

European Studies in Gozo

Roderick Pace

The inauguration of the University Gozo Centre, now the University Gozo Campus, twenty years ago was greeted with a mixture of optimism and uncertainty. This is normal when new projects are launched. The vibrant activity at the Gozo Campus has been evident throughout these twenty years and this testifies to its success.

Professor Roderick Pace



I believe that it has led to three main achievements: it has spread tertiary education to the island of Gozo, thus making it easier for many Gozitans who missed their chance to attend University at a younger age to return to their studies and obtain a University diploma or degree; it has stimulated research on Gozo leading to an improvement of our knowledge of the island, of its strengths and weaknesses; it has permitted a stream of Maltese University academics to travel regularly to the island and to mix with Gozitan graduates teaching at the Campus and thus familiarise themselves with the special problems of insularity and with the way that Gozitans perceive these drawbacks.

An assessment of the Campus's past twenty years shows that the successes outweigh its failures, but at twenty the Campus needs to stop a little, take stock of its achievements and carefully plan its future. Success is not automatic in any enterprise and the Gozo Campus is not different in this respect.

As for myself, I am one of the "fortunate" few who accepted the opportunity to involve themselves in this academic enterprise from the start. I say "fortunate" because the area of speciality which I provide, European Studies, is not considered to be a "grande dame" of the academic world just like philosophy, law, history or theology.

However, there has been an ongoing interest in Gozo in the study of European Integration initially generated by Malta's application to join the EU, subsequently sustained by Malta's actual EU membership. Structured courses on EU integration have filled a particular void which information provided by the media could never fill.

I found the experience of teaching European Studies in Gozo very fulfilling for many reasons. On average Gozitan students tend to

be mature adults who already hold a job and who are studying to improve their qualifications. They tend to be enterprising, hard working and after a while inquisitive. They are also practical and down to earth which often encouraged me to provide practical applications of the knowledge I was imparting.

There was one rather funny aspect about Gozitan students which caught my attention from the very beginning and which I keep encountering. Almost invariably during the first lecture of the course, they would inquire about the method of assessment and the nature of the examination. I got the impression that most of them tend to be somewhat frightened by the very mention of the word “examination”, even though most of them do well in the end.

In all else and as I shall explain briefly below, Gozitan students are not different from their Maltese counterparts at the main campus in Tal-Qroqq.

In Gozo, as elsewhere, the content of European Studies draws the same initial bewilderment amongst students. My impression is that students join the course thinking that they are going to sit out a discussion on current European affairs, just as they find in the media.

Instead, they have to focus their minds on theories such as functionalism and liberal Institutionalism which are used by political scientists to try and make some sense of the multitude of “facts” or “events” happening out there, what we call the empirical data, some of which is reported in the media. They never imagine that one day they would bump into such alien beings as the social constructivist analysis of inter-state dynamics before they actually do so.

When it came to the EU institutions initially most participants were interested in knowing what Malta’s participation in



Hon. Minister Giovanna Debono awards a certificate to a successful short course participant. The University Gozo Campus attracts students of different ages.

the institutions would be like and whether Gozo would have a voice in them. Will Malta have the right to nominate a Commissioner? Will it have its turn at the six monthly rotating EU Presidency? Was it true that Malta would have only three seats in the European Parliament? Would a parliamentary seat be allocated to Gozo?

There is absolutely nothing wrong with such questions. But most of the analysis focuses little on these questions and enters the more difficult terrain by probing such issues as “Why do states set up supranational institutions in the first place?”, “What power do they wield?” or “How truly democratic are they?”

After the initial shock of discovering that European Studies is different from what they had imagined, students tend to



Former Prime Minister Dr Edward Fenech Adami, inaugurating the Xewkija premises of the University Gozo Centre in 1996.



A coffee break during one of the public seminars organised by the University Gozo Centre.

adapt themselves quickly to the content and from there on it is plain sailing.

One of the many, perhaps unmentioned contributions of the Gozo University Campus is that it has permitted the growth of a small but important University library on the island. Lecturers provide the Campus with lists of books which are then catalogued and stocked in the library and made available to students. The gradual expansion of this facility and the improvement of the internet service on campus have enhanced access to knowledge.

Last but not least the success of the Campus can be attributed to a number of what I call 'human' factors namely that the people who dedicated themselves to the teaching and supervision of research over the past twenty years really believed in and liked what they were doing. Had it been otherwise, the whole project would have sunk faster than the Titanic.

The second important factor was that the Campus and the courses offered were ably led and managed – much to the credit of the Director and support staff. In this respect a balance was struck between satisfying the educational needs of the island and the available resources to achieve them.

Above all a concerted effort was made at maintaining standards. This has enhanced the Campus's reputation and provides it with a solid basis for future development.