Article title: Journey from a Humanitarian NGO to a Social Enterprise in Malta

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Journey from a Humanitarian NGO to
a Social Enterprise in Malta

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Abstract

This paper, via field observations and interviews, explores the implications of running a small scale non-governmental organisation in Malta whose intention it is to establish a social business despite the absence of social business-friendly laws in the national legal system.

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I would like to thank Dr Anna Khakee and the rest of the Faculty staff, especially Mr Joseph Debono, my supervisor Dr Maurice Said, all my peers and of course my research participants – they all made this work possible via their understanding attitudes, advice, flexibility of thought, compassion, and patience.

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Introduction

It has been recognised at the European Union (EU) level that social enterprises as individual constituent parts as well as social economy on aggregate are a growing trend and are expected to be changemakers in addressing social and environmental issues in the near future. The EU's *A map of social enterprises and their eco-systems in Europe* published in 2015¹ gives an overall perspective of what each member state (plus Switzerland) has done so far in the area of promoting the growth of the social economy. The EU has adopted an operational definition of a social enterprise – commercially active entity with social and societal objective of the common good whose profits are mainly reinvested for social purposes, not enrichment, with a form of democratic decision making. However, the very same report acknowledges that this is only an operational definition and each member state has its own definition – to be precise, only twenty out of twenty-nine countries covered in the report recognise social entrepreneurship as a form of business. Furthermore, the report speaks in general terms of the obstacles posed to establishing and running a social company. My research zooms in on one specific NGO based in Malta whose aim it is to establish a social enterprise – it is common for NGOs to establish a social business and run it in parallel or become one (change their legal status from NGO to company), according to said report, but it has not been explained why. The EU's report vaguely informs that social entrepreneurs usually suffer from legal uncertainty, denied investment, and weak organisation (European Commission, Directorate E, 2015) which is also evident in my observations and interviews – my research covers the obstacles in a more detailed manner in a Maltese context.

Although my initial research proposal contains a research question which addresses the implications of the relationship between NGO staff and donors, during my fieldwork, I came up with a different research question which this thesis provides an answer to: *how does the absence of pro-social business legislation in Malta affect*

¹ During a Social Enterprise Summit in Dublin on 16 October, 2019, I approached one of the speakers Karel Vanderpoorten of the European Commission's Directorate General responsible for social entrepreneurship to inquire whether a more recent report was available in order to cite it in my research work to which he tentatively promised there was a 2019 version to be published in late October. However, it still cannot be found on the European Commission's website, thus, I am relying on the 2015 version.

the endeavours of a philanthropic NGO to pursue the aim of empowering migrant women via social business? The [Literature Review](#)² chapter provides an insight into the reasons behind my inceptive research question (*How do NGO employees define their organisation's raison d'être in light of the current dominant scheme of NGO financing as principal-agent interaction?*) under the [Initial Inspiration](#) subchapter – dwelling on the motives inciting my curiosity which led to the initiation of my fieldwork. It continues with topics which I had to explore as a consequence of the change of the focus of my research: [Social Entrepreneurship](#), [Philanthropy](#), [Time and Time Management](#), [Volunteerism](#), [Humanitarianism](#), [Law and Society](#), and finally [Diversity and Discrimination](#). The [Methodology](#) chapter elaborates on the methods I used and the challenges I had to overcome during my research resulting in the modification of the research question.

My work strives to provide an answer to the research question by cross cutting it in six dimensions: who, where, when, what, why, and how. The [Observation](#) chapter addresses the first three questions which are descriptive in nature: who are my participants, where are they, when did I observe them? The chapter also delivers the overall atmosphere of my fieldwork from my perspective. And I am not deterred to say that it is my personal perspective of the events as anthropology is not simply a study of other people but also an admission that it is a study of others from the researcher's vantage point – more on this notion in the [Initial Methodology – the Study of Otherness](#) subchapter.

The [Analysis](#) chapter continues with what, why and how aspects of my research question. What is it that my participants are doing? Why are they doing it? How are they doing it? In order to respond to these questions, I resorted to the help of interviewing my participants. More on why and how the interviews complement my fieldwork observations can be read in the [Interviews](#) subchapter. The [Entrepreneurial Spirit](#) subchapter addresses the *what* question supported by the readings from the [Social Entrepreneurship](#) subchapter. The [Philanthropy, Volunteerism & Humanitarianism](#) subchapter seeks an answer as to why they want to do it supported by the [Philanthropy](#), [Volunteerism](#) and [Humanitarianism](#) literature. And the [Time](#).

² Underlined text are links to other chapters – it is my intra-work referencing system available to digital readers only which allows to move swiftly from the current paragraph to the one referred to elsewhere in this work

[Law & Diversity](#) covers the how area of my analysis supported by the readings of [Time and Time Management](#), [Law and Society](#), and [Diversity and Discrimination](#).

Literature Review

Initial Inspiration

My initial approach was primarily triggered by CDA's³ *Listening Project Issue Paper* (CDA, 2008) which covers the discontent expressed by a group of aid recipients with the way the organisations which are supposed to help them to overcome their hardships instead pay much closer attention to what the organisations' donors wish to see in reports. CDA criticises NGOs for their internal culture which resembles that of the corporate world. The CDA's work intrigued me and led me to works by Cooley and Ron (2002), Nunnekamp et al (2009), Koch et al (2009), Dreher et al (2012), Teegen et al (2004), Molenaers et al (2014) who emphasise that there is growing competition in the NGO sector as too many organisations strive to attract the attention of too few donors for insufficient financial resources. These authors chiefly focus on the relationship NGOs maintain with their donors once donations are acquired and emphasise that more must be done to reveal how relationships are built to facilitate disbursement of funds. Based on these authors, I produced a research question: *How do NGO employees define their organisation's raison d'être in light of the current dominant scheme of NGO financing as principal-agent interaction?* However, my fieldwork proved that it was unattainable to address the question as my observations led me into the field of social entrepreneurship. I elaborate on the process of the change of the topic of my research and hence, the change of the research question in the [Methodology](#) chapter.

Social Entrepreneurship

As mentioned earlier, my focus of research, during my fieldwork, shifted towards social entrepreneurship, hence, I felt a natural urge to read to understand what social

³ CDA is the leftover acronym standing for the Collaborative for Development Action which no longer represents the actual current scope of the CDA's activities as it has expanded since 2003 but the name has remained unchanged (ReliefWeb, 2019)

entrepreneurship entailed. According to Fraisse et al (2016), France has been at the forefront of pro-social business legislation and they claim that social entrepreneurship can take various forms depending on the goals envisioned. A social business can engage itself in: 1) helping disadvantaged and marginalised groups to find employment⁴, e.g. by employing disabled persons; 2) it can also follow ordinary employment practices while focus on how its profits are utilised – charitable donations is the usual goal, e.g. donating all its profits to a cancer research laboratory; 3) or else a social company may focus on rendering services considered non-lucrative yet socially and environmentally important, e.g. providing a clean-up of a contaminated area at the cost price. A combination of two or all three is not uncommon too (Fraisse et al, 2016). Interestingly, entrepreneurs running the first type of company (provision of employment to the disadvantaged and marginalised) are usually either ex-social workers or relatively recent business programme graduates believing in something bigger and beyond sheer profits as their ultimate mission (ibid).

In countries where pro-social business laws are passed, such companies are granted tax exemptions and other stimuli (Corriveau, 2016), (European Commission, Directorate E, 2015), (European Commission, Directorate E, 2016). Legal certainty (clear definition of social business in law) promotes growth of social businesses as entrepreneurs are aware of what type of company they are permitted to establish and what taxes to pay while investors and creditors are more willing to provide financial means to such companies (European Commission, Directorate E, 2015). In Corriveau's (2016) interpretation, a social enterprise expects the government to create a special regime for such companies for one very important reason: absence of greed – social companies must refrain from enriching its owners; dividends are not paid (or reduced to the bare minimum) – only salaries to its employees are paid. Unlike a regular company whose operations are defined by the mission of enriching its owners, a social enterprise puts emphasis on its socially beneficial goals. Fraisse et al (2016) provide an insight into the long-established French model of pro-social entrepreneurship legislation which puts certain constraints on such companies, e.g. the management level employees' salaries are capped at a certain level (the largest salary cannot be more than ten times higher than the smallest salary in such

⁴ The EU's report points out that most social enterprises start as integration projects and later expand into other social and environmental areas (European Commission, Directorate E, 2015).

companies), there must be a democratic decision-making process as well as the main prerequisite – profits, if they ever happen, must always be spent on a social mission either directly or via a mediator (100% of profits donated to a charitable organisation). While the government metaphorically holds a stick in the form of such constraints, it simultaneously provides a carrot in the form of tax exemptions for social enterprises. Corriveau (2016) and Fraisse et al (2016) essentially hint at a pact that is intended between the government on the one hand and social entrepreneurs on the other hand: the government gives tax cuts and in return expects social firms to operate greedless-ly. In essence, a social enterprise must always work as a “no-loss and no-dividend” machine – no loss to ensure its survival and no dividend to avoid taxation (Fraisse et al., 2016). One may ask for clarification as to what the difference between a social entrepreneur and a philanthropist then is.

Philanthropy

In essence, social entrepreneurship is a form of philanthropy (Maclean et al, 2013), (Harvey et al, 2011), (Shaw et al, 2013). Philanthropy has its roots in the Greek words *philos* and *anthropos* (love and human, hence, love of people). It centres on: 1) meeting the basic needs such as food, health, shelter; 2) fighting for equality and human rights, 3) democratization, 4) community capacity building, and 5) public participation in decision making (Widianto, Hadi, & Irawan, 2018). Philanthropy can be carried out by someone possessing the necessary resources (usually money, knowledge, or time) that can be used to help the needy. Philanthropists must possess the will to do good as well (Charitable, 2019). However, philanthropic activity is not as clear-cut and unambiguous as one might assume. Despite the good intentions of philanthropists, its goals are often short-sighted and small in scale (Blowfield & Frynas, 2005), (Frame, 2005) and at times, can be plagued by nationalist agendas and fuelled by corruption schemes but these are very rare and special cases (Widger, 2016a, 2016b). Michael Edwards (2009), similarly to Frame (2005), Blowfield and Frynas (2005), elaborates further that the corporate philanthropic actors have a tendency of hijacking the NGO and state aid actors' discourse and agendas. They often tend to behave in a brash manner which is not necessarily inefficient but often overlooks the wider picture, particularly the roots of an issue, and instead concentrate on fixing said problem in a narrow context, e.g.

lifting just one village out of poverty in an extremely poor region and not doing enough to fight the causes of poverty in the entire region. Corporate philanthropists believe that market forces, empowerment of the aid recipients (fishing rods instead of fish), and sustainability are the answers to aid recipients' problems. They often dislike aid trends set by governments and donors and they pursue independent paths of action (ibid).

So how do we map philanthropy vis-a-vis social entrepreneurship? Philanthropy can exist without social entrepreneurship set in law. A philanthropist can be any person possessing a resource, usually, of monetary nature who spends some of that resource on assisting those in need. It is a voluntary action and can be carried out regardless of the existence of tax exemptions or other legal stimuli for that matter. Frame (2005), Edwards (2009), Widger (2016a & b), Blowfield and Frynas (2005) speak of philanthropic entrepreneurs who run regular for-profit companies (not social businesses) and devote a portion of their profits to charity. The emphasis here lies on the word 'portion' and moreover, such portions do not have to be regular – they take place at philanthropists' whim. The difference between a philanthropist and a social entrepreneur exists in the very reason behind the establishment of a particular company as described by Corriveau (2016) and Fraisse et al (2016) – a social business is a social business from day one of its existence – it regularly spends 100% (or very close to 100%) of its profits to address social or environmental issues. And here the emphasis is put on the regularity of spending its profits. In cases similar to that of France with old and deep pro-social business laws, social entrepreneurs have legal restrictions on dividends and salaries in return for the privilege of tax exemptions (Fraisse et al., 2016). In essence, pro-social entrepreneurship legislation creates a strict corridor with regulations, restrictions, as well as rewards for regular (not occasional) philanthropy.

In the case of my participants, I have not noticed significant monetary resources available for charity. However, I have noticed that the only true resource in their possession is time. It is a resource of philanthropic importance as discussed earlier (Charitable, 2019). As any resource it has to be managed well – Widiyanto et al (2018) stress the importance of good management skills in order to ensure philanthropic success. The EU also stresses that social enterprises often suffer from poor business organisation skills (European Commission, Directorate E, 2015). So what is time?

Time & Time Management

Time is a ruthless and unstoppable, yet manageable concept. Humans are unique in their ability to comprehend the notion of time: past, present and future (Engel, 1987). It is also a matter of power. In Lucht's (2012) account of the lives of African migrants in Naples, he often refers to Pierre Bourdieu's notion that time can be used as a means of exercising one's power over others – the persons in authority are capable of making an individual's life miserable by delaying processes the individual in question relies on, e.g. issuance of work permits, passports, or social security papers. However, one can seize control of one's own time as well and, hence, power over one's own life. For Alvin Goldman (1974), time can be used today in order to achieve desired, yet sometimes unknown, goals of tomorrow, that is to say that a person can, for instance, build his or her reputation today as a reliable and trustworthy employee which in turn can later be of use when an opportunity of career promotion occurs. The main prerequisite here being the person is in charge of his or her own time today and is actively using it. Use of time may appear easy to say but is often characterised by struggle when it comes to the actual time management in our lives and Daniel Golden (Benedek & Veszelszki, 2016, pp. 51–56) reveals the way humans visualise time in order to facilitate the comprehension of its flow and the means of its management. He quotes Ted Johns (2003) who concludes that there is, in general, an endless supply of time, however, everyone is given only a limited fraction of it. In Golden's view, the industrialisation and the consequent commercialisation of our lives has put extra pressure on people to manage their time more efficiently. In order to achieve our desired goals, we either opt for an extensive use of time, i.e. use more time at work, or else we go down the intensive path implying we add the necessary value to the existent working time. Golden boils it down to essentially managing one's self – time management is akin to self-management. Once, people had agreed that time was a concept to consider, they turned to its visualisation through calendars, clocks, watches and other visual reflections of time, and they later added time management tools such as schedules, drawn deadlines, rosters, and so on – all to reduce its waste and improve its use.

While agreeing with Golden on the importance of time management in capitalist societies, Engel (1987) points out that the perception of time differs across cultures. In capitalism, one pays extra attention to the time spent at work and the money paid for it, in other words time is indeed money. Moreover, he touches upon the main two distinctions of how the flow of time is usually interpreted: repetitive versus non-repetitive. Day and night, breath, heartbeat – all fall within the former category while transitional concepts fall within the latter, e.g. one's life from birth through aging towards death. Tensions and conflicts occur as a result of the distinction between the two perceptions. Engel's observations cover a relatively short period of time during which he investigates the everyday life of rural Midwestern US people and how they get disrupted by the arrival of city people as a result of the industrialisation of their county. Engel focuses on the iteration of the rural traditions prior to the industrialisation against the erosion, i.e. non-iteration, of such traditions in the aftermath of the industrialisation and in turn, conflicts between the rural and the city people.

