

Editorial: Public Library

There is no doubt that the setting up of the Gozo Branch of the University of Malta has proved to be a boon to higher education in Gozo. Many who had previously missed out, now had an opportunity to catch up and participate and obtain a diploma or a degree, or at least take part in one of the many courses offered there.

On the other hand, it is a pity to see a great institution, like the Public library being neglected. In spite of the efforts of the curators there, and in spite of the not inconsiderable improvements that have occurred over recent years, including the facilities provided with computerisation, a brief visit to the library is sufficient to see that lack of space has become an emergency situation.

One notices the piles of books accumulating in offices and in corridors. Workers seem to be drowning among books and papers reminding one of Dickensian working conditions. How can one possibly work in such an environment?

The laws of the land stipulate that a copy of every book published in Malta must be donated to the public library. That means that several hundred new books are delivered to the library every year to be coded and suitably displayed. Lack of sufficient space for this makes a mockery of such legislation – they might just as well be left unpacked, in boxes,

in some underground storage facility. One would have thought that a government that legislates for the accumulation of books, is also under an obligation to provide the space for their care and adequate display.

Housed in the same building in Vajringa Street we find the Archives. This represents a veritable treasure of information which any Gozitan should be proud of but hardly anyone actually knows about. It should provide a rich source of material for research-minded students, but how many actually make use of it?

Gozo, it must be admitted, is not rich in intellectual offerings. It is therefore the more urgent to treasure what we have, and to instil in our younger generation an interest in these issues. I would suggest that secondary school students might benefit from regular conducted tours of the library and archives. They might even be given assignments that would require some elementary research involving actual handling of books and documents, rather than just googling secondary data on computer.

I believe that educators as well as legislators should emphasize the value of such a heritage, and do everything in their power to ensure that it is utilised to best advantage.

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