

# Editorial:

## The Future of Gozo

The history of Gozo reflects the feelings felt by many small islands of being between a stone and a hard place. On the one hand there is a gut feeling that we must preserve our precious natural gifts with which nature has provided us. These include not only the natural pristine environment, both on land and under the crystal water surrounding it, but also the character of the population, with its unique history, dialects, folklore and other characteristics which make this island unique.

On the other hand there are overwhelming pressures to move on, to provide incentives for progress, to attract business activity, to ensure that our standard of living does not drop precipitously, leaving the island as a backwater.

Hence the dilemma in which we find ourselves. We find that the native population of Gozo is actually diminishing, propped up as it is by ID-carrying weekend visitors from the sister island. We find that our children have to look across the channel for a job, which often results in permanent residence there once the family begins to grow and throw roots.

Schemes have been hatched to remedy some of these problems. The latest one was the mammoth development proposal for Hondoq ir-Rummien which planned for the building of a 150-boat marina

surrounded by 285 flats and villas, a five-star hotel, 731 underground parking spaces, ten shops and five restaurants. This would have worked wonders for the Gozo economy, providing work for local people and hopefully a constant stream of tourists and visitors to the island. This plan has been rejected by the Environment tribunal, but an appeal might succeed.

One could ask, what would these extra thousands of visitors be doing in Gozo? Would not this and similar huge developments turn this unique island into yet another spot with nothing to distinguish it from anywhere else? Would it not destroy the very reason why tourists currently seek Gozo: a jewel of peace and serenity which has all but disappeared from everywhere else? The hackneyed cliché of killing the goose that lays the golden egg springs easily to mind.

Yet another major scheme has been the underwater tunnel to join the islands, at a cost of half a billion euro. No doubt this would provide a much enhanced and speedy way to work or study for those thousands who have to cross the channel every day. No doubt it will enhance business efficiency, and encourage better interaction between the two islands. This is not without a considerable cost, as mentioned above. Gozo would become another place just beyond Mellieha.



Hondoq ir-Rummien Bay.

(Source: <http://www.malta.com/en/attraction/beaches/gozo/hondoq-ir-rummien> - May 2013)

It is indeed a dilemma on how to balance progress with preservation. The term 'sustainable development' means so many different things to different people that it has become simply a cliché behind which politicians and developers tend to hide. It cannot be quantified adequately, and hence remains difficult to judge objectively. Let's hope those that govern us can find a reasonable solution.

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