

Project Gaia

The Integrated Management of Specially Protected Coastal Areas in Malta

**Report for the period January to December, 2004, on activities carried out by
The Gaia Foundation as Project Manager of Ghajn Tuffieha.**

Introduction

Project Gaia is the name given to The Gaia Foundation's work on the integrated management of specially protected areas in the Maltese Islands. The project covered a number of initiatives in the management of 2 sites between 2000 and 2003, namely Ghajn Tuffieha and Ramla, Gozo. The management agreements for the sites expired in July and December 2003 respectively. A renewed contract for Ghajn Tuffieha was signed in June, 2004. A renewal of the Ramla contract was still pending by the 31st December, 2004. While the Foundation's work in 2004 included the continued management and protection of the Ramla site in the absence of the said contract and related funds, the main thrust of its work took place at the Ghajn Tuffieha site. The following is a report of the activities carried out at Ghajn Tuffieha.

Background

The management of Ghajn Tuffieha formed part of a LIFE project, that included the management of Ramla Bay, Gozo, namely TCY99/M/95, which fell under the direction of IcoD and the management of The Gaia Foundation. This project commenced in 2000 and was brought to a successful conclusion in 2003.

Project Overview

The main arms of the project that formed part of the integrated approach to coastal management were:

Project Olympus:	coastal conservation
Project Elysium	tree planting
Project Dionysus	beach management
Project Persephone	sustainable agriculture
Project Apollo	operation of a visitor centre
Project Hermes	dissemination of information
Project Phoenix	waste management.
Project Pegasus	photo monitoring of coastal areas.
Project Odysseus	sustainable tourism
Project Poseidon	marine conservation and safety

These projects were all active in the project report period.

Project Gaia has included other arms, which were however not active during this period, namely:

Project Galatea cultural heritage
Project Hercules assistance in landfill restoration

Milestones.

A number of important milestones were reached in 2004. These included:

January: Persephone club commenced operations from the Elysium Visitor Centre
Feb/Mar Completion of tree planting season with over 2,000 trees and shrubs planted
February Collaboration with ALE and MEPA in the demolition of a hunter's hide at Qarraba
March Upgrade of Gaia volunteer programme.
April Collaboration with Kooperativa Kummerc Gust
May Launch of food festival at Elysium
May Launch of new Project Midas on Fair Trade
June Renewal of Ghajn Tuffieha contract
Jul/Aug Collaboration with BICREF in marine surveying work
July Launch of workshops for students from the USA
July TUI supports project Gaia
August Vodaphone supports project Gaia
October 2 day workshop for local school
November The Gaia Foundation wins Frank Salt Environment Award for Project Gaia
December Elysium hosts workshop on Kum Nye.
December Gaia launches Project Chiron

Project activities

Project Dionysius -Beach Management

- 1. A system of safety lines for Ghajn Tuffieha and Golden Sands that were reintroduced in past years for the summer months were instrumental once again in maintaining high levels of safety. The advantage of the system is its availability 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and does not require personnel to manage it.**

2. **The control of vehicular access to Ghajn Tuffieha bay and to the tower was carried out successfully through the use of bollards, made of thick steel, and filled with concrete, placed 1 metre below ground. While these have not been vandalized owing to their strength, the padlock had to be changed once following a case of vandalism.**
3. **Gaia personnel carried out regular patrols of the protected site. Wardens were used throughout the week and longer hours on weekends. Their main tasks were to provide information on the site as well as to secure implementation of environmental as well as maritime regulations (safety for bathers).**
4. **The planning permit for the construction of a snack bar for at Ghajn Tuffieha car park, was obtained in December, 2001 and issued in January, 2002. An application was subsequently made to the Malta Tourism Authority for an operating license. This is still pending.**

Project Poseidon – Marine Conservation and Safety.

5. **In June a seminar was held organized by Mepa on the drafting of a management plan for the Marine area around Ghajn Tuffieha, that is, between Rđum Majjiesa to the North and Ras il-Pellegrin to the South. The Foundation submitted a list of comments and recommendations to MEPA on the said plan. It also highlighted the areas of activity covered by the draft plan that were currently already being carried out by the Foundation.**

Project Olympus – Coastal Conservation

6. **Regular wardening was carried out to control breaches of regulations in connection with offroading, bikes and campers. The number of breaches of these regulations continues to decline as the public is generally more aware of the protected and important status of Ghajn Tuffieha, although some few exceptions continue to defy the regulations, most notably some off road motor bikes, who go so far as to flout the law by offroading without any registration plates in order to avoid identification. These are very difficult to control, even by extra duty police officers commissioned to assist in patrolling the sites.**
7. **Ongoing survey work in collaboration with the Biological Conservation and Research Foundation was carried out over the summer months in the vicinity of Ghajn Tuffieha.**
8. **In February Gaia personnel at Golden Bay Headland noticed some activity being carried out on the Qarraba Plateau close to a hunter's hide. MEPA enforcement Unit and the ALE were immediately alerted, whereupon members of the ALE came on site to investigate, together with the said personnel. A person was caught working on a hide. Following discussions the said person undertook to remove the hide structure within 2 days. This was effectively done, and Gaia informed the ALE and MEPA accordingly.**