Volunteerism

As mentioned above in the [Time & Time Management](#) and [Philanthropy](#) subchapters, the main resource at the disposal of my participants is their time which is devoted rewardless-ly, thus, I cannot logically omit the topic of volunteerism as it is exactly what volunteering implies – dedicating one's time to work for free voluntarily. Importantly, the EU reports that social businesses during their inception period heavily rely on in kind donations and especially on volunteers (European Commission, Directorate E, 2015). Why do people volunteer at all?

One of the most quoted research articles in the area of identifying the motives attributed to volunteering is Clary et al's (1998) psychological perspective on volunteers' motivation. In their work, they search for a verification of the widely accepted motivations for volunteering by means of surveying their participants before and several weeks after the commencement of their voluntary activity. They employ the functional approach to comprehend their participants motives quoting Snyder (1993) who in turn argues that different individuals may be performing an identical task while that task serves each participant in its own way, hence, it performs a function. This approach is very much focused on connecting one's personal plans

with one's actions in achieving such plans. Clary et al (1998), predominantly based on the works of Katz (1960) and Smith et al (1956), identify six different so-called *functions* their participants strive to extract from their voluntary activity: values – willingness to express one's values; understanding – ambition to expand knowledge in a particular area; social – willingness to enjoy one's company or to be perceived well by other people; career – learning the necessary skills for future career growth; protective – escaping negative feelings such as remorse by doing good; enhancement – pursuit of positive feelings by having helped someone. Clary et al's (1998) results validate the existence of the six functions as motivations for volunteering. Besides, they also claim that volunteers' satisfaction with their activity and hence, their willingness to continue or repeat said activity is higher when the activity in question meets the goals set by the function an individual participant pursues. Moreover, quite obviously the researchers claim that the type of placement organisation is strongly related to the type of activity it can offer to its volunteers which consequently affects the fulfilment of an individual volunteer's intended function, e.g. if the placement organisation provides ample opportunities to interact with children and a volunteer's function is to understand children better, then the chances of satisfactory outcomes for the volunteer occur to be much higher than in situations where the activities offered and functions pursued are mismatched.

James Lavelle (2010) heavily bases his insight into the organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) on Clary et al's (1998) work as he believes that volunteering and OCB have much in common and thus, can be analysed in the same fashion. OCB takes place among colleagues when an employee or a group of employees go above and beyond what they are required to do within the scope of their professional duties. He uses five of the six functions leaving the protective function out and divides them into other- and self-oriented ones. He puts the value function in the other-oriented group and places the career, understanding, social and enhancement functions in the self-oriented group. He does so as he quotes Clary et al's (1998) acknowledgement that the value expression is of deeply altruistic and humanitarian nature – volunteers and OCB activists wish to see the world a better place not just for themselves but for other/all human beings in general. Then Lavelle sums up the self-oriented functions in a similar way to Clary et al's (1998), however, he tweaks the enhancement definition by adding *ego* to "enhancement" inviting his readers to entertain the idea of how voluntary activities boost one's self-esteem as

an important and irreplaceable actor, hence, making one feel good about oneself. He concludes that more functionalist volunteer research methods ought to be applied to OCB research.

When touching upon the value function James Lavelle mentions the research done by Farmer and Fedor (2001) who also make references to Clary et al (1998) on several occasions in their work on how motivation for volunteering transforms during the voluntary period. It reads that the overall volunteer contributions range in quantity and quality because naturally there is no monetary reward offered for their input unlike paid staff. They believe that volunteer performance can be enhanced and provide the following hypotheses with regard to the necessary conditions for better performance by volunteers: (1) requirements from the volunteers' role are consistent with the degree of input they want to give; (2) ability to socialise with other volunteers is there; (3) voluntary role investments are well tied to the organisation; and (4) volunteers' intentions match the function of the organisation. They point toward a major difference between salaried institutions and volunteer-run and thus, the problem of finding motivated volunteers for the latter. Salaried institutions, even when employing a volunteer, e.g. an intern, tend to have a more structured and regimented division of labour whereas volunteer-run organisations lack such levels of organisation which makes monitoring of volunteers' input much harder and hence, produces lower levels of accountability and motivation. However, when the organisation's and the volunteer's values match despite low levels of division of labour, volunteer performance increases. Timetable conflicts are another important aspect to consider as volunteers besides their voluntary role play other roles: family member; worker; student; and others. Usually, volunteering is the first to be sacrificed for the benefit of the others. Whereas paid staff are bound together in a relatively artificial manner by virtue of being paid for their work, hence, showing lower levels of amicability, volunteers tend to exhibit higher levels of interpersonal binding (friendships) as they are often recruited through personal contacts or share the same values. Thus, they argue that there is greater contribution by volunteers when they have formed amicable ties. The authors sent out surveys to more than a thousand March of Dimes (an organisation helping mothers and babies overcome pregnancy related diseases) volunteers from disparate backgrounds and received about one third of them back by post. The results show, by and large, that their hypotheses are correct but deeper research is necessary to solidify the findings.

Rene Bekkers (2005) by acknowledging Clary et al's (1998) input in understanding the motives of volunteers from a psychological vantage point offers an improvement by applying a three-dimensional tool employing political, social and psychological prisms to studying motives of Dutch volunteers. He sums up works by Almond & Verba (1965), Putnam (2000), and Tocqueville (2003) as giving importance to the political dimension – a healthy democracy must have volunteer-run organisations. Sociologically, Bekkers mostly refers to Musick & Wilson (1999) who claim that people are inherently well-wishing but only some of them find the necessary resources to volunteer to help the needy. Bekkers combines the three vantage points to see to what extent (1) sociological factors such as: education, income, religion, and community size; (2) political considerations: like political attitudes and values; and finally, (3) individual psychological characteristics all define who is active in voluntary associations. His findings show that the more educated, interested in politics and/or religious a Dutch person is, the more likely their engagement in voluntary activity. In rural areas, people express higher levels of interest in civic activity. Volunteers usually vote for leftist and Christian democratic parties. Psychologically, individuals with heightened empathy tend to engage in voluntary work. However, he points out that the psychological prism provides an incomplete picture and that more research must be done. Nevertheless, Bekkers has noticed a pattern of some specific psychological traits overlapping with social factors, e.g. the higher the level of empathy, the higher the church attendance frequency which he speculates could be explained in two different ways: either churches trigger empathy or empathetic people are simply more inclined to embrace religion. Bekkers invites more research to be done to reveal the relations between psychology, politics and sociology pertaining to voluntary work.

Humanitarianism

[Philanthropy](#) and [Volunteerism](#) do not exist in a vacuum. Philanthropy as discussed above is a word of Greek origin meaning the love of people. Humanitarianism on the other hand is of Latin origin and is a derivative of “human”. Its central focus is humanity at large (www.dictionary.com, 2010). It has been widely accepted that there are four main principles of humanitarianism that all humanitarian organisations must follow and so must their employees. The first one is *humanity* – alleviation of

the most pressing hardships experienced by people regardless of their location with the aim of restoring the satisfaction of their most basic needs and human dignity. Number two is *neutrality* which implies that humanitarian actors do not take sides in a military conflict, instead focus solely on helping those individuals who need their help the most. *Impartiality* is closely related to the previous principle with a narrower focus on the actual sufferers on the ground and this principle dictates that aid shall be provided regardless of race, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, political affiliations, etc. Finally, *independence* – humanitarian actors must act autonomously from political, economic, or military objectives (European Commission, 2013), (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2012), (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 5 August, 2019).

The four principles must be elaborated on as in their pure definitive form they fail to tell the whole picture. It has been acknowledged by the international community that rescue of people affected by natural or human-made disasters can be labelled as humanitarian provided there is cross-border action present. In other words, if there is a rescue operation taking place within the national boundaries of a country and the rescuers are citizens of the country in question, that is not considered a humanitarian operation (Barnett, 2011), for instance, when firefighters save the lives and properties of people affected by a wildfire in their own country it does not count as a humanitarian operation, however, as soon as firefighters from one country travel to another country to save people and property, they can be called humanitarians. Humanitarianism must be international by nature. A true humanitarian is not permitted to exhibit nationalistic feelings – he or she cares about those who suffer regardless of their geographic location based purely on the fact that they are humans (ibid).

The other three principles – neutrality, impartiality, independence – are idealistic guidelines for a humanitarian organisation to strive for as they can never be achieved to their fullest. In Barnett's (2011) view, any organisation acknowledges its limits with regard to achieving the complete adherence to the four principles and in times when its humanitarian status and reputation are questioned, it shall endeavour to persuade its critics that it sticks to the four principles no matter what as the failure to do so automatically implies that the organisation loses its humanitarian status.

Michael Walzer (2011) has a philosophical account of what humanitarianism currently implies. In his view, the rules (the four principles) are there to be bent at

times as long as justice is concerned, and justice is the core principle of humanitarianism, not charity as it may seem. Walzer digs deeper behind the scenes of humanitarianism, into the driving forces behind it. Charity does not happen for the sake of charity. It takes place due to people's sense of justice. Via humanitarianism, we strive to establish justice as we feel for those who suffer because we find their sufferings unjust and through charity, we seek justice for them. While he touches upon the moral dilemmas of humanitarians theoretically (no concrete examples), one can find them in Barnett's (2011) book, e.g. neutrality and impartiality at times are ignored and broken when humanitarian organisations side with one warring side as they find their sufferings more unjust than the ones on the other side as in the case of the early MSF (Medicines sans Frontier) when they would vote on which warring side's territory their services would be more useful and thus, just. Or for instance, in the case of Kosovo, when the international humanitarian community appealed to the world powers (NATO countries in particular) to use military force against Serbia to stop ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and to provide humanitarian access to Kosovo.

While philanthropy and volunteerism can exist within the national boundaries of the people involved in such activities as depicted by Widger (2016a) in the case of Sri-Lankan philanthropists working in Sri-Lanka, humanitarianism's requirement for internationalism imposes geographical limits. On the other hand, philanthropy as well as volunteerism can also exist in the international realm which overlaps with humanitarianism, e.g. a volunteer who leaves his or her native country to help foreigners overcome calamities is simultaneously a volunteer and a humanitarian, and also a philanthropist as volunteerism lies within the domain of philanthropy as discussed above – volunteering implies dedicating one's time (resource) free of charge. Once a resource is dedicated free of charge for the greater good it constitutes philanthropy. Still, not all humanitarianism is philanthropic or voluntary – professional humanitarians who work for a salary are not volunteers (Barnett, 2011). Also, not all volunteerism is humanitarian or philanthropic – an unpaid intern working in a for-profit company does it in order to learn and to improve his or her curriculum vitae for future career growth (Lavelle, 2010).

Law & Society

Law & Time

As discussed above in the [Social Entrepreneurship](#) section, law plays a pivotal role in social businesspeople's ability to use their profits more freely to help those in need. The authorities, through law, hold the reins to define who pays taxes and who is exempt. Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey in their 1998 work *With the Law* address three big themes: members of society; authorities; and law. Through their communication with ordinary Americans, the authors explore the interaction that their interviewees have with the authorities and how they perceive law. Similar to Lucht's (2012) observations of African migrants' interactions with the Italian authorities, they point out that people's perception of legal matters is dictated to a large extent by their temporal considerations. Often, a person unfamiliar with legal procedures finds him- or herself in a discouraging position because on the one hand law in abstract terms and on the other hand authorities in quite tangible terms are capable of making one's life hell – a hell where time is spent in vain.

Ewick and Silbey (1998) cite Kafka who describes law as living in a shrine that shall be spared visits at all costs. In Kafkian words, they claim, law has undergone reification and now resides in a sacred place behind a stupendous gate and anyone who dares open it risks causing nuisance to the holy animal. It takes courage, wit, audacity, hard work, and of course time to take one's seemingly mundane nature of things into the shrine for resolution once all other non-legal means have been exhausted. According to Ewick and Silbey (1998), even people familiar with legal procedures like their interviewee Dwayne Franklin are at times reluctant to make full use of law due to the slowness of legal procedures. Notably, every story that eventually touches upon law has prehistory and epilogue surrounding law and it is not necessarily the case that a given situation will involve law, e.g. a conflict between neighbours can remain at the non-legal stage and even find its resolution bypassing laws.

Law and society scholar Kitty Calavita (2010), who also makes a reference to Ewick and Silbey (1998), based on her observations and by summarising the works of Weber, Durkheim, and Maine, draws a conclusion that law and society are mutually intertwined phenomena influencing each other on a constant basis – each

is a reflection of the other. In her view, if people tend to think that law is something abstract, then it is purely due to the fact that we, people, ourselves tend to make it abstract and believe in it; law and how we live by it is the product of our perception. Calavita points out that people in general are very law-conscious – they know what they are and what they are not allowed to do. Our everyday obedience of law is an extremely mighty instrument of socioeconomic control. Laws shape the way we think and talk to a large degree. Despite its hegemonic presence and awesome feel, law can often provoke a rebellion that brings about change (ibid).

Ewick and Silbey (1998), besides their stories of individuals who exhibit wariness of laws, provide their readers with the opposite view of persons who feel confident of utilising legal instruments, and even playful. They can be overt rebels challenging existing laws or silent observers looking for the best way of utilising the available inventory. Utilisation of law is not necessarily always something malicious (intent to cause harm to others), rather it can be used to express oneself or express one's relationship towards others – assertion of one's rights (ibid).

Maltese Law

Malta is among the group of countries with no pro-social business laws though discussions have been on-going since 2015 and a draft bill has been prepared (Ministry for the Economy, 2019). A lack of pro-social business laws does not mean that a social enterprise cannot exist. Malta is comparable to Canada – the home of Corriveau (2016) who runs socially oriented companies and gives lectures to prospective social entrepreneurs. Canadian federal laws do not provide space for social entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, Corriveau insists that her Canada-based social companies manage to deliver the envisioned services to the needy despite the penalising tax code which is indifferent toward the fact that her companies operate as not-for-profit organisations while utilising free market competition methods. In essence, this means that in Malta like in Canada an entrepreneur who wants to donate 100% of his or her profit toward a social goal is still obliged to comply with the same tax regulations as an ordinary entrepreneur who preserves greed as his or her motivator for running a business. However, Corriveau points out that technically a Canadian entrepreneur can run a 75% social business by donating 75% of their pre-tax profits to charities tax free and 25% must be taxed no matter what (100%

donations are not permitted by the Canadian Tax Code). On the other hand, Malta's tax system requires that the entirety of income has to be taxed accordingly and once the taxes have been paid, the taxed entrepreneur is allowed to make donations and on very special and rare occasions limited deductibles might be issued (PwC Malta, 2018).

