

A GREATER FUTURE FOR GOZO'S GOLDEN QUARRIES

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Gozo has population of just under 30,000 and welcomes about 430,000 tourists a year. They come to enjoy the historic antique sights of this beautiful agricultural island with its Roman farming terraces and the traditional style architecture built in glorious glowing golden blocks. Tourism for Gozo, like Malta itself, is a major industry with the marvellous prospect of further expansion and, as the facilities grow more sophisticated, great increases in revenue to the island from the visitors.

So, the priorities are keeping the island lovely, retaining agriculture, and for both residents and tourists keeping the buildings in the antique traditional style. To do this the quarries must continue profitably providing those marvellous golden blocks of soft limestone. The quarries are essential to the scheme of keeping Gozo beautiful, comfortable, attractive and profitable.

However some people feel the naked cliff faces of the quarries spoil the panorama. There are clouds of dust, thousands of tons of ugly waste stone, offcuts and rejects. The dust is further moved around in large noisy trucks traveling without covered sheeting, ruining the roads and providing for every new or extended building an unwelcome cloud of dust which destabilizes the street until completion.

Key to Success

Yet that dust is the most likely key to the future success of all these objectives. It becomes gold dust if it is moulded into statues and shapes, cornices and capitals, arches and architraves. It can provide by modern technology not only the decorative indoor items like vases and small statues, fireplaces and flower pots but, the outdoor cladding for houses especially those on the estates which seek variety of appearance, and even the structural architectural features so welcomed in the western world which now restores its classical buildings and is designing more and more in

the style of the Greeks and Romans. This is in rebellion against the institutional ugliness of contemporary architecture which has disfigured the west with offices which look like sparking plug factories and the temporary look of an unfinished garage.

I have reason to believe that the skilled collection of that gold dust can firstly *improve the profitability of the quarries*, second reduce the dust problem, thirdly use up the waste, rubbish and rejected blocks, and fourthly raise the profile of Gozo by becoming a widely publicized international export.

In Britain today there are multi-million turnover chains of Do-It-Yourself stores whose buyers travel the world to bulk purchase small decorative items for house and garden. Golden Gozo models could satisfy many of those buyers because the moulding process means designs made to order are perfectly practical. The exterior market means selling to the estate developers as well as the wholesale and retail trade whilst the professional architects, structural engineers and great conservation bodies like British Heritage must be approached with technical information and catalogues of classical Greek and Roman designs proportionately correct. Fortunately from the works of Piranesi in Italy, Adam and Soane in Britain and Denneuforge in France one could restore even the greatest public buildings and churches in Europe at a fraction of the cost of patch work onsite replacement.

Clearly this would need public recognition and the tourist glamour of Gozo and Malta already invite a high pressure Public Relations campaign on TV, Press and professional publications once the moulding range is launched. I have personal experience of this having turned "Brick is Beautiful" into a national slogan and for 5 years the Public Relations campaign made the newly-extended range of face bricks and the buildings they

beautified into steady food for the media until brick became accepted as the preferred environmental cladding. Those campaigns did much to stop the sad and socially disastrous construction in UK and America of the tower blocks which made the concrete jungle the great failure of public housing. Even today in Britain every few months another concrete tower block is blown up to make way for proper housing.

The Value of Quarries

As in Great Britain the older, uneconomic and abandoned quarries are worth much more when converted to other use than when they were active. Their appearance often spoiled the landscape with the cliff like walls visible for miles. All islands suffer the problems of limited land space. When the post war nationalized and moribund British brick industry was sinking no one had solved the problem of waste disposal in the new age of packaging and planned obsolescence. The abandoned clay quarries offered impacted waste disposal opportunities. The great holes were of bigger value than many of the companies that owned them. I am well aware of the regulations of the European Community on the subject of refuse dumping, impaction etc but these are matters which may well respond to negotiations as the matter of Malta's application for entry to the Union is negotiated. The current members are struggling with a new rule commanding incineration and no more landfill for waste but again islands are a special case for discussion. The largest brick pit we had in Britain was used for processed and sorted waste infill transported 75 miles from London. It was compacted, degassified and finally had a concrete raft over it and now houses an industrial estate a quarter the size of Gozo. The value of that hole financed the creation also of four major housing estates in addition to the industrial area, the hightech park and the distribution centers. Your quarries have similar future value.

Identifying Opportunities

No one had seen the opportunity for six story

parking garages hidden in the clay pits. Nor had they guessed that such a huge excavation offered the ideal place for multi purpose malls which would offer parking below, shops and restaurants at ground level, offices and medical centers above, industry and car trade adjacent and within the malls the cinemas, auditoriums and social centers which would so attract and improve the choice and the life style of inhabitants and tourists alike. I must emphasise the social benefits of the malls where people can gather in air-conditioned comfort. They are particularly important for keeping the teenagers and young people in a country, yes you do need the discos and clubs in the basement, and above all with the western worlds ageing population the malls are the ideal meeting place for the elderly.

Naturally all successful malls, which means the large ones, must be based on the recognition that today, and even more so tomorrow, people wish to travel in the comfort of ever increasing numbers of cars and in air-conditioned coaches and buses. The older generation have taken to the malls as the logical social assembly points for each community so they must be transported in style. The auditoriums, the social and medical services, the local authority contacts are all best centred on the malls because it suits that most important person on earth, the consumer who is incidentally also the voter. That consumer requires parking to be available or it will go elsewhere.

The Priorities for Gozo

The priorities for Gozo remain, keeping it lovely, maintaining its traditional style architecture, and preserving the farms to keep attracting the tourists. How can that be achieved as the flood of motorcars increases? Of course one can hope for a permanent one way system as the British had to invent for their tourist area called the Lake District. Imagine that Victoria was one way only and all bulk deliveries were made from midnight to six am. Imagine a new approach to the Gozo roads with perhaps a new ring road for the industrial and quarry and mall sites. The

shops in Victoria could be carefully guided to keep their old style appearance to fit in with tourists vision but the owners could have their bigger branches in the Gozo shopping Mall, big enough to offer in-stock service and a much wider choice for the consumer. Wider choice for consumers is an unstoppable demand all over the world because it is seen and promoted every day in every home with a television set. Even the internet is carrying the constant flow of information promoting wider choice and higher standards for consumers, less hassle in their lives and better living standards.

Naturally all this depends on ample parking for all those cars and buses and luxury coaches. Preferably with the coaches kept small and given sole rights to certain parking areas and services for the convenience of their customers.

The key to this newer, better opportunity for Gozo lies in marketing the moulded golden dust from the Quarries and recognizing the real value of the quarrying industry.

In areas of obvious conservation and tourism benefit one can see the rewards best. Dwejra is a case in point. It must be conserved and the Planning Department has made that clear but the volume of visitors is increasing and at present the facilities are primitive and produce little more than a view. The bleak, crowded, disorganized parking areas, the lack of facilities for the tourists, all cry out for a plan which would enhance the panorama and increase services and standards which tourists have a right to expect. Tourism is a global industry and the penalty for disappointment is bad word of mouth publicity when comparisons are made with better-serviced panoramas. The beauty of Dwejra needs hidden parking, a nearby Mall with restaurants, and every item, service and choice the tourists want. The revenue would be enormous. It would also take some of the traffic pressure away from the existing historic sites because the tour organizers would quickly work out suitable rotations and times.

One or more of the worked out quarries might function as a waste refuse pit on a scale that

would get Gozo through the next twenty years. As we have seen in Italy and Britain the appearance of quarries can be changed by tree screens, by hanging gardens effects and other landscaping combined with safety measures but all this takes money, which needs to be earned from the moulded products.

The Possibilities

So let me review the possibilities again. Firstly the scientists must be financed to perfect the moulding processes in three colours of gold, in three strengths:

- Decorative statues and models for retail sale and indoor display,
- cladding items for builders of estates to be sold for exterior use in frost-ridden areas, and a
- a much wider range of steel-reinforced long-wearing load-bearing architectural items made to classical sizes and proportions.

A colleague of mine Dr Neville Scott, a famed Technical Director for ICI, British Nylon Spinners, and Sasol the international firm who make petrol and chemicals from coal is the person who would deal with the creation of the chemistry, machinery and manufacturing techniques. For example, I believe it would be possible to use one formula for moulding statues with a resin type mixture with the dust which could take a casting from existing church statues. With a centrifuge it may be possible to give the resulting steel skeletoned figure an additional transparent protective external surface which would preserve it from pollution for many years. These high tech solutions are Dr Scotts territory.

Once the dust is collected it would be moved in tankers to the most economic and profitable place for manufacture. This decision of where to site the plant rests entirely on finding the best accounting, costing, tax, warehousing and transport figures to ensure the most competitive profit and pricing country in the normal manner used by all the global corporation projects. There are ample professional in benchmarking companies available for this purpose already represented in this country.

As to the tankers and the pumping machinery and the packing and transport of finished moulded products Dr Harri Mostyn, another colleague, is arguably the world's leading expert on such transportation to keep breakage and movement costs to a minimum whilst ensuring the fast delivery which is required nowadays.

The marketing and promotion of this whole range for worldwide sale is a major undertaking which has to be done in cooperation with the multinationals and large firms who can provide the distribution on a big enough scale. Professional Public Relations can make this project attractive to television, the press, the professional construction and architectural journals, and can place the pictures and catalogues and stories about the project in a manner to please the media. The PR campaigns would need to be a continuing process but would also add to the worldwide publicity identifying and raising interest in Malta and Gozo.

The techniques of collecting the dust, converting the waste, tenting, roofing, amending cutting and polishing machines to reduce unwelcome distribution of dust can be tackled at the same time. The European Common Market has severe rules for waste disposal, working conditions, safety of quarries, transport, sheeting of trucks, masks to be used by construction workers, building sites management of waste and dust limitations on dumping and many other firmly enforced rules. Experience in Britain has shown that it is much better to adjust existing practices at an agreed rate rather than face serious legal obstruction later from visiting Brussels officials.

For example when cutting the blocks, in the quarries there is a plume of dust from the circular saws but I want to see those machines tented and vacuum-fitted to collect the dust which is too valuable to blow away in the wind. When carving or working on site there are ample modern extraction machines to meet even the fiercest regulations which

make sense once one assesses the health risk and the value of the golden dust.

Some clay pits I found in Great Britain had long been abandoned and the local people including children had learned to skirt them safely even where water had created deep pools. The incoming regulations of both UK and European Common Market demanded great expense and terminal ugliness of fencing which could have been avoided if the value of the property had been recognized in earlier times. Gozo is in an ideal position to plan the changes and finance them on the back of the export programme. The stone blocks are extremely low priced in comparison to other structural materials and it would require an unacceptable price rise to finance the quarry changes. It is obvious that this is a phased programme requiring serious investment but the profitable export scheme needs priority to incentivise the quarries whilst fitting in with the Planning Departments overall conservation scheme for Gozo.

Conclusion

So the quarries are a national asset and must be encouraged to continue to produce the golden stone blocks which give the buildings of Gozo their magical traditional style. It is that style which is, with the farms and the historic sites such a draw for tourists. The limestone dust is indeed gold dust and the scheme I propose is to build an export market which will bring profit to the island, benefit the quarries, the residents and keep Gozo beautiful. I hope you will feel the same.