

Opening Ceremony from the Non-Binary Day Exhibition hosted by the LGBTI+ Gozo organisations



Gender Neutral bathroom sign in the Ministry of Gozo



Early on, I was confronted by the similarities Gozo has to my own country, Ireland, both places with strong Catholic values while also boasting forward-thinking legislation on LGBTIQ+ issues. As a young queer person who grew up Catholic, I was eager to explore how young people navigate their identities in predominantly Catholic Gozitan society. Was it possible that these two opposing cultures could coexist in harmony? Did the young people of Gozo feel comfortable exploring their sexuality and identity here? Or did the societal Catholic norms and apparent consensus to conform to tradition inhibit young people from exploring their individuality?

My research question focused on how young people navigate self-expression and explore identity and sexuality in a Catholic society where traditional values and conservatism are of significance. I broke my target groups up into three different categories: the Church, LGBTI+ youth and Catholic youth. I structured the Church aspect of my research around talking to Catholic youth leaders and attending morning mass regularly in my local town, Xlendi. From going regularly to mass and chatting with the local priest and mass goes afterwards, I could observe the importance of faith and religious services to the people of Xlendi. I also established connections with the LGBTI+ Gozo organisation who gave me a completely different view of youth and community on Gozo. Additionally, through word of mouth I met with some Gozitan young people, who offered a more general perspective on youth culture on Gozo, aside from the LGBT youth experience. I was surprised to realize the similarities in how both the Church and the LGBTI+ Gozo organisation offered a sense of belonging and community which was particularly valued during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

A turning point in my research was when LGBTI+ Gozo invited me along to the opening ceremony of their Non-Binary Day Photo Exhibition. The exhibition focused on the private life stories of two young non-binary Gozitans and was a testament to the powerful efforts and cooperation of the LGBTI+ organisation. It was striking how these individuals could show the rawness of their life experiences for the public eye to see. The Minister of Gozo opened the exhibition and his presence was symbolic of recognition in the wider Gozitan community.

My lasting insight is that Gozo is presently changing and opening as the conservative meets with the contemporary, while also simultaneously maintaining a strong sense of community and tradition.

Photo taken with Elena, (a local who I met through mutual friends) after a casual interview and lunch together.



Xlendi parish church where I attended mass almost every morning and sometimes evenings too!



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Catholicism and Youth Identity