The intended Maltese version of the pro-social enterprise law in its current redaction (White Paper – Social Enterprise Act) prescribes wide powers to the Minister responsible for the economy of Malta with regard to the levels of taxation imposed on social enterprises⁵ (Ministry for the Economy, Investment and Small Business, 2015) which distinguishes it from its French equivalent which does not provide such unilateral powers to one cabinet minister⁶. Basically, it implies that the given ministerial post of a Maltese government may opt for not granting any tax exemptions to social enterprises at all once the bill is promulgated into law making the entire pro-social business agenda virtually useless as such companies would not be viewed as special vis-a-vis conventional companies. It does not require social businesses to have a democratic decision-making structure either. Also, the proposed version does not impose special salary regimes on social businesses – the most it asks for is the implementation of market level salaries for tasks similar to the ones found in the given sector of the economy⁷. However, the proposed version does possess one typical quality of a pro-social business law – it restricts the use of profits by shareholders (only 10% of profits can be enjoyed directly or indirectly by the owner while 90% goes toward the furtherment of a company's social mission)⁸. In its core, the proposed bill falls short of establishing a full-hearted pact discussed by Corriveau (2016) and Fraisse et al (2016) of sticks and carrots between the state and the social entrepreneur.

The Ministry for Finance of Malta refers to a research report prepared in 2011 by APS consult⁹ which claims that one of the aims of a pro-social business law would be to support, empower and otherwise help the volunteer, NGO, co-operative and similar organisations in Malta by providing more space for activity. The proposed bill was criticised in 2016 for the lack of ambition in making social enterprises sufficiently

⁵ Part IX 34 (2)

⁶ LOI n° 2014-856 du 31 juillet 2014 relative à l'économie sociale et solidaire (1), Article 81

⁷ Part 1, 2 (1) j

⁸ Part II, 4 (2)

⁹ <https://mfincms.gov.mt/en/home/social-enterprise/Documents/Report%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

free regarding their dividend use, loan acquisition, and reporting by the Malta Co-Operative Federation (Attard, 2016) backed by Lindsay Marie Farrugia's research findings (2016).

Diversity & Discrimination

Diversity within a group is something to bear in mind concerning [Volunteerism](#) and [Time & Time Management](#) – the former with regard to the importance for volunteers to socialise with one another and the latter concerning time consumption required by diversity. Herring's (2009) work sheds light onto the importance of diversity considerations of decision making processes in businesses. He tests the argument that the more diverse a group of employees are, the harder it is for the management to implement its policies and achieve productive business outcomes. He uses mixed methodology – employee surveys and statistical tools on several American companies both diverse and homogenous. His research concludes that it all boils down to time consumption. Indeed, ethnic, language, cultural, and other diversity can turn out to be an uneasy issue to address for managers. However, there is a bright side to having a diverse workforce – decisions reached are of higher quality and statistics proves it as diverse companies have better market share indicators. In other words, Herring's argument: slowly but surely. In order to hear out all opinions which in a diverse group of people happen to be of more diverse nature than in a homogenous group, one needs simply more time. Moreover, a consensus of some type must be reached in order to avoid tensions and resentment which makes such decisions more qualitative and diplomatic.

Although Herring (2009) champions diversity as a source of creativity and quality that opens new opportunities to business to conquer even higher summits, it (diversity) can also serve as a source of great tension. Syed & Pio (2010) claim that diversity of one kind, e.g. race, is a whole different story vis-a-vis layered diversity where two or three variables overlap, e.g. race, religion, and gender. They take a particular focus on Muslim migrant women's experiences in the Australian labour market. Their findings about Muslim migrant women are comparable to those discussed in the next paragraph regarding Malta, for instance, discrimination in job-hunting; society at large and employers in particular prefer to keep foreign employees uninformed about their labour and other rights; at work foreigners often

occupy the most undesired lower positions – job *ghettoisation*; real language barrier and perceived language barrier by the host nation; perception by migrants themselves that women should not work (in Islam); dress-code discrimination against Muslim women at work (requirements for no veil).

Interestingly, according to the EU-MIDIS II (Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey) (2017), job-hunting and while at work are the two areas of usual discriminatory practices that immigrants experience. Malta has one of the worst track records for SSAFR group immigrants (Sub-Saharan Africans) of the first and second generation among the EU countries when it comes to SSAFRs (many of whom are also Muslims) looking for or being at work. While the trust of immigrants in an EU country's national law enforcement and judicial institutions is among the highest in the case of Malta, only 11% of those who felt discriminated against reported such incidents to the appropriate institutions. Only 12% of SSAFRs in Malta are aware of organisations helping discrimination victims to overcome their experiences – while 8% of men could name at least one such organisation, less than 1% of women could name any. And the absolute anti-leadership position occupied by Malta in the EU is the secure residence status of first generation SSAFRs – at only 2% of all the respondents – no other country has a worse indicator. SSAFR females' national language proficiency levels are two and a half times lower than those of their male counterparts in Malta. 30% of female SSAFRs are employed against 51% of males in Malta which is one of the worst indicators for both genders in the EU as well as with regard to the male-female balance which correlates with Malta's SSAFRs' overall agreement with the survey statement that both genders should equally contribute their income to the household – only 53% of men think both genders should work and only 38% of females (again among the worst indicators in the EU). Only 53% of SSAFRs in Malta reported having amicable ties with at least one Maltese person which is one of the lowest records among the EU countries. SSAFRs¹⁰ are recognised as the least protected group in Malta – they are the most exposed foreigners to violent racism in the country, hence, the EU survey's close focus on this specific group in Malta (European Commission, 2018), which was well illustrated in practice in a recent crime when two soldiers of the Armed Forces of Malta allegedly shot dead one and

¹⁰ To a large extent, my participants' association's endeavours are aimed at empowering SSAFR women in Malta

wounded another two immigrants in a racially motivated night time drive-by shooting spree (“Racism is in our DNA – The Malta Independent,” 2019), (“No room for racism,” 2019).

Methodology

Initial Methodology – the Study of Otherness

Atkinson and Hammersley (2007), in their first chapter, first try to and then admit that they cannot coin the definition of ethnography in one sentence. However, in my view, while reading their account of how ethnography has gone through numerous phases of transformation across centuries, it becomes clear that they simply fail to say an obvious thing – ethnography is the study of other people – what is so other about them, what is their otherness? When they refer to western settlers and missionaries of the colonial epoch in the Americas and Africa, they, in fact, refer to westerners going abroad, encountering peoples of different cultures from the West, observing them and retelling their experiences back to their western co-nationals. When Atkinson and Hammersley bring up examples of well-off, urban, western social scientists of the nineteenth century visiting economically deprived western rural areas to explore how the village populations were coping with the impact of the industrialisation and urbanisation, they again refer to the study of otherness – curiosity exhibited by one specimen of a particular group regarding the lifestyle of another group. Moreover, it must not be left unnoticed that their curiosity about otherness assumed – the word of focus here is ‘*assumed*’ (*assumption*) – the explorers usually had, have and will have some assumptions about the people they intend to study. The first and most obvious assumption – that they will be different – they will not be like us. In the past this assumption was also reinforced by western racist stereotypes – an assumption that the participants would be less developed, less educated and otherwise inferior or even vulnerable in comparison to the observer (*ibid*).

I, too, had expectations of otherness – I had never volunteered or worked for an NGO, including humanitarian NGOs. I had never written, nor had I ever read, an application for donation by an NGO, nor an application for investment by a corporate

company. I had never seen NGO staff work behind the scenes in their offices being able to discuss issues away from the public eye. I was a total outsider to this type of activity altogether. And many anthropologists find it advantageous – it is good to be an outsider who is capable of looking at phenomena and the people involved from a neutral and detached vantage point (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007), (Russell Bernard, 2017). Outsiders, however, can be of two overt types, according to Bernard (2017): observing participant or participating observer¹¹. The former refers to ethnographers doing their fieldwork as equals to the ones they observe, e.g. observation of builders as a builder. On the other hand, in the latter case the observer is around but does not participate, e.g. observation of builders as a by-stander. I assumed that as someone completely inexperienced in the field of writing applications for financing I would be initially a participating observer and then, provided I had learnt, I would have moved into the observing participant mode. In my opinion, judging by the examples of the two types provided by Benard (2007) and Atkinson and Hammersley (2007), it looks like the observing participant gives an extra perspective to the researcher by means of actually trying out what a particular activity feels like, e.g. when a builder lifts up a heavy brick and later says it was heavy is not the same as lifting that brick up yourself and realising that the brick is indeed heavy, or maybe not heavy at all. Case in point, Bernard (2007) tells a story of a researcher who was disguised as a boat builder among other boat builders which allowed him to know the ropes of the trade when he overheard an interview of two participating observers with the participants during which the participants told many untruths.

Additionally, I had a particular interest in the subject for two reasons: I was curious to see the NGO backstage where people are involved in office chores and their relations with donors as it seemed something rather shady, to put it simply and straightforwardly, judging by the CDA's accounts (2008); and I was personally interested in knowing more about the actual processes attributed to the production of applications for financing as by that point I had been asked on numerous occasions whether I was knowledgeable in this respect by job interviewers to whom it occurred decisive for my employment. It is not unusual in anthropology to be inquisitive about

¹¹ There is a third type too – complete participant (going 100% undercover – nobody knows there is a person doing research in the field). More on my reasons not to go undercover can be read in the [Access & Privacy](#) section.

a particular subject to such an extent that it triggers actual research (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007), (Zwillinger et al., 2018).

My assumptions of the participants prior to the fieldwork were based on my literature review, especially on that of CDA (2008). I assumed they would be preoccupied with searching for the most feasible and attainable financing for their projects. I foresaw that the ones actually writing applications to their donors would be very much focused on satisfying the criteria laid out by donors; the actual needs of their aid recipients would serve a secondary role. I was looking forward to being exposed to a great deal of new vocabulary that I would have a vague understanding of. I also thought that the application writers would be professionals hired purely for this sole purpose of producing good application papers whose structure and wording with slight alterations could easily fit the corporate world of business project production. I was expecting to meet such people, observe their everyday dilemmas and ask them questions about their feelings concerning their involvement in the production of application documents and how they felt it was from a moral standpoint. I was expecting to encounter many ethical and moral considerations for myself too as I would not want to put my participants in an inconvenient position by telling too much about their organisation's financial matters. I knew the topic was prone to numerous obstacles, especially because NGOs receiving donations care about their public image – the better it is the greater the chances of attracting new donations (Wymer & Samu, 2003). More on that in the [Access and Privacy](#) part.

Besides, I found it important to explore the NGO-donor relations in the so-called “natural setting” in Atkinson and Hammersley's words (2007). It is obvious that one cannot put the two groups (NGO workers and donors) in a laboratory setting and observe them interact and demand they answer questionnaires. The alleged corporate nature of modern NGOs (CDA, 2008) and the indications by Cooley and Ron (2002), Nunnekamp et al (2009), Koch et al (2009), Dreher et al (2012), Teegen et al (2004), Molenaers et al (2014) that there was a gap in literature with regard to the actual processes happening between NGOs and their donors also contributed to opting for an ethnographic (qualitative) approach. I had to see for myself what was going on between the applicants for donations and their donors. Positivist (also known as quantitative) methods would not have helped either as they focus on statistical and numerical data as their main instrument of measurement (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007), (Russell Bernard, 2017) which again would not have shed much

if any light on the actual processes behind the scenes of NGO-donor relations. Hence, qualitative research methodology was chosen which, in many positivists' view, is prone to lacking objectivity (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). The objective versus subjective conflict is redressed by the acknowledgement of the very existence of the subjectivity of the observer/researcher, and hence, the realisation that the observer/researcher is actually not supposed to focus on the subject(s) observed but rather on the process of the observer/researcher encountering the world via the observed (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2001). And Bernard (2017) also stresses the impossibility of being completely objective – it just has to be admitted and taken into account leaving space for others to reflect upon your work via critique and commentaries of their own.

Moreover, I was advised by my supervisor and also by two other sources – Hutnyk (1990) and Spyer (2015) – that it was recommended to have a comparative approach to the phenomena observed. I also believed that it would again broaden my knowledge of the field of finance acquisition since the Maltese context could be too narrow and too specific due to the size of the country and the NGO sector ("EMPOWERING MALTESE NGOS – EEA Grants," n.d.). Hence, I chose to strive for a transnational approach and have two NGOs observed – a Maltese and a non-Maltese – to see if there were cultural (national) differences in approaching donors. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) write that comparisons are important for testing a hypothesis in practice – the wider the range of different settings wherein a test can be carried out the stronger the conclusion as one single setting might produce a result possible only in that particular setting overlooking other important factors present in other settings, hence, either falsely validating or falsely overturning the tested hypothesis.

This brought me to the next challenge – sampling. How do I find two organisations (one in Malta and one overseas) for research? Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) point out that ethnography can at times be messy and reliant on touch-and-go mentality – I prefer to use the term *opportunism* and more on how it is associated with my research one can read in the paragraphs below. In short, my sampling relied on my personal contacts, or rather I should say one contact – a peer student Rita¹² who works for a Maltese NGO and with whom I had an amicable

¹² This and other names changed for privacy protection purposes

relationship and whose organisation I knew relied on various donors for financing. By choosing Rita, I followed Bernard's (2017) advice to make it as simple as possible – there is no need to re-invent the bicycle and personal contacts play a big role in accessing the field. A much bigger challenge was to find a foreign setting – a foreign NGO dependent on donations. I had no personal contacts in foreign NGOs who could grant me access. Besides the lack of personal contacts, I also lacked what Russell Bernard (2017) puts in a simple term: money – the financial means to support myself abroad purely for the purposes of this research. He suggests writing applications for research financing – ironically, the very thing I intended to learn from the research (how to successfully apply for money). I decided to combine my research with a paid internship abroad via the European Union's (EU) Erasmus+ programme which provides scholarship grants to European university students undergoing an internship in another European country (outside their home university's country). I went to the International Office of the University of Malta that curates this type of business and applied for an internship grant which required no complicated application procedures unlike Bernard's (2017) proposed solution.

Actual Methodology – Chasing Opportunities

Access & Privacy

Issues attributed to access and privacy proved to be the major players affecting my initial plans. Concerning the former, my gatekeeper Rita did her best to ensure my presence in her organisation's meetings and other important day-to-day activities. And it was not that challenging as Atkinson and Hammersley's (2007) example of Sampson and Thomas (2003) who warn that access to one setting is a full-time activity throughout the duration of research. Once my access was granted, I did not have to re-verify my right to be present. However, I experienced the full-timeliness of this activity while trying to gain access to a non-Maltese NGO. I sent dozens of internship applications candidly mentioning that my intention was to learn the craft of writing applications for donations and in parallel to do research on the very activity of writing such applications. Most organisations ignored my emails or turned them down. In August, I thought I had succeeded – I was in talks with the German NGO

Kiron which was very close to hiring me when suddenly the job interviewer (over Skype) realised that my research would cover the activities I would be involved in at Kiron. The tone of her voice changed, she promised to discuss this in detail with her superiors and one week later I received an email from her saying my application was declined.

