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Editors, Prof Maurice N. Cauchi, Mr. Joseph Calleja.
All correspondence is to be addressed to:
University of Malta - Gozo Centre, Mgarr Rd., Xewkija, VCT111, Gozo
e-mail: ugc@um.edu.mt
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Editorial: The Advantages of Distance Learning

The University of Malta is not vast by international standards. It hardly compares with campuses which may have forty or fifty thousand students – not an unusual situation in many universities overseas. What is fairly unique about Malta University is the rapid increase in student numbers which has gone up from about one thousand only a generation ago to ten thousand students today.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the result has been little short of chaotic. There has not been adequate planning for this relatively massive intake. Nor has there been a sufficient budget set aside for what has to be described as one of the most significant investment in the future of the country. Moreover, a considerable moiety of what money was available was spent in a relatively unproductive way in providing student stipends. This has encouraged spending money on cars and electronic gadgets, but starved the university of funds for maintenance, management, books and other essentials. Lecturer posts have been left vacant, and those meriting promotion have been left lingering in their old posts with resulting deterioration of morale.

As a consequence, standards of teaching are bound to suffer. One cannot keep stretching resources forever. One solution to this problem is the provision of distance learning. There is no doubt that this method of reaching the student is cost-effective, and can replace most of the classical forms of teaching, particularly the lecture theatre, which in any case has been shown to be archaic and largely dispensable. Distance learning makes the best use of lecturers and lecture facilities. It reduces the need for endless travel to the university campus. It might even obviate the need for every student to have his/her own car and consequent need for a stipend to support it!

In the case of Gozo this is particularly relevant. Attending a single lecture may mean day-long tiring journey, even when one ignores the vagaries of weather. Distance learning can overcome most of these problems, and reduce the needs to cross the Channel to a very minimum. It is therefore with satisfaction that one notes that the Gozo Centre has been at the forefront in the introduction of this mode of communication. We can only hope that it will succeed and its use will increase in the future.

This is not to say that distance learning can completely replace all other forms of communication. There will always be the need for keeping in touch personally with a tutor. Practical and clinical tuition requires the physical presence in a laboratory, class or hospital setting. It is also a fact that degrees obtained wholly through distance learning have somehow a reduced status in the eyes of many. However, any reduction in the required attendance on campus will definitely be a boom to student teaching in general and Gozitan students in particular.
The Natural Environment of Gozo

JOE SULTANA*  

Preamble

The word "Environment" is a frequently abused one. Several different definitions, encompassing all that is found on and around this globe, and affecting man's life, are attributed to it. For the purpose of this presentation, the term "the natural environment of Gozo" addresses, albeit in a general way, the biodiversity of the Island: the variety of plant and animal species together with their various habitats found in some of the ecologically important localities in Gozo.

Some species need a particularly special habitat, others have adapted to live and grow in a diversity of habitats. The Giant Fennel *Ferula communis* grows profusely in rocky areas as well as in disturbed ground. But the Sea Daffodil *Pancratium maritimum* is found growing on sand dunes. The latter is a very scarce habitat and the species, which are only adapted to grow in it, are consequently localised, restricted and rare. Habitats provide an adequate place for one or a group of living organisms, to multiply, and to find food and shelter. The status of a habitat is always a decisive factor for the health or otherwise of the population of a species which is adapted to it. A special habitat is usually considered as an ecological site and a site of special scientific importance.

An ecological site is a place which provides a good habitat, or better still a diversity of habitats. These in turn provide food and shelter to a species or a number of species. Ta' Cenc area and its surroundings is a fine example of an ecological site. Here one finds garigue and steppe areas, rocky rain-water pools, and cliffs. Such a healthy diversity of adequate habitats, which provide food, shelter, protection, nesting sites and other necessities, is synonymous with a biodiversity enriched with a healthy number species.

Topography

Gozo has a surface area of about 67 sq.km and a coastline of about 40km. Its highest point at Ta’ Dbiegi has an altitude of 191m. The formation of the Maltese Islands is mainly the result of geotectonic movements, which started to occur millions of years ago. Tracts of land collapsed or subsided; others were raised from the bottom of the sea, and what are known as faults, in geological terminology, were created throughout the islands. The principal fault in Gozo crosses from Ras il-Qala to Mgarr ix-Xini. The topography of Gozo is more complex than that of the Island of Malta and is characteristically marked by a number of hilly plateaux, such as Id-Dabrani, In-Nuffara, and Ta’ Kuljat, amongst others, formed from upper Coralline limestone, between which are plains where erosion has exposed the Globigerina limestone. The hillsides are covered with clay slopes, whilst the plains slope down into several valleys such as Wied il-Qleghja, Wied il-anaq and Marsalforn Valley.

Gozo’s coastline is less spoilt than that of mainland Malta. 14.5% of the coastline is composed of scree and 62.0% of cliffs. Less than 7.5% of the coastline is obscured by development such as Marsalforn Bay and Mgarr Harbour, while 74% is inaccessible from land. This inaccessible part provides good habitat, as well as some protection, to a variety of flora and fauna species. Here one finds sites of ecological importance, supporting habitat types, which are rare in the Maltese Islands, and where endemic and/or rare species are found.

The Flora

Coastal cliff communities are mainly located on the south, southwest and west coasts of Gozo. There are many plant taxa here including two, the Maltese Cliff-Orache *Cremnophyton lanfrancoi* and the Maltese Rock Centuary *Palaeocyanus crassifolius*, which belong to monotypic genera, both of which are

*Joe Sultana ornithologist and nature conservationist, ended his government services as Principal Environment Officer and is presently Chairman of the Ornis Committee*
endemic to the Maltese Islands. The recently described Maltese Cliff-Orache is restricted to sheer sea-cliffs in the western part. It is a dense shrub with whitish, elongate leaves and is the only species found in the genus *Cremnophyton*. The same can be said for the Maltese Rock Centuary, Malta’s national plant, which, in Gozo, is restricted to the southern cliffs. The Maltese Everlasting *Helichrysum melitense* is another coastal species. Known in Maltese as Sempreviva ta’ Ghawdex this is one of Gozo’s endemic plants found only in the Dwejra area and on Fungus Rock.

The flora of Gozo is essentially similar to that of the rest of the Maltese Islands but there are several species, which have been recorded only from the Island. The Shrubby Campion *Silene fruticosa* is one of them. A very small population of this eastern Mediterranean species still grows in the valleys of Mgarr ix-Xini and Xlendi. A number of typical dune species persist on the sand-dunes at Ramla, which are the least spoilt dunes in the Maltese Islands. The Prickly Parsnip *Echinophora spinosa* and the Sea Spurge *Euphorbia paralias* are two dune species, which are confined to Ramla. One cannot omit mentioning the famed Malta Fungus *Cynomorium coccineum*, which in the Islands is known mainly to grow on Fungus Rock. This strange looking plant was formerly only known from this islet and it was believed to have medicinal and magical powers. In time it was found growing in other parts of the Mediterranean. Whilst few indigenous tree species exist on Gozo, the African Tamarisk *Tamarix africana* and the Chaste-tree *Vitex agnus-castus*, two large shrubs, locally considered as small trees, are quite widespread in Gozo, while they are very rare on the main Island.

**The Fauna**

The land fauna of Gozo, apart from a few mammals and reptiles, and several birds, is largely made up of invertebrates, with insect, arachnid and mollusc species being the most dominant. Migrant bird species are quite in evidence during spring and autumn, but only about 15 species breed regularly on the island. Amongst these one finds fine colonies of the pelagic Cory’s Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*. The breeding population of the Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, which in recent years decreased drastically on the Island of Malta, is still widespread on Gozo during the summer months. The most interesting mammal species is the Sicilian Shrew *Crocidura sicula*, which has been recorded only in Sicily and Gozo. Its subspecies calypso occurs only on Gozo. On the other hand mammal species which are found on the Island of Malta, such as the Weasel *Mustela nivalis* and the Pygmy White-toothed Shrew *Suncus etruscus* are not recorded from Gozo. The same can be said for snakes. Out of four species recorded from Malta, only the Western Whip Snake *Coluber viridiflavus* is found on Gozo.

One of the most remarkable invertebrates found in Gozo is the Ramla Sand Cricket *Brachytriphes megacephalus*. This rare, nocturnal, relatively large-sized sand-burrowing cricket is restricted to the sand-dunes at Ramla. There are several endemic invertebrates in Gozo. A recently described species of False Scorpion *Chthonius (Epphippiochthonius) maltensis* is restricted to Dwejra.

The rocky valley of Wied Han ira supports a large number of flora species
Ecological Sites

Dwejra is a geological complex, which is on top of the list of Gozo's ecological sites. Here one can find geological formations, slickensides, collapse structures, quaternary deposits, a unique topography, and a diversity of habitats including a freshwater pool. Fungus Rock is found here too, standing in front of one of the collapse depressions. This islet is not only the home of the famed Malta Fungus but also of the endemic subspecies Podarcis filfolensis generalensis of the Maltese Wall Lizard. This massive stack is known locally as Haġret il-Ġeneral or il-Ġebla tal-Ġeneral and is a strict Nature Reserve by virtue of L.N. 22 of 1992.

