

Progression that is Leading to Regression

Location Naxxar. Date 10/2/2010. On my Dad's insistence I was made to go to mass since for us Maltese, the 10th of February is a public holiday- the feast of St.Paul's shipwreck. I was still a few days from a couple of exams that required alot to study and to be honest, I was quite frustrated since I felt that I was not well prepared although my mind was stuffed with alot of definitions and formulas. These left me no idea on what should I write in order to criticise development and other agents of nature destruction.

Luckily enough, the visit to the Parish church gave me the idea on the main subject of this article. As I was passing infront one of the places where Naxxar's elderly people stay during their quiet day, the words that the boundaries between our village and Mosta were going to be built, left me nothing but shocked and worried that we were going to firstly lose our identity as a locality and secondly endanger many living creatures that are becoming extinct such as the Robin. Apart from these causes, there will be more vacant property and less rainwater would fill the acquifer- which is our island's main water supply. But although the actual development has not started yet, these creatures and their habitats are still exposed to danger everyday due to quarry blasts in the area of San Pawl tat-Tarġa which have recently become unacceptable.



Figure 1: One of the areas where frequent explosions take place...

Unfortunately this issue has been going on for a number of years and when habitants of that area tried to get a glimpse of the situation, they were promptly advised to stay out of it. During a meeting held by a number of residents including those who form part of environmental organizations such as the Ramblers'

Association of Malta and local council members a couple of years ago with governmental bodies such as MEPA, it was concluded that all the explosions that are taking place in the quarry in the area abide by Maltese laws and residents were also informed that each time an explosion takes place, Mepa and police representatives are on site to see that everything is under control and that no law is broken.

HOWEVER, A QUESTION ARISES: IS DAMAGING ANOTHER'S PROPERTY OR MAKING ANIMALS SUFFER ACCORDING TO LAW?

The answer is definitely no. However, this is exactly what is happening every time an explosion takes place under the supervision of MEPA and the police. It is not the first time people in San Pawl Tat-Targa have rushed out of their houses towards the middle of the road shouting "earthquake,earthquake!", only to