

The Second Generation in Australia

A survey of Maltese-background persons

Maurice N. Cauchi



Maltese Community Council of Victoria, Inc.

April 2014

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those organisations and individuals, in particular, the editors of *The Voice of the Maltese* and other community newsletters, who helped in disseminating the survey questionnaires.

To Edwin Borg-Manché my thanks for helping to organise a user-friendly version of the questionnaire, setting up the online version and disseminating it electronically.

I also thank members of the ethnic radio stations, and particularly Marlene Galea Scicluna for their help in disseminating information about this project on radio.

Maurice N. Cauchi

© copyright 2014 Maurice Cauchi. All rights reserved.

Note:

Copies of this report may be downloaded from: <http://mauricecauchi.wordpress.com>
and from the MCCV website <http://www.mccv.org.au>



Maltese Community Council of Victoria, Inc.

(Inc. No. A1737) A.B.N. 66 736475 892

477 Royal Parade, Parkville, Victoria 3052, Australia

Telephone (03) 9387 8922 Facsimile (03) 9387 8309

Website: <http://www.mccv.org.au>

Email Address: admin@mccv.org.au

Content

Survey findings summary	3
Introduction	4
Structure of the survey questions	4
Characteristics of the second generation	5
1. Age distribution.....	5
2. Gender distribution.....	5
3. Family constitution.....	5
4. Ethnicity	6
5. Religion.....	6
6. Maltese language maintenance.....	6
7. Interest in politics among Maltese of the second generation.....	7
8. Membership of Maltese associations	8
9. Passports	9
10. Relations with other nationalities.....	9
11. Level of education achieved.....	10
12. Links with Malta: Visiting Malta	11
13. Links with Malta: Communications.....	11
Comments by participants.....	12
A. Culture and heritage	12
B. Language maintenance.....	13
C. Facilities to learn Maltese.....	13
D. Ethnicity.....	14
E. Visiting Malta	14
F. Assistance from Malta	15
G. What needs to be done by the community.....	15
H. Some conclusions from respondents' comments	16
Further reading.....	16

Survey findings summary

The following is a summary of the major findings from this survey, involving over 200 participants:

- The second and subsequent generation of Maltese-background persons in Australia totals 163,990 (Census 2011).
- The majority (65%) are under the age of 50, with a few (13%) over the age of 60 years.
- There were a calculated 1.24 child per participant. Most families had 2 children. Single individuals with children amounted to nearly 7%.
- The majority (66%) described themselves as 'Maltese/Australians' and another 11% as 'Maltese', with 23% defining themselves simply as 'Australians'.
- The majority (77%) considered themselves 'Catholic', but only a third (37%) attended church regularly on Sundays. Half of the children were said to have the same religious orientation as their parents.
- Half of the participants (57%) claimed to be able to understand Maltese at least moderately well, but only 21% use it to speak to parents or friends. The majority (69%) stated that they never speak in Maltese to their children.
- About one-fifth (21%) stated that they keep themselves informed about Maltese politics and 39% stated that they kept themselves informed about European politics. Over 40% stated that they would be interested in voting in elections if facilities (e.g. postal voting) were made available.
- A small minority (20%) stated that they were members of Maltese associations, but only 6% of these were under 40 years of age.
- A considerable proportion (31%) had a Maltese passport and another 30% were considering applying for one.
- Their relations with other ethnic groups varied considerably. Only a small minority (2-3%) indicated feelings of antagonism to persons who were either of Maltese, Australian or Mediterranean origin. On the other hand there was a higher level of antipathy towards persons of Asian (17%) or Muslim (28%) background.
- The proportion of participants with a tertiary qualification reached 58%.
- The majority (82%) stated that they had visited Malta several times, and only a very small number (10%) had never been to Malta.
- The majority do not listen to local Maltese radio or SBS television. About half of the participants (45%) stated that they kept in touch with Malta news through internet.

Introduction

We are all clear who constitutes the *first generation*. Data, particularly census data, are quite clear about this, defined as *those who were born overseas*.

On the other hand, in countries like Australia, it is already difficult to give precise details about the size of the second generation, and even more so in relation to subsequent generations.

As regards the first generation, the latest census (2011) in Australia makes it clear that there are currently 41,274 persons born in Malta (first generation). This has shrunk from the high water mark of several years ago (when it had reached over 56,000 at its peak).

One can calculate the rate of decline over the years and this has now reached a rate of one per cent per year. This rate is of course expected to rise quite sharply in the coming decade resulting from the rapidly increasing age of the current population.

More relevant to this survey is the number of persons belonging to the second and subsequent generations in Australia. According to the 2011 census, these are the numbers in question:

a. Both parents born overseas:	85,822
b. Father only born overseas:	21,150
c. Mother only born overseas:	11,254
d. Both parents born in Australia:	42,602
e. Parents birthplace not stated:	3,162
f. Total	163,990

From these statistics it should be noted that nearly 43,000 of these were born to parents who were themselves born in Australia (ie they belong to the third generation).