The Maltese Wall Lizard Podarcis filfolensis, the well known slender lizard with the long tail, is endemic to the Maltese Islands and to the islands of Linosa and Lampione. Five subspecies are known to occur, four of which are found in the Maltese islands. The subspecies maltensis is found on the islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino and of course is present at Dwejra area. But one of the other subspecies, the generalensis, is restricted only to Haġret il-Ġeneral and nowhere else. The generalensis is different in appearance by having reddish underparts with bluish flanks. It was first described by the Maltese Naturalist Giovanni Gulia in 1914.

Il-Qawra is also a subcircular collapse depression, which includes what is popularly known as the ‘inland sea’, surrounded by a couple of valley mouths, cliff sides, a steep sided ridge, clayey slopes and long uncultivated fields. The endemic Maltese Sea-chamomile Anthemis urvilleana, a low-growing plant, which is frequent in sea-side habitats is one of the interesting flora species which grow in the area. Il-Qattara, a permanent freshwater pool fed by a perennial trickling spring, is also found in this depression. This permanent freshwater provides a habitat, which is quite rare, and in spite of its small size its ecological importance is great. It abounds with water life particularly in summer, when the surrounding area is parched dry.

Il-Qawra at Dwejra is a unique permanent freshwater pool

Several species of insects, including diving water beetles and water boatman, dragonflies, and wasps, amongst others, are common here. The richness of the pool’s fauna includes a number of freshwater snails, which are found in the spring trickling into the pool. Amongst these one finds the Freshwater Spire-snail Mercuria similis and the Dwarf Pond-snail Lymnaea truncatula.

The Corn Bunting Miliaria calandra, which has almost disappeared from the island of Malta and has decreased drastically in Gozo, still visits the pool during the summer months. The whole area of Dwejra is, in fact, also very important from an ornithological point of view. It is one of the few areas where one or two pairs of Corn Bunting still breed. This species, which prefers open country with a few or no trees, builds the nest on the ground among herbage. Dwejra is also one of the remaining posts where another declining species, the Spectacled Warbler Sylvia conspicillata, is still found breeding. It is a shy, resident species, frequenting open countryside, preferring low-growing shrubs as a nesting site.

Next on the list as a site of ecological importance is Ta’ Ċenċ extensive rocky area. Apart from the beautiful landscape provided by the massive lower coralline limestone cliffs, the area is famous for its garigue vegetation, parts of which are dominated by the Tree Spurge Euphorbia dendroides or the Mediterranean Thyme Thymbra capitata. The Common Pyramidal Orchid Anacamptis
pyramidalis, the French Daffodil Narcissus tazetta, the Large Star of Bethlehem Ornithogalum arabicum and the Blue Stonecrop Sedum caeruleum are few of several common flowering plants that grow here, providing an extensive natural rock garden.

Ta’ ċenċ area also qualifies as an international important bird area. The cliffs support the largest colony of Cory’s Shearwaters Calonectris diomedea in the Maltese Islands, and are a home to the national bird, the Blue Rock Thrush Monticola solitarius. The cliff-top rocky area is a good breeding site for the Short-toed Lark Calandrella brachydactyla and the Spectacled Warbler Sylvia conspicillata, while the Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus and the Barn Owl Tyto alba used to breed in the cliffs. Quite recently a small colony of the European Storm-petrel Hydrobates pelagicus has been rediscovered in one of the numerous sea caves below the cliffs.

The valleys in Gozo harbour very interesting vegetation and support a wide variety of fauna species. Mgarr ix-Xini and Xlendi valleys are amongst the most remarkable ones providing adequate habitat for a variety of species. But even other valleys, such as Lunzjata, are of ecological significance, in spite of human interference. Lunzjata valley, which carries a permanent spring, is the only place in Gozo, which supports the rare Fresh Water Crab, the Maltese endemic subspecies Potamon fluviatile lanfronci. The rare Dwarf Elder Sambucus nebulus together with other interesting flora can be found growing here. This is the only place in the Maltese Islands for the predatory leech Haemopis sanguisuga and the freshwater amphipod Echinogammarus ebusitanus as well as the breeding ground for the semi-aquatic grasshopper Paratettetix meridionalis. Further down the valley as it starts running towards Xlendi, two snail species found on the rocky sides are endemic to Gozo. Here too grows the rare Sicilian Iris Iris sicula, an endemic plant to Sicily and Malta. It was in the thick vegetation along this valley that the Cetti’s Warbler Cettia cetti first established itself some twenty-five years ago as a new breeding bird in Gozo. In fact the whole length of the valley from Lunzjata down to Xlendi is one of the most attractive sites for spring and autumn migrant bird species as well as for winter visitors.

No garigue area in the Maltese Islands is as rich as the area known as Tal-Maġun, a rocky limestone plateau protruding eastwards and flanked by the valleys of Dahlet Qorrot and Wied ir-Rihan. Here the garigue has developed into a dense covering of low-growing shrubs of a large variety of species, dominated by Narrow-leaved Rock-rose Cistus monspeliensis, Tree Spurge Euphorbia dendroides, Wolfbane Periploca angustifolia, Mediterranean Heath Erica multiflora, Olive-leaved Germander Teucrium fruticans, and White Hedge-nettle Prasium majus, with scattered Sea Squill Urginea maritima and Branched Asphodel Asphodelus aestivus. Patches of the yellow and purple forms of the rare Southern Dwarf Iris Iris pseudomila, amongst several other scarce species, are also found here.
**Human Intervention**

For the last 7000 years man has been tampering with his natural environment and no doubt has changed the face of these islands. Since man arrived Gozo too has seen great changes. There is not one single square metre on the face of the whole island where man’s footprint is not in evidence. Man started using land to yield his sustenance and by time changed the landscape. The terraced fields supported by many kilometres of rubble walls together with natural valleys and watercourses, cliffs and a unique coastline carved through millennia of years, harmonise together to present us with a pleasant natural environment, quite rich in biodiversity. However, the negative effects of human activity have never been as devastating as in the last forty years.

The human population of Gozo now stands approximately at 28,000, which gives a density of over 400 persons per square kilometre. No wonder human pressure on the natural environment is quite evident everywhere. In spite of an increase in population, the terraced slopes of valleys and hillsides, where fodder crops were previously grown, now lie abandoned. The characteristic dry-stone walls are gradually collapsing, leading to the loss of whole tracts of soil through rain-induced erosion. Re-building of rubble walls needs time and skills, and these are both lacking. So we end up again with a degraded changing landscape.

The increase in built-up areas, together with the large number of new roads, some of which have been constructed along valley beds, have lead to an increased volume and rate of flow of water run-off. Apart from eating up chunks from the Gozitan countryside and ruining natural watercourses, this development also results in less water percolating into the ground, while the run-off rainwater carries tons of soil down into the valleys and subsequently into the sea.

The topography of Gozo, having a proportionally high ratio of hills, is more prone to run-off soil erosion. The end product of this erosion-induced desertification can be easily seen by the turbidity off valley mouths at sea after heavy rains, which often give rise to flash floods.

The construction of roads and the booming building development of the past thirty years resulted in a flourishing quarrying industry to the detriment of large stretches of land, both garigue and agricultural, and in many cases ruining the natural environment. Disused and derelict quarries are not all restored into agricultural land, and when restoration takes place this is carried out in a slipshod and haphazard way.

Apart from the building development there are several other activities harming the Gozitan Natural Environment. Illegal off-roading activities along valley beds, on hillsides, and not infrequently on Ramla Bay’s precious sand dunes, lead to the opening of new tracks, degradation of land, compaction of terrain and the destruction of flora and fauna. Illegal dumping in valleys of household wastes as well as inert material from quarries and building development only block natural watercourses, and also damages the natural environment in many ways.

The sand dunes at Ramla support an interesting variety of flora and fauna.

Bird trapping and hunting, which is widespread in Gozo, also has a negative impact on the environment. They do not only harm the environment by taking away large number of birds but also contribute towards the degradation of the landscape. Bird shooters plant groves of the fast-growing eucalyptus

(Continued on page 11)
Banking in the Gozitan Economy*
CARMEN SALIBA**

Introduction

It is reckoned that Malta’s financial system is healthy, well supervised in the context of a comprehensive legal framework, and strongly compliant with most of the international standards and code. However, Maltese financial institutions are continuously facing challenges in our small and open economy. The economic vulnerability of small island states like the Maltese Islands arise from the fact that their economies are to a large extent, shaped by forces outside their control, mostly due to their economic openness and high dependence on a narrow range of exported products. This means that their financial development is likely to be dictated mostly by forces outside their control.

The Banking System

Financial liberalisation and privatization fundamentally transformed the Maltese financial system during the 1990s. Restrictions on bank interest rates were gradually removed and the relaxation of capital controls facilitated the growing integration of Maltese financial markets with those abroad. Laws governing the sector were entirely overhauled and a regulatory framework was introduced based on European Union legislation.

Banking in Malta is regulated by the Central Bank of Malta Act 2002 and by the Banking Act 1994. The CBM has the authority to define and impose statistical reporting requirements and to establish the actual reporting population and standards for transmission so as to enable it to bring Malta’s monetary and financial statistics in line with international standards. For this reason a Memorandum of Understanding with the Malta Financial Services Authority (MFSA) has been signed, and a co-operation agreement with the National Statistics Office (NSO) has been made, thus establishing an ongoing working relationship on matters related to financial stability. The introduction of a general obligation of professional secrecy in the Professional Secrecy Act of 1994 and the introduction of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (1994), which have been strengthened and updated on several occasions, have consolidated the integrity of the legislative framework itself and the credibility of Malta as a financial centre.