My strategy was to be open about my intentions – no undercover research. In the case of Rita's organisation, I had no other way but to ask for her permission overtly as I feared to jeopardise our friendship. Regarding Kiron, I also cared about my reputation as I presumed that doing research covertly would undermine my presence as an intern sent by the University of Malta receiving EU funding, should Kiron have discovered I had not been completely honest with them about my motives. Overt versus covert fieldwork is a common dilemma researchers have to address (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007), (Russell Bernard, 2017).

Having decided to play in the open, I encountered the next challenge invoked by Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) – that of ethics – the researcher's responsibility toward the researched¹³. Just as they describe, I had to go through the process of obtaining formal consent from Rita, Nadine and Zoe (read why them in the [Interviews](#) subchapter) for the right to interview them as well as the institutional consent for the right to make observations in the organisation. It is a formal requirement of the University of Malta – the UREC form¹⁴ (ethics and data protection form) and all the accompanying documentation: participant consent forms, institutional access forms, supervisor's letter of permission and so on. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) dedicate two short paragraphs informing their readers that such procedures have become increasingly common in the academic world while in reality it took me more than just two short paragraphs to read and write in order to comply with the

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- ¹³ ● Informed consent – research participants must be informed about the purposes and risks of research before agreeing to participate – applicable in my case
- Privacy – research makes private matters public, hence, there must be a line drawn what can and cannot be published which is often a legal matter – applicable in my case
 - Harm – presence of a researcher around a participant can sometimes cause undesired stress or other harm which has to be taken into consideration, e.g. being around terminally ill patients – not applicable in my case
 - Exploitation – researchers might occur in a dominant position vis-a-vis their participants which may lead to exploitation – not applicable in my case
 - Consequences for future research – obligation to other researchers to conduct your own research in such a manner that allows them to do future research by avoiding conflicts with participants – probably applicable in my case

¹⁴ <https://www.um.edu.mt/urec/onlineforms>

University's regulations as well as the EU GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) whose current shape can be traced back to the events unfolding back in early 2018 when Facebook breached users' privacy (Hern & Pegg, 2018)¹⁵. Although the official implementation date of said legislation was 25 May, 2018 ("GDPR Explained In 5 Minutes: Everything You Need to Know," 2019) and my research was supposed to commence in September, 2018, the Ethics Committee's invitation to fill out and hand in the UREC form was received on my email account only in early December, 2018. My queries about the necessary steps in order to protect my participants' privacy prior to the reception of said email were generally ignored – only Mr Joseph Matthew Debono of the Faculty of Arts was responsive to my inquisitive emails and said I could send my questions for the participants to the Ethics Committee by email for review which I did but never received any feedback. In general, the communication with the committee in question was rather one-sided (I actively asked questions and requested meetings for clarifications while the other side rarely replied and was elusive). To make things harder for inexperienced researchers like myself, the University does not provide its students with templates for participant consent forms unlike some other universities, e.g. I had to search for consent forms via Google and found one provided by Trinity College Dublin¹⁶ which I had to modify and use for my participants. As a result of the committee's shortcomings, I failed to comply with their regulations on numerous occasions and had to resubmit the forms several times which obviously delayed the entire process of research. In short, it was a nerve-wracking experience for me which could have been avoided had the Ethics Committee been more operative and responsive.

Fieldwork – Change of Topic

As promised, I come back to the word *opportunism* – it is what happened to me during my fieldwork. While busy trying to gain access to one more NGO, I recalled the challenges invoked by my peer students, Faculty staff, and frankly myself too during the presentation of the research proposal at the end of the second semester based on what Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) shamelessly call common sense –

¹⁵ Ethics is a changing variable and what was once permitted now could be frowned upon and vice versa (Russell Bernard, 2017) and the Facebook Cambridge Analytica scandal has created an extra burden on researchers by triggering stricter data protection laws in the EU

¹⁶ <https://www.tcd.ie/swsp/assets/pdf/Participant%20consent%20form%20template.pdf>

in their view, common sense has an equal weight to literature review for judgements. On that spring day, our collective common sense expressed in a University auditorium went along the lines that financial matters were too sensitive for anyone to talk about openly, including NGOs. Opportunism is not the antagonist in this account of events. It is, quite on the contrary, the remedy to redress moments of impasse and despair. My supervisor Dr Maurice Said joined the choir of warning voices about the potential hardships and he was the one who immediately proposed the remedy – be flexible with regard to fieldwork and research topics. It was a paraphrase (without a deviation from the main point) of James Boster's (1986) soothing guide for inexperienced field researchers – there will be potential problems with regard to responsibilities toward the informants (privacy), denial of access, isolation, personal hardships but remain loyal to the main two parts – fieldwork observations and interviews.

Firstly, the challenge of no access to the field resurfaced when Kiron turned down my application which meant that my research would be confined to Malta. It confirmed that sensitive topics face high levels of access denials (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). My supervisor proposed plan B – to refocus instead purely on Malta by contacting Maltese organisations. Only one, besides Rita's organisation, very reluctantly permitted me to take one interview (no observations) on the condition that I would email questions upfront. I eventually took the interview and it serves as auxiliary material for wider context. Plan B could not be fully implemented not only because there was only one organisation where I was permitted to do my observations but also because my participants were not busy searching for new donations by writing applications. Instead, I observed how a group of people volunteering for a local NGO helping refugees and other foreigners in Malta were preoccupied with establishing a commercial entity with a social mission. As mentioned in the previous subchapter, it is not unusual that personal interests in the topic are among the motivating factors for anthropological research. Additional to my interest in developing skills in writing business plans, I was curious, still am, about different business models. I always admire entrepreneurs who have something more than greed to satisfy. This helped me to seize the opportunity to explore the field of social entrepreneurship and move on to plan C (the current plan of this work).

It is a common trend in ethnographic research when a researcher is forced to refocus his or her topic as a result of fieldwork observations (Strathern, 2005),

(Marcus, 2018). The phenomenon of impactful unexpectedness has been elaborated on by Nordstrom and Robben (1996). Particularly, they endorse the principles of anthropologist Frank Pieke in whose view sudden twists must not instil fear. On the contrary, they ought to be seized upon implying that the unforeseen developments should be incorporated into the ongoing research with all the ramifying features as long as the researcher manages the new situation accordingly. Rita's organisation granted me permission to be present during their planning sessions of the future model of their envisioned food truck which was supposed to provide migrant women in Malta with employment and training. The truck is also supposed to serve as an additional source of income for the organisation's other projects. I observed their daily struggles to get the food truck up and running and later designed a list of questions for the opinion leaders of the food truck project. I encountered a number of problems when it came to the organisation of actual interviews with these persons. Most of them work for the organisation on a voluntary part-time basis and devote only as much time as possible while doing their full-time jobs, raising children and running other daily tasks. That is how I changed my research question to: *how does the absence of pro-social business legislation in Malta affect the endeavours of a philanthropic NGO to pursue the aim of empowering migrant women via social business?*

Interviews

Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) do not question the importance of having interviews but have an ambiguous position regarding the purpose of interviewing participants and they are clear about their own ambiguity – they coin it a *catholic* position implying that they agree with all opinions. One opinion suggests that it is the ethnographer's duty to do research on those who are marginalised and by interviewing them the researcher amplifies their voice. Others believe that the researcher ought to deconstruct the interviewee's words and seek the origin of such discourse. Prior to the research I held no strong opinion. Today, I can say that this particular thesis work is leaning toward the former opinion perhaps because I have developed a sort of solidarity with my participants which is a common phenomenon in fieldwork (ibid).

While initially I had questions pertaining to the background of acquiring financial donations on my mind, I opportunistically foresaw that I had to broaden the context, and I included more questions connected to the organisation's aspirations to found and run a business. Only later during the transcription process of the interviews, I realised how central the food truck topic appeared to my participants as well as to my research. It was one of those pivotal *aha!* moments described by Zwillinger et al (2018) when the researcher lets the interviewee take initiative and lead the conversation into uncharted waters – the questions concerning the food truck produced answers that shed more light on the implications of social entrepreneurship in Malta.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) also, like Zwillinger et al (2018), mention the seizure of opportunity in their interview guidelines which prescribes that the interviewer should let the respondent always provide an answer in their own words and let the conversation flow naturally (no interruptions, no sharp twists). At the same time there must be a stimulating or even slightly inquisitive touch to it – it is important to obtain the necessary answer as well as it should be deep enough to fully grasp the context which I did with relevant follow-up questions in times of unclarity or superficiality in the respondents' answers. In Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) view, premeditated questions are only an invitation to a longer exchange of words leading to the necessary conclusion. Interview as a genre is not a questionnaire – dry, inflexible, strictly channelled; rather it is an interaction or as they put it in their more recent work it is about *hows* as much as *whats* (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). The former referring to the process of knowledge production while the latter are the guidelines ensuring the overall content and substance.

Furthermore, I followed the rule of being an informed interviewer – one who has background knowledge of the context and processes the interviewee is involved in. Interview questions must produce a reflection of observations and seek elaborations that complete the observed phenomena with the missing bits and pieces (the *whats*), hence, interviews come after observations and not the other way round (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007).

Respondent selection – firstly, I understood and stuck to the obvious yet often underestimated rule that the interview is about the interviewee and not the interviewer – there is no place for chasing fame and glory as interviewer – interviews are about the other person, the interviewee, and more importantly, his or her

meanings – interviewers serve as mere organisers of such meanings conveyed. Secondly, it is about the assignment of competences – how do we select the most competent interviewees in terms of their ability to deliver the desired *whats* via *hows*? The search for the most competent respondents begins with observations – who is involved (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004)? Holstein and Gubrium (1995) provide an example of a nineteenth century scholar of poverty in London who revolutionarily decided to let the poor Londoners themselves talk about their own conditions – let the poor define their own poverty if there was such at all. Hence, I decided that the only legitimate interviewees I could have were the ones involved in the establishment of the food truck business: Zoe – an active food truck proponent; Rita – the organisation’s board member and administrator who votes on major decisions; and Nadine who runs the catering services of the organisation – that is what Bernard (2017) calls roles and statuses that define the interview-worthiness of a participant. I managed to arrange interviews with Zoe and Rita and failed with Nadine due to her busy schedules. Nevertheless, on several occasions Nadine provided useful comments which shed light on processes, at times unexpectedly and unsolicited-ly. Besides, I interviewed two outsiders (people unrelated to the organisation in question) for the purposes of diverse opinions and the creation of the overall context as Holstein and Gubrium (1995) suggest. The initial aim was to interview a wider demographic, especially among other Maltese NGOs, to see how financing issues look in a broader context – basically, is it only my participants who experience it or is it part of a wider trend? Only one Maltese organisation and one foreign agreed on the condition of total anonymity which confirms my concerns expressed in the [Access & Privacy](#) subchapter.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) go on by emphasising that the main question to address, however philosophical and rhetorical the issue may be, is not: why do we choose to interview these people and thus, give them a voice? But rather quite on the contrary: why do we leave other people out by not interviewing? I also had to address the issue and decided to stick to the topic of social business establishment by a Maltese NGO as anything wider in scope would require more time and would go beyond the permitted word count.

Meaning-making within an interview, in their – Holstein and Gubrium (1995) – terms is a fluid process implying that the interviewer must refrain from having standardised and highly categorical questions, e.g. on a scale from 0 to 10 how

satisfied are you with your income level? The interviewer's objective is to seek the interpretations and feelings about the phenomena researched, which the example question above falls short of achieving due to its lack of space for expressiveness in the answer part as the respondent is invited to give a narrow response by choosing a number between 0 and 10. In real life, individuals' perceptions of satisfaction with their income is a relative measurement as one individual may be satisfied with fairly low earnings whereas another individual earning just as much finds it unacceptable. Or else there might be other reasons for giving a particular answer which actually does not represent the true feelings – envy, competition, peer pressure. In designing my questions, I made sure that the respondents had enough space for manoeuvre and expression, enforcing it by my follow-up questions depending on the response given. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) continue along the lines of meaning-making and suggest that the interviewer and interviewee ought to use the same *indigenous code* when communicating – in other words, all types of barriers (unknown language, expressions, acronyms, etc) must be settled as soon as possible to ensure there is nothing lost in translation which I did to the best of my knowledge – only once my interviewee Rita could not understand a question I read out loud and asked me to hand the paper over to her so she could read it herself.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) remind their readers to make sure the interviewee is allowed to build *horizons of meaning* – the respondent resorting to examples and metaphors to make his or her point more explicit is the type of situation the interviewer must listen to extremely carefully as it is the very process of explaining one's mindset and feelings on a given topic – metaphors are the key to better understanding as well as yet another opportunity to find a hidden topic, which I must admit worked particularly well when I interviewed Zoe whose business consulting background and knowledge of the French social entrepreneurship legislation strengthened my curiosity about the implications of having a social business in Malta. Having followed the Holstein-Gubrium system, I produced the following questions for Zoe, Rita and Nadine (again, only the first two ladies answered them) which can be seen in [Appendix 1](#).

As evident, there were questions inspired by the initial research question which lost their central role, e.g. question 14, and the focus shifted towards questions 4-8 during the interview transcription phase and consequent analysis. Besides the interviews, I received useful unsolicited comments from my participants

which often prove to be more important than interview responses as they were natural and spontaneous which many researchers therefore find more useful than choreographed interviews where either side might be interested in presenting oneself in a better light than in reality (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). The next [Observation](#) chapter explains the background behind the origin of the questions.

Observation

This chapter makes an introduction to the who, where and when dimensions of my work (Who are my participants? Where are they? When did I observe them?) and prepares the groundwork for the consequent what, why and how dimensions elaborated on in the next chapter. This account is a reduction of my original rather wordy field notes describing useful as well as useless details – common strategy to overdo it and later decide what is worth keeping (Russell Bernard, 2017).

In September 2018, I make my way to the volunteer centre situated in the Maltese capital, in an old building probably built two centuries ago, with a shabby facade, a porch deemed inaccessible for a wheelchair user, a front door in poor condition outside which are two ladies of approximately my age (late twenties to early thirties). Their voices quietly (yet loud enough for my ears) discuss the weather, mention names of persons not present and their reasons for either not coming today at all or arriving late. I do not greet them, and they also pretend not to take notice of my presence. I hear a typical mobile phone vibration buzz coming from one of the two ladies' bags. She reaches out for the source of the sound and a smartphone emerges out of her purse. Her fingers make brisk movements along the surface of the phone and a few seconds later she announces to her companion that a person named Jane will arrive shortly with a key.

A few minutes later, Jane shows up wielding the key to the centre's front door. I am able to recognise her since my gatekeeper Rita provided me with Jane's contact number. We have been communicating over Whatsapp and her account is decorated with a profile picture allowing me to recognise her. We quickly confirm my presence during their deliberations today as the rest look on and I feel obliged to repeat that I will be sitting quietly in the corner taking notes. The meeting is going to cover matters pertaining psychological help for refugees and will be chaired by Jane who is a trained psychologist.

