

# Wied il-Mielah - Valley Restoration and Management of Storm Water Project

A Project partly funded through the European Regional Development Fund as part of the Structural funds for Malta 2004 -2006

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## Introduction

The Għarb Local Council was the first Local Council in Malta to receive funding under the Structural Funds allocated to Malta by the European Union for period 2004 - 2006. The funding amounted to 145,000 Euros and represented 73 per cent of the value of the project whilst the Local Council itself financed the remaining 27 per cent.

The project was satisfactorily concluded during 2006. Following a site visit by the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Danuta Hübner, earlier this year, the project was also selected as one of the success stories for EU Regional Policy.



Commissioner Hübner signing the guest book after having planted a tamarisk tree in the Wied il-Mielah site, Għarb.

## Location of Wied il-Mielah

Wied il-Mielah is one of the eleven valleys found within the locality of Għarb. It starts from just under

the Ta' Pinu Sanctuary and extends along a 2324 meter stretch towards the coastal cliffs on the western part of Gozo. It is one of the more picturesque valley found across the Gozitan countryside. Being slightly afar from the residential area, the valley lies in a tranquil and natural environment. Very few in fact are aware that at the very end of the valley, nature has carved a large window within the rocks through natural erosion, which (window), is very similar to the famous blue window at Dwejra.



The natural window at Wied il-Mielah at sunset.

## Background to the EU funded project

Regrettably, over the years, as a result of lack of planning and management no corrective measures were taken to maintain the natural landscape of the Wied il-Mielah valley area:

- sewer mains were placed along the valley basin and not maintained;
- sewage was being discharged off the coast;
- foul smell from leaking pipes became the order of the day;
- rubble walls were left to crumble under heavy rains and were not maintained;
- fertile soil was being gradually eroded;

- dams within the valley, were left to pile with debris in such a way that these no longer served their original purpose;
- no proper monitoring and control was kept on a nearby landfill.



The degraded valley before intervention works started.

### Objectives of the project

This state of neglect prompted the Gharb Local Council to seek ways to redress this precarious situation by giving the green light for an environmental conservation programme and address the degradation of this scenic valley.



Rubble walls under re-construction.

### Project Description

The project mainly involved:

- taking stock of the environmental degradation through a number of surveys;
- repairing and rebuilding of derelict rubble walls;
- clearing of debris from within the existing dams and carrying out repair works thereto;
- promoting the area as a recreational spot;

- monitoring the implementation of another project to stop the sewage outflow off the coast;
- stopping the loss of fertile soil;
- promoting environmental awareness by protecting wildlife and nature,
- involving different stakeholders in the rehabilitation programme;
- launching of an awareness programme on the rich Gozitan countryside

### Results achieved

As a result of this initiative the Council has:

- removed 10,850 Cubic m. of rubble and debris from the valley basin;
- removed 1,207 Cubic metres of fertile soil from the valley and re-deposited it into the nearby fields for agriculture purposes;
- rebuilt 4,255 sq.m. of derelict rubble walls
- involved the participation of different stakeholders - school children, farmers, members of the Gozo Business and Tourism communities;
- carried out systematic promotional campaign on all local media - press, TV and radio stations and magazines;
- raised public awareness of a prime natural site of which, very few were previously aware of;
- increased agricultural activity as area has become more accessible

### Future Perspectives

The rehabilitation process has created more awareness and support from the local community to adopt an environmental approach towards the site. As a result of the project the EU funding has helped to translate wishful thinking into practical reality.

The Gharb Local Council will now proceed with its plans to continue upgrading the environment of the area. More Local Councils in Malta are expected to follow the Gharb Local Council's initiative by undertaking similar environmental projects utilising the new EU funding schemes for Malta, to the benefit of the community at large.

Paul Curmi is the Leader of the Wied il-Mielah project.