

Your own beach living room



Sofas, tables and bean bags have been placed on part of this beach at Armier. Why is this allowed to go on?

Beach concession operators seem to always conceive innovative ways as to how to best utilise the restricted sandy swathes on these islands. For instance, hordes of sofas have recently been placed at Armier, and a handful of other beaches, literally turning the beach into a private living room and further elbowing out those who rightly refuse to pay to use a public amenity.

Two of the accompanying photos show two very different beach realities to those in Malta. Italy's Adriatic coastline is fringed with some of the most economically important sandy beaches in the Mediterranean, including those of Rimini and Lido di Jesolo. These beaches are dominated by monotonous rows of beach furniture, perfectly aligned on the beach from the early hours of morning. However, the 15 metres of beach closest to the shoreline are out of bounds to the beach furniture operators, with the public free to roam round to their heart's content.

On the opposite side of the Adriatic lie the Croatian beaches, which are lined with trees, mainly mature oak and pine trees. The trees are coveted for the precious shade they provide, rendering beach furniture completely redundant. No one in this part of the Mediterranean would dare prune these trees to fit in more outlets and kiosks.

In the same vein, the French government, anxious to avoid copying the obtrusive concrete installations along large swathes of the Spanish coast, has recently renewed its vigilance against permanent coastal installations. In fact, according to a French law passed in 2006, there is no such thing as a private beach, and the public must enjoy unfettered access to the coast, although numerous exceptions, notably along the French Riviera, have been granted.

The French government has now gone a step further, informing operators of legal beach concessions that they must close shop and dismantle their structure once their permit expires. This latest campaign, which enjoys the support of 90 per cent of the French public, affects installations dating back as far as 1947, such as Paloma Beach in Cannes.

A representative from France Nature Environment summed it up nicely: "This is a good law. Private rights are not above collective rights. The law must be respected. Illegal constructions which become permanent should be removed."

Silly season capers

The height of the summer season has been often branded as the 'silly season' by commentators as any strange behaviour is attributed to the stifling heat at this time of the year, which is used as an excuse to justify such behavior.

Take Charles Polidano's recent extraordinary antics in response to the latest déjà vu (namely further illegal construction) at Montekristo Estates, with his lawyer asserting that his client has constantly being picked upon and that this newspaper has embarked on a negative publicity campaign against the entrepreneur rather than focusing on the positive contributions of activities at Montekristo to the economy and to charity.

This stand, which is reminiscent of a toddler's tantrum, defies credulity. Polidano attracts attention not as a result of some form of paranoia on the part of journalists but simply because he has amassed an unprecedented number of enforcement notices, now in excess of 50.

Private rights are not above collective rights. The law must be respected

Polidano's latest media statement, through his lawyer, confirmed that he is fully aware of the fact that the Maltese mindset awards brownie points to anyone who works for charity, irrespective of whether the law (planning law in this case) has been breached along the way.

In addition, illegal construction activities at Montekristo resumed immediately following the 'Fiera l-Kbira', which endowed the estate with a veneer of legitimacy, at least in the public mindset.

Given that Polidano has resumed illegal construction at the premises would his lawyer confirm that his client's public apology last year (in the wake of the thwarted crackdown by Mepa) was simply a case of crocodile tears?

Empowering the public through education

The University has launched a Programme in the Liberal Arts and Sciences (Plas) to make an extensive range of knowledge available to people who are not normally attracted to a campus-based course, for various reasons such as lack of time and aversion to formal examinations. Its ultimate aims are to empower the public to enable their more active civic engagement.

This dynamic programme features a collection of bite-sized study units, all of which are formally accredited by University and which can eventually lead to participants being awarded diplomas and degrees. Most two-hour lectures will take place during evenings, at the Valletta campus, once or twice a week.

The programme, which kicks off in October, and which will be delivered by University academics and professionals alike, includes a kaleidoscope of disciplines, including the art of wine-making, the chemistry of fireworks, public policy, conservation of artifacts of artistic and historical importance, migration, marketing and economics, biology, archaeology, architecture, music, law and earth sciences, as well as environmental issues and challenges.

In the latter study unit, professionals and NGO exponents and correspondents will be delved into a plethora of environmental issues that regularly hog the headlines, such as afforestation efforts, noise and waste pollution and urban core preservation

For further information about this innovative programme of studies visit the website below.

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