A healthy and vibrant economy requires a financial system that moves funds from people who save, to people who have productive investment opportunities. Despite the growth of non-bank financial intermediaries and the development of a domestic capital market, banks remain the principal financial institutions in Malta. The Maltese banking industry is highly concentrated, reflecting the small size of the domestic market and the history of the industry.

The two major deposit money banks in Malta are Bank of Valletta plc. and HSBC Bank Malta plc (previously Mid-Bank Bank). The other commercial banks operate on a smaller scale. The privatisation of Mid-Med Bank in 1999 introduced higher competition and new financial instruments and decreased state ownership in the banking sector to a remaining 25% in Bank of Valletta plc. Plans are now in hand to start the process for the selling of shares in Bank of Valletta plc. Despite the high concentration in the sector by the two major banks, which account for about 90% of total deposits and loans of domestic credit banks, the degree of competition is reasonable given the size of the economy, and has led to higher

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* This is a summary of a long essay on “The Perceptions of Gozitans on Maltese Local Banks” by the same author.

** Carmen Saliba is currently following a course leading to the MA in Islands and Small States Studies at the University Gozo Centre.
Maltese commercial banks offer all forms of commercial banking services. This also includes standard lending services of overdraft, loans and trade finance. Banks are flexible in considering applications for finance. The retail banks also have separate institutions, mainly on a joint venture basis, to provide specialised financial services, such as life insurance, fund management, underwriting and security issues, long-term housing schemes and leasing.

The two major banks have even furthered their delivery channels through the provision of internet banking. Credit institutions also engaged in consolidation processes by centralizing back-office functions. Some domestic banks are expanding their business operations by acquiring international subsidiaries and increasing their collaboration with foreign entities, as well as by opening offices abroad to gain exposure to new markets. Moreover, the enactment of the Special Funds (Regulation) Act 2002, establishes the statutory basis for retirement schemes and retirement funds, thus leading to the development of schemes run by the banks.

Banking in Gozo

Gozo is a small island with an area of 67km². Its settlements are small and the population of around 30,500 is scattered over fourteen different localities, thus requiring a spread of various public and private services all over the island. In Gozo commercial banking is conducted by four banks. These include the two major banks: Bank of Valletta plc and HSBC Bank (Malta) plc; Lombard Bank (Malta) plc and APS Bank Ltd. Lombard Bank (Malta) plc and APS Bank Ltd are represented only by one branch, which is situated in Victoria, while the major banks are represented in more than one locality.

In Malta financial products during the last few years became more innovative and sophisticated, thereby giving customers a broader choice of investment opportunities. The positive economic effect of this development is that a greater proportion of the country’s savings is being mobilized through the financial system and channeled to the productive sectors for investment purposes. Despite the unfavorable economic climate of recent years, the profitability of the credit institutions in Malta and Gozo has continued to improve steadily.

The high crucial financial intermediary role of the deposit banks is evidenced by the high propensity of residents who place their savings in bank deposits. During the last ten years Gozitans have played a major role in the expansion of banking deposits. This is an important indicator of economic development in Gozo.

Banks play a major role in channeling funds to borrowers with productive investment opportunities, they are important in ensuring that the financial system and the economy run smoothly and efficiently. However, whereas in Malta a high percent of bank deposits are loaned to the private sector, in Gozo only a small percent of deposits are loaned to the same sector. This is an important indicator of under-development and lack of investment opportunities available in Gozo. If the level of loans and advances in Gozo were to be on the same level as those of Malta, there will be an increase in investment in the Gozitan economy with all the resultant benefits in wealth generation and job creation. In Gozo private entrepreneurs must be encouraged to invest not only in the expansion of their existing businesses but also in new ones. This can be done if Gozitan savings can be invested in the Gozitan economy for the benefit of the whole society.

Perceptions of Gozitans on Local Banks

The marketing orientation of Maltese financial institutions is evidenced by their focus on customer needs and on market segmentation,
product development, pricing policies, personal selling and advertising and promotional programmes. In the month of August 2004 a survey on the perceptions of Gozitans on local banks was carried out. The results were based on a sample of two hundred individuals ranging from an age of 18 to that of 94. The replies received provide an insight on the Gozitans' banking activities with their most preferred banks and how they perceive the service provided by the local banks. Moreover, the preferred localities and frequent banking transactions have also been outlined. The relevance of the survey results is undoubtedly constrained by the limited sample size and the limited amount covered in the questionnaire.

Eighty two per cent of respondents have chosen either Bank of Valletta plc (BOV) or HSBC Bank Malta plc (HSBC) as their best bank in Malta. On the other hand, only 33 percent of the respondents hold accounts only with their preferred bank. The survey illustrates that Gozitans are interested in getting an efficient and fast service. Gozitans also prefer to deal with helpful staff, who thus enable their preferred bank to gain a trustworthy and reliable image. Cash withdrawals, cheque encashments, and depositing of funds result the most frequent banking transactions. Given the limited number of branches and agencies, Victoria emerges as the preferred locality for effecting banking transactions. However, there are cases where branch location is a key factor and influences a customer’s choice of a financial institution.

In the Maltese Islands the rationalization process has been facilitated by the massive growth in automated banking. The availability of ATMs and sharing arrangements like those of APS with BOV, give card holders of APS the ability to use the cash machines of several others, thus reducing the customer demand for such extensive branch networks. In the survey 67 per cent of respondents utilize a debit card, and 37 per cent of respondents utilise a credit card. Only 21 per cent of respondents utilise internet banking as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Survey Results: Use of Automated Services by Gozitans

Figure 2 shows the age profile of 26 percent of respondents who do not make use of any automated bank services offered in Gozo.

When internet banking became available, many professionals predicted the death of the branch. And yet, branch-based business has not only maintained its place in banking, it is growing. In the survey only 16 per cent of the respondents think that local banks are already efficient and thus no other measure must be adopted. The other respondents highlighted the need to increase the number of branches/agencies and ATM machines in other villages in Gozo. An increase in the opening hours was also requested, while 52 per cent of respondents clearly viewed, that there is the need to adopt effective measures in order to reduce queues and thus be able to give a faster service.

According to 35 per cent of respondents, no measure must be adopted by Maltese local banks in order to become more client-friendly. The remaining participants highlighted the need of continuous training as a priority area.
and a key element in the professional development of banks’ employees in order to achieve their business objectives and ensure quality standards.

**Conclusion**

Local commercial banks play an important role in the social and economic development of Gozo. With their achievements local banks prove that they are the banks with whom one can plan his or her financial future. But it is not just the financial strength that Gozitans can take comfort in. Gozitans believe that a sense of commitment, quality and service must be at the core of their business. The future of local banks in Gozo lies in offering customers an increasingly personalized and professional service. A subsequent challenge is to ensure that the service delivered meets the specification set.

This is essential since during the last ten years Gozitans have played a major role in the expansion of banking deposits. However, local banks need to nurture their loan portfolio by tapping related marked segments in Gozo. The Gozitan economy will benefit from the introduction of a strategically defined service quality programme; in order to monitor the changing environment with respect to Gozitan customer needs and expectations; technology and product development; business and economic conditions; and competitor activities. This is a must for the Gozitan community which is becoming increasingly demanding, better informed and ready to play a more active role in their relationship with a bank.

Better data to assess the real role of financial institutions in the island of Gozo is essential. This will help promote Gozo’s own interests, and render the demand for disparity reductions more credible. Moreover there is the need of further studies in order to come up with proposals to support and encourage the Gozitan economy, in order to be able to exploit the strengths and opportunities that Gozo offers.

(Continued from page 7)

trees to attract birds for hunting. These groves are sprouting everywhere, not only preventing the establishment of any undergrowth, but consist of alien species incompatible with our indigenous vegetation and landscape. Gozo also has to endure widespread illegal hunting of protected birds. The Peregrine and the Barn Owl, to mention just two species, have been lost due to illegal hunting. Illegal shooting of protected birds also prevents other species such as the Kestrel to settle and breed here.

Bird trappers, too, should share the blame of the degradation of Gozo’s landscape. They transform rich garigue areas and agricultural land into bird trapping sites, not infrequently spraying herbicides on these sites to prevent vegetation growth. They set up netting sites in ecological areas, along cliff edges and hillsides, turning a beautiful landscape into one big eyesore. Tal- Maġün, Ta’ Ċenċ, Wardija Point and several other places are evidence of these atrocities against Gozo’ natural environment.

**References**


Of Salmonellae and *Salmonella* Gozo

LORANNE VELLA*

**Introduction**

I will always remember the summer of 1993 as a particularly hot and humid season, not to mention my experiences chasing, with gloved hands and booted feet, a few hundred apprehensive and distrustful cows for some stinking, fresh dung. The memories now are quite hilarious, but not then, at least not when the bulls or a rather angry cow had to be confronted.