Structure of the survey questions

The aim of the survey is to obtain information about the following parameters:

- a. Average age of participants, gender, marital status, and occupation,
- b. Gender distribution,
- c. Level of education achieved,
- d. Knowledge of Maltese language,
- e. Use of Maltese language for communication with family and friends,, especially with their own children,
- f. Whether they belong to any Maltese Association
- g. Ethnicity: whether they consider themselves as Maltese, Australian or Maltese-Australian,
- h. Citizenship: whether they possess a Maltese passport, and if not, whether they intend to apply for one,
- i. Degree of intermarriage,
- j. Number of children in the family,
- k. Contact with Malta: how often they visited Malta, and their impressions thereof,
- l. Interest in Australian politics and union affairs,
- m. Interest in Maltese and European politics and whether they would vote if this were possible,
- n. Religious affiliation of participants, their partners and their children,
- o. Whether they listen to Maltese programs on radio or SBS television,
- p. Whether they keep contact with Maltese media
- q. Finally, an attempt was made to assess relationships with other ethnic groups.

Participants were also given the opportunity to highlight any particular issue which was not covered in the above questionnaire.

Over 200 responses were received and analysed. The following is the result of this analysis.

Characteristics of the second generation

According to the information gleaned from this survey, and bearing in mind the reservations on this and similar surveys (discussed below), we can make the following conclusions:

1. Age distribution

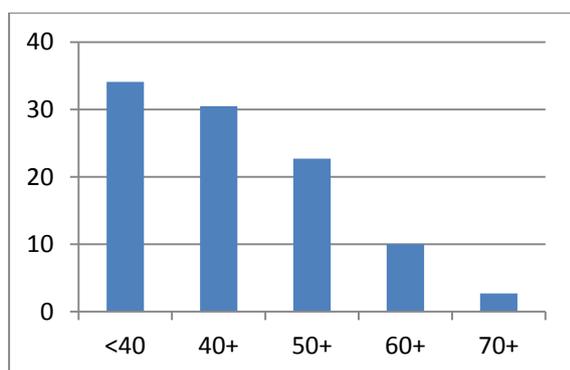


Figure 1: Proportion of participants within the age bracket indicated

The graph in Fig 1 shows that

- Two-thirds (65 percent) were below the age of 50, and 34% were below age 40 years
- There is a significant number aged over 60 (12.7%)

2. Gender distribution

There were slightly more female participants compared to males in the ratio (F:M ratio = 1.22)

3. Family constitution

In this survey it was found that the majority (63%) were married and another 9% had a de facto relationship. Another 28% stated that they were single. It should be noted that the survey did not enquire into the age of these persons.

There has been a complete change in the constitution of the family in the second generation compared to the first. The vast majority of the first generation was constituted of a couple, both of whom (for most couples) were of Maltese background, speaking Maltese to each other and to their friends, who often were also Maltese.

In this survey it was found that there has been a marked shift, with the majority of persons of Maltese background (60.4%) had a partner s of Australian or background. Another 13.4% had a partner of non-Maltese background (Italian, Polish, etc.). Less than one-third of persons of Maltese background (26.2%) had a partner of Maltese background.

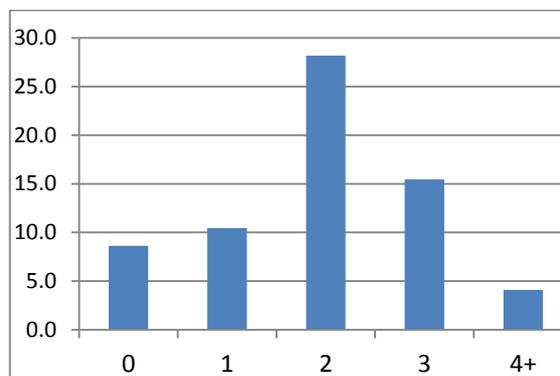


Figure 2: The proportion of participants having the indicated number of children (0 to 4 or more)

The total number of children from participants in this study was 273. This resulted in an average of only 1.24 per participant (per family).

This is not directly comparable to the total fertility rate as usually defined, because it is calculated as the proportion of the number of children per participant. However, as an indication of fertility rates, in Australia the total fertility rate is 1.88 (Australian Bureau of Statistics), while the total fertility rate per woman in Malta is 1.38, and in most countries in Europe it is well below 2.¹

The modal number of children per participant (ie per family) was 2. Very few had four or more children. The number of participants who had no children was less than 10%.

Of total participants, 10.5 % had 1 child, 28.2 % had two children; 15.5% had three children, and 4.1% had four or more children.

The proportion of single parents with children was 6.8%.

¹ Eurostat 2011

4. Ethnicity

Being born and bred in a foreign country is bound to impact on one's understanding and assessment of one's ethnicity. In the early days of settlement, particularly in the immediate post-WW2 period, not many Maltese migrants, and still less their kids would have thought of themselves as 'Australians', or even as Maltese-Australians.

It was, therefore, pertinent to ask whether, with the passing of the years and with changing concepts about multiculturalism in particular, their assessment of their own ethnicity has changed in any way. This aspect has been emphasised in the recent censuses in Australia which ask questions as to what ethnic groups one considers oneself to belong to.

