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Any funds for pavements?

Michael Briguglio

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Earlier this year, Transport Malta and the Valletta Local Council were ordered to pay a 46-year-old woman close to €16,000 to compensate for an injury she suffered, after tripping on uneven paving in 2017.

Referring to the court case in question, The Times of Malta (18 July), reported that 'as a result of the accident, the woman suffered seven per cent disability'. It also emerges that she spent 12 weeks open 'ering in bed after being operated upon. The same newspaper report refers to other instar

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My qualified guess on the frequency of such compensation tells me that they are rare only because very few people actually take legal action on such matters. Unfortunately, the terrible condition of many pavements in Malta often cause difficulty to pedestrians. This includes not only injuries such as those referred to above, but also lack of access.

Whether it is due to careless construction, tables and chairs, signs, garbage bags, e-scooters, sundry objects, and so forth, pedestrians often have no option but to walk on the road when commuting. Sometimes, not even that option is available. Not to mention that very often, works on pavements are shoddy and of poor quality, resulting in damage and deterioration after some time, with little maintenance, if any at all.

If political discourse is a yardstick, I doubt I ever heard a minister within different Maltese governments talking about the importance of pavements, let alone giving them importance in policy priorities. Budgetary funds for the construction and upkeep of pavements leave much to be desired.

The same cannot be said for huge infrastructural projects. These are often flaunted as political monuments by different governments, often with the assistance of EU funds. There seems to be a political fixation that 'big' developments are better for propaganda. In Malta's political discourse, 'pavements' do not stand a chance when compared to 'roads'. The car is king, and to hell with pedestrians.

Which reminds me of a theoretical concept within political sociology and political science, that of 'interest groups'. These are referred to by scholars within the Pluralist school, such as Robert Dahl

Maltese civil society is characterised by a healthy eco-system of diverse groups with different ideological orientations, affiliations, interests, structures and strategies. Some NGOs do highlight the importance of pavements, and rightly so, but mobilization and coverage on the issue is not pronounced. Indeed, we cannot speak of a social movement on pavements or pedestrians' rights.

I find this to be very ironic, when pavements are such a basic need in our everyday lives. For many people, pavements are a basic tool for everyday democracy. For if one's access and mobility is hindered, this means that one cannot participate properly in basic social activities.

The theoretical concept of 'latent groups' assumes that politicians and policy makers may give some consideration to the issues in question, as they would be aware of them. To date, Maltese pavements are a consistent exception. We seem to find budgetary funds for so many different policies, often accompanied by expensive billboards and propaganda, even when we need to cut down on expenditure. Yet the pavement remains politically excluded.

With the yearly national budget round the corner, how about dedicating a national fund for the modernization of Malta's pavements?

Dr Michael Briguglio is a sociologist and senior lecturer at the University of Malta
www.michaelbriguglio.com

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