Having always been rather keen on the study of micro-organisms, I knew right from my freshman year at the University of Malta, that I wanted to work in a topic related to microbiology for my undergraduate thesis. In 1991, I spent a whole summer reading Medline abstracts, but it was an article on *Salmonella* in one of my Medicine Digest copies that actually caught my attention. Another reason that encouraged me to undertake a study on *Salmonella* was the fact that no such studies on animals had been carried out before in Malta. I remember writing a brief protocol about what I wanted to do, going to the Bacteriology laboratory in St. Luke's Hospital and asking Dr. Paul Cuschieri, the Consultant Bacteriologist in charge of that laboratory, if he could be my tutor and if what I had in mind was feasible. Happily enough, he was quite interested and accepted without hesitation. So started a long and eventful study on salmonellae. Initially, I wanted to study salmonella carriage, infection and disease in poultry but complications arose, primarily because permission to visit poultry processing plants was almost impossible to obtain. Next, I focused my attention on pigs; however, I practically knew no one in Malta who could take me around the various pig farms in Malta. In the end, keeping in mind the limited time I had to carry out the study, I realized that Gozo was just small enough and had just the right number of cattle farms for my project. There were other advantages: my father could help to take me around the various farms for the samples (since I had no car) and I could speak the various Gozitan dialects, which made the farmers more receptive.

**The Genus *Salmonella***

*Salmonella* is a group of bacteria consisting of more than 2000 different types (known as serotypes or serovars); these are all potentially pathogenic to man and may cause gastroenteritis, septicaemia or enteric fever. Salmonellae also infect many animal species, including birds and reptiles. In man, infections often result following ingestion of improperly cooked animal products that have been previously contaminated with faecal matter during processing. This results in an acute, self-limiting gastroenteritis\(^1\) or a systemic infection (enteric fever) involving other areas of the body. Patients with acute gastroenteritis excrete large numbers of bacteria in faeces but numbers diminish as recovery progresses, so that after 3 to 4 weeks, stools are usually bacteria free. However, some patients continue to excrete salmonellae for a longer period, which ranges from months to several years, although permanent chronic carriage lasting for more than one year is very rare. The case fatality rate is low, usually less than 0.4% and deaths mainly occur in the very young, the very old and in debilitated, immuno-compromised persons.

The generic term *Salmonella* was given to the micro-organism in 1900 in honor of Dr. D. E. Salmon (1850-1914), an American pathologist who, together with Theobald Smith, was the first to discover and describe *Salmonella*. On the surface of this bacterium, there are various proteins called antigens, which differ in their nature between the different salmonellae. This enables scientists to distinguish between one *Salmonella* serovar and another; thus, *Salmonella*...
Enteritidis has different antigens on its surfaces compared to say, Salmonella Montevideo. Historically, salmonellae have been classified according to their antigenic structure (i.e. the types of antigens present) and each new type that is discovered is named after the place in which it was first isolated. The Kauffmann-White scheme is a systematic tabulation of the different antigenic structures of the Salmonella serovars known. In this classification system, the genus Salmonella (abbreviated to S.) is divided into two species, namely, S. enterica and S. bongori. Salmonella enterica is further subdivided into 6 subspecies, the most important of which is Salmonella enterica subspecies enterica. Most of the Salmonella serovars pathogenic for mammals and birds belong to this subspecies, although members of S. enterica subspecies arizonae are important causes of diarrhoeal illness in turkeys and are therefore of worldwide economic importance.

The Study

In 1993, I therefore started a cross-sectional study on a representative sample of cows and bulls from various farms in Gozo, the main aims of which were:

1. to determine the prevalence of Salmonella excretion/carriage in these animals;
2. to identify the most common serovar prevalent within the study population; and,
3. to determine the presence of any serovar resistance to the antibiotics commonly used in animal husbandry.

The study population consisted of 2325 cows and 68 bulls. A representative sample of 300 head was selected using strict random sampling from 62 farms spread in 14 towns in Gozo. These consisted of 296 cows and 4 bulls; the animals were from 3 to 4 years old and the cows consisted of both wet (milked) and dry (non milked) animals. Calves and one year old heifers and bulls were excluded.

Faecal swabs were obtained every week for nine consecutive weeks from each individual animal chosen from 52 farms distributed in 12 towns in Gozo. The 300 bovines sampled represented 12.5% of the total bovine population of Gozo whilst the 52 farms sampled constituted 83.9% of the total available sampling points (farms = 62). Each swab was placed in a special medium to protect it, stored at 4ºC whilst in transit and processed in the laboratory within 24 hours of collection. Isolation and identification of the Salmonella isolates were carried out using standard procedures. Antibiotic sensitivity testing on the isolated strains was performed using the impregnated disc diffusion method (Stokes’ modification of the comparative method); the antibiotics chosen included ampicillin, cefuroxime, chloramphenicol, ciprofloxacin, furazolidone, gentamicin, sulphafurazole, tetracycline and trimethoprim. Throughout the study adequate internal quality control was carried out including quality control on culture media used for the isolation of Salmonella serovars, quality control during the actual isolation and identification of the organisms, controls during serological testing and controls used for the antibiotic sensitivity testing.

Results and Discussion

Of the 300 faecal samples taken, 41.3% (n = 124) yielded Salmonella and more than one serovar were isolated from seven swabs; hence, there were 131 isolates in all, which increased the percentage of Salmonella isolated to 43.7%. Since a single faecal swab was taken from each animal, this means that 41.3% of the animals sampled were excreting the organism at the time of sampling with 7 of the animals excreting more than one type of Salmonella.

The cows and bulls yielding positive Salmonella cultures did not show any clinical signs of salmonellosis such as fever, dullness, diminished appetite, blood-stained faeces and in the case of cows, reduced milk yields. Since the animals were excreting the organism, it is more likely that they were Salmonella carriers rather than cases of acute infection. However, from this study, it cannot be concluded
whether this was temporary or permanent carriage. The nature of carriage is particularly important because it affects the persistence of *Salmonella* in the herds. Additionally, cattle from Gozo are used for human consumption both in Malta and Gozo. This increases the opportunity of *Salmonella* dissemination at the abattoir prior to slaughter with a consequent increase in the risk of meat contamination.

Seven different kinds of serovars were isolated, including a new serovar for which the name *Salmonella* Gozo was given (Table 1). When taken together, the three serovars *S. Croft*, *S. Telaviv* and *S. Montevideo*, constituted up to 33.7% of the total number of samples taken. Thus approximately one in every three bovines sampled might have been carrying one of these three serovars. The relative proportions of the serovars isolated may affect the likelihood of the infection of persons or other animals; this is also influenced by the pathogenicity of individual *Salmonella* serovars. In several countries, *S. Dublin* and *S. Typhimurium* are the most common and most pathogenic serovars causing serious clinical infection in adult cattle and calves.

However, at the time of the study, this does not seem to be the case in Gozo, because neither serovar was isolated. Also, since the main *Salmonella* serovars isolated from man locally are *S. Enteritidis* and *S. Typhimurium*, (which were not isolated from any of the animals sampled), it is very probable that *Salmonella* serovars in beef are not a likely cause of *Salmonella* infections in Gozo. This could be due to very efficient cooking of meat dishes.

However, lack of reporting of individual cases especially if mild or no symptoms are experienced have to be kept in mind. It could also be due to the fact that the serovars isolated from the cattle studied have a low pathogenicity and are easily destroyed by proper cooking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Salmonella</em> serotype</th>
<th>Antigenic structure</th>
<th>No. of Isolates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croft</td>
<td>28: g,m,s: e,n,z15</td>
<td>55 (18.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv</td>
<td>28: y: e,n,z15</td>
<td>29 (9.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montevideo</td>
<td>28: g,m,s: 1,2,7</td>
<td>17 (5.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gozo</td>
<td>28: e,h: e,n,z15</td>
<td>14 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kpeme</td>
<td>28: e,h: 1,7</td>
<td>7 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantis</td>
<td>8,7: r: 1,5</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abadina</td>
<td>28: g,m: e,n,z15</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6 (2.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>131 (43.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These were rough strains that could not be serotyped and hence, identified; consequently, they cannot be classified under any serogroup.

Table 1: Number and types of *Salmonella* serovars

The New *Salmonella* Serovar

A total of 14 *Salmonella* isolates belonged to a serovar that was subsequently confirmed to be a new serovar by the WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on *Salmonella* in France. All isolates were biochemically typical of the *Salmonella* genus. This isolate could not be serotyped easily with the commercial antisera available to me and it could not be classified in the then current edition of the Kauffmann-White scheme. I determined that the serovar belonged to the O group 28 but it showed antigens in just one phase, (the e,h antigens), while the antigens in the other phase could not be determined even after repetitive attempts (unfortunately, at that time, the hospital laboratory also experienced a shortage of antisera which are necessary for the identification of each *Salmonella* isolate). I had to send all the isolates to the WHO Centre in France for full identification; it was subsequently reported by this Centre that this serovar had the antigenic structure of 28: e,h: e,n,z15. The fourteen isolates were cultured from specimens taken from farms in Nadur (n = 1; one farm) followed by Sannat (n = 3; two farms) and Xewkija (n = 10; three farms). Although the first specimen to yield *S. Gozo* was taken from a farm in Nadur (the farms in Nadur were the ones which I visited first in July 1993),
it was one of the isolates from Sannat which was first fully confirmed to be a new serovar by the reference laboratory (from my laboratory logbook records which I still have, the date in which I took the sample that yielded this particular isolate was 2 August, 1993). The ten isolates of S. Gozo from Xewkija were obtained from three different farms in this town; direct or indirect contact between the animals on these three different farms is probably responsible for the spread of this new serovar.

