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Editorial



Over a short space of less than one generation, Gozo has become transformed from a backward farming community into a forward-looking tourist-oriented oasis in the middle of the Mediterranean. The standard of living has reached heights unheard of in the 1950s and 60s. No house is now complete unless it boasts a rococo façade and often a swimming pool at the back. Evidence of conspicuous consumption is everywhere to be seen.

Moreover, in our effort to participate in the easy money that keeps pouring in, we have indulged in a orgy of building towers of flats to rent in the summer months and leave fallow during the rest of the year. Our brethren in Malta are also anxious to ensure that they will not miss out on the bonanza, and as card-carrying Gozitans they also endeavour to become the proud owners of a flat here. Just imagine if everyone decides to do likewise! Surely it must be merely a question of time before we will have to say: enough is enough, and put a stop to further development. Already there are over 15,000 buildings for the 9000 households in Gozo, a ratio of nearly two buildings for every family. This statistic should find its way into the Guinness Book of Records, because it is a unique situation.

In the article by Dr. Mario Tabone in this issue, clear warning is given that this cannot go on for ever. Gozo should not endeavour to become another Malta, desperately trying to introduce all the cheap attractions for an ever-increasing number of day-tourists. We have to specialise in order to survive. We have to be different, more discerning, more selective, more wary of the consequences of trampling over our land and our heritage. We cannot afford to turn Gozo into a miniature Malta, indistinguishable from it with respect to discos, and other cheap entertainment, otherwise, if there was no difference, what is going to make it worth while for the tourist to come over here at all? We have to cultivate difference and ensure that we stand on our own feet and not just wait and hope for the crumbs to fall off the table next door.

An improvement in the standard of living usually brings about an increase in spending on all of those items which we could not afford previously. As nouveaux riche we have a lot of catching up to do. While we should indeed be grateful that poverty and shortages in food and daily necessities are now a thing of the past, we must be aware of the consequences of the rich and easy life. I'll mention only a couple of these:

Health: A change from the frugal life-style of yore with an increase in food-intake and reduced amount of physical work would be expected to result in obesity, high blood pressure and an explosion in the prevalence of diabetes and its complications. The result of over-indulgence are readily seen in our community. Just look at the size of our school children, and I am not just referring to their height!

Utilization of resources: The future belongs to our children at least to the same extent as it belongs to ourselves. Under no circumstance should we allow the urge to maximise immediate cash flow to ruin their chance of inheriting a world worth living in. Hence the need for environmental protection.

The list can go on. It is an unfortunate fact that richness, like poverty is a relative concept. A millionaire may suffer from an inferiority complex next to a billionaire. A person who feels left out of the rat-race will try to make up for lost time. It is time that we asked ourselves, do we need all this exhibition of affluence? Or should we rather be impressed, like Aristotle, with the number of things in the market that we don't really need?



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