

## While everyone is looking at Żonqor...



Some of the many 'boathouses' at Delimara, most of which are illegal developments that have been tolerated by successive administrations despite being fully-fledged summer seaside residences. Some have even hived off public paths. The authorities should show zero tolerance towards such blatant infringements. Photos: Tiziana Buriani Biavati

Over the course of the past six months, Żonqor has become a household mainstay due to the raging controversy surrounding the development of a university campus earmarked for the site, such that the issue has monopolised the country's environmental headlines. Meanwhile infringements, such as illegal development on Outside Development Zone land, continue unabated and these merit sustained coverage in spite of the occasional cause celebre such as Żonqor.

The plight of our coastal areas through the unremitting illegal construction of 'boathouses' is a case in point. Many would agree with such a statement, but would immediately veer towards Armier as the typical poster child for this phenomenon. The other extremity of Malta – Delimara – is similarly plagued by these illegalities, but hits the headlines much less frequently than Armier.

Times of Malta journalist Caroline Muscat recently penned an article on the sheer extent of the hunting and trapping 'infrastructure' on the Delimara peninsula. I would dare say that building infringements at Delimara are even more blatant, with historical coastal structures dating back to the British period and public footpaths being hived off for private use.

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Meanwhile, additions to existing 'boathouses' and more worryingly, spanking new 'boathouses', have sprouted like mushrooms at Delimara over the past 10 to 15 years.

These despicable activities have been documented in detail, along with extensive photographic evidence, not by a Maltese citizen, as one would have perhaps expected, but by a female Italian expat who settled in the Marsaxlokk area 10 years ago. The conscientious individual went as far as penning letters to the Prime Minister, the local council and the Malta Environment and Planning Authority to decry the ongoing pillage at Delimara.

The woman even met a Mepa official but all in vain, as no tangible action was embarked upon, such as the illegal structures being demolished. Consequently, the same pro-active individual approached Din l-Art Ħelwa on the issue.

Most of the 'boathouses' in question are diametrically opposed to what boathouses should actually be, having all the amenities of fully-fledged seaside summer residences, such as roof water tanks, canopies, garden furniture and so forth.

Most of the illegal constructions are not associated with salt pan-related work, as some of the 'boathouse owners' claim, since most of the salt pans are no longer being harvested. Neither are most of the 'boathouses' located close to the salt pans.

The last Mepa direct action taken at Delimara dates back to December 2013, and mainly involved the removal of dumped debris and inert waste. Three small rooms used for hunting and trapping were also demolished during the intervention.

As the accompanying photos amply show, it's high time the bulldozers moved in again in spite of the political patronage some of the 'tenants' might enjoy.

## **No applause for Żonqor decision**

The Office of the Prime Minister's decision concerning the proposed university at Żonqor whereby its original ODZ footprint was scaled down from 90 to 18 hectares, was met with lukewarm approval from various previously dissenting organisations and individuals. While the scaled-down ODZ footprint is an unequivocally positive decision, the fact that the Żonqor site was retained, with the consequential uptake of ODZ land on site, is still no cause to rejoice, for various reasons:

(i) As a direct consequence of the reduction in ODZ land that the project will encroach upon at Żonqor, the development will have to rise higher, reaching a maximum height of five to six storeys, which will stick out like a sore thumb on the largely undeveloped coastal promontory;

(ii) The 18 hectares of ODZ land to be swallowed up by the project at Żonqor are still being taken away from the nature park that has long been earmarked for the site. Columnist Claire Bonello made a valid call for an equivalent area to be deducted from existing development zones as a compensatory act;

(iii) The project's coastal location was retained, while its inland spread was struck off the map. This has two unsavoury implications. The development will rub shoulders with a coastal zone that is more important for ecological and leisure purposes. This does nothing to dispel suspicions that the location has been chosen simply to accommodate certain people, including Malta Developers Association president Sandro Chetcuti, on the verge of purchasing land close to the site.

Although we have a tendency to be grateful for small mercies in this country, the Żonqor siting of the Jordanian university is still a wrong decision from an environmental point of view.

So the mind boggles as to why Environment Minister Leo Brincat was keen to be photographed, along the Prime Minister, when the stage-managed launch of the project was announced on site, despite admitting he had no role in 'promoting' the project. His presence at the protest march in Valletta organised by the Front Harsien ODZ would have been much more appropriate and would have drawn the admiration of many, given his status as a government minister.

## **Greener buses on European roads**

Thanks to the Clean Hydrogen in European Cities (Chic) project, 500 to 1,000 innovatively-powered buses will roam city streets in Europe by 2020. Besides not spewing out any noxious emissions, the buses will consume an average of eight kilograms of hydrogen every 10 kilometres, making them 10 to 40 per cent more efficient than their diesel counterparts. The project is coordinated by Evobus of Germany and funded under the Seventh Framework Programme.

For more information visit <http://chic-project.eu> .

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