When news came from France that the serovar was new and needed a name, my first thought was Salmonella Gozo but I wanted to discuss the issue with my tutor and ask for his opinion. Dr. P. Cuschieri suggested Salmonella Threehills and Salmonella Calypso, but I wasn’t very happy with this choice. I wanted a simple name and a name which people would associate immediately with a geographically known location. Strictly speaking, the name should have been Salmonella Nadur because that was the place from where it was first isolated. Still, Nadur is not as well known as Gozo and so, I still held in favour of the name S. Gozo, which, after much good-natured argument, also satisfied my tutor. Hence, the name which we eventually proposed for this new serovar is S. enterica subspecies enterica var. Gozo or briefly, Salmonella Gozo. This name was accepted by Prof. Popoff (with whom I was corresponding through Dr. Cuschieri) at the WHO Centre for Salmonella in France and is today listed together with the other Salmonella serovars in recent issues of the Kauffmann-White scheme.

Apart from the taxonomic and epidemiological significance associated with the discovery of a new serovar, the isolation of such a strain has other implications. Since the bovine population in Gozo is almost completely isolated from other bovines, this serovar may have become adapted to the island due to particular environmental factors or farming practices found only in Gozo. If this holds true, such factors have still to be determined. Further studies are required to reveal how diffuse this serovar is on the island. To my knowledge, no such studies have been conducted yet.

### Further Points

As a result of strict random sampling, the number of animals sampled were proportional to the total number of animals in each locality (Table 2). The basic trend appears to be one of higher Salmonella incidence in localities situated in the SE and SW regions of Gozo. The seven localities (Fontana, Ghajnsielem, Kerċem, Munxar, Nadur, Sannat, Victoria and Xewkija) that have the highest percentage of Salmonella positive animals are all geographically adjacent to each other. The other localities are quite remote compared to these seven regions. The close proximity of these localities lends strength to the hypothesis that easy contact between farmers and farm workers in these places, provides ample opportunity for the transfer of Salmonella between one farm and another through commonly shared tools, machines and other fomites.

Pigeons and other birds kept on the farms investigated may also be responsible for the carriage of salmonellae from one place to another. These birds are mobile and may defaecate onto, and thus contaminate, water reservoirs and animal feeds. The cycle is complete when the cows become infected and start shedding the organism in the environment thus promoting further infection and colonisation of other animals. Other animals that may contribute to the spread of salmonellae in different farms include dogs, cats and rats. The use of pressure hoses to clean and disinfect animal pens may cause aerosols to form and spread salmonellae to other parts of the premises and thus further contributes to the spread of infection amongst animals. Transmission of salmonellae may also occur during breeding; in Gozo, bulls are sold or transferred from one farm to another for mating purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>No. of bovines per locality</th>
<th>No. of animals sampled</th>
<th>No. of Salmonella isolates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xewkija</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerċem</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadur</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garg</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munxar</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xagħra</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Lawrenz</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ħebbu Ħal Farina</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2393</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Percentage frequency of isolates per town
No salmonellae were isolated from San Lawrenz, Xaghra and Žebbug, which are relatively further north compared to other localities. There is no clear explanation for this result. Admittedly, the number of animals sampled from these regions was small compared to the other localities, but then, the total bovine population in these areas is also small compared to that of other towns.

It is common practice in Gozo to house all bovines in a large barn or else divide the herd into small numbers and house them together in smaller pens. Herding the animals together facilitates transfer of salmonellae from one cow to another. After milking, during the day, the animals are almost always allowed to stroll freely in a large open yard and this may enhance transmission, apart from the possible contamination of feeds in troughs. In Xaghra and San Lawrenz, the bovines were kept in sheds of 6 animals each. This partial isolation may limit transmission of infection from one animal to another.

**Antibiotic Sensitivity Tests**

All the antibiotics used in this study have applications in both human and veterinary medicine with the exception of furazolidone which is used exclusively in animals. At the time of the study, the farmers reported using the following antibiotics to treat infections in their cattle: penicillins, oxytetracycline, streptomycin, trimethoprim with sulphamethazine and gentamicin. However, they did not mention using chloramphenicol, cefuroxime, ciprofloxacin and furazolidone.

During testing, the strains gave definite results, there were either sensitive or resistant - practically no strains showed intermediate resistance. The majority of strains were sensitive to most of the antibiotics used but most strains (n = 98, 74.8%) of all serovars (excluding S. Abadina), were resistant to sulphafurazole. Resistance to sulphonamides by S. Montevideo was found to be greater than with the other serovars.

Despite the widespread use of penicillins and oxytetracycline for the treatment of infections in the bovines studied, relatively little resistance was found to these antibiotics. It was most reassuring that no resistance to the newer antibiotics (ciprofloxacin and cefuroxime) was observed.

**Conclusions**

By March 1994, I had completely finished my study and writing it up. I remember then being completely immersed into studying for the looming final examinations and so, I was greatly surprised by the publicity which followed when the Head of the Pharmacy Department broke the news of the S. Gozo isolation in a press conference, because I was not expecting it. However, when I look back, it is the lesson of being prepared and of perseverance in doing one's work right the first time that comes instantly to mind. Quoting the great Louis Pasteur, "Chance favours the prepared mind", when one prepares well and meticulously carries out the task at hand from beginning to end, no matter how laborious the work or what the subject matter is, the end result is always worth the efforts put in. Finally, I have always believed that what one starts, one must finish and then, one has to move on.

(Continued on page 27)
An Interview with Ann Monsarrat

MAURICE CAUCHI*

When did you first come to Gozo?

Nicholas and I came to Gozo for a week in October 1968, stayed at the Calypso Hotel in Marsalforn and immediately fell in love with the island.

What made you decide to come to Gozo in the first place?

This is rather a long story. When I married Nicholas he was living in Canada, where he had been director of the UK Information Office, and he had recently bought one of the Thousand Islands in the St Lawrence River, a spectacularly beautiful area. The island was minute, with just room for a house, a boathouse and a few trees, but we both loved the isolation and being so closely surrounded by water. But the winters there, of course, were so cold that we could only enjoy it for a few months each year. So we began to search for a slightly larger island with a warmer climate on which we could live permanently. We first heard of Gozo from Professor Parkinson, of Parkinson’s Law fame. He was a very sociable fellow, then building a holiday house for himself in San Pawl tat-Targa. Gozo, he told us, was very beautiful but far too quiet, no one could possibly live on it. It sounded exactly what we had in mind. We spent a week here looking at all kinds of properties but it wasn’t until our last night that we were shown an old farmhouse in San Lawrenz which we both thought enchanting. Just a few hours before our departure, Nicholas signed the deeds by candlelight. The electricity had cut out all over the island, which was a quite a common occurrence then. Our lawyer was Dr. Anton Calleja, a delightful man. He and his sister, Maria, became our first Gozitan friends.

How has Gozo changed since you came here first?

Well, happily, the electricity is now splendidly reliable. There used to be many shabby areas and a general feeling of poverty. In the villages many houses were without electricity and for many families their only supply of water came from the village pump. America was still sending food parcels to the older inhabitants. Kerosene for cooking and light was delivered door to door by donkey cart. Children, especially the boys, left school at a very early age, often at ten or eleven, to help in the home and fields and many women rarely left the house except to go to church. Nicholas used to worry that the children had no fun and arranged for a conjurer to come over from Malta to entertain them at the annual San Lawrenz Christmas party. This was such an extraordinary novelty that many of the parents came to see him too. But really one shouldn’t interfere. During one trick a small boy appeared to have been beheaded which caused tremendous consternation. It is very different now when so many families have television and there is a sense of real prosperity. There is also more compassion for the disadvantaged and fewer restrictions for the young. At festas when we first arrived, the girls all stood on one side of the square and the boys on the other, eyeing each other from a distance. Only the boys were allowed to follow the procession. However, there are several things I miss from those earlier, simpler days, like the great flocks of sheep and goats which rustled past the house every morning and evening and the donkeys, which pulled the ploughs and were for many the only means of transport. It was a much quieter island then.

How would you describe relations of ‘expatriates’ with the local population?

They seem to me to be remarkably good. I don’t know anyone who hasn’t had a wonderfully generous welcome and made good Gozitan friends.

Are there enough facilities in Gozo to attract people from overseas to retire here?

There certainly are for me and everyone else I know. There are excellent doctors and dentists,
a very pleasant and efficient hospital, a wide range of shops and restaurants and there is certainly no lack of entertainment. Gozo has an extraordinary wealth of musical talent and great enterprise in putting on operas and concerts. It is often impossible to go to everything. And then there is an excellent cinema and library. The only thing I can think of which might be improved is the bus service. Both Gozitans and foreigners, especially those who no longer drive, might welcome smaller buses which ran more frequently.

Do you involve yourself in any local activities, organisations, etc?

I used to think that the best and probably only things foreigners should do was to donate money and encourage Gozitan enterprise and talent. It was with this in mind that I joined Wirt Għawdex when it was revived a few years ago. I just wanted to give them some financial support but, since I had been a journalist in my youth, I was soon roped in to help with their publicity. It was a very exciting time. We got a lot done and I was very glad to have the opportunity to actually participate in doing something for the island.

What would make Gozo more attractive to persons like yourself?

I can't think of a single thing. I love it just as it is.

Any comments relating to what makes Gozo different from Malta?