Perhaps the most fundamental issue is whether these persons consider themselves Maltese or otherwise.

A surprising majority of respondents (77 per cent) defined their ethnicity as either 'Maltese/Australian' (66 per cent), or simply as 'Maltese' (11.3 per cent), with 22.6 per cent considering themselves as 'Australian'.

It is interesting to note that very few of the participants actually think of themselves primarily as Maltese and these are largely the older members of the community.

Of interest also is the substantial number of participants (over one-fifth of the total) who consider themselves as unhyphenated 'Australians'. On the one hand, this would indicate that they have integrated completely within society, but on the other, it might imply that they have lost completely their interest in their culture and may or may not be interested in any contact with the mother country. These issues were not investigated further in this survey.

5. Religion

Several census statistics in the past have indicated that the original settlers coming from Malta, like the ones they left behind were staunchly Catholic, and regular Sunday church goers. As is very obvious, the link with one's religion has now become very tenuous, and

more and more of the younger generation have ceased identifying themselves as Catholic.

In this study, 77 per cent of respondents who chose to answer this rather personal question considered themselves Catholic. But when asked about their religious practice, only just over one-third (37%) stated that they go to church regularly on Sundays, several other (40%) indicated that they go to church only on special occasions (Christmas, Easter, weddings, baptisms). Others preferred not to answer the question.

Intermarriage is also a factor in reducing church attendance and loss of one's religious beliefs if these are not shared by a spouse or partner. Half of the number of respondents stated that their partner did not have the same religious background as themselves (50 per cent).

Perhaps of more significance is the religious orientation of their children. Again about half of the children (52%) of these couples were said to have the same religion as themselves.

This is a world-wide trend, and not peculiar to Maltese-background persons outside Malta. For comparison, in Malta itself, the proportion of persons attending church regularly has fallen to 51 per cent by 2005.²

6. Maltese language maintenance

One might ask: why do those who have decided to reside permanently in a foreign land bother to keep alive their mother language?

The answer is complex. Certainly those who depart do not thereby cease to be Maltese, and being Maltese normally implies an ability to communicate with others of the same background.

But a more deep and complex reason is the fact that a language encapsulates an identity, and loss of language often is associated with a loss of culture. Many of those who reside overseas still speak their original language because of the emotional links that this entails. Ask any group of migrants from any one locality what language they prefer to speak (assuming they can speak several), they would opt for the one

² <http://www.discern-malta.org/research.html>

which they learned from their mother's mouth. Hence the popularity of clubs where Maltese could congregate and speak their language.

There are also emotional needs best subserved by the original language, and no other language, especially if learned rather late in life, is capable of replacing.

It is, therefore, of interest to enquire about the situation relating to language maintenance among the second generation of Maltese living abroad.

The participants of this survey of persons of the second generation have been born and bred under influences quite different from those existing in Malta. These individuals have gone through schooling and have interacted with others of the same age, and have acquired a persona which is almost identical with that of the average native born person in Australia.

The degree of fluency in Maltese by these individuals was investigated, to see to what extent they have maintained command of the language which to them must be considered foreign if not completely useless, or at most, useful only to communicate with ageing grandparents who have now practically lost any command of the English language which they once had.

The survey indicates that just over half of all persons (57%) in the 2nd generation claim to be able to understand Maltese well or moderately well. However, they do not seem to be using this language regularly. Only 21 % admit to speaking Maltese to parents or friends.

As mentioned above, intermarriage occurs at a relatively high rate among persons of the second generation, and this has a determining effect on language maintenance. It is very difficult to maintain the Maltese language when one's spouse has a different language. This drawback can be seen at any function where a mixed audience is present – not an unusual situation at gatherings, parties, homes with mixed marriages, or at more formal occasions – where courtesy demands that the common language (English) is used.

Such mixed marriages are expected to have a disastrous effect on language maintenance. The result of this *miscegenation* (the mixing of

different racial groups through marriage) on top of a rather small base of Maltese second generation speakers, results in a dramatic effect on language maintenance by children of the second generation (ie third generation). Just over two-thirds (69.1%) of respondents stated that they never speak to their children in Maltese, and only 2.3% per cent say that they speak in Maltese frequently to their children frequently.

In rare circumstances, parents may decide to use both parental languages (in addition to the common English language), but this is the exception.

It can be readily deduced from these data that maintenance of language under these conditions, which is already stretched in the second generation, is likely to be extremely precarious in the third.

It must be admitted that no specific survey has been conducted to determine whether children of the third generation can understand any Maltese at all, and if they do, whether, in practice, they use the language with any frequency.

Considerable efforts have been made, and are being made, by community leaders and other organisations to encourage the teaching of Maltese, to ensure that it remains a viable language. A more energetic approach would involve convincing the second generation (which currently exceeds the first in a ratio of 4 to 1) of the importance of language maintenance.

7. Interest in politics among Maltese of the second generation³

It has often been taken for granted that Maltese who left the Maltese islands a couple of generations ago would not be interested in either local politics in their adopted homeland, and still less in politics in Malta. And if this is true for the first generation, one would have expected that it might even more so in the

³ See also: Cauchi M.N., 'Maltese politics from afar', *The Sunday Times*, January 30, 2014

subsequent generations of Maltese born overseas of Maltese background.