We transit through a slightly larger room only to settle down in a smaller room with just one window at which I decide to sit down as there is an isolated chair away from the conference table occupying the central part of the room. The ladies take seats around the table with Jane at the end of the table. Jane justifies her being late as she had to pick the key up from someone else who was also supposed to come

earlier and open the centre for the rest. In response, the other two members express their curiosity with regard to today's exact agenda to which the chairperson replies: "reports and rosters." The ladies open their respective rosters: some on their phones, others have them as printouts. They are trying to find common dates off work to devote to the Association's needs. Jane adds she hopes that the other members are able to show up today and thus, the gathering reaches the reasonable quorum for meaningful decision-making.

Another three ladies of about the same age appear. One of them has brought her child which initiates a discussion about childcare. They trade the most recent developments in their children's lives and a number of useful best parenting experiences are shared. Jane quickly introduces me to the newly arrived and invites me to comment on my research topic. I am told that some finance will be discussed but in the future, I shall find it more appropriate to seek Nadine's counsel on such topics when she returns since it is her field of responsibility at the association.

The lingua franca of the association is English, but accents and nationalities suggest a myriad of origins. One of the new arrivals, Zoe, has more to say than the others. At times, she uses her lunch box cutlery to reinforce her narrative like an orchestra conductor while speaking. She raises the issues the association faces in the refugee camps in Malta. She mentions that the association is short on psychologists and interpreters to be able to cater to everyone's needs in the refugee camps. Jane confirms that their association is at its capacity and adds: "we have to start considering extra interpreters." The main problem appears to be the diversity of the refugee population for the organisation in question as well as for the entire country of Malta and its government agencies dealing with refugees. The language issues, in Jane's view, trigger intercultural tensions inside the camps too: "West-Africans predominantly speak French and East-Africans mostly speak their own diverse languages. There have been conflicts on the language basis."

Zoe continues by disclosing an interesting observation: "kids in the camps are bored, that's why the pencils that are brought by us disappear fast." The other ladies agree that the pencils are actually brought for the psychologists' sessions with the adult refugee females, however, the refugee kids tend to appropriate them in order to be able to draw. Then, Zoe switches to the problem of not having a fruitful session with refugee women when there are their male relatives or husbands present in the same room who tend to express the desire to control the entire process. As an

example, she relates how a girl was taken away by her brother when she burst into tears. A lady wearing a headscarf says that the Libyan men are usually like that – they take care of their women but are tough on them at the same time and do not want their ladies to be seen crying in front of strangers. Jane adds that unfortunately the refugee camp personnel are not of the most helping kind regarding NGOs' activity inside the camps.

Later, Zoe complains that the US Embassy in Malta finds it inefficient to help refugees on a project to project basis and Jane replies: “in order to make a project successful, you don't have to address the victims individually” to which Zoe points out that when an association member meets refugees in group sessions and speaks about atrocities, refugees nod and express understanding but remain reluctant to open up and share their individual stories. The issue is left alone and the conversation switches to the material situation of the refugees. Jane says: “in Hal Far where a refugee camp is situated, the people there are in survival mode – they have to survive on 130 euros a month”. One of the girls present expresses a more sceptical view: “be careful with how much money they tell you they have – they tend to cheat.”

Apart from the actual cash that the refugees allegedly receive, the attendees decide to cover other material aspects of the refugees, for instance, they exhibit their frustration with the type of clothes donated to refugees by the Maltese population. They find it difficult to transfer old Maltese pieces of clothing to Muslim refugee women due to obvious cultural differences – Maltese women generally wear revealing shorts, dresses, and skirts that fail to cover the body parts considered intimate in the Muslim world. Jane reminds the girls present that it is important to save receipts for goods bought for refugees, when Zoe recalls how fast her purchased sweets are consumed by refugee camp children. Such purchases can be reimbursed within reasonable limits, according to Jane.

The discussion flows from what the refugees receive as donations and social benefits toward the possible means of bringing them to self-sustainable subsistence. Jane announces: “remind the refugees that they must go and attend the English language courses. Tell them there are other activities too: job-hunting and so on.” Zoe states: “we need to help men too” to which the lady in the headscarf agrees: “yes, one woman regularly asks how to employ her sons”, and as a result of these

two remarks the other participants provide their examples of men being interested in the association's services in particular as well as in help in a wider sense.

Approximately an hour since the beginning of the meeting – Zoe and the child have finished their respective meals, and Jane reminds everyone that it is the association's primary task within the current psychological counselling project to provide aid to the refugee women who have suffered from abuse first hand and only after to the ones who have seen the sufferings of others. The participants agree and Jane ushers them to agree on a date for the next meeting. Once a consensus is reached, Jane proclaims the meeting adjourned. Some girls leave while the others remain but move to the adjacent room where they are preparing to host a session for refugee women. I am kindly asked by Jane to step closer to her so that she can briefly explain the overall conditions under which the psychological help programme exists: "I get paid for this – I get a salary. The other girls don't. The interpreters also get paid. It is a vicious circle – if you don't have money on your organisation's account, you don't get money from donors; if you don't get money from donors, you don't have money on your account". After this concise explanation, I am asked to leave as the upcoming activities are private – psychology sessions with refugees.

Having struggled for two months to get another opportunity to visit and observe the Expat Aid Association,¹⁷ I finally arrange with Nadine via Whatsapp a place, date and time to conduct my next field observation as she has come back to Malta from Africa. It is early November in Malta, still relatively warm, yet, occasionally rainy. On a late Friday morning in November, I am rushing to meet Nadine at a different location. Once I arrive at the arranged location, there are three other ladies. One of them happens to be Zoe, the others are unknown to me. As soon as I sit down and organise my notebook and pen, I start receiving an unsolicited flow of comments from Nadine and one of the unknown girls: "we struggle daily; women don't want to participate; we need a proper accounting system; if you build your org based on projects, how can you run your administration? We work full time and we are volunteers; it is hard to get the paperwork straight for the food truck if you're not Maltese; we get funds – volunteer org scheme fund which is very helpful but you can only use a small fraction for salaries (15%); language barrier is the biggest problem when it comes to communicating with the target women; our work is

¹⁷ Name changed

very casual but we try our best to make it formal". Zoe refrains from providing comments to me at this stage. Agatha, from Eastern Europe, is in her final month of pregnancy. The other unknown girl, who also looks younger than the rest (in her early twenties), turns out to be an intern and she is leaving the organisation soon.

At some point, the ladies tell me that they think that this office room feels like a luxury. They used to have an even smaller room in a different area of the island without a window. For the current room which includes a big window, overlooking the parallel street, they pay by resorting to a witty scheme (creative accounting) which is not illegal, they claim, but it causes inconvenience anyway. Nadine mentions another reason for feeling happy. She can, at last, hire someone to work for her as she officially runs the association now but she cannot technically hire herself because she is a non-European Union citizen, that is, she can only hire EU citizens.

Then, Agatha and Zoe begin discussing potential catering areas. Zoe estimates that there are around 500 workers in Mosta and if they manage to attract around ten percent of them, it is fifty customers daily. So, the girls believe that their future food truck should make preparations on a daily basis to sell at least fifty portions. However, Zoe has her misgivings about the number – what if only fifteen customers show up and thirty-five portions turn out to be wasted. They begin to entertain the idea of running an event-catering business instead. The two options on the table are: 1) sell food in a busy place daily (food waste problem); or 2) catering events (irregularity of events and hence, irregularity of work is the issue). Zoe says: "structuring business so we know there are customers is important". While the two are busy brainstorming about the best business model. Zoe and Agatha are now considering using the food truck officially just for serving and delivering food while cooking off-site. Zoe proposes to Agatha: "if we can't find a kitchen, then maybe we find a garage next to a kitchen which we use as storage and certify the kitchen but don't actually use it."

Nadine turns to the two girls preoccupied with the catering business. Agatha believes that the minimum number of people served at an event must be no less than fifteen, otherwise, it is financially unviable. The three fantasise about employing an accountant to keep their finances in order. In their view, it is possible to hire an accountant once a company is registered and it shall be written in the statutes that a certain percentage goes to the accountant and to financing various association projects. Zoe and Agatha mention another member's name (unknown to me) who

has found an accountant who might help them. Suddenly, the ladies decide to discuss a potential offer to cater at a Christmas event but there is a problem to find staff to fulfil this mission – most members of the Expat Aid will leave Malta for Christmas to visit their home countries.

Unexpectedly for me, a man in his forties appears in the doorway. He greets us. He speaks English with a Maltese accent. He is there to discuss the food truck. Nadine and the intern remain in the current office room. Agatha, Zoe and the new guest move to a vacant room down the corridor closer to the exit, and I follow them. The three sit down at a desk. I am left with the remaining chair and sit down in the corner on the left of the entrance. Agatha commences by stating that they need a licence for the food truck. The man responds that it is even hard for a Maltese like him to open a restaurant, let alone getting a licence for a food truck. He claims that he owns several fast food establishments around Malta. He lists the bureaucratic hurdles one has to overcome in order to open a catering business: proper air exhaust system; building permit; sanitation authorities. According to him, it is not complicated to get a loan or an investor for a new business in Malta, provided one has a good business plan. Zoe is trying to distance from this notion of establishing a separate entity, that is, running a food truck in parallel to the association. The man insists it is better to run it separately in parallel. He also advises to get a licenced restaurant kitchen and use the truck for deliveries. In his words: “it is a cockroach country [Malta]. You have to be one otherwise you die”. Zoe and Agatha bring up another counterargument to having a separate business entity – they are concerned with profit transfers from the company to the association (there is no law in Malta allowing one to run a so-called social enterprise). He is indifferent to this comment. He carries on by saying that they need a good chef to do calculations for their meals, so they know their expenses and profits. He reiterates that Maltese businessmen are cockroaches, but they can be nice too – there might be a food and beverage supplier willing to invest twenty percent in their food truck. He makes a claim that it is normal for a Maltese restaurant to have two treasuries (cashboxes): one legal for the registered income and the other for black money (unregistered). He briefly touches upon Hugo’s empire (hotels, restaurants, and other businesses in Paceville). In his view, the prices on Hugo’s burgers make no sense. There must be some hidden agenda behind them, he claims and speculates about the possible causes of Hugo’s death. “You can’t get stabbed for selling expensive burgers,” concludes the guest¹⁸.

As this conversation ends on this note, the man leaves, and another guest shows up. This time it is a lady in her mid-twenties. Her name is Judy. She has arrived to help the association conduct interviews with potential candidates for a vacancy announced by Nadine. She works at the University of Malta. Nadine and Judy settle in another empty room. While Nadine and her aide are interviewing candidates, I have moved back to the original office where I find Zoe and Agatha negotiating a salary for a potential employee for the kitchen. They have a girl who occasionally cooks for them and consults them on food issues. They are contemplating an eight euros per hour wage. They hope they could use the surplus money in their budget that Rita mentioned earlier. They wrap up the day by mentioning that they are expecting a donation from PFC (People for Change) which still has not come through.

Three days later, I revisit the same office. Their meeting has already started as I walk in. I observe five participants of whom I am familiar with three: Nadine, Zoe and Fatima (she is my peer student and a few weeks earlier informed me that she would be interning with the Expat Aid). The other two remain unknown to me. One is wearing a headscarf and glasses while the other girl is wearing a dark leather jacket and speaks with a slight Hispanic accent. A few moments later, I will learn that she is from Latin America. She will go by the name of Shakira. The ladies are discussing the design and menu of their upcoming food truck. Just like during the Valletta volunteer centre visit and my very first visit to the association's office, one can feel that Zoe is a natural leader. She has provided her laptop for today's deliberations, and she has prepared handouts with designs proposed for the food truck. The other four ladies are flocking around her. Zoe asks questions, actively seeks the others' opinion, and is not shy to open up about her views on various aspects.

One of the participants, Karima, argues that she is in favour of only those designs that provide customers with a clear view of what is going on inside the truck.

¹⁸ The guest raises numerous implications associated with the catering industry in Malta. In order to complement my research by putting the intended food truck in context, I have attempted to find relevant studies depicting the realities of the industry in question. My internet search has led me to a number of outdated and superficial publications which by no means could verify the guest's depiction of the catering industry, nor could they overturn his words, nor could they supplement his account. Noteworthy, I have searched only in English and hence, I might have missed publications in other languages, e.g. Maltese (which I do not speak). Additionally, I did not have the necessary connections and time resources to do parallel research by means of observation into the local catering industry. However, in my opinion, it is an area that deserves thorough research in its own right and hence, I leave it for some other scholar to look into.

She is convinced that it is of paramount importance for the clientele to ensure that the food sold is prepared in clean conditions. The other participants disagree with her, especially Zoe and Nadine who do not understand why it is so crucial to have such levels of transparency. They decide to leave the design issues for the time being and transfer their attention to the menu instead. Zoe and Nadine are the advocates of having an assortment as varied as possible. Zoe also raises the issue of running an environmentally friendly business – no refuse policy – as an example she refers to their chef consultant who has told her that yesterday's pita bread can be reused today as pita crisps. The rest express their agreement with this policy.

Then, the ladies start to entertain the idea of having a flexible menu allowing some space for clients to design their own dishes by asking the staff to mix several ingredients together in order to create a dish that originally does not exist on the menu. Shakira occasionally warns the rest that she cannot stay for too long today. Zoe again turns to forwarding messages from their chef consultant who allegedly warned the girls from having too predictable a menu: "don't sell pizza because pizza sells and everyone sells it here." According to Zoe, their advisor is encouraging them to find their own niche in the Maltese catering market. One of the potential means of achieving this uniqueness could be a rotating (seasonal) menu, in Zoe and Shakira's view. The latter also thinks that before making up their mind on the final version of their menu, they should first go down the trial and error path – cook various dishes and see what sells and what not.

Zoe is trying to lead the conversation into a different direction away from the actual food that will be cooked to the pricing policy. She is of the opinion that it is better to set their prices in stone from the very beginning. Shakira protests – to her mind, the opposite approach is going to be a better tactic from a business point of view. Zoe finds Shakira's position unfair towards the newly gained loyal customer base – people must be able to count on their food truck as having stable prices. Having left this issue unsolved, Zoe moves back to the food freshness and zero waste matters. She puts forward an idea of outsourcing baking since pita bread gets hard and thus unpleasant fast. She would like to leave baking to a professional and hence, avoid this hassle in the food truck. At this point, Shakira announces that her time is up, and she must leave. Zoe tells the remaining delegates that the menu proposed serves as a reference point only to trigger further brainstorming. The conversation enters a halal versus non-halal zone. Karima on one hand and Zoe and

Nadine on the other hand lock horns on this issue. Despite being a Muslim lady herself, Nadine relentlessly repeats that the Expat Aid Association is all about inclusion and diversity. She states that the organisation is about migrant women and not religion and points to the fact that the association in large part consists of non-halal nationalities like Latinas. Zoe throws her support behind Nadine's position. Karima (who is a Muslim) on the other hand defends her pro-halal position. In her view, the possibility of having non-halal foods being prepared inside the food truck's kitchen might discourage pro-halal girls from cooking there and it also might cause unpredictability vis-a-vis their clientele who would like to see consistency in terms of the type of food served. Zoe decides to raise the stakes by announcing that one day the food truck may sell alcohol too. Nadine is trying to reason with Karima – she reiterates the association's primary mission of bringing different ethnicities and cultures together and that those who cannot bear it should not take part in it. Fatima has remained silent for the most part but during the halal versus non-halal debates nods a few times in support of Zoe and Nadine's arguments and says no a couple of times when Karima has something to say. Zoe and Nadine are trying to wrap up this dispute by proposing a rotating menu and hence, rotating cooks – three months a group of halal cooks work, then a group of non-halal cooks take over for a similar period.