Oh, the peace and the people. I enjoy Malta too, but compared with Gozo it is like going to the big city. There were only four ferries a day when we first came to live here and they were quickly cancelled at the slightest hint of a storm. Now, it is possible to enjoy both islands, but I still wouldn't want to live anywhere but in peaceful San Lawrenz. Gozo seems to me to be a very ancient patch of land, with its strange, flat-topped hills and deep valleys. Wandering along its goat-tracks one has a great sense of its history. I never tire of it.

Tell us something about the working routine of your late husband?

Nicholas was in the Navy during the Second World War and, by the time I met him, he had curiously reverted to the naval regime of ‘watches’, four hours on duty and four hours off, though his timetable was rather more fluid than the Navy would have allowed. In Gozo he usually woke around 5 am, strolled round the garden, listened to several radio news broadcasts and then settled down to fair copy the two pages he had written the day before. He very rarely changed anything after that. He then began work on the next two pages before lunch and, after a four-hour siesta, worked again before and after dinner. He was extremely disciplined and had the whole book in his head before he began writing it. He did jot things down in notebooks during the planning stage but it was all very minimal. He was fortunate in never being short of ideas and he never took a holiday until he had written the first paragraph of his next book.

Tell us something about what you yourself have been doing, writing etc.

Well, I have been writing bits and pieces for guidebooks to Malta and Gozo and a chapter on the deity of the islands’ amazing neolithic temples for a book, covering all aspects on Malta’s prehistory. Daniel Cilia, a Gozitan of course, has been the prime mover in this and has taken many superb photographs for it. However, I haven’t really been doing much writing since I had what I consider to be the very great honour of being put on the board of St James Cavalier in Valletta. It is a wonderful place, a showcase of all the arts. It has been a great experience seeing it establish itself so quickly. It means that I have been in Malta more than usual but I am still always delighted to drive onto the Gozo ferry and head back home. And, having lived here for thirty-four years now, more than half my life, I certainly do consider Gozo as my home.

What are your plans for the future?

To continue enjoying Gozo and one day, I hope, to finish writing a book for which I still have to do a great deal more research.
Towards a Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Maltese Islands with Special Reference to Gozo

LINO BRIGUGLIO

Pursuing sustainable development goals is important for the Maltese Islands given their high population densities, which lead to heavy pressure on the environment. This is especially so in the case of the island of Gozo, which is more dependent on the environment than Malta, due to its reliance on agriculture and tourism.

The Conference on sustainable development in Gozo, which was held at Hotel Ta Cenc on 26 November 2004, highlighted the main sustainable development issues in this small island with a land area of 67 square kilometres and a population of about 30,000. The conference was organised by the National Commission for Sustainable Development, together with the Ministry for Gozo and the University Gozo Centre, with the support of the EC Representation in Malta. It was attended by about 90 participants.

In his introductory remarks, HE Ronald Gallimore, who at that time headed the EC Representation in Malta, said that the meeting was an important one in view of the fact that it dealt with sustainable development, which encompasses economic, social and environmental dimensions. He referred to the EU Lisbon Agenda, which sets out a ten-year strategy to make the EU the world’s most dynamic and competitive economy. He said that this strategy should lead to a stronger economy based on sound environmental policies and social includes, which are at the basis of sustainable development. He praised the National Commission for Sustainable Development for taking the initiative to draw up a sustainable development strategy for the Maltese Islands.

The Ethical Dimension

Hon Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo, spoke about the meaning of sustainable development, and emphasised the point that such development has, at its roots, an ethical dimension in that thinking long term for future generations is an ethical issue. She dwelt at some length on the special development constraints faced by Gozo in view of its double insularity, small domestic market and ecological fragility. She gave a brief account of the actions undertaken by the Ministry for Gozo to promote sustainable development on the island. The full speech of Minister Debono, in Maltese, is presented as an annex to this article.

Hon George Pullicino, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Environment, who represents the Prime Minister as chairman of the National Commission for Sustainable Development, also referred to the ethical dimension of sustainable development and emphasised that need that every one of us feels the need to act responsibly to improve the quality of life of the population as a whole and not just to a section of it. He said that sustainable development is multifaceted and it is therefore necessary to consider its many dimensions in the strategy. He said that economic development is necessary to create sound environmental management, and that the quality of life of the people is intimately tied with economic and environmental concerns. He explained the role of the National Commission for Sustainable Development in promoting...
awareness of the need for a holistic approach in attempting to improve the quality of life of the Maltese population.

Sustainable Development and Quality of Life

Professor Briguglio spoke next. He said that ultimately sustainable development is intended to improve the quality of life. He said that economic development is very important in this regard, and efficiency is at the core of such development. However, environmental and social concerns require that economic development should not be short sighted, and should have a long run dimension, so that the changes will be durable and will benefit current and future generations.

He explained that the process of drawing and implementing the strategy itself should be conducive towards the creation of participatory schemes and educational experiences. He also explained the role of the National Council for Sustainable Development in the drawing up the strategy, and said that the Commission was set up in terms of the Environment Protection Act (2001) to raise awareness on the need for sustainable development.

The Special Needs of Gozo

The participants then split into three groups, focussing on economic, environmental and social issues respectively. Each group was asked to review the draft strategy document and to suggest improvements to the text.

The main outcomes of the sessions, in so far as Gozo is concerned were the following:

- The sustainable development strategy is likely to include more reference to Gozo. In its present form, the draft strategy does not give appropriate importance to the special needs of the island
- Issues of direct relevance to the sustainable development of Gozo were discussed at length during the break-out sessions. The most important constraints identified by participants related to:

  (1) Gozo’s heavy dependence on transport for economic development. There was a call for improvements in the inter-island transport connections
  (2) Gozo has a fragile ecosystem, and tourism and agriculture, which are Gozo’s most important economic sectors, exert heavy pressure on the system. There was a call for better environmental management on the island
  (3) There are various threats to Gozo’s social cohesion, arising from the rapid changes that were taking place. There was a call for policies to take account of these threats.

The Conference was attended by a large number of participants

Educational Outcomes

The conference offered an opportunity for an educative experience arising from the informative introductory speeches, video on sustainability indicators and presentation on the purpose of a sustainable development strategy. The conference helped to foster greater awareness that the development challenge in Gozo needs to be tackled in a holistic way, with economic, social and environmental concerns integrated in development strategies and plans for implementation.

In addition the participants from the different walks of life and with different interests, had the opportunity to share their views and express their opinions on what needs to be done to promote sustainable development in Gozo and in the Maltese Islands as a whole. As expected there were contrasting views, but in general, participants agreed that a one sided approach to development is no development at all.
ANNEX

The Hon Giovanna Debono delivering her speech during the conference

The GOZO OBSERVER (No.12) - March 2005


Ghawdex

Ghawdex huwa g’ira għir. Għalkemm id-densita’ tal-popolazzjoni hija baxxa meta mqabbla ma’ dik ta’ Malta, xorta wahda f’Ghawdex id-densita’ hija għolja meta mqabbla ma’ g ejjer u pajji i oħrajn fill-Mediterran u fid-dinja. Għalhekk il-pressjoni fuq l-ambjent hija għolja.

Barra minn hekk, hemm ukoll diffikultaijiet ekonomiċi. Minħabba l-problemi ta’ insularita’ doppa, f’Ghawdex ġandna problemi ta’ kompetittivita’. Dan kemm f’dak li jiġirwarda l-manifattura kif ukoll it-turi mu. Ma dan in idu l-arranġamenti amministrattivi li xi kultant jaghmluha aktar diffiċli biex produtturi Ghawdxin jikkompetu on a level playing field ma’ dawk Maltin.

Ghawdex jiddependi hafna fuq l-agrikultura u t-turi mu. Dawn i - ewġ industriji għandhom it-tnejn konnessjoni qawwija ma’ l-ambjent. Żvilupp sostenibbli għalhekk huwa mportanti hafna, speċjalment f’dak li ghandu x’jaqsam mal-harsien ta’ l-ambjent.

Direzzjoni

L-istrateġija għall-i vilupp sostenibbli għandha l-iskop ta’ ġerghi direzzjoni dwar x’għandu jsir fl-oqsiema soċjali, ambjentali u ekonomi biex ikun ġurati li l-i vilupp tal-pajji ma jellifx il-kwalita’ tal-hajja tagħna u ta’ dawk li se jiġu warajna.

Il-qafas ewlieni ta’ l-istrateġija ġandu jkun marbut ma’ pjan li qablu miegħu l-pajji i kollha tad-dinja, magħruf bħala ‘Ġġenda 21’.

Strateġija għall-i vilupp sostenibbli titlob partecipazzjoni minn kull wieħed u wahda minnha, għaliex kullħadd irid igorr ir-responsabbilta’ sabiex titjieb il-kwalita’ tal-hajja u tonqos il-pressjoni fuq l-ambjent li nghixu fiż.

L-Ambjent


Jehtiċeg li nharsu l-kwalita’ ta’ l-ambjent tagħna, mhux għalina biss, i da għall-istess sistemi ekologjici u naturali li fuqhom tiddependi l-hajja fuq wiċċ din il-pjaneta. Ix-xibka tal-hlejjjaq
hi minsuga b’tali mod li kull impatt u kull dannu jista’ jinfirex fuq il-holqien kollha.


**L-Ekonomija**


Htieġa ohra hi li ma jsirx hela fil-konsum, sabiex ikun hemm bilanċ bejn il-provvista u d-domanda ġar-ri ċorris ta’ pajji.