Persons from the second generation would be expected to be more interested in issues in Malta and overseas, partly as a result of better education, resulting in better economic and social conditions. The availability of Maltese citizenship which opens a gate into Europe would be another attraction. One has to bear in mind that the second and subsequent generations constitute about four-fifths of the total Maltese-background persons in Australia, and are still growing (as shown in the latest census, 2011).

We cannot therefore assume that the political involvement of these persons would reflect those of their parents and grandparents.

Studies relating to the Second Generation Maltese-background persons overseas are quite limited. (See, for instance, *Maltese Background Youth*, by M Cauchi, H Borland and R Adams, published by Victoria University, 1999).

In view of this lacuna in our knowledge about the views of the 2nd generation Maltese-background persons in Australia, it is of interest to obtain, among other things, more information about the views of persons of Maltese background about their interest and involvement in politics in Malta and in Europe.

One question was meant to assess their interest and involvement in local politics in Australia. While just over half of the respondents (56.2 per cent) stated that they were interested in Australian political news, only a very small minority (8.8 per cent) were actually personally involved. Of interest is that about one-fifth (22.6 per cent) of respondents were actually involved in union matters.

Of more relevance to the Malta scene is the interest shown by these respondents about the situation in Malta. About one-fifth of respondents (21.2 per cent) stated that they kept themselves informed about the political situation in Malta. Moreover, a larger proportion (39.2 percent) stated that they were informed about conditions in Europe.

Questions were also asked about their views as to whether they would be interested in becoming involved in a postal vote for elections

to parliament if such a thing was available. It was rather surprising to note that just under half of the respondents (41 per cent) stated that they would be interested in voting in elections for members of parliament in Malta and also for members of the European parliament (44.7 per cent).

It is not is not claimed that this is necessarily representative of the whole community in Australia. However, if these trends are confirmed, they would imply that there is definitely an active interest by Maltese living abroad in being involved in the election processes in Malta and Europe.

8. Membership of Maltese associations

When migrants first came to Australia, one prominent requirement was the necessity to interact with fellow Maltese, who could speak the same language, and who could share the same experiences. Practically every sizeable collection of Maltese would form an association, often named after the location in Malta from where they came, or the village titular saint whose feast day they would celebrate every year.

Hence the mushrooming of associations all over the major cities in Australia. The strength of membership varied for several dozen to several hundred.

This need to congregate, while still present to this day, was certainly much more urgent in the heyday when migration was at its peak in the 1950s and 1960s. As the aging process continues to take its toll, the number of associations with large numbers of members has understandably diminished, often necessitating changing their name to 'senior citizen' clubs, but dinner dances are still held for those who enjoy shaking a leg, and more importantly chat the evening away.

The same cannot be said about members of the second generation. Only a fifth (20.5%) of respondents stated that they belonged to a Maltese association.

More tellingly, the majority of these were in the age group of 50 and over, and only 6 percent of all respondents under the age of 40 stated that they were members of associations.

It is clear from these data that younger persons are not interested in Maltese organisations. They do not want to mingle with the 'oldies'. Dinner dances or outings which were so popular with their elders hold no attraction to them.

A second result of these changes of habit is the difficulty of identifying and reaching out to this group of Maltese. All the standard methods that have been used in the past to contact these persons have not been successful in bringing in the members of the second generation. (See also Section 13 below on communications).

One optimistic development of recent years is the setting up of a couple of organisations which cater for persons of Maltese-background, organising ethnically flavoured gatherings (cooking competitions, etc.) There is also the occasional jamboree where a popular DJ gives a performance with Maltese-orientation and flavour, and this can attract several hundred participants.

9. Passports

A major indicator of ethnicity is citizenship. There was a time when one could not hold citizenship of more than one country. Many persons of the first generation had to make the painful decision of losing their Maltese citizenship if they applied for an Australian one.⁴

Luckily, this situation has now changed completely, with Australia now recognising dual citizenships, and with Malta declaring that those who had Maltese citizenship (the first generation) never in effect lost it when they applied for other citizenships.

More recently dramatic changes have occurred which have extended Maltese citizenship to anyone who in effect could show direct connection with Maltese parentage. In effect, as long as there had been no interruption of the blood line, one was considered automatically to

have the right to apply for recognition as a Maltese citizen.

In this respect it was of interest to see how many Maltese-background persons have taken up this option of applying for a Maltese passport.

From this survey it appears that just under one-third (31%) of participants actually had a Maltese passport. About an equal number (30%) stated that they did not have one, but were considering applying for one.

One could speculate as to what this would mean if applied to all potential persons of the second generation.

If this latter datum was translated to apply to all persons who were stated in the census to have a Maltese ethnicity (stated to be 110,000 in the 2006 census), then one could expect that there are some 30,000 persons in Australia who might be applying for a Maltese passport sometime in the future.

If one were to extrapolate these figures to include all Maltese on a world-wide basis (where it is calculated that there are as many as an estimated 300,000 Maltese-background persons)⁵, then one could end up with a figure of 100,000 who might be interested in obtaining a Maltese passport.

