

Gozo Curia's green initiative



Despite the Ramblers Association's efforts and token progress by the Lands Department, large swathes of land, such as this area at Bahrija, remain cordoned off to the public.

News has emerged that the Gozo Curia, following on the steps of the Vatican itself, is to embark on a large-scale carpeting of the roof-space of some of its most imposing buildings with photovoltaic cells to generate 75,000KWh annually.

This is a highly commendable move by the Curia which is perfectly in sync with the ethos of eco-Gozo.

However, the Curia should also strive for consistency in that the valid impact of this laudable initiative may be undermined by the environmental

damage wrought by the Nadur cemetery extension and the Cathedral Chapter's request to extend the car park at the Citadel and the potential eyesore of the proposed enlargement of the Ta' Pinu complex.

In fact, since the latter project is still in the pipeline, the Gozo Curia should be coherent in its stand and modify its plans so that the extensions to the Ta' Pinu complex are minimal and do not encroach on the surrounding countryside.

The Gozo Curia should not limit its welcome green renaissance only to renewable energy generation. The shift in mindset should also extend to the sustainable use of land and potable water resources.

Machinery depots, illegal scrapyards

One of the photos accompanying today's column illustrates a common phenomenon in Gozo – that of a hotchpotch of open-air depots for the hoarding of heavy machinery, vehicles, and construction debris are used concurrently as illegal scrapyards.

The site in question is at Ghasri, and literally rubs shoulders with licensed houses leased to foreigners in what otherwise would be a stunning backdrop of a rolling landscape and the Citadel in the background.

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority has already informed the owners of the site about the illegal nature of their activities but this has not in any way thwarted them from continuing to spoil the environment. This testifies to the low regard with which we locals generally hold landscape assets on our island.

On a positive note, following the mention made in this column last month, it seems as if the environment around Ta' Kenuna Tower in Nadur has been cleared of the heavy machinery which had yet again been dumped on site.

The Curia should not limit its green renaissance to renewable energy generation

- Alan Deidun

Can Natura 2000 be financed?

With the current economic crisis Europe is experiencing, there is serious concern over whether financial support can be secured to keep the Natura 2000 network in place. This concern has even been acknowledged by European Environment Commissioner Janez Potocnik, who said "securing the investment required for Natura 2000 is a significant challenge".

In fact, as the horse-trading over the details of the post-2013 EU budget allocations gathers pace, a strident call is being made to fund the estimated €5.8 billion needed to keep the Natura 2000 network going.

The highest expense within this figure (€2.7bn) is earmarked for monitoring and habitat management measures, with additional expenses for infrastructure (€817m) and further land purchases (€417m).

The breadth of the Natura 2000 network is unprecedented: so far it includes over 26,000 sites covering about 18 per cent of Europe's land mass and approximately four per cent of its coastal waters.

Last year in Nagoya, Japan, the EU had pledged that by 2020, 17 per cent of its land and 10 per cent of its marine area would be protected. Achieving the latter target appears challenging.

Three green lessons from Europe

Germany's second largest city, Hamburg, is also Europe's Green Capital for 2011, despite a number of challenges and constraints that it is faced with.

These include a sprawling population of 1.8 million and a harbour on Europe's second largest river, the River Elbe.

Despite this, Hamburg has invested heavily in an efficient metropolitan transport system such that no household is located further than 300m from the nearest means of public transport.

In addition, the city has managed to cut its power consumption by a staggering 46,000MWh per year, thereby slashing its per capita carbon dioxide emissions by 15 per cent compared with 1990 levels.

Yet another interesting initiative taken by the city authorities is the Train of Ideas, composed of seven carriages representing different green priorities for a city, including mobility, energy, climate protection, nature, economy and consumption.

The train will hopscotch through a number of European capitals exporting Hamburg's highly successful concept to the rest of the continent. For more information about the European Green Capital programme, visit http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/index_en.html.

While global bee populations are under threat due to a variety of factors, the city of Copenhagen has managed to perfectly integrate large bee populations within its urban fabric.

In fact, as a result of an initiative adopted recently by the city authorities, bee-keeping in the city's numerous parks has been galvanised and promoted. A video documentary highlighting the success of the campaign may be viewed online at www.eea.europa.eu/atlas/eea/city-bees.

Syracuse in Sicily is renowned for its Greek patrimony but also for being endowed with one of the very few functional marine protected areas (MPAs) in the whole of Italy – the Plemmirio MPA.

Ambling through the impressive visitors' centre on site, I stumbled across a talk being delivered in one of the centre's lecture theatres. The audience was composed of prison inmates who had been selected to attend regular lectures every week on a wide range of different themes apart from marine biology, including history.

The aim is to promote the prospects of the prisoners' eventual reintegration within the community.

Well and truly a praiseworthy initiative.

For more information about the Plemmirio MPA, visit www.plemmirio.it.

www.alandaidun.eu