

Beach neanderthals are back



Is this recent construction at Tal-Virtù legal?

As temperature rises and the seaside becomes more enticing, the jockeying for the most coveted locations starts. In civilised countries, such locations are usually assigned on a first-come, first-served basis – that is, you go to the beach as early as possible in the morning to assure yourself of your preferred spot.

But there are those who play foul and occupy sites for weeks and months on end. No sooner is a site cleared, such as at Ġnejna, than the motley crowd of squatters settles elsewhere, testing the tolerance of the public and authorities.

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- Alan Deidun

For instance, the tranquil and uncluttered Mistra Bay is yet again this year being marred by caravans, vans and tents which are inexorably encroaching upon the whole bay.

Any dithering by the authorities in clearing these 'settlements' simply emboldens the squatters who use all sorts of contraptions to make their stay permanent, ranging from concrete platforms to mobile toilets and water tanks.

At the start of a long hot summer, more propriety and civility at the seaside is called for – let us respect everyone's right to public land and unfettered access to the seaside.

Make every drop count

'Every drop counts' is the slogan used by many water-conservation campaigns in arid countries, including in Malta some years ago. But even European Green Week 2012, which kicked off on May 22, adopted a similar tag line – 'The Water Challenge... Every Drop Counts.'

Mainland Europe, which traditionally does not suffer from water scarcity, is feeling the pinch, with countries like the UK, for instance, experiencing anomalous dry spells recently. Belgium and northern France were hit earlier in the year.

This year's edition of Europe's largest environment-themed conference saw 3,000 participants, representing stakeholders, NGOs, government representatives and EU officials, converge to discuss water-related issues. The conference also featured the European Business Awards for the Environment, paying tribute to innovative companies which dovetail innovation, competitiveness and outstanding environmental performance.

EU Environment Commissioner Janez Potocnik put it well when he said: "Water is literally a vital resource, and human activity is having an enormous impact on it. During Green Week I hope the hundreds of experts and interested parties who are gathered here will help develop both existing policies and new ideas so that this precious resource is safeguarded for us all."

Water pricing policies that discourage waste was one of the many controversial topics discussed at the Green Week. An apt saying on the value of water was coined by Benjamin Franklin in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776 "When the well's dry, we know the worth of water."

A recent European Commission survey shows that seven out of 10 Europeans think water-related problems are a serious concern. Most significantly, Green Week will feed into the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources scheduled for November this year.

For details on the Green Week view www.greenweek-2012.eu/.

A legal construction?

Over three weeks ago I sent a query to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority asking whether a recent construction at Tal-Virtù, Rabat, shown in the above photo, was legal, but no answer has been received till this article went to print.

While the revamped Mepa map server is a giant leap forward on the previous version, it is not always possible to determine the exact geographical location of a position in the absence of GPS coordinates, especially in rural settings where landmarks are few and far between.

One hopes this construction is covered by a permit and that my misgivings are unfounded.

Pointless tree planting

Tree-planting in this country has fortunately surged ahead in the past few years, with tens of thousands of trees being planted in different areas around the country.

But apart from well-known afforestation sites such as Salini, Ta' Qali and Xrobb I-Għagin, many trees planted in sites not in the media glare are often left to fend for themselves once they are planted. These trees are rarely, if ever, irrigated with the result that most of them shrivel up within a few weeks.

The accompanying photo of a mature Aleppo pine planted along the Żurrieq Bypass is a case in point.

Planting trees may earn a local council, company or other entity PR brownie points but planting trees and not watering them regularly during the arid season is pointless.

Documentaries on our Marine Protected Areas

The launch of two underwater documentaries on the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) at Rdum Majjiesa and Dwejra last week marked a shift from an emphasis on printed material, of which we luckily have a lot at the moment, to multimedia productions, of which there is still a dearth.

These documentaries were tailor-made to fire the imagination of viewers so as to generate more awareness about the beauty and fragility of our underwater assets and promote them with locals and tourists alike.

The two documentaries were produced through the Panacea project, which is funded under the Operational Programme Italia-Malta 2007-2013. The project funds are being used to promote local MPAs and to develop an environmental education centre at Dwejra, close to the Inland Sea, which is set to open in October.

The documentaries will be screened continuously at the centre while a complimentary copy will also be distributed to all schools in October.

Excerpts from the documentaries may be viewed online through a dedicated Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzpPK1pAILA&feature=youtu.be.

A scientific manual and promotional leaflets on the local MPAs' underwater assets are also being developed through the project. The project partners are the International Ocean Institute-Malta Operational Centre at the University, and San Lawrenz local council.

www.alandeidun.eu