10. Relations with other nationalities

In any society where there is a considerable variety of ethnic groups, there is bound to be preferences and antipathies between the various groups. Even when Australia had a 'White Australia policy', there was plenty of rivalry and division between say protestants and catholic, and antagonistic feelings towards Asians (the so called 'yellow peril'), aborigines etc.

With the introduction of the concept of multiculturalism, largely the initiative of the Whitlam government in 1973, a serious attempt was made not only to provide a mechanism for a slow integration process, but also to educate

⁴ For further details relating to citizenship, see Cauchi M.N.: *Under one Umbrella: A history of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria, 1958-2008*. MCCV 2009, p 238-242

⁵ See Borg-Manché, Edwin: Federation of Maltese Living Abroad (FMLA) website page at <http://malteseabroad.org/index.php/diaspora>

the general public about the value of migrant intake in a country like Australia, with vast empty spaces and perceived problems with under-population.

In this survey, an attempt was made to quantify the degree of latent racism within the community. Respondents were asked to classify their relationship with persons of other ethnic groups, answering the question: "How close are you prepared to be with any of the following persons?", by ticking a box labelled '1' (most close), to '5' least close. A low score would thus indicate a close relationship, while a high score would indicate a less close relationship.

It turned out that respondents gave a score or around 2 (varying from 2.3 to 2.5) when dealing with persons of Maltese, Australian or Mediterranean nationality. On the other hand they gave a score of 3.6 to describe their closeness of their relationships with Asians, and a score as high as 4.4 to characterise their relationships with Muslims.

Another way of looking at this issue is to determine the proportion of participants who gave a score or '4' or '5' (indicating strong antipathy) to specific ethnic groups. Only a very small proportion of participants gave a score of '4' or '5' in relation to closeness to Maltese or Australians (1.4 and 0.9 per cent respectively), indicating quite close relations (as expected). Relationships with other persons of Mediterranean origin were also quite close (with only 2.8 % per cent of participants giving them a high score on this scale.). On the other hand there was a much high proportion of participants indicating antipathy towards Asians (17.1 per cent) and many more (27.6 per cent) towards Muslims .

This seems to indicate that there is a definite perceived scale of relationships in the Maltese community, with participants considering themselves to be much closer with those who come from certain backgrounds, (Maltese, Australian or Mediterranean) and a considerable degree of antagonism against those belonging to other backgrounds (Asians and particularly Muslims).

While this might reflect a certain degree of latent antagonism, there is relatively little evidence that this has resulted in overt racist

action. There have never been any reports in the press of racially-motivated actions by Maltese against other ethnic groups

The marked effect of a strong multicultural policy practiced in Australia since the 1970s under the Whitlam government and continued under the Fraser Government has certainly established Australia as a multicultural community. It is disturbing, however, that the same cannot be said with confidence about the current Abbot government where remnants of anti-multiculturalism have reared their ugly heads once more.

It is of interest to compare these findings with the situation in Malta at the present. In a recent survey carried out among 400 University students, conducted by the University Student's Council⁶, it was stated that more than one-third of students were not willing to share their campus with irregular immigrants, and forty per cent stated that they were not comfortable living in the same street. More significantly perhaps, one-in-five students were against giving migrants opportunities for work, even if they had valid work permits. This attitude is particularly worry seeing that university students are expected to have more liberal views than the average person within society, and, moreover, they are expected to be the future leaders of the country. When such a large proportion of them have such extreme views must indeed be very worrying development.

11. Level of education achieved

One major issue that haunted educationalists in the early days of migration (1950s and 60s) was the very high rate of loss of students when they reached year 10 (Form 4) of secondary schooling, associated with a large proportion of students who did not complete school-leaving certificate, let alone participate in tertiary education. The situation was particularly marked among Maltese students, who preferred to take up an apprenticeship. The result was that Maltese students had one of the lowest participation in tertiary education, compensated

⁶ *Times of Malta*, Saturday, March 22, 2014

for by one of the highest rate of participation in apprenticeships.⁷

For the sake of comparison, it is of interest to note that the proportion of persons who obtained a university education in Malta itself in the 1950s and 1960s (at a time when most of the migrants left Malta) was of the same order of magnitude, namely, in the region of 2 per cent of the population. This proportion has increased considerably among the younger members of the community in Malta, now reaching around the 26% mark in those aged 25-34 years of age.⁸ To note that in the age group 55-64, the proportion of Maltese with a tertiary education is still one of the lowest in Europe, at around per cent.

It was therefore of interest to look into the educational achievements of second-generation persons of Maltese background in Australia. The main point that comes out of this survey however, is the finding that the proportion of persons with a higher qualification was as high as 58 per cent, which is far higher than expected. There was a higher proportion of women participants with a tertiary qualification (female to male = 1.5). In other words, there were about 21 per cent more females than males with a tertiary qualification.

These data have to be taken with a degree of reservation. The survey was available to every person within the community, through internet, radio advertising as well as contact through Maltese associations and other means. However, no attempt was possible to ensure that there were equal responses from all walks of life. It is possible that the results are skewed towards those who have achieved a higher education, who perhaps are more computer literate and more likely to respond to questionnaires of this nature.

