

Fields of dust



The massive Radam site at Qrendi, where former quarries are being reclaimed for agricultural purposes. While this is a laudable exercise in itself, wardens should be posted on site to ensure that each truck load is secured with canvas coverings and to inspect the material being dumped. Some of the material spills over from the trucks onto the roads, which are covered with mud as a result.

We may have just seen the welcome advent of the revamped construction site regulations, which should offer some reprieve for the thousands of downtrodden residents who are unfortunate enough to live close to a construction site. However, lassitude still reigns when it comes to sites where construction waste and debris is legally dumped.

In fact, the media have largely chosen to ignore the shambolic state of several areas, most notably the former quarry sites being filled with construction debris, mainly for agricultural reclamation purposes, where contractors show utter disregard for residents and the environment.

A case in point is the site in Qrendi, known as Tas-Sinjura, off Siggiewi and Mqabba Road, where dumping of construction waste to develop a vineyard has ensued unabated, even if permits for such dumping have long expired - as was highlighted in a letter by the Qrendi Council to the Environment Ministry over two years ago.

The site is a receptacle for construction waste from gargantuan projects, such as Lufthansa Technik's base at Hal-Farrug.

In order to appreciate the task in store for the 25 wardens entrusted with enforcing the new regulations, you must visit the surrounding streets to savour the dust-blanketed building façades and the disillusioned residents annoyed at the perceived helplessness of law and order in the face of construction magnates, whose trucks remain uncovered.

You could also visit the sister site of Tas-Sinjura, located just above Ghar Lapsi. This is under the same operator, and all the vegetation is covered by a thick blanket of dust.

Residents have heard the pass-the-buck story many times before - the Malta Environment and Planning Authority stays out of the fray since the matter does not concern illegal development. The police also keep out of it, the local council laments that it lacks the necessary resources, green wardens say they must be dispatched by the local council, and the Transport Authority points fingers at the police. In the meantime, the truck drivers and their employers are laughing.

Why Caqnu?

Ever since Anna Mallia's article titled *Why Caqnu?* (Malta Today August 27, 2006), I have been racking my brains in order to work out whether all the criticism levelled at the construction magnate is justified or not.

For a long time I was afraid of jumping on the bandwagon of the many who continuously hound the man, Charles Polidano. After all, he has his good points, like employing thousands of people and apparently also helping out the most needy in critical times. However, I reasoned that it would have been unfair to shy away from this piece. A lot has been written about Mr Polidano, who seems to attract a lot of public attention.

Besides the Tas-Sinjura site at Qrendi, which is operated by a subsidiary company of Polidano, the tycoon's repeated applications for supermarkets outside the development zone (ODZ), his illegal excavations at Xemxija, which is condemning the country to a partial one-lane bypass, his notorious hotel-on-public-land at Marfa, and another 80-odd planning infringements, the contractor is also involved in a former ODZ site at Triq il-Fenici, Safi.

Mr Polidano applied to construct a home for the elderly, in the same area where he had the initiative (or temerity?) to apply 11 years ago for a change in scheme designation to pave the way for this development.

His request was twice turned down, and in fact the same area was not included in the revised development schemes contained within the local plans in 2006.

Despite this, Mr Polidano has not thrown in the towel and has now submitted PA 5412/07 for the development of the senior citizens' home for the same spot.

This area has already been subjected to fly-tipping and dumping of waste, for which Mepa had issued an enforcement notice (ECF 117/06). This was listed for direct action last year. Yet ecologically degrading an area is one of the most frequently resorted-to ploys by developers.

The site earmarked for the elderly people's home is a stone's throw away from two villas, which Mepa issued enforcement notices against and for which applications to sanction have been submitted.

Mr Polidano can be his own best PRO. If he stays within scheme areas that are already committed for development purposes, he can improve his public image and be solely remembered for his entrepreneurship and positive exploits.

Supermarkets and obesity

While the local craze for more supermarkets is ablaze, an excerpt from September's issue of the Scientific American journal can open a few eyes. 'The growing presence of supermarkets in the developing world has greatly increased the availability of both sweetened beverages and processed foods (two major contributors to the global obesity pandemic).

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