Barra minn ħekk, jehtieg ukoll li jonqsu l-konsum ta’ prodotti li jħallu mpatt negattiv fuq l-ambjent, bhalma huma ġoggetti tal-plastik u oggetti tossiċi.

**Is-Soċjeta’**


Żvilupp sostenibbli huwa wkoll mibni fuq l-edukazzjoni. Din twassal biex ji died l-gharfien tal-benefiċċi ta’ l-vilupp sostenibbli u ti gura li jkollna l-opportunita’ li niskbu t-tagħrif, il-ħiliet u l-valuri mehtieġa. Hekk inkunu nistgħu nieħu sehem b’mod attiv u responsabbli f’deċi ċonnix li ghandhom impatt fuq il-kwalita’ ta’ ħajja tal-generazzjonijiet pre enti u dawk futuri.


**Il-Pjan għal Gawdex**


B’dawn il-ħsibijiet ahna nagħ li liema progetti ser ninvestu fihom. Nagħ lu li niffukaw l-energija u r-ri ċorris taghna f’dawk is-setturi li
fihom ghandna vanta©©i jew tradizzjoni ta’ success. Fuq kollox nagh lu – b’konsultazzjoni wiesa’ u diskussjonijiet li permezz taghhom il-partijiet kollha jkunu konvinti – li l-pro©ett in kwestjoni huwa dak li rridu u li verament ghandna b onn sabiex intejbu l-livell ta’ ghixien taghma Ikoll f’Ghawdex.

Partikolarment hawn nixtieq nirreferi ghal xi pro©etti u inizjattivi li l-Ministeru qed jahdem fuqhom bhalissa.


Irrid insemmi wkoll l-involviment tal-Ministeru ghal Ghawdex fil-management committee tal-g’ra ta’ Kemmuna, fejn ukoll qed nahdmu flimkien ma’ partijiet oha, sabiex inwettqu strategijji li jharsu l-ambjent naturali ta’ din il-g’ra ira filwaqt li ji®ppermettu li l-potenzjal turistiku taghma jibqa’ ji®ji sfruttat fil-futur.


Qed insemmi dan biex naghti e empju ta’ kif fil-prattika ahna qie®hîhin nikkontribwixxu u ni guraw li kull pass ‘il-quddiem li jaghmel Ghawdex ikun verament pass li jassigura kwalita’ ta’ hajja ahjar ghalina Ikoll illum, u ghall-geräzzjonijiet futuri.

Nikkonkludi billi nesprimi l-awgurju tie®hi li permezz ta’ din il-konferenza johorg®u iktar ideat ta’ kif nistghu nkomplu ni guraw vilupp sostenibbli f’Ghawdex. B’hekk inkunu qed ni guraw vilupp soçjali u ekonomiku li, mhux talli ma jeqridx l-ambjent, i da jkun vilupp li jhares u sahansitra ttejeb l-ambjent ta’ madwarma.
University Gozo Centre Students make their Way into the Public Service

PAT CURMI

In the autumn of 1999, the University of Malta Gozo Centre offered a Bachelor of Commerce course majoring in Economics and Management. As I sat down for the first lecture I was very nervous. It had been close to 10 years since I had attended university and I knew none of the other students. I had originally began my studies in New York and it had always been one of my regrets that I did not complete my studies. So I leaped at this opportunity to be able to complete my degree with the convenience of lectures in Gozo.

We were a group of twenty who initially began the course. By the time finals came around the number had dropped down to nine. The pressures of work and home life had overcome the others. The remaining nine persisted against many trials and tribulations – including one year of non stop lectures including the summer months and travelling to Malta on Saturdays for lectures in one semester when our lecturer was unable to travel to Gozo.

We were successful in our final exams with 3 obtaining second upper class and the rest second lower. Initially, I had no aspirations beyond obtaining my degree, but fate had other plans. In August 2002 an advert in the newspaper grabbed my attention. The Government was recruiting Management Graduates for the position of Principals within the Public Sector. Although I was employed at the time, I applied. Unbeknownst to me so did several of my former classmates. Interviews were set for later that year. This was a new method of recruitment for the Government. The aim was to recruit and train a small group of promising individuals with good academic results in areas which would enable them to take up management roles in the Public Service.

Of the twenty chosen, four were Gozitans and 3 of those were graduates of the Gozo Centre Bachelor of Commerce course. Initially we had a one week Induction Course at the Staff Development Office within the Office of the Prime Minister. There, the speakers were mostly senior Public Officers, who discussed work practices and procedures in the varying sectors they represented. It also included a walking tour of Valletta showing it as a city built as a seat of Government and culminated with an outdoor teambuilding exercise. We, then, underwent an 8 month training period where we were individually paired with mentors – either a Permanent Secretary or a Director for 4 months and were assigned a project. The other half of the mentorship was spent at the Management Efficiency Unit (MEU) within the Office of the Prime Minister, where along with our MEU mentor, we worked with other staff and consultants on projects aimed at various ministries. The work was enlightening and rewarding. In the course of 8 months I worked on 4 different projects aimed at 4 different ministries. At the end of our mentorship period, we all met up again to discuss our experiences and evaluate the mentorship.

In the course of the year, further University Gozo Centre graduates made their way into the Public Sector in middle management positions such as Principals, Economic Officers and Policy Officers, not to mention those who were promoted due to their academic achievements.

In all, University Gozo Centre has contributed 6 Principals, 2 Economic Officers, and 1 Policy Officer from 2003 to date, thanks to the courses offered in Gozo. The University Gozo Centre has definitely made a contribution to the Public Service!

* Pat Curmi is currently employed with the Ministry for Justice & Home Affairs in the Policy Development Directorate.
Gozitan artist at St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity

JOSEPH CALLEJA*

Between the 1 October and the 7 November 2004, the Main Hall of the St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity in Valletta was the venue for an exhibition of paintings entitled “Manifesting the Soul”. This was the third personal exhibition of paintings put up by young Gozitan artist Mark Sagona (b.1976), and was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Dr Lawrence Gonzi.

The exhibition brought together around forty abstract works produced between 2003 and 2004. In these creations, which mark a new chapter in Sagona’s artistic development, there is a further exploration of the possibilities analysed in his earlier paintings. The usual subjects of figures, objects and landscapes have now been substituted with more conceptual themes so that a purer and more forceful artistic expression is achieved. The canvases are the fruit of the artist’s thought and meditation on different aspects of life, with its positive and negative aspects, and all those forces which model human existence – such as the search for God and the infinite, death and destiny, fortune, passion, sacrifice and the struggle of life. Therefore, the paintings put a particular emphasis on the spiritual and are conditioned by the artist’s personal experiences. The meditative aspect of the collection is also reflected in the technique which exploits the use of mixed media, calculated layers of pigment, rich textures and forceful contrasts.

The lavish full-colour exhibition catalogue, published for this event, contains a foreword by Professor Mario Buhagiar, Head of the Art Programme within the Faculty of Art of the University of Malta, and a short critical note by artist and art critic Dr Joseph Paul Cassar. In Buhagiar’s words: “...this is an emotionally charged exhibition that reflects the changing moods of a highly sensitive young man in which colour is perceptively manipulated to express the joys and fears that haunt his impressionable mind”. Despite the rather dark passages in some works, hope abounds in the use of light, at times distant and at times exploding against the picture surface. As Dr Cassar has rightly commented: “Light is very predominant, manifested in different beams and crevices. These works also speak of Mark Sagona’s soul searching as he discovers his spiritual self through his art”.

The exhibition may be still viewed online on the artist’s website www.marksagona.com.

*Joseph Calleja is the Administrator of the University of Malta Gozo Centre
Parasol in Maltese Lace
MARY LOUISE BAJADA

Parasols became very fashionable during the Victorian era. It is quite common to come across paintings and lithographs of Victorian ladies carrying the parasol. It even attracted Claude Monet’s attention - he used it in one of his paintings. However, ladies with parasols are included in various scenes in many other masterpieces.

During the Victorian period, the parasol was very much in use not only in England but also in Malta, some of which were made with Maltese lace. One particular instance is a Maltese lace parasol which was done in Gozo and presented by the Maltese people to Queen Mary as a wedding gift. And that is not the only instance of a documented Maltese lace parasol. In Marquis Nicholas de Piro lace collection at Casa Rocca Piccola in Valletta, one may find some of the finest Maltese lace parasols.

My project for the Certificate in Lace Studies course (2003-2004), was based on the Victorian lady with a Maltese lace parasol. A small porcelain doll dressed in a Victorian costume holds a reproduction of a miniature Maltese lace parasol. The dress is decorated with my design of a border of tallies (moski) and edges (puntina) worked in silk bobbin lace. Naturally, the main feature is the parasol worked with very fine silk thread. I designed the pattern on an eight-pointed star the point de Paris ground (punt talballa) - a distinct Maltese lace characteristic. The Victorian Lady with a Maltese lace parasol project was very time consuming but rewarded with satisfying results.