Further studies would be required to confirm these results.

⁷ Cauchi, M: *Maltese Migrants in Australia*, 1996

⁸ Eurostat 2011

12. Links with Malta: Visiting Malta

One important parameter to test the strength of links with Malta is to assess how often participants have actually visit there, and what they think of the place.

It is to be noted that less than 10 per cent stated that they never had been to Malta. More than half of respondents (58.2 %) said that they went several times (1-4 times), and a considerable number (17.3%) having been 4 – 10 times. A relatively small number (6.4%) stated that they had been to Malta more than 10 times.

This would suggest that there is still a strong link between the second generation and Malta, and they consider this as a suitable destination to go for a holiday.

An attempt was made to assess the degree of satisfaction they had from their visit to the islands. The questionnaire asked the participants to indicate on a scale of '1' to '5' how 'impressed' they were with what they found (with '1' indicating complete satisfaction, and '5' indicate least satisfaction.) An average mark close to '1' would therefore be expected to indicate good satisfaction with their visit to Malta.

In this survey, most participants appeared to be quite satisfied: overall an average grade of 1.7 was obtained.

There were, however, a few (13.6%) who were disgruntled and not too impressed with what they found. It would be important for those involved in the tourist industry to inquire as to the reasons for their dissatisfaction (an aspect not covered in this survey).

13. Links with Malta: Communications

The main means of communications with Malta for anyone interested in keeping in touch fall into two main categories:

- a) those produced locally, including print, radio, and electronic media. Print media has all but disappeared, apart from the production of newsletters by various organisations. Particularly for the younger generations who are quite computer-savvy, reading newsletters via emails has become the favourite way of keeping in touch.

Television programs (on Special Broadcasting Service - SBS) are transmitted (half-an-hour twice a week), and these consist of selected news prepared by the PBS in Malta.

- b) Information may also be obtained directly from sources based in Malta, primarily newspapers and radio stations which are easily accessed these days through the internet.

These various methods of communication were assessed through this survey and these are the results:

Local radio stations: These are quite popular with the first generation, but not so popular with the second. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents stated that they never listened to local radio, with another third (28%) stating that they sometimes listened to these broadcasts. Only per cent stated that they listened to these radio broadcasts frequently.

SBS television: The situation here that just almost half of respondents (46.5%) stated that they watched SBS television sometimes and another few (14.6%) stated that they watched it frequently. Just over one-third (38.9%) stated that they never watched this program.

Maltese radio stations: In relation to accessing information directly from sources from Malta, it was stated that 14.5 per cent accessed Maltese radio directly, and about half of respondents (44.5%) stated that they have contact through internet. A relatively small proportion (15%) stated that they look at Maltese newspapers.

These findings indicate that there is still a relatively strong interest within the second generation in relation to keeping in touch with what is happening in Malta, through the use of one or other means of communication, most frequently through electronic means.

Comments by participants

Participants were encouraged to send any comments relating to topics raised by the survey questionnaire, or other related aspects. The following is a summary of some of these comments which deal with various aspects of life as a second generation person.

A. Culture and heritage

In spite of the distance in time as well as geography, many second-generation persons still fill the need to belong to the greater Maltese citizenship and to consider themselves to be partly Maltese. As one respondent put it:

Malta is equally my home as well as Australia.

And another:

[I am] Australian, but I will always be Maltese.

One respondent emphasised that

There is a need to keep the Maltese culture alive for current and future generations of Maltese descent.

A young lady under 40 years of age wrote:

While born in Australia, Malta will always hold a special place for me as the birthplace of my parents and a country I have very fond memories of as a child from our many visits. Having recently taken our 3 children to Malta it was pleasing to see that they loved it just as much as we did as children and loved going there....It will always hold a special place in my heart.

A number of respondents were worried to see that they were rapidly losing their culture and Maltese identity. The following are some comments in relation to this aspect.

It is getting sad watching my own children who only know some Maltese words and seeing that slowly we will lose the real Maltese culture our parents taught us. As second generation born in Australia, we are more affiliated with the Australian way of life and the multi-cultural aspects it offers us.

Another respondent put it thus:

As a Maltese Australian second generation I feel we are losing the identity of our heritage. The Maltese adapted to Australian way of life and mixed well with other cultures and in the process they lose their culture. Most [of] the 40-50 age group next generation don't keep traditions or even know the language.

B. Language maintenance

As clearly shown by the survey, second generation persons may be able to understand spoken Maltese to a greater or lesser extent, but they are certainly not using the language for communication, and especially not to speak to their children.

A minority of respondents appreciate a fundamental aspect of culture and bemoan the fact that they are losing their heritage and strive to do something about it, as in this comment by one respondent:

We love our Maltese heritage. My husband who is Australian has never stopped my parents talking to my children. He has encouraged it. He loves the sense of Maltese family.

