

Claiming public land as their own

Usurpation of car parks



Further dumping of inert waste on good quality agricultural land has occurred at Ghaxaq - unless such incidences are nipped in the bud, enforcement becomes redundant.

Much has been said about the usurpation of public land by boathouse and caravan owners - this extends, it seems, to public car parks as well.

Two car parks next to the Riviera Hotel in Marfa are occupied by boat trailers and caravans. When such paraphernalia are not physically occupying spaces within the car park, makeshift props, such as cones, are used to reserve them. To add insult to injury, some caravans seem to be permanently plonked within the car park, propped up on bricks, effectively taking up parking space for three or four cars.

Aren't boathouses meant to house boats and car parks meant to house cars, rather than boathouses housing individuals and car parks housing their mobile homes?

Climate change wake up call

The term 'avaaz' may not arouse or intrigue many locals, but it stands for 'voice' in many European, Middle Eastern and central Asian languages. In 2007, the term was adopted for a web-based global movement addressing climate change, poverty and associated injustice issues.

To date, the movement can boast a total of 3.5 million global members. Avaaz successfully bases its actions on web alerts that solicit peaceful rallies and other ancillary activities.

If you are prone to dismissing the movement as insignificant, then you may be interested to note that the Economist asserts that "Avaaz is poised to deliver a deafening wake up call to world leaders".

Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore's tribute to the movement states that "Avaaz is inspiring and has already begun to make a difference".

The non-profit movement is independent - its grassroots ethos is further strengthened by the fact that it does not receive any funding from governments or large multinational corporations. It is staffed by a global team based in Ottawa, London, Rio de Janeiro, New York, Buenos Aires and Geneva.

The flagship activities of the movement are so-called 'flash-mobs', or events in public places attended by scores of individuals. The plot is simple: once you register for one such flash-mob, you are given instructions on the location, date and timing of it, with Avaaz assuming the role

of a networking entity that coordinates the gathering of adherents from adjacent geographical areas.

The impromptu gathering of a makeshift crowd may not sound too effective in driving home important messages but, once gathered, the motley crowd will embark on a specific action. Tomorrow is a case in point. Avaaz have pledged to organise a climate change wake-up call in which those who have registered and pledged their support will contact their respective governments and leaders to solicit their signing of a fair and binding climate change deal at Copenhagen next December.

At the time of writing, over 1,000 events in 88 different countries had been subscribed to, including one in Malta - the film *The Age of Stupid* will be screened on Tuesday at 6.45 p.m.

The importance of the UN conference on climate change cannot be overstated. This will determine the post-Kyoto Protocol situation at a time when doubts exist about whether we can really stave off the two degree rise in temperatures to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Despite the acknowledged importance of such a conference, the groundwork leading to it has been far from impressive, with few countries committing themselves to tangible cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. The EU's pledge of a 30 per cent cut of emissions (from 1990 levels) is also conditional - that other major economic players also increase their pledges. This led a few to make a strident call for greater ambition.

If you are apprehensive about climate change and don't fall into the category of armchair critic, log on to <http://www.avaaz.org/en/> , register and keep your eyes open for similar activities over the coming weeks and months.

Quarry reclamation

Many are those who have expressed concern over the sprawling mounds of rubble and topsoil that have stockpiled within and around the quarry at Żebbiegħ, located on the main thoroughfare linking Mosta to Mġarr. After lodging a query with the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, the following details have emerged:

The development permit issued on July 4, 2007, requires the quarry operator to restore the exhausted part of the quarry in accordance with an approved restoration scheme. Works on restoration of this part of the quarry are still in progress and will be completed once excavation works on the current extension have finished.

The operator is required to store on site material removed from the quarry, such as soil and inferior quality limestone, for reuse in the restoration process at a later stage. Dumping operations on site have been and continue to be monitored by Mepa to ensure full compliance with permit conditions.

Pope's message on environment

Pope Benedict XVI inherited the daunting legacy of Pope John Paul II in the environmental sphere - in fact, his predecessor was inspirational in espousing the Church's mission with the pro-environmental message and his was a hard act to follow. In what appears to be a welcome sequel to his predecessor's stance, this month Pope Benedict made two very strong appeals.

On September 1, reacting to Italy's declared 'Day for the Protection of Creation', the Pontiff delivered a message from his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo: "I call everyone to a greater commitment to the safeguarding of creation, gift of God... In particular, I encourage the industrialised countries to cooperate responsibly for the future of the planet, and that the poorest populations not pay the greatest price for climatic changes."

Two weeks later, speaking at a meeting with sponsors, he reiterated that "Today more than ever, people must be helped to see in creation something more than a simple source of wealth or exploitation in man's hands.

"The truth is that when God, through creation, gave man the keys to the earth, he wanted him to use this great gift responsibly and respectfully, making it fruitful.

"The human being discovers the intrinsic value of nature if he learns to see it for what it really is, the expression of a plan of love and truth that speaks to us of the Creator and of his love for humanity, which will find its fulfillment in Christ, at the end of time."