Festuni
MONICA BONNICI

The circular motifs or as they are better known in Maltese ‘Festuni’ were developed in the early 19th century by a Gozitan priest, Dun Salv Bondi. Towards the end of the same century Dun Guzepp Diacono worked hard to create modern designs on these motifs. There are many different types of these ‘festuni’ but the most common are the Star, the Flower, the Maltese Cross, the Sun, the Crescent Moon, the Palm, the George Cross, the Cluster of Leaf and a variation of Flower motifs.
In the 19th and 20th century, Gozitan ladies produced extremely beautiful masterpieces especially church vestments with these motifs. This inspired me to create my project for the Certificate in Lace Studies course. I selected four types of ‘festuni’ and made a lace insertion for a small curtain to cover a cupboard’s glass pane. I used linen cloth and linen thread as linen is a very durable type of material.

Linen is one of the earliest products known to mankind. It was widely used by the Egyptians and other civilizations in later periods. Linen is made from a plant know as flux and its main areas of cultivation are Russia, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. There is also proof that flux was cultivated and linen was produced in the Maltese Islands. In fact, in the valley between Sannat and Xewkija in Gozo there are baths, which are believed, were used for the manufacture of linen.

‘Balla’ Lace and the Armorial Altar Lace Insertion at Casa Rocca Piccola, Valletta.
ANNA MARIA GATT

Maltese ‘Balla’ lace incorporating liturgical symbols, feature predominantly in church vestments such as in lace trimming for altars. Many lace workers worked and contributed lace for ecclesiastical purposes. My research features the historic and cultural events leading to the introduction of the ‘Balla’ lace in the Maltese Islands and how Church lace became characterised as ‘tal-Balla’. The technical drawing of the ‘Balla’ stitch, its technique applied in Maltese lace and its significance, are also discussed and illustrated.

Cathedrals, churches and museums have extensive collections of altarpieces. One such altar lace edging design depicting an armorial motif is in the private collection of Marquis Nicholas de Piro at Casa Rocca Piccola, Valletta. The history, origin, design and commissioning of this particular lace work are also discussed in this research.

The reproduction of a section of the original pattern, the use of old thread and technical drawing of the boll stitch and other techniques used in Maltese lace explaining the sequence of work, are all included in this project.

(Continued from page 16)

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Frank Galea (Veterinary Surgeon, Gozo Civil Abattoir) and the Gozitan farmers for their co-operation and help. Once more, my gratitude goes to my former tutor Dr. P. Cuschieri for his assistance and guidance, especially in giving me permission to use the facilities of the bacteriology laboratory.

References


Extra Curricular Activities at the University Gozo Centre - 2004

JOSEPH CALLEJA*

Between 1 and 3 March the University Gozo Centre hosted an International Workshop organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of Malta. The workshop, which focused on economic vulnerability and resilience building of small states, was inaugurated by H.E. Jagdish Koonjul, the Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) which represents forty states in the United Nations. The participants of the workshop consisted of twenty-six experts from all Commonwealth regions. These included academics, practitioners, policy makers, and representatives of international and regional organisations.

Azzopardi, coordinator of the Lace Making Programme, delivered a talk about the aspirations of those who seek to attend lace courses at this centre. She also explained how these courses held on a scientific level would raise the level of Maltese lace making to the same footing as the big European lace making countries, such as Belgium, Holland, France, Italy and Spain. In his talk the Hon. Anton Tabone, praised the initiative taken by the University of Malta to approve such a matter as Maltese lace to be studied as an academic subject. Mons. Lawrence Sciberras delivered an interesting talk about lace in church vestments.

The event also included exhibitions of Lace Programme projects and textile crafts. Other exhibitions were mounted by the International Organisation of Needle and Bobbin Lace (OIDFA) and by the Malta Lace Guild. There were also demonstrations of pillow covering, card weaving, cord making by ATC and information about short courses in different aspects of Maltese Lace. A number of stands were mounted by the Koperattiva Għawdexija tal-Bizzilla u Artigjanat with lace making materials.

On 18 April 2004, the Lace Making Programme at the University Gozo Centre organized the annual event “Gozo Lace Day” for the eighth consecutive year. The event, held at the University Gozo Centre premises, consisted of a number of exhibitions and demonstrations of Maltese lace and a number of talks on matters related to lace making.

The event was introduced by Professor Maurice Cauchi, member on the Board of the University Gozo Centre. Ms Consiglia Azzopardi, coordinator of the Lace Making Programme, delivered a talk about the aspirations of those who seek to attend lace courses at this centre. She also explained how these courses held on a scientific level would raise the level of Maltese lace making to the same footing as the big European lace making countries, such as Belgium, Holland, France, Italy and Spain. In his talk the Hon. Anton Tabone, praised the initiative taken by the University of Malta to approve such a matter as Maltese lace to be studied as an academic subject. Mons. Lawrence Sciberras delivered an interesting talk about lace in church vestments.

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The event was introduced by Professor Maurice Cauchi, member on the Board of the University Gozo Centre. Ms Consiglia

*Joseph Calleja is the Administrator of the University of Malta Gozo Centre
Just before the event, Ken Wroe, a British resident in St. Paul’s Bay walked in with a biscuit tin containing some forty Maltese bobbins and an accompanying letter. They were sent by Mabel Duxbury from Leeds Yorkshire, UK, now in her eighties and is unable to travel over because of her illness. Daughter of Commissioner for SW Leeds, Mabel had trained as a Domestic Science teacher with emphasis towards needlework and craft. At the end of World War II one of her relatives ended up in Malta, and he kindly purchased for her “a ‘set’ of lace bobbins and a pillow made from the bottom of a trousers’ leg, stuffed with straw and stitched at the top and bottom,” as she described in her letter. Mabel never got to use the bobbins and she is delighted to find a safe harbour back home where they belong after safe moving custody in England, hoping some Maltese fingers will again find pleasure in using them.

The Lace Making Programme extends warm thanksgiving feelings to Mabel Duxbury, and to Ken Wroe who was instrumental in carrying the bobbins back home.

An Expert’s Workshop on Competitiveness Strategies of Small States was held at the University Gozo Centre between 14 and 17 July 2004. It was inaugurated by Minister Censu Galea whose portfolio includes competitiveness. He said that Malta like other small states is very heavily dependent on imports and exports and therefore its competitiveness is of paramount importance.

The workshop was attended by senior officials and experts from different Commonwealth countries. At the end of the workshop the participants approved a final statement with recommendations as to how small states can maximise their competitiveness potential. The workshop was convened by Professor Lino Briguglio who is also one of the editors of the book which have been launched during the workshop entitled ‘Competitiveness Strategies for Small States’.

On 20th August 2004 the Centre held its annual summer activity entitled ‘An Evening with Walter Micallef u l-Hbieb’. The activity was organised by the University Gozo Centre with the participation of Mr Walter Micallef (Guitar & Vocals), Paul Camilleri (Harmonica), Renzo Spiteri (Percussion), Eric Wadge (Bass), Jes Psaila (Acoustic Guitar), Albert Grazia (Accordion) and coordinated by Mr Steve Borg. The concert was received with great enthusiasm by the big audience present. Among the guests were the Hon. Giovanna Debono and Professor Lino Briguglio, Director of the Centre.
On 22 November 2004, nine students were awarded with a Diploma in Commerce after having successfully completed the course offered at the University Gozo Centre between October 2002 and July 2004. The graduation ceremony was held at the University of Malta.

In October 2004 the University of Malta through a Sixth Framework Project called “Twister” offered for the first time a Diploma in IT course simultaneously in Malta and in Gozo. The course is run by the Board of Studies for IT and students can attend classes simultaneously at the Department of Communications and Computer Engineering at the Tal-Qroqq campus and at the University Gozo Centre in Xewkija. The system is based on the virtual classroom concept where one lecturer in one location will conduct lectures for two classes using IP technology. The equipment used is basically that of video conferencing adapted for interactive simultaneous classes where the students can ask questions and interact with the lecturer and with each other, in both locations at the same time. The bandwidth is being obtained via a new satellite connection provided from EUTELSAT, one of the consortium partners.

The launching of the system took place on Wednesday 27 October at the two sites being used for the course namely the Tal-Qroqq Campus (Engineering Building) and the University Gozo Centre. Present for the occasion were Prof. Roger Ellul Micallef, University Rector, the Hon. Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo, Prof Lino Briguglio, director of the University Gozo Centre, Dr Hector Fenech, manager at EUTELSAT, and Prof. Paul Micallef, Dean of Engineering.

Prof. Roger Ellul Micallef said that this is a unique opportunity for the University of Malta and he was sure that this system will open new prospects in the future. He thanked Prof. Paul Micallef and Prof Lino Briguglio for their work in making this idea a reality.

The Minister for Gozo, Hon. Giovanna Debono, who was also present for the occasion, stated that she is very happy that Gozo has become more connected to the University. She thanked the University for the invaluable support it was giving to Gozitan society.

On 11 December, the ‘Award of Certificates’ event was held at the University Gozo Centre. The Hon. Giovanna Debono, distributed certificates to 150 candidates who were eligible after they had followed courses at the University Gozo Centre during 2004.

Minister Debono, commenting on the activities of the Gozo Centre, said that the partnership between the Ministry for Gozo and the University Gozo Centre is bearing fruit. She said that the large number of participants attending courses at the University Gozo Centre is a clear evidence that the Centre is making a very important contribution to Gozitan society. In his speech, Professor Lino Briguglio, who presided over the event, said that he was very pleased that so many students are seeing the need for further training and attending the courses offered by the Centre. This already shows that the Centre is filling a very important void. He thanked the Minister for Gozo and the University authorities for their continuous support of the Centre.