Others try to explain why they have lost their language. A 69 year old respondent who arrived in Australia when only 4 years old comments:

I regret that I have not kept up my Maltese language. I understand 75% - 80% of spoken and written Maltese but do not speak it as fluently as I would like because of lack of practice. I have attended Maltese classes at MCCV and am very grateful for that. I applaud MCCV for their initiative and encourage you to keep them going for future generations.

Another participant put it this way:

My only regret in terms of my nationality is that I cannot speak and read Maltese. Although my mother's family speaks Maltese (which I can understand but cannot speak very well), Maltese was banned in my father's family ... as a way of making them become 'Australian' quicker. As a result my father stopped speaking Maltese (at age 6), and as a result no Maltese was spoken in our household when I was growing up.

This is not an uncommon situation. With the best intention in the world, namely, to ensure good integration within society, many Maltese families decided not to converse in Maltese with their children, with the result that Maltese disappeared as a language of communication within these families.

The same view was expressed by another respondent who said:

I feel sad that I don't know my language well enough to speak fluently. I believe it was my parents fault by not raising me to speak Maltese as my first language. I can understand and speak a little but not as much as I would like.

We constantly hear Maltese in Australia complaining that it is getting more and more difficult to understand Maltese as it is spoken in Malta. This is the result of the influx of neologisms which are finding their way into the language, as well as the incorporation of words from European (particularly Italian language) which make it difficult for Maltese who never studied Italian to understand.

Some comments were made about the way Maltese language is changing. For instance, one respondent wrote:

I think it is sad that in Malta itself they use way too much English and feel the language has changed...I feel that in our country Malta they are ruining the language themselves. My culture is very important to me. I have done some Maltese language classes in the past at MCCV to improve.

Another participant agrees:

When watching or listening to Maltese programmes it's disappointing to hear the Maltese language broken up with English words. Whereas other European countries talk their language fully.

C. Facilities to learn Maltese

As mentioned above, several respondents referred to efforts to learn Maltese. In Australia, schools for teaching Maltese have been available for decades, at least in the major cities. However, in a large country it is often difficult to attend centres where Maltese language is taught. With time, with further suburban sprawl

which is occurring in the larger cities, this is getting worse if anything,

The following are some comments relating to this issue:

I have tried to learn to speak Maltese, but there are only a few venues and they are over an hour's drive away from my residence. Also their teachers do not have a curriculum that excites me as an adult learner. A pity as I think others in my family would be interested to learn as well.

Other respondents follow along the same line:

I have attended Maltese classes at MCCV and am very grateful for that. I applaud MCCV for their initiative and encourage you to keep them going for future generations. I am going to Malta in 2014 for 2 months and intend to do a lot Maltese conversation.

These comments emphasize the need for establishment of distance learning. All the above commentators would be in a position to take advantage from such a development.

D. Ethnicity

As has been shown from the results of the questionnaire (above) the vast majority of persons of the second generation think of themselves as Maltese-Australians. Their comments enlarge on this sense of belonging to both Malta and Australia:

While being brought up an 'Australian' and with no Maltese language – (my father died when I was 13 and my mother is Australian with no Maltese language), I still consider myself Maltese to a degree. I regret I was never taught the language as a child. I look forward to visiting Malta and have read a number of books regarding Maltese History. I suppose it's in the blood.

On the other hand there are those who have moved away from the feeling of belonging to the larger Maltese community as this young lady stated:

I am proud of my Maltese heritage however do not feel I have any reason to identify as Maltese.

Another contrarian viewpoint was expressed by the following participant:

I would encourage all persons of Maltese background (born here or otherwise) who are Australian citizens to describe themselves first and foremost as Australian. Many Maltese Australians I speak to use the term 'Australian' to describe Australians of Anglo or Irish background. However, many Australians of Anglo or Irish heritage have not been in Australia nearly as long as many Maltese Australians (whose family or themselves first came to Australia anywhere from 50 to 100 years ago). As such, it is important that Maltese Australians claim Australia as being as much theirs as Australians from other ethnic groups. The game and psyche of identity politics in Australia is very important and Maltese Australians should claim what is theirs and what they have earned and forged through toil in Australia, and not think of themselves (or allow others to define them) as outsiders when defining notions of who or what is Australian.

It is arguable that describing oneself as 'Maltese-Australian' somehow reduces one's claim to being a fully integrated Australian. What is certain is that those (a minority) who describe themselves as 'Australian' are more likely to have forgotten all about their Maltese background and culture. It is also unlikely that losing a culture, whatever the culture is a beneficial development for the individual concerned. The whole concept of multiculturalism as practiced in places like Australia and Canada is that a different culture is an enriching experience to be valued and added on to the majority culture of the country one is living in.

E. Visiting Malta

As seen from the results of the survey, the vast majority of persons from the second generation have visited Malta, often on several occasions. In general these visits have been met with considerable satisfaction and complaints have been minimal. These are some comments from the participants in relation to their visit to the home island:

"I love it, it is my second home"

The thought of never going to Malta again fills them with sorrow

My parents, my brother and I came to Australia in 1951..... As I am turning 70 this year, I will probably not see Malta again. It is too long a journey now. I keep in touch with my cousins in Malta via internet and Skype.

