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Why sociology?

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At this time of the year, students from different age groups and social backgrounds would be pondering about what subjects to choose at the University of Malta. There is a wealth of choice and options, and this helps make the University the vibrant place that it is.

In this short article, I will discuss the value of choosing the subject which I myself decided to open up and analyze in: sociology.

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I chose this discipline for the first time back in 1994, at University level. I had never heard of sociology before I finished 6th Form. I was passionate about social change, and somehow I eventually learned that this subject existed, within the University's Faculty of Arts. I chose this subject and never regretted choosing it ever since, eventually obtaining a BA (Hons), MA and PhD in the discipline.

I am lucky to have learned this discipline through great lecturers and fellow students, and to have encountered a wide variety of areas and concepts in the process. These included areas such as politics, policy, family, crime, deviance, environment, employment, social movements, media and culture; and concepts such as power, social change, social reproduction, ideology, identity, the self, interaction, structure and agency.

In more recent years, the Sociology Department has expanded further into areas such as health, medicine, the environment, the arts, small states, demography, protests, cyberspace and many others. In turn, these are analysed through robust research methods which provide evidence and interpretations of what goes on in society, from everyday situations in personal life, to international transactions at a global level.

One of the most beautiful things about this discipline is that it helps us develop a sociological imagination, through which we can view the world in a broader and more objective way than just from our personal standpoint or affiliations. One never stops learning in sociology.

This approach is particularly useful to help ask questions about things that we take for granted, from family life to shopping, and from food to football.

At the same time one can have a particular standpoint in sociology, but this can be refined, adapted and even changed through the ongoing investigation of society. Some sociology students are motivated to choose the subject because they are passionate about a particular cause, issue or

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networks. In this regard, a qualification in the subject is, in itself, an investment in one's own journey, equipping a person with various tools, skills and outlooks to encounter the opportunities and risks of society today.

There are also various routes to practice sociology. Some sociology graduates are involved in the production of evidence, for example through surveys, questionnaires, collection and interpretation of data and analysis; others are involved in teaching the subject; others use their sociological skills to aid their respective roles in Government, NGOs and the media; and yet others are 'public sociologists', meaning that they apply their knowledge to the development of society and policymaking.

Thus sociology happens to be a great choice for employment opportunities. Former students of ours have been employed in a wide range of jobs, ranging from European Commissioners, to teachers. Some became Ministers, others are well-known names in Malta's public sphere in a variety of sectors, such as education, media, and policy-making. Sociology graduates are found in professions such as teaching, journalism, research, administration, communication, consultancy, public service, gaming, and so many other professions which develop across time and space.

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