the visit for a long time and when it finally happened it was amazing.

3. **How would you describe your overall experience during that visit?**

It was really special. Participating in a Mass with John Paul II and thousands of people was like nothing I had ever seen. The energy was amazing. Everyone felt united and deeply devoted. It made me feel closer to my community and to God.

4. **How do you think the visit influenced the Gozitan people? Did it have any lasting impact on the community?**

The visit really brought everyone in Gozo together. It reminded people how strong their faith is and why it's important to live by it every day. Not everyone might feel that excitement now, but I believe the memory of the visit still unites people. Its message stays in our hearts.

5. **Do you think John Paul II's visit strengthened the religious faith of Gozitans? Why or why not?**

Yeah, I think it really did. The Pope showed up and talked right to everyone. He focused a lot on family and its role. He told people to keep their faith, even when things get tough. For many, it was a fresh start. I've seen more people come to Mass and join in parish events in the months since he visited.

6. **Do you think younger generations in Gozo are aware of the visit and its significance?**

Some people remember, but it's not enough. We all need to help keep the memory alive. It's important to teach our kids why it matters to Gozo.

7. **Do you think John Paul II's visit influenced Gozitans' views of Polish people?**

Before he became the Pope, his name was Karol Wojtyła. Most people saw John Paul II as the head of the Church and a spiritual leader. Not many focused on his Polish heritage. Sure, those who knew more about him were aware he was Polish, but being the Pope was what mattered most to many. Still, knowing about his background made us feel a bit more connected to Poland and its people. Learning about his struggles under communism and his love for his homeland made us admire Poland even more. It didn't really change everything, but it definitely left a good impression.

Anthony – 31 years old – semi-structured interview

1. **Do you think that it was an important visit? How do you think the visit influenced the Gozitan people? Did it have any lasting impact on the community?**

- Yes, the visit was important as the Maltese islands are very religious (or actually maybe more like were very religious)

2. **Do you think John Paul II's visit strengthened the religious faith of Gozitans? Why or why not?**

- I don't really think so. In my opinion the Church is losing the fighting battle. It's a shame but people are not as interested in the religion as they used to be. At least the younger ones.
3. **Do you think younger generations in Gozo are aware of the visit and its significance?**
- Yes, they are aware of it. People from the generation that is now between 30 and 40 years old are still interested in Church matters and faith. Not as many of them as in the generation of our parents and grandparents but they would ask the older ones how it was to see the Pope visiting the island for the first time and so on. The younger are not interested at all. They know that the visit has taken place but they're drifting away from the Church and religion.
4. **What is the reason for the younger people to stay away from the Church in your opinion?**
- I think that Church for them is just not attractive and they don't fear the devil and hell anymore. Maybe they'll start to be more religious when they will be getting closer to the end of their lives.
5. **Do you think John Paul II's visit influenced Gozitans' views of Polish people?**
- No, I don't think that the visit did something in that matter at all. We do know that Pope was Polish so when you meet someone from Poland you may think like "Oh that's where the Pope came from" but it didn't really brought any interest of Poland to the Gozitans. I believe that flights to Kraków and trips to Zakopane did more in that topic than the Pope's visit (laugh).