

How to mistreat a coastal zone



Cars parked on the rocky shore at Little Armier (above) and on garigue, overlooking Paradise Bay. Enforcement is conspicuous by its absence.

Malta's coastal zones suffer an onslaught during summer, mainly due to the sheer number of people visiting the seaside and the lack of sandy beaches on the Maltese islands, but also due to the complete lack of management measures to regulate what turns into completely undisciplined behaviour.

Haphazard parking of vehicles directly on the sandy beach (at Gnejna), on the rocky shore (at Little Armier), on garigue (at Paradise Bay), in clayey fields (at Ghajn Tuffieħa) and on sand dune remnants (at Little Armier), for example, are causing ecological damage to these coastal areas due to the current complete lack of management.



Admittedly, there are very few alternatives available – one either enlarges the existing parking facilities at these popular coastal areas (with the consequent encroachment on even more natural land) or else one enforces a carrying capacity regime, whereby vehicles are turned back by Transport Malta officials once the available parking spaces are all taken up.

One should not balk at the latter system – it is already being implemented in a number of touristic areas abroad, such as the Dolomites in northern Italy, with late-comers forced either to park further away and walk the final stretch or board a shuttle service to reach the site.

The Blue Lagoon has long been synonymous with unbridled encroachment tactics by beach furniture operators such that it is a no-go for those not enamoured with clutter. It was only after an outpouring of complaints by locals and tourists alike about this unacceptable situation that the Malta Tourism Authority finally drew a line in the sand and decided to enforce regulations on site. This is a welcome move – the challenge now for the MTA and its enforcement arm is to maintain its stand at Blue Lagoon till the end of summer so as to prove the cynics wrong that this is just a temporary smokescreen tactic.

It's no secret that cigarette butts are a constant feature of our coastal areas, with smokers disposing of butts in rocks and crevices or directly on sandy beaches. The rocky shore at Wied iż-Zurrieq, Ghar Lapsi, Delimara and San Tumas, for instance, are replete with such butts, and the list of affected sites is probably much longer. Some smokers blame this on a lack of proper disposal facilities on site, pointing out that only in places like Ramla l-Hamra are carton ashtrays handed out by Gaia Foundation volunteers.

But I believe the real culprit is the Maltese people's lack of discipline and amour-propre for these islands and a chronic lack of enforcement. For instance, local wardens are not fulfilling their environmental enforcement role in any way.

Cigarette litter takes anything between 18 months to 10 years to degrade, and may also contain toxins. Various different entities, such as local councils, the Local Enforcement System Agency, and the Malta Tourism Authority need to coordinate their efforts to address this environmental hazard.

Some people just don't take no for an answer

The perseverance and resolve of the Maltese when it comes to striving for a building permit is legendary. The endless loop of application, refusal, reconsideration and appeal does not seem to dissuade applicants in any way, who, once having set their eyes on something, go all out to reach their ultimate objective.

The hamlet of Santu Rokku in Kalkara is a case in point, having had the dubious honour of being within the crosshairs of developers at least for the past seven years. A case in point is application PA 01509/09 for the construction of a terraced house and underlying garage in an ODZ area along Triq Santu Rokku in Kalkara.

The former Malta Environment and Planning Authority had rejected the application in 2012, and although this was followed with a request for reconsideration, Mepa consistently spared the site from development. The case officer's report for the application was damning, expounding in explicit terms why the application should be refused. A brief summary of the report was featured in this column on October 7, 2013 (see link below).

Fast forward to 2016 and a new application (PA 04437/16) has been submitted by the same applicant and architect for the construction of four residences and underlying garages at the same site.

At face value, the mind of the uninitiated observer may boggle at the apparent foolishness of the applicant, who has chosen to embark on yet another expensive attempt after all the previous rebuttals he was handed.

However, the reality is that the legislative landscape has changed since then, and the raft of revised Outside Development Zone policies that were ushered through in 2014 will probably bolster the applicant's chances this time round, especially since his architect is advising government on these policies.

As the photo illustrates, the ODZ site in Kalkara hosts a sizeable carob tree of venerable age. It also houses the entrance to underground wartime shelters dating back to the World War II. One hopes that common sense will prevail this time round as well, to further drive home the message that developers should steer clear of ODZ sites, especially in the Inner Harbour area where such sites have become extremely rare.

Even more rewards for Ġnejna law-breakers

The inertia of successive governments over the illegal boathouse issue is probably the biggest blight on our political class. The public has probably almost given up that any administration will have the guts to take this thorny bull by its horns and demolish, rather than regularise/ sanction these illegal structures.

So Enemalta's application for a permit to dig a trench to provide the Ġnejna boathouses with electricity has understandably aggrieved many. As if the enjoyment of an illegal structure in a prime seaside location was not enough, we add insult to injury by providing these law-breakers more amenities so that they can enjoy the 'fruits of their labour' even during nighttime.

Ġnejna is one of the few local beaches that does not suffer from significant light pollution and this status quo should be maintained. I wonder what justification the government will come up



Some of our rocky shores are full of discarded cigarette butts. Local councils, the Local Enforcement System Agency and the Malta Tourism Authority need to collaborate to address this environmental hazard.

The revised ODZ policies that were ushered through in 2014 will probably bolster the applicant's chances this time round, especially since his architect is advising government on these policies



This ODZ site in Kalkara has been targeted by developers once again for residential development, with the same architect advising government on ODZ policies being involved here as well.

2/12/2019

How to mistreat a coastal zone

with this time round – electricity theft, as in the case of the Armier boathouses when they were provided with meters?

www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20121007/environment/Some-applicants-have-no-shame.439975

www.alandeidun.eu

alan.deidun@gmail.com