Project Hermes – Dissemination of Information

- 9. In 2003 a series of 3 documentaries was produced under the LIFE Project**
 - 1. The first is named Project Persephone, covers sustainable agriculture in the coastal zone. It is meant for students, consumers and farmers alike, and forms part of the initiative to organize a sustainable agriculture zone around Ghajn Tuffieha.**
 - 2. The second is named Project Elysium, and covers the biodiversity aspect of the project and the natural habitats found in the Maltese Islands, many of which are essential to the coastal areas of ecological importance.**
 - 3. The third is named Project Olympus, and covers the general subject of coastal conservation and management of the coastal zone.**

All documentaries are approximately 15 minutes in length and have been produced in both English and Maltese versions. In 2004 these were disseminated to schools and shown on a regular basis at the Elysium Visitor Centre. They were also converted to DVD for easier viewing.

- 10. The project's website, located at www.projectgaia.org, included web pages on each project, as well as downloadable documents covering all activity and financial reports, management plans, studies and surveys. The website had been available in English, French, German and Spanish. In 2004 it was also translated into Italian by an Italian national carrying out an internship at Gaia. The translation is to be uploaded in early 2005.**
- 11. A number of nature documentaries were purchased for the Centre and made available for viewing during workshops and other educational activities.**
- 12. In June a workshop was organized by BICREF on marine conservation practices and held at Elysium, followed by field work at Ghajn Tuffieha Bay.**
- 13. Throughout the year a number of school trips were made to the Ghajn Tuffieha site. The students were exposed to the Project Gaia and were given information on the habitats of the Maltese Islands and the Indigenous and endemic plants being propagated at the nursery. The said nursery has become a very useful educational tool for young and old alike, as well as providing a supply for a large number of native trees, many of which are not available elsewhere.**
- 14. Throughout the summer a series of one day workshops were organized for foreign visitors, namely school groups from the USA. These included hands on work at the centre, a presentation on Project Gaia, and a workshop on "Becoming an eco citizen". Students participating were given certificates.**

- 15. In 2003 a number of information boards were produced covering various aspects of Project Gaia, from waste management to organic farming and marine conservation, providing useful tools for the visitors to the site. In 2004 these were increased to cover new environmentally related topics such as nutrition, organic farming and fair trade. Each board is weather resistant and is mounted on a mobile structure, which allows for the organisation of a mobile exhibition of 20 information panels.**
- 16. In October the Gaia Foundation attended a seminar organized and funded by The British Council on environmental governance. The main themes raised included dissemination of information and accountability within the policy making structures, as well as direct public participation in the decision making process as well as in environmental management, in line with the principles of the Aarhus Convention.**

Project Phoenix – Waste management

- 17. The first separation at source system was set up at Ghajn Tuffieha Bay in the summer of 1997. This was carried on through the Spring and Summer months every year. In 2002 the Foundation started cooperation work with “progett skart” (project waste), that provided skips for glass, metal and plastic at Ghajn Tuffieha Carpark. The Foundation’s separated waste bins located at Ghajn Tuffieha were being serviced by the tourism department beach waste personnel. The response of the beach cleaning team was however poor, and its work had to be constantly overseen and supplemented by Gaia Staff. In summer 2004 Progett Skart did not provide the skips that had been made available in the previous 2 seasons, and therefore for the first time since 1997 the separated waste system at Ghajn Tuffieha could not operate. Many members of the public complained that the separated waste system was not available. This was positive feedback from an increasingly aware public, especially amongst the patrons of the protected site. It is hoped that the Foundation will be able to collaborate with Progett Skart in the coming season.**
- 18. In October a new organic composting unit was put together at the Elysium Nursery to cope with an increase in garden and vegetable waste. The capacity has grown 500%. The composting section is now a special feature at the Centre, and is equipped with 3 information boards. Members who pick up their vegetables are encouraged to bring their organic waste.**
- 19. The Elysium Centre has also been equipped with a separated system to store waste fractions generated by the Centre’s activities. Paper is reused, while metal, plastic and glass are stored for removal to Sant Antnin Plant.**
- 20. Packaging at the centre has been reduced to a minimum. Members are given cotton carrier bags, reused boxes and nylon bags. While the former are purchased, the latter two are supplied with a returnable deposit. Food processed by Gaia is supplied in returnable glass containers.**

Project Persephone – Sustainable Agriculture

- 21. A mixture of mushroom compost and Posidonia Meadows compost was once again added to the fields prior to planting in August. The Posidonia was removed from Ghajn Tuffieha Bay during the summer season and deposited outside the Persephone fields. It was washed thoroughly to remove the salinity. These fertilizers are added on a yearly basis to the fields which, upon soil analysis, are known to be low in organic content.**
- 22. The sustainable agriculture project commenced in March, 2001. It has carried on into this project period, with sowing of the following crops:**

August:	Brassicae family, namely cabbages, cauliflower and broccoli, as well as parsley.
September:	broccoli and cauliflower.
October:	radish, beetroot, potatoes, garlic, cabbage broccoli and broad beans.
November:	Broad Beans, onions and lettuce.
December:	Lettuce, Cabbage, Broccoli and Beans.
January:	Lettuce, peppers, tomatoes and eggplant.
- 23. There was no harvesting in the period up to December. Once again problems related to pest control have been minimal. Snails taking shelter in the rubble walls have been kept at bay with a line of lime at the perimeter of the fields, while chicken wire was used to protect against rabbit attacks. Onions and garlic, sticky Fleabane and Marigolds were planted amongst vegetable crops as repellents. A spray mix of onions garlic and chili peppers was also used. The buffer zone around the fields are approximately 2 metres wide, and are covered with trees and wild vegetation.**
- 24. The crop rotation cycle is based upon a minimum of 3 years. The fields are divided into 4 sections. Each year a different crop family is sown in each section and moves down to the next section in the following year.**
- 25. Intercropping techniques are also used.**
- 26. A series of meetings were held with the producers who form part of the Persephone club with a view to prepare the way for organic certification, following the setup effected by the Malta Standards Authority in the second part of the year.**

Project Elysium – Biodiversity and Tree Planting

- 27. Biodiversity and tree planting: work at the nursery focused on the sowing, sticking and repotting of various indigenous and endemic species, detailed below in paragraph 38. Soil was also moved for repotting, and weeding and cleaning was carried out throughout the nursery. A total of 4,599 trees and shrubs were planted throughout the period. 1,830 were planted between January and March, while 2,769 were planted in November and December. Details are listed in Annex 1.**
- 28. The trees and shrubs planted at Ghajn Tuffieha were irrigated by drip from the water sources at the Nursery up to October. Areas irrigated were the Golden Bay Headland and the clay slopes above Ghajn Tuffieha Bay. The sites were irrigated twice a week regularly up to September, and once a week in October and November. Despite the fairly extensive water storage facilities situated at the Elysium Centre, water was required from outside sources to maintain irrigation through the dry months. The water budget for 2004 increased over 2003. Saplings are irrigated for at least 2 years.**
- 29. Propagation of plants through sowing, sticking, layering and repotting at the Elysium tree nursery carried out in the report period are detailed in annex 2.**

Project Odysseus – Sustainable Tourism

- 30. The Foundation's volunteer programme for foreigners got underway in earnest in 2004. The Foundation sought to provide a setup whereby foreign students and other persons could come to Malta to carry out internships as part of Project Gaia. Persons interested in combining an eco friendly visit to the Island with a practical training session ensured high standards of sustainable tourism. These were due to the nature of the trip. These visiting interns showed a healthy disposition to traveling lightly, reducing their ecological footprint by reducing and separating their waste at the Centre, eating local and healthy foods with reduced packaging, traveling by bicycle and public transport, and assisting in the environmental management projects with the Foundation, in addition to gaining practical experience in environmental management. The internship/sustainable tourism programme amounted to 938 visiting days to the Maltese Islands. Most of the interns in 2004 hailed from Germany.**

Launch of new projects.

31. In the Spring of 2004 a new project was added to Project Gaia to address issues relating to fair trade and the purchase of local produce. The name given to this project is Midas. Information boards on both issues were designed and produced and added to the ones situated at the Elysium Visitor Centre. Throughout the year the Foundation cooperated with Kooperativa Kummerc Gust in the promotion of fair trade principles. The promotion of local produce featured in the ongoing awareness activities and education to visitors at the Centre.

32. In the Autumn of 2004 a social wing was added to Project Gaia through the organisation of fund raising and awareness activities to provide assistance to persons undergoing great hardship. A X'Mas lunch was organized for members, the proceeds of which went towards assisting the refugees located at the Good Shepherd Convent, Balzan and Hal Safi Barracks. The name given to this project is Chiron.

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Executive Director**

Documents:

**Annex 1
Tree Planting records for 2004**

**Annex 2
Propagation of plants at the Elysium Nursery, 2004**

**Annex 3
List of expenses covered by the Ministry Grant**

**Annex 4
Projected Activities Jan-June 2005.**