Once the conflict around the halal versus non-halal foods has died down, the ladies decide to plan the food truck launch site. The University of Malta main campus is being considered. In their view, many people circulate in that area which is good for attracting attention and gaining recognition. They decide to hold another meeting on the food truck related issues. In the meantime, a man in his late forties has arrived. He is a representative of Malta's federation for a very popular team sport and he is organising a competition in late November at which he would like to see the Expat Aid ladies as main caterers. He wishes to see a quote for their catering services so that he could calculate his budget and make up his mind regarding the number of catering companies he can afford to hire for his event. He estimates that the event will gather around 150 individuals. Then, he becomes curious about the right way of making a payment for their services as he acknowledges that the association is not a company but rather an NGO. He needs an official invoice for their cooking services but Zoe expresses her concerns that it may not be possible due to not being registered as a company which makes the guest thoughtful at first

but then he seems to have come up with a solution – he assures them he has a relative working for a major accounting company in Malta who might advise the ladies on how to redress this problem in question.

The ladies and man agree to keep in touch as he gets up from his chair and leaves. Nadine warns Zoe that she has had previous experience with this gentleman and that prudence is the most appropriate way of carrying out business with him. Nadine calls it a day and before we leave she informs me that she will meet an accountant who will help them free of charge to make things orderly and she explains why it is important: “we have a system which is not a system”. We agree to meet four days later.

That day comes and I arrive as arranged. The minute I drop my rucksack on the floor in their office, I am asked whether I could help them assemble their furniture which will arrive any time soon from their old office. Nadine is holding a meeting with their new intern in a separate room which happens to be vacant, thus, can be used by the Expat Aid – officially the association is renting only one room on this floor of the office complex. Nevertheless, the floor in question contains more than just one room. Two rooms are occupied: one by the Expat Aid; and another one by some firm. The other three or so rooms are not rented by anyone and the landlord does not mind that the association or the firm use them now and then. Agatha informs me that they had a rendezvous yesterday with the accountant who was found by their Italian member (whom I still have not met). When I inquire about the meeting, Agatha replies that he does not feel sufficiently skilful to consult NGOs but he will do his best to help the association.

While waiting for the delivery company to bring their office belongings, Agatha and I are having a chat about her role at the Expat Aid. It turns out that she is not that heavily involved with the food truck. She is just following developments. However, her main job is to keep track of finances. The association has a separate bank account for each project and a separate file on their computer for each project's money transactions. She explains that they are not professional accountants but would like to keep things orderly, hence, they find it the most appropriate way of bookkeeping. She adds that this current system makes their lives easier when it comes to producing reports for their donors. She has been a volunteer at the organisation for about one year and she moved to Malta due to her husband's job. She explains that when she moved, she sensed an urge to get involved in some sort

of voluntary activity and the Expat Aid Association seemed like a good choice. Having chatted for about thirty minutes, we see the movers arrive and deliver the furniture. The day is wrapped up by Agatha sighing that she hopes they will never ever have to move again, except to larger premises. Nadine confirms by adding that she hopes that they will have money to continue to pay the rent.

Analysis

My analysis focused on providing answers to the three most important questions that left me restless during my observations: what, why and how. What is it that my participants are trying to achieve? Why do they desire to achieve it? And how are they succeeding in achieving it? The [Entrepreneurial Spirit](#) subchapter addresses the what question. The [Philanthropy, Volunteerism & Humanitarianism](#) seeks an answer as to why they want to do it. And the [Time, Law & Diversity](#) covers the how area of my analysis. The proceeding subchapters contain interview excerpts which are aligned to the left and my comments on my interviewees' responses which appear as normal text (justified alignment). All direct quotes are written in smaller font. My questions are written in *Italic font* to distinguish them from Zoe's and Rita's quotes.

Entrepreneurial Spirit

What is it that my participants are doing? Is this social entrepreneurship? Complying with the interviewing techniques outlined in the [Interviews](#) subchapter, I make queries about my [Observation](#) of the participants' deliberations about the food truck to see whether I have understood their intentions as what constitutes [Social Entrepreneurship](#). Zoe's and Rita's answers indicate that their intended food truck would have two objectives: to help migrant and refugee women who struggle with employment and integration in Malta as discussed in the [Diversity and Discrimination](#) chapter; and to finance the association's other projects, which leads me to conclude that these aims qualify with two out of the three areas of social entrepreneurship – employment of marginalised groups and profit allocation to charitable causes. Their primary task is to provide employment and the profit allocation would play a secondary role which reflects the EU's observation that the majority of social businesses begin as integration projects and later possibly expand and refocus (European Commission, Directorate E, 2015).

ZOE

Mhm. Alright. OK, why have you decided to have a food truck for your social business so to say?

Like why me? Or why the association?

The association and whose idea was it? Was it your idea, was it..?

No, it was not my idea. It was defined more than a year ago. There was a research project Step Up, I believe, which highlighted that the women we were in contact with had very good cooking skills but a lot of them were not doing cooking as a means of living. And it was also decided. Well, it was not decided but it was recognised that promoting diversity through food was a very efficient way to break prejudices and make talk together even if they are from different backgrounds. It was a nice way to start, you know, promoting a dialogue among cultures and basically we started doing catering events but then we realised: "if we want to promote women's empowerment and employment, events are not enough because it is one or two days during a month". So, it's not, you know, regular income that's enough to sustain someone's life. So, we thought that a food truck would be operating on a daily basis so we could actually employ women with full time contracts.

You employ women who are the most disadvantaged, who are, let's say, migrant women who can't find a job and are probably facing some discrimination?

Well, yeah. That's the aim. Right now, the two women we are employing... Em, yeah, do they? Are they completely the targets? Well, yes and no, like you know one of them has very good experience in cooking and like even managing a kitchen. And I don't know the full story. I just know that she did a couple of experiences. Em, she learnt a lot. She's very knowledgeable in everything, including, the Maltese environment. And... And she wanted herself to kind of keep back. And she is part of this project because she liked the idea. So, she's not the most disadvantaged woman. And the second one, she's from Syria and she never worked as a cook. She's very good. She worked as tailor before. You know, at the same time she didn't want to get a crappy job without a contract which happened to be the case. She was employed without a contract, you know, for a couple of hours. So, and the ambition is as well to work with refugees. So maybe very soon we'll be in a position to employ another refugee.

As it is evident, their aim is to empower women as an organisation and they wish to expand this ambition through an establishment of a business entity which leads me to question their self-awareness as NGO workers, hence, our conversation moves into the realm of distinction between business thinking and philanthropic thinking and this is where we see that a social entrepreneur is both an entrepreneur as well as a selfless benefactor – a business person detached from greed as defined in the [Social Entrepreneurship](#) subchapter.

We are very much thinking business-wise.

Aha!

Well, you know, at the end of the day, if we don't have money, so we don't want to be like a hard-core business. Maybe today is a good example. So, the discussion started business-wise, like organisation of, you know, the operations, because we started to do a bit of catering, having people taste the menu, and you know get some feedback. Do you like it or not? Bla-bla-bla. But then we realised that we were catering for between 15-20 to 70 people like every day for four days. And when I look at how it was going in the kitchen, so it is the beginning, so maybe a bit different, but still, I was seeing Karima and Alzira, they're already really busy. Even without loading and unloading the truck, driving the truck etc. So we started to discuss: "OK, do you think we need a third cook because it seems to me a bit tight in terms of, you know, responsibilities and timing and everything?" and we started to discuss: "who we will recruit?" And I had interviews with a couple of women, and I had someone in mind – a more different profile. And with Nadine we shared an idea that this woman happens to be an Eritrean. And you know this is when the social mission comes into the equation as well. This woman is Eritrean, and she has a refugee status. We were like: "this is a perfect candidate." At first, she openly expressed her willingness to work, to be a kitchen helper, because she said: "I'm not a cook. I have experience in helping in a kitchen, but I can't tell myself I'm a cook". So, she is interesting by this position and she has the right, you know, by any other characteristic we look at. You know, diversity of profiles and the social mission. This is where the social mission gets into discussion. We started business-wise, OK, operations, how we can make sure that we are able to do what we need to do. And then when you choose a candidate, you don't only choose based on I want this profile, you also choose: "who do I want to empower?"

When it comes to profits going to a charitable cause, Rita as well as Zoe claim they will use any surplus income of the food truck to finance the association – again we see that greed is not the motivating factor, instead it is their selfless will to empower the disadvantaged. However, they differ in their levels of optimism concerning how much extra cash the envisioned social business will actually generate.

ZOE

No, no. It was because of, because this is what we will end up doing – like having a separate commercial entity with a special agreement with the association that like 90% of the profit, no, let's put it, 100% of profit minus what's needed for investment will go to the association. The reason why we were a bit reserved when we met this guy was because he wanted to take some shares in the company. And we are not very comfortable with this.

RITA

But you're still pushing for a social business and if it doesn't happen, then you are setting up a private entity, company that will, if possible, also finance the association. Yeah?

Yeah, but I don't think that will finance the association. I think that's a really... (makes a gesture with her hand pointing upwards).

Yeah, yeah, well...

It would be a dreamer's dream, the biggest dream ever. No, it's just to make the ends meet. How do you say..?

Make ends meet.

Yeah!

Alright.

Because it definitely wouldn't finance the association. Also, the association runs only with projects at the moment, so then funding that is needed is only for specific projects. Like or no...

Philanthropy, Volunteerism & Humanitarianism

Why are they doing it – what is the motivation behind the association's future food truck? The [Philanthropy](#), [Volunteerism](#) and [Humanitarianism](#) subchapters shed light on benefactors' motives (including those of a social entrepreneur) and how the three concepts intertwine summarised in the [Humanitarianism](#) subchapter – philanthropy, volunteerism and humanitarianism are overlapping concepts but each stands on its own ground – a person can be part all three concepts simultaneously, e.g. someone working free of charge abroad with a mission of alleviating fellow human beings' sufferings. Also, a person can perform only one role at a time, e.g. someone working as a humanitarian for money. Inspired by my [Observation](#) and the replies of Zoe and Rita in the [Entrepreneurial Spirit](#) subchapter, I proceed to investigate their motives, and their responses place them in the intersection of the three concepts: their organisation consists of foreigners rewardless-ly striving to empower marginalised individuals – it is philanthropic, voluntary and humanitarian.

ZOE

What brought you to Malta?

My husband was transferred here for work

How did you get involved with this association? Why particularly this association?

I got in contact with Nadine through my lecturer at university because I'm doing a master's in Gender Studies

At the University of Malta?

Yeah! And at some point, I knew I had some more free time, so I decided to volunteer. I wanted to do something in relationship with the master's. So! And my lecturer, who knows Nadine very well, told me: "just go and see how you can help"

This account of Zoe's about her presence in Malta confirms my [Observation](#) that the association consists of foreign nationals. Rita also confirms in her interview that she is not a Maltese national and that the association's goals chime well with those of her own – empowerment of foreign women in Malta – which is where I draw parallels with the values function discussed in the [Volunteerism](#) subchapter by Clary et al (1998) and Lavelle (2010). Being an overseas citizen does not make them automatically humanitarian, philanthropic, or voluntary. However, it is one step closer to making them humanitarian as discussed in the [Humanitarianism](#) subchapter as they put alleviation of human suffering above international borders (Barnett, 2011) as becomes evident in the proceeding exchanges of questions and answers.

ZOE

OK. I see. So, you're doing Gender Studies. Was your Bachelor's also regarding Gender Studies?

What is, sorry?

Your Bachelor's before you..?

No, no, no, I already hold a Master's. Already in Business Administration with the specialisation in sustainability and consulting.

OK, OK, OK. And then you decided to get another Master's degree.

Exactly.

And you also saw this organisation and it kind of chimes together very well because this is an organization that is trying to empower women, correct?

That's the thing. When I was working as a sustainability consultant at some point [before moving to Malta], like when I was pregnant, I took a leave of course and I was thinking to focus more on empowering women and then I moved to Malta and I said: "OK, the two fields that interest me are migration and women". So, of course, you know, Expat Aid Association was a perfect fit. And at that moment, I applied actually to the association. I was starting a course on gender-based violence and this is why I started with Brighter Tomorrow because Brighter Tomorrow¹⁹ is focused on gender-based violence survivors. Even though we do address women who are not openly gender-based violence survivors, but it was a conjunction of everything.

RITA

Why did we start providing English lessons to women? Because we realised that they were not going to the ones organised by the government. Why they don't go, because, for example, they don't have no one at home to leave their kids or maybe the classes would also have male participants and so on, so maybe their husbands would not allow in certain cases. They just can't afford to pay or that the courses are done during the working hours. Or yeah, there are a lot of... we took all this, and we tried to find a way to deliver English lessons only for women and we started providing childcare at the same time. So, we would invite them to lessons, and then in a different room in the same building there is a space where we have, can take care of the kids for one hour and a half. It's not really day-care because it's not like they are taking the kids...

playroom?

It's a playroom. You can imagine when you go to a supermarket, there's that, Santa Venera, there's a playing area. Anyway, so I don't know. Yeah, if they can have better teachers... we did this voluntary for a very long time. Then we managed to get small funding for it to pay the teachers.

¹⁹ Title changed

Worth mentioning is the fact that Rita in the excerpt just above touches upon another question of mine which is strongly connected with the notion of [Humanitarianism](#) – alleviation of suffering, in other words, a humanitarian focuses primarily on the other persons' problems (European Commission, 2013), (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2012), (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 5 August, 2019) and only then applies the necessary and often only available means and not the other way round. During my other two interviews with two humanitarian NGO workers (one Maltese and one Swedish), the very same principle is put above all other principles – needs come before trends. However, unlike Zoe and Rita the other two interviewees admit that trend-ism is inevitable and once search for funding begins an NGO is forced to adapt to the current trends which often are in dissonance with the needs of aid recipients. While NGOs remain at the mercy of what their donors are prepared to give, social entrepreneurs, being entrepreneurs, strive to define their own ways of accumulation of finances (Fraisie et al., 2016), (Corriveau, 2016). And this is how Rita and Zoe confirm their needs-based approach.