It is amazing how quickly the returned migrant can settle back to the old life and feel at home in Malta, even in the case of those who left Malta as very young children, or those who were not born in Malta.

On the other hand, there are those who, when finding themselves in a different environment, become much more aware of their differences. One participant, a male aged under 40 years with a Bachelor degree, who described himself as Maltese/Australian, states:

In Malta I feel Australian; in Australia I feel Maltese.

The odd negative remark is the exception:

I have Maltese family on one side of the family. I have visited Malta and loved the place but found some of the people very rude.

F. Assistance from Malta

Some participants seem to expect the Government of Malta and other institutions (including the Church) to be more visibly supportive of the needs of the community that relate to maintenance of language and culture. This aspect is of course well appreciated by practically all other European nations who provide ample material to ensure culture maintenance of information to members of other communities.

In particular, one respondent remarks:

The Maltese offer little to nothing to our children as in means of interactive activities or interest.

Another respondent asks:

Why can we not have Maltese-speaking priests within Australia in areas where there is a high level of people who speak Maltese? People have contacted Bishops in Malta requesting this and there has never been any response... Why is there not financial support

from the Maltese Government to provide more Maltese translators for public support systems available in Australia? These immigrants supported families remaining in Malta while facing great personal challenges to move to Australia. They have remained as Maltese citizens but for whatever reason are unable to return to Malta...however there is very little support for them here unless they personally choose to search out a Maltese community group who may hold social functions but very little else.

The sad history of child migration is still very much alive among those who were affected by this scheme. One participant asks for:

More recognition in Malta for the children sent to Australia in the 1950s. A monument to be erected at a special place where the boats departed. My father was included in one of the first groups in 1950. His picture appeared in a special report in 'The Times' a number of years ago. More recognition given to the people of Malta who emigrated due to necessity to help family. Today's generation in Malta have no knowledge or have forgotten about this. What would have happened to families if this did not take place?

And finally, on the issue of transmission of Maltese television to Australia, which currently takes place on a twice-a week basis, one participant vents his frustration thus:

For Christ sake can we have more than 20 minutes on Maltese programs on TV?

G. What needs to be done by the community

A number of participants expressed their satisfaction that something is being done (through this survey) to assess the situation and needs of the second generation. Typical among these is the following remark:

I am glad to see that the MCCV are conducting research on the issue of engagement (or lack of) between 2nd generation Maltese and the Maltese culture. I would be prepared to assist with this research if required.

We also got some advice by some participants on ways to improve communication with the second generation and emphasising the need

to involve them in the management of welfare and other issues relating to the community. On respondent states:

The Maltese Community Council of Victoria needs to encourage our age groups in the committee to keep the Maltese second generation alive and well.

And again:

The MCCV needs to recruit young people to its board to ensure the local Maltese community is sustainable.

In particular, it was hinted that most of the activities organised by Maltese organisations, including the MCCV, usually attract the older (first) generation, and provide little engagement for the members of the second generation. One participant writes:

Of all the activities organised by the Council and Maltese Societies there is almost nothing that might attract later generations of Maltese... I believe that in general 2nd generation and later generation of Maltese are alienated from the Maltese Community both by the unattractive activities and the behaviour of old leaders towards them.

And again:

The Maltese Community Council of Victoria need to encourage our age groups in the committee to keep the Maltese second generation alive and well.- Thank you for allowing me to participate.

A number of responders took the opportunity through this survey to ask questions relating to their situation and particularly in relation to passport facilities. Some questions related to the process of getting original copies of papers necessary for filling-in passport applications, others requested information about non-Maltese-background persons right to obtain a Maltese passport.

It is to be noted that so far, the website of the Migration Museum (www.maltamigration.com) has been the only one available where persons can ask and obtain answers about issues that concern them.

H. Some conclusions from respondents' comments

These comments simply illustrate the point of view of individual participants. One cannot, of course, draw conclusions from single statements like these, but such statements certainly give an extra dimension to a survey, where the responses are limited to a tick. A number of respondents expressed their gratitude for the opportunity of giving their point of view, perhaps for the first time ever.

While many of the above issues have been discussed at several levels, including especially the Maltese Community Councils in the various states of Australia, many of the issues raised are still relevant today as much as they ever were.

Moreover, what holds for Australia, most likely holds also for Maltese Diaspora in other continents.

To overcome the problem of the lack of communication, a number of actions have been taken in the past, including the formation of the Federation for Maltese Living Abroad (FMLA), which is open for participation by all members of the Maltese community. More recently, the government of Malta has set up the Council for Maltese Living Abroad (CMLA) consisting of representatives from various continents to advise the Minister of Foreign Affairs on issues relating to Maltese living abroad. Through these avenues it is hoped that the voice of all Maltese living abroad will be heard and action hopefully will be taken.

Further reading

Cauchi, M, Borland, H, Adams, A (eds): *Maltese Background Youth.*, 1999, Victoria University.

Cauchi, M.N, 'The Second Generation in Australia', in *The Maltese Migrant Experience, Malta, 1999.*

Cauchi, M.N. 'The View from the Future: the Second Generation', in *Maltese Achievers in Australia, 2006*, Maltese Community Council of Victoria.