

A DEGREE COURSE IN GOZO STUDIES

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When in 1996 the Gozo Centre of the University of Malta was officially inaugurated, a small group of people, including myself, felt a surge of pride and the satisfaction of a job brought to its conclusion. *Finis coronat opera*, I said to myself as the Prime Minister inaugurated the Centre. We had worked hard for many months to achieve this, even though lectures had already started being given at the Sir M'Ang Refalo Post-Secondary School, Victoria. But why all this fuss, why were we so enthusiastic? The reason was very simple. We had brought tertiary education within the grasp of all Gozitans. For the first time ever, Gozitans could say that the University had come across to them.

The idea was of course not new. Early in British times there had been a suggestion to set up a University in Gozo to cater for Maltese, including Gozitans, and for other inhabitants of the Mediterranean. The purpose was of course to spread British culture and influence among the peoples of the Mediterranean. Later, much later, the President of the Gozo Civic Council and MP for Gozo, the late lamented Dr. Anton Tabone, had actively promoted the idea of having a distance learning arrangement for the Gozitans to have access to tertiary education. This was a time when the Open University indeed had started to grow strong in the UK. I remember attending meetings on behalf of Dr. Tabone at the University with the late Professor Aquilina, a supporter of the scheme, and Professor Edwin Borg Constanzi, then Rector of the University. Unfortunately in spite of the efforts made, the idea came to nothing. It had to be Dr Tabone's son and namesake, the Hon. Anton Tabone, then Minister for Gozo, who resumed where his father had left off, and this time the idea was brought to fruition. I had formed part of the committee, which had put flesh to this idea and had found a home for the Centre.

The Centre is now flourishing and the first batch of students have actually graduated. But what of the future?

There are a number of courses being run, most with the needs of Gozo in mind. But it is perhaps time to think up other subjects, which will in due course not only serve Gozo but promote Gozo as well. One of these, I propose, is a course designated for Gozo Studies.

What I have in mind is a number of areas for study, eventually to be designed as units for a degree course. To mention a few: history, archaeology, geography, governance, tourism, etc. The subjects are inexhaustible, but to keep one's feet on the ground it is necessary to match the availability of teaching to the potential number of students. It is essential for lecturing staff at the University to be utilized so that Tal-Qroqq standards be maintained.

The purpose of the course would not be simply the satisfaction of having Gozo intensively studied by a few Gozo fanatics. There must be the opportunity of deep study, research, and ultimately publication of original works. The course would be aimed at Gozitans but also at Maltese and, why not, foreigners.

If this idea is taken up by the University authorities and supported by the Gozo Centre, I am sure that both Gozo and the Gozitans will benefit immensely.



Dr Anton Tabone