RITA

OK. How do you usually find the money? Donations – do you come up with an issue that needs to be addressed, e.g. psychological help for refugees, and then you search for money, or is it the other way round – you check what activities donors are prepared to finance and then you apply for the money, regardless of the real life situation?

Until now we've based all projects on our own research. So, we did research a few years ago – the first project that we ever had. And we tried to understand... eh. At that time, we were focused on employment because we knew that from the formal feedback – for the women that had difficulty finding employment – so, we explored that, and we had this small report. From that and from the interactions with all the women and the other activities that we ran, we realised that... yeah, we took the feedback into consideration. And then we tried to create projects that would meet...

Why would you do that? Do you think it was the right way of doing it – to first find the needs, then find the money and not the other way around?

I don't know, yeah, mmm... yep.

So, you think it's better than first looking at what donors want to give money for...

It makes it harder for us. It does but at the same time we... that's why, for example, we have empowerment circles now. They just started last week. We just created this platform for women to come together and discuss the findings. And, also, the cooking came out of research somehow because that was the unexplored skill that most, most, of the participants had and they really enjoyed it and they wanted to... so yeah.

Do you like the existing system of financing NGOs?

In general?

Yeah, that's a general question. You can also apply it to your NGO of course because this is how you know about it, I guess, through working at your NGO.

I think that the existing financing system is keeping projects tight to... no, keeping organisations tight to projects and always project writing, report writing and being always. Not sustainable, something like this, I don't know. It's difficult.

At some point, we end up discussing the role of governments and NGOs wherein we entertain the idea of the world where the governments took care of all issues and there were no need for NGOs.

RITA

Do you see then a world where...? I guess you see a world in the previous question that there is no need for NGOs, right? That it all goes away. Right? There are...

Maybe they shouldn't be but then you need a balance because you can't, only, have the government providing services.

Why can't you have only the government providing the services?

Because then you can have abuse, or you can have people falling between the cracks, and em...

This is where I see parallels with what Rene Bekkers' (2005) notion about volunteer organisations is – that they are necessary in a democratic society and volunteers usually are politically active and that being part of an NGO is being part of keeping an eye on the government's intentions.

ZOE

So how do you usually find the money, donation? Do you come up with an issue that needs to be addressed, e.g. psychological help for refugees and then you search for money or is it the other way round – you check what activities these donors are prepared to finance and then you apply for the money regardless of the needs?

We start with the needs.

Is it easy to start with the needs?

No, because some are less sexy than others. Like SAHHA is very sexy. English classes very much less sexy.

Why? How come?

When I met this summer with the Malta Chess Community or whatever the name is, MCCF, they have a like a huge amount of money because they do big fundraising activities, and then they do a call for NGOs to get funded... and first we met them because of SAHHA. And when I met with them, it was like SAHHA – we get some money – but English classes – it's not nice. I mean, it's not nice, it's not...

Useful?

I don't know. It looks better if you do a report in your company, it looks better if you say: "well, I had to build a nice, trendy food truck for migrant women" than paying for English classes.

Did they explain why it looks better?

No. They didn't say. I told them: "it's much more difficult for us to fundraise for English classes than for a food truck." Individual people give for food truck, no one gives for English classes even though it was the original programme from the association. I got contacted by a friend, someone I know from somewhere, who is giving a theatre show and at the end they got donations from the audience because it is a free show. And he told me: "like last year gave the money to an organisation and this year we want to give it to you because we love the food truck." So, the food truck, it's appealing.

But will it last forever?

No. This is why we are building to make this work. (both laugh) because we need to be self-sustainable. So...

Do you like the existing system of financing NGOs? The one that exists...

No.

No?

It is shitty (laughs).

Shitty. What is it that you really don't like about it? That there are these sexy and non-sexy topics to finance?

First, it is about trends. Right. Of course, it's about who sets the... we don't set the priorities. We try to do advocacy that we do but you're dependent on the trends from the big donors. For example, the reason, like, we got the fund from the US embassy for Brighter Tomorrow is because they decided to focus on gender based violence and you know, there has been so many debates right now in society about violence that probably it should or shouldn't, I don't know, be easier to get funds for this. But if start from the needs, sometimes you know, the needs... as I said, English classes is not sexy. It's just English classes. Everyone does English classes. But just funding this is difficult because we know it's the fundamental barrier for integration, language, and it's just paying, em... paying an English teacher and someone to care for the children. There is no social innovation in this.

Then the main question of my research so far yeah [back then I had not changed my topic yet]. So is regarding the moral authority to be eligible to ask for donations. On what moral grounds can you as someone who works at an NGO ask for donations? How is it different from a private contractor who could win that money in a tender and simply deliver a result, e.g. a donor gives money to a private company to teach English to refugees and you don't get that funding? Would you disagree with such a decision? Why? And this question is addressed to you as an individual working for the association and as the organisation as a whole, as a collective of people.

First, we don't do it for profit.

Do you think that gives you some moral boost?

Well, it's not the moral boost but is like... if you look at Brighter Tomorrow, for example, we do this because there is no service for migrant women who were survivors of gender-based violence with interpreters. There is like a hole in the brackets. And the same for English classes. Can you believe that the government is referring people to us to give English lessons for people who don't speak English? Maybe, at some point, there has to be like a government responsibility in some things. What we do is.. you can't blame people for not being integrated. If you don't help them just a little bit, give them a push, to have the tools to integrate.

Do you see your moral authority as filling the gaps that the government left? So the government, there's this big government system but it has gaps, in this case of integration of migrant women, and then you have this moral authority to say to the government: "you see there are gaps we will fill them for you."

I don't think it's a moral authority. It's just a realistic view of the system. You know if you look at the needs of the migrant women, well, they don't have employment, why? They can't, they don't have anyone to take care of kids if they want to go to an interview, or to a training, or... so how do you help? You know, if you look at this specific society, it is very much built on the fact that people also have their parent around. Strong social network. If you're a migrant person, what is your social network? Non-existing.

Let's say, a government can say: "well, you're nice people but we found this private company and we will give this money to that private company and they, for instance, will organise language courses or anything". So how would you argue in your favour? How would you say: "no, we are better than that private company"?

We are better. I just say, if this private company does it better, fine with me as long as it's done. I'm not a preacher for NGOs. I come from the private sector. I'm not a preacher for NGOs. I'm just saying

if this private company does it the right way, we'll not sacrifice the social mission that's behind the business because of business reasons, then fine. Just do the job. It's OK. Like if tomorrow the government said: "whatever you've started with Brighter Tomorrow, we're going to re-integrate it into our services," I'd be: "wow, great, just do it". Just do it but do it properly.

The two excerpts above confirm the [humanistic](#) needs-based principle which is driven by the willingness to see the world a better place as discussed by Walzer (2011) and Lavelle (2010) – there is no charity for the sake of charity, instead, there is charity for the sake of justice and my participants see injustice in migrant women's treatment when it comes to employment in Malta as it is described by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017). The above excerpts also shed light on their attitudes toward the established structures and distrust toward governments' ability to address all needs which is a rather [philanthropic](#) mindset – the government is failing these individuals, thus, we need to step in and provide the necessary service rewardless-ly. However, there is another typical aspect of philanthropy noticeable – my participants intend to do a small scale activity in a narrow context (catering) which might overlook the greater problems pertaining the refugee women in Malta (Edwards, 2009), (Frame, 2005), (Blowfield & Frynas, 2005).

Our conversation continues by revealing what rewardless-ly entails – they sacrifice their spare time to help others for free which puts the [voluntary](#) aspect into the picture (Clary et al., 1998).

ZOE

OK. do we like money, do we do this for money? (I laugh) Is this the question?

Well, in a way yes. All of them are about money, these questions.

Do we personally or as an organisation?

As an organisation of course, as an organisation.

Well, we don't do it for money. I'm working on volunteer basis since four months. We don't do it for money. We do it because we want like... the money is a means. Like, if you want to be able to, you know, when they first wrote the business plan, they said: "our objective is to employ forty women." But today we are employing two or three if you count Nadine. You know, so if we want to reach the point when we say we employ forty women, combining maybe the food truck and the events, like you know, women working regularly for events, we need to grow...

And Zoe continues about the secondary role of money vis-a-vis the centre stage role of the enhancement function that is of great importance for many volunteers as highlighted in the [Volunteerism](#) subchapter. Notably, it is also present in the [Social Entrepreneurship](#) doctrine where delivering a service of social importance prevails over money making – absence of greed.

So, you have to, also... it's not only about money. And you know, for example, the case of Karima is telling as well. We... we designed a contract and she's paid but she is not paid like a million. And she said: "you know, for me it's not only about the money. It's about the project. It's about being able to employ women. It's about being able to promote diversity through food and, you know, create this dialogue among cultures." So, it's not only money. Money is even for women who participate, you know. It's not only money. Like, when I see Alzira, she is so excited because they are two in the kitchen, both of them in the kitchen decide on the menu, they decide on everything. Basically, you know, they have power, the decision power which is greater than everything they had before in their work experiences. And, also, their culture is recognised and em... valued. Like, you know, past week we did some tasting for the menu and she... well I tried it before... she cooked one of the Syrian dishes and it's very good. And they never get to cook it before, not in their job in the kitchen, not even for an event, I think, because for an event we do more pastries and so on. And when they deliver the food to this company, you know, we have like a great feedback every day. And they were so excited because at the end of the day it is their culture that is valued.

Time, Law & Diversity

How are they doing it? The [previous](#) subchapter and my [Observation](#) indicate that the participants' main resource is time and time's importance per se and in the context of social entrepreneurship has been outlined in the [Philanthropy](#) and [Time and Time Management](#) subchapters. However, time is a vulnerable resource as [Law and Society](#) and [Diversity and Discrimination](#) subchapters inform – legal burdens and diversity issues can serve as hindrance. This is how my interviewees perceive the legal obstacles toward establishing a social business in Malta – Zoe's and Rita's perspectives at the Maltese law and ways of overcoming obstacles set by it.

ZOE

I see. Why do you want to run your truck as a social business and not a separate company that subsidises the association? It is for tax reasons?

Why don't we..? Can you repeat?

The thing is, as I understand, there is no law in this country about social business but you would love to be in that situation where there is this law and you can run a food truck as such and as I remember there was this man who consulted you and has several restaurants and he was proposing: "just open a business and run it as a business and funnel that money from the business into the association".

Yeah.

And as I remember, it was you and Agatha, you had a bit of reservations about that because of taxes.

No, no. It was because of, because this is what we will end up doing – like having a separate commercial entity with a special agreement with the association that like 90% of the profit, no, let's put it, 100% of profit minus what's needed for investment will go to the association. The reason why we were a bit reserved when we met this guy was because he wanted to take some shares in the company. And we are not very comfortable with this.

You want to be independent, right?

Yeah, and you see I think you asked before about a good offer and this is the second person who offered to take shares in the company. So somewhere it does validate the fact that is gonna work. And there's like a market segment for what we want to do.

You are prepared to do this thing to have two separate entities.

We have to.

The association and the business and then funnel the money.

Yeah, we have to. We have no really other choices.

How do you think the government will look at that? Like they'll say: "pay taxes and we don't care how you spend your income". Or they will say something like: "well, you know it's a bit dodgy, it sounds dodgy what you want to do".

Well, you know, as of today we were told by some accountant and some lawyers that there's no regulation, there's no legislation for social business. As soon as it happens in Malta, maybe we will change. But as of now to do what we need to do and be able to operate because this is also a problem like... From what I understood, there's legislation about, or regulation, whatever, about voluntary organisation that is kind of unclear. So, there are some limitations in terms of trade; possibility of doing some trade and you know the VAT things. Too many, too high obstacles. Like if you are a volunteer organisation but don't want to... like the VAT regulations are different. So, if I create a commercial entity, I can collect VAT and get refunded but if I operate as our association, I can't which means I'm kind of stuck because I have to pay 18% more for the same thing. So, they don't want to give us exemption on VAT because of competitiveness (sic) as an NGO but at the same time if we don't do it and they say: "OK, for competitive reasons we can't do this compared to other catering business". But if I start an NGO, I'm also disadvantaged because I can't benefit from VAT regulations.

What about the income tax of private entities who donate money to charity? Is there anything in the Maltese law that you get refunded like you get tax cuts for the next year, like I know in some countries there's a cap?

I know in France it is the same, but I don't know in Malta, honestly. I didn't have time to look at it but from what I understood, having a separate commercial entity with a strict mandate where the funds are going is the best way to run the business because otherwise as an NGO we're always struggling in terms of funding. Like funding opportunities are much more, they favour start-ups, you know, commercial entities. So, everyone needs some funds to start. It's like a chicken and egg situation. If we don't have funds, we can't hire women. If we can't hire women, we can't do fundraising anymore.

Jane, I guess, told me the same. After that meeting, she said: "like if you don't have money in the account, nobody wants to donate; and if nobody wants to donate, you don't have funds on your account".

Yeah, that's the problem. And so, on the contrary if you're a start-up, you get all the funds you want. If you're a company run by women, created by women, then you get many funds. So, I think, you know, the way the market is right now, is distorting. They don't want to have NGOs. They want to have start-ups. So, let's have a start-up but on our own terms. I mean, start-ups with a social mission.

While Zoe's account above is reminiscent of what Ewick and Silbey (1998) depict in the early parts of their interviews with ordinary Americans who give up on fighting legal battles as they are too time consuming, the paragraph below sounds her more belligerent attitude which chimes with what Ewick and Silbey describe as a playful way of addressing legal matters – law can be rewarding too provided its user knows how to turn it to her advantage.

Yeah, but you know it's everywhere in business. When you do a joint venture between two car makers because you want to have common models, you use a vehicle to do your things. When do money laundering or, you know, like you take advantage of fiscal rules somewhere, you create a system, you play the system. This is what we're doing. We want to do a social mission. Being an NGO is too complicated, because you can't trade, you can't do this, you can't bla-bla-bla. So, we use the system to make the social mission. And so many companies do the same all around the world. I mean this is

why new, a new company status is created because some companies want to do things differently and, at some point, they do some lobbying to change the rules but, in the beginning, you need to play by the rules. Even if on your own terms, not illegally, but on your own terms.

Rita also describes her frustration with the current legal framework and says that the law actually pushes them into creating a separate company from the association because staying within the existing structure of providing catering services via the association does not meet their ambition of empowering migrant women similarly to what Zoe describes above – Zoe, in essence, invites me to have a different perspective on the Maltese law akin to Calavita's (2010) notion that law is what we make of it – it can be an obstacle while it can be an instrument as well (a vehicle in Zoe's words). What kind of vehicle is it? I reckon that the closest description is that of Ewick and Silbey (1998) – law can be an expression of one's rights – a vehicle that helps refugee women in Malta to express their right to work and everything that comes with it. Rita touches upon another important feature of social entrepreneurship – regularity of philanthropy as discussed in the [Philanthropy](#) and [Social Entrepreneurship](#) subchapters – they want their business to be a constant and continuous process of migrant female empowerment (a regular vehicle of justice for those suffering from injustice).

Unlike the initial residents of a rural county depicted in Engel's (1987) work, my participants actually express dissent with the iteration of time. The status quo and its perpetuation do not facilitate their goal of empowering women. Instead, they wish to see a non-iterating time flow wherein new developments would improve their aid recipients' financial, career, and other prospects. In this particular context, I notice that Engel's (1987) iteration and non-iteration of time flow and Walzer's (2011) advocacy of justice as humanitarians' main ambition are two parts of one process. Iteration in the given context is perceived as injustice toward refugee women in Malta by my participants, whereas their envisioned non-iteration via the food truck business is perceived as an embodiment of justice toward refugee women in Malta. Time is a tool of change too – a vehicle of power described by Lucht (2012) – despite all the impediments in their way my participants possess their time and are trying to use it wisely to bring about the desired outcome.

RITA

That's why I'm asking because I understand the perks of having a social enterprise. Unfortunately, in this country there is no legal framework for that. That's why you work so this... well, funny scheme where you kind of give food away for free at some event but then you get a donation.

We give the food to the organiser. The organiser gives us a donation for that and it's yeah, it's... voluntary organisations are also allowed to do such fundraising. Like...

How? You say such fundraising – what type of fundraising is it? Like fundraising against some service? Is it like...

Yeah.

Does it, is it the way it's stipulated in the law but it's fundraising against some service? No? Or is it not?

I don't know if they use the word 'service'.

Ah, they don't use the word 'service'?

They might be using the word 'service'. You can check if you want.

OK.

There was a change in the legislation this past month.

Alright, I'm just wondering what's the point then of having a social enterprise business if you can just sit on this system of kind of giving food away for free but then...

The problem is of having them regularly, on a very regular basis.

The regularity is the problem.

Whereas, we don't, we did not have them regularly.

If there is no regularity, you cannot regularly employ people. Correct? If I understand correctly.

What do you mean 'legally employ people'?

No, not legally, 'regularly' I said. So right, because you want to provide people with some regular employment, stability, growth. Right? And then if you cannot do it regularly – these events or catering in general – then there is no regularity for their job, right?

(nods)

While law is an external obstacle which affects time too (iteration and non-iteration and search for solutions to establish a social business – search for justice), time as a factor can also be found within the association. My [Observation](#) suggests that the participants are required to live up to other obligations, e.g. family, education, work, which at times is in conflict with their obligations as members of the association in question. This is where Daniel Golden's (Benedek & Veszelszki, 2016, pp. 51–56) revelation that each individual is given a limited fraction of time while there is an infinite supply of it in general comes into play – moreover, this is also where Herring's (2009) group diversity makes its presence felt as individual association members seek compromises by comparing their rosters to find common time slots for association meetings and other activities – it is part of a diversity challenge that heterogenous organisations have to learn to overcome by finding a compromise. Hence, I am curious to hear their opinion on time management issues to which they admit that it is a challenge. In the case of my participants, that is an internal compromise too – how much time can I devote to furthering my humanitarian mission with this association? And when working for the association, my participants often perform numerous tasks due to the shortage of people who could devote their time – another compromise.

ZOE

Mhm, mhm. When was it that you joined the association?

October 2017.

Last year basically. Alright, OK. So now what do you think? Do you have enough time to attend meetings and perform other tasks – then, like job, childcare? You have a child.

Yeah, two.

Agatha is pregnant. She's going to have a child. There is someone else who has a child and then household and everything, everything, everything, plus you're doing your Master's. So how is it?

It is messy.

Messy, OK.

Of course, it is hard to – hard to articulate everything. And then you have to set your priority, for example, I'm considering stepping a bit back because I need to write my dissertation myself and I know if I continue on the same pace with the association, I'm gonna write my dissertation at night between midnight and 3 am every night which is not recommended, right? So... Especially when you have kids waking up at 6:30 (laughs). So, you know, you just need to set your priorities. Even without this, I mean, there are many, many meetings, conferences, projects that are sent to the association and we can't do everything. Because even if there are so many interesting things to do, at the end of the day we are limited in resources and by resources I don't only mean financial but also human resources like time.

OK, so I think we have already covered question 4 about your responsibilities but just to recap. So, you are coordinating things for the psychology unit, department – I don't know how you call it.

Yeah, Brighter Tomorrow.

The excerpt above from Zoe's interview and the one below from Rita's expose three phenomena: intensification of time usage, prioritisation of out-of-association activities, and the lack of division of labour. The first (intensification) is a product of the willingness to achieve more while the second just like the third is a typical characteristic of volunteer-based organisations. The intensive versus extensive time usage is what Daniel Golden (Benedek & Veszelszki, 2016) points out: every human being, having acknowledged that insufficient work has been done, is facing a dilemma: either to work more hours or to work more intensively. My interviewees work more intensively – they perform numerous tasks simultaneously which is also a lack of clear division of labour so typical of volunteer organisations as discussed by Farmer and Fedor (2001). Zoe actually opts for working less hours for the association and more on her master thesis instead and this is where Farmer and Fedor (2001) can explain why – volunteers' priorities with regard to time management are dictated by other obligations, e.g. education, family, and so on. They note that unpaid staff (volunteers) are more likely than paid professionals to prioritise out-of-voluntary-organisation obligations at the expense of their voluntary duties once a time management conflict arises which results in a significant hindrance for a voluntary organisation's ability to perform its tasks.

However, Zoe and Rita do not quit the association altogether. As discussed in the [Philanthropy, Volunteerism and Humanitarianism](#) subchapter, my participants as predominantly value motivated volunteers (Clary et al., 1998) are prepared to go above and beyond to see the association's goals achieved (Farmer & Fedor, 2001) while at the same time trying to preserve their other roles outside the association. Rita also struggles with time management and, also, opts for spending less time on the association, and she also wears many hats at a time in the association.

RITA

How is the time management? Do you find enough time to dedicate to the organisation, to the women's organisation and then some other things that you have to do like studying? Some hobbies or whatever you have?

No, not really.

Not really, busy?

I just went on part-time work because of that.

So, you say it's hard, right?

Mhm.

OK. So, I remember that you're a board member. Besides that, anything else?

So, I used to be a volunteer before that. Then I became a board member. This is also voluntary. Then yeah, but I'm still involved in the running of the organisation, not only board duties.

What other duties? Administrative stuff?

Administrative stuff. Like helping with applications. Em... keeping in touch with other organisations by email.

Later, I discuss diversity issues with my interviewees which also affects their time management. Diversity of opinion is what Herring (2009) emphasises in his work as an internal obstacle a corporate entity must consider and seek ways of addressing in a consensual manner. The halal versus non-halal debate depicted in the [Observation](#) part cannot be left unattended and Zoe had the following interpretation of the events and points out that running a social business is about making decisions together, in other words, she invokes consensus building which again is a slow process. I did not observe the association long enough to see the complete resolution of this particular point of contention, however, Zoe's responses indicate that more time resources will be spent in the future to address the halal-non-halal debate. Considering the current level of diversity of the association in combination with their aim of having an organisation which is open to all nationalities, we can only speculate how important Herring's (2009) notion of building high quality consensuses will become.

ZOE

Do you think you'll come back to that debate, that issue of halal?

Of course, we will. I settled this debate very easily now because we have only Muslim women cooking in the food truck. But we know... our aim is to employ more women from different backgrounds so of course they're gonna be a diverse team. And as I said before, even for events, like the World Music Festival or Connecting through Cultures, we wanted to offer as many different cuisines as possible, so we had Romanian, Venezuelan, Colombian. Not everybody wants to do halal.

So, yeah, then a follow up question – how difficult is it to keep this organisation together? There are so diverse people, you know, like halal/non-halal is just, probably, one issue. Probably, there's something else.

It isn't an issue per se. It's just you know a choice to make together. It's not an issue. I mean we have nobody say...

Choice to make together. That's an interesting way of putting it. Choice to make together.

Well, that's how Karima also framed it. She said: "we need to decide". And then you know people will agree to it or not. So, I mean it is not a dictatorial, dictatorship organisation. We need to decide what we are ready to do together.

And you need a consensus.

Yeah.

But anyway, it will end up as a concession to someone because someone will have to give in and say: "OK, I disagree but I will carry on with the rest of the gang".

The thing is, there are disagreements and disagreements. You can say: "I don't want to". Like, you can find some middle ground as well. If you want to cook halal, you cook halal. But if you have another cook who does other dishes non-halal, then cook non-halal stuff and that's it. You know what I mean? And then you wash your utensils and that's it. You know, you use another fryer if you need to, that's the way to do.

That's maybe your view.

Of course, it's my view, as of now.

Because some people might have reservations even regarding that system.

Yeah, but then it's about diversity. The mission of the organisation is to promote diversity and have people talking together. It's not only Muslim women for Maltese people. It's also among the migrant women. The migrant women don't exist. There are so many different migrant women. You can be a Roman Catholic, you can be Muslim, and they're all targets of the organisation. So, if you want to be a member of the organisation, you can't expect the organisation to be a Muslim organisation. You know what I mean? You have to accept that this is about diversity. Even, every one of us is doing, I don't

know, how to say it, every one of us is learning diversity. I had never worked with Sudanese before, or Romanian people which when I say this doesn't mean that the Sudanese and Romanian people I work with are characteristic of every Sudanese or Romanian. I'm just saying, you know, brings his own culture and experience and this is how we learn to work together. So, it is the same thing for our members. If you want to put it this way.

I think that Karima also raised this thing about consistency and predictability about the food truck. So, if you're a very diverse food truck, doesn't it mean that it would be very hard for you to build a loyal and regular customer base because you will be a bit unpredictable this week? You're halal this week, you're non-halal next week. This week you sell alcohol, next week you don't sell alcohol. This week you're vegan, next week you eat meat.

If you look at what the Grassy Hopper is doing right now, the vegan, vegetarian restaurant, in Gzira, they stop operating during the day, they just do special evenings. So of course, their consistency is about bringing vegetarian and vegan food but then their special evenings, special nights – you have one Japanese night, one pizza night, one Indonesia food. So, it is about bringing a whole diversity of food and twisting recipes to make them vegan and vegetarian. And I guess that the mission of the food truck is also to bring this diversity with people coming from different backgrounds. So, for me it is not a problem if we have a specific menu. And you know like if you look at numbers, well I'm not 100% sure of this, but if you just look at the women who we are in contact with, the vast majority are women from Syria or Libya or, you know, North Africa. So, I think it's kind of realistic to say that on the menu we will have always dishes from these countries and these cultures. And then, I would very much like to have someone from Eritrea or Somalia or West Africa to bring other things. But even Filipinos, Colombian people. And we will find a way. There's always a way to market things. We can say: "Oh, we have a new cook, or a new cook visiting for one month". And you get a limited time contract for this person, for one month, we advertise a lot, we say: "hey, let's discover together food from Columbia". And you keep part of your regular items on the menu, but you know change half of the menu to cater for these specific things. I think there's always a way to... what we bring is like home-made food from different countries. So, no matter what the countries are.

Conclusion

How does the absence of pro-social business legislation in Malta affect the endeavours of a philanthropic NGO to pursue the aim of empowering migrant women via social business? The short answer: the absence of pro-social business legislation in Malta affects my participants negatively. However, there is a broader picture.

The EU's 2015 report on social entrepreneurship superficially touches upon the barriers faced by social entrepreneurs in Europe – lack of pro-social business legislation causes legal uncertainty and in general NGOs striving to establish a social enterprise lack good organisation. My work has managed to see behind these vaguely described obstacles and see what distinguishes social entrepreneurs from ordinary entrepreneurs. Firstly, as evident from the [Law and Society](#) chapter, law is just one element embedded in a larger narrative – any story touching upon legal matters starts before law is invoked and usually surpasses the legal stage and continues to exist at later stages. My participants as defined in the [Analysis](#) part exhibit traits attributable to humanitarians, volunteers and philanthropists supporting their social mission as future entrepreneurs, that is social entrepreneurs, and as such they face the legal uncertainty when it comes to establishing a social enterprise which they see as a mechanism of delivering justice to those (refugee women) whom they perceive as suffering from injustice – the lack of integration and employment opportunities in the Maltese society.

Secondly, apart from the external legal obstacle which incites them to resort to creating a *vehicle* as described by Zoe to realise their plan, there are a myriad of internal factors causing delays in the establishment of the food truck social business. They lack the organisational skills and time resources necessary to reach their goals at the desired pace. Zoe's envisioned *vehicle* is a product of deliberations and planning caused by the lack of appropriate laws which has consumed much time. Time occupies a special place in the lives of my participants. It is the only true resource at their disposal to further their goals but as volunteers they devote it free of charge and only as much as is permitted by other obligations, i.e. family, education, work. And time is also a measuring tape of their perception of injustice and justice – similar to Engel's (1987) iterating and non-iterating time flow – the current situation

with the refugee women is perceived as an iteration of injustice and the envisioned future social business is perceived as a non-iteration of injustice and, hence, progression toward justice.

As became evident during my research, there are a number of other areas to study. Obviously, I failed to realise my initial plan to explore the area of NGO-donor relations. Moreover, I managed to secure access to only one organisation and in one country only – Malta. Thirdly, I find the *cockroach* comparison assigned to the Maltese catering industry as an area of great potential for further research.

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df](https://www.greenbook.org/Content/housecalls/ETHNOGRAPHYGUIDELINES.pdf)

Appendix 1

1. What brought you here to Malta?
2. How did you get involved with the association? Why are you with the association? What can you say about their ideals and how do they chime with your personal ideals?
3. Do the association members find enough time to attend meetings and perform other tasks: job, childcare, household?
4. What is it that you are responsible for? I see you do a bit of administration and also deal with the food truck.
5. Why have you decided to have a food truck for their social business? Whose idea was it? The market is full of other caterers.
6. Why do you want to run your food truck as a social business and not as a separate business that subsidises the association? For tax reasons?
7. Do you think that you should start thinking more business-wise and less NGO-wise with regard to the food truck?
8. What if the food truck fails?
9. Can you picture a donor whom you'd turn down any time under any conditions? Someone whose help you consider as immoral, and thus, detrimental to your reputation and ideals.
10. As I have understood you can't take payments for services for cooking but you can accept donations, correct? How do you usually get around this issue of payment for your services? You put it down as a donation?
11. How do you usually find the money (donations)? Do you come up with an issue that needs to be addressed, e.g. psychological help for refugees, and then you search for money or is it the other way round - you check what

activities donors are prepared to finance and then you apply for the money regardless of the real life situation concerning the real needs of the people?

12. Do you like the existing system of financing NGOs?

13. How would you change it if you could?

14. The main question is regarding the moral authority to be eligible to ask for donations. On what moral grounds can you as someone who works at an NGO ask for donations? How is it different from a private contractor who could win that money in a tender and simply deliver a result, e.g. a donor gives money to a private company to teach English to refugees and you don't get that funding? Would you disagree with such a decision? Why? And this question is addressed to you as an individual working for the association and as the organisation as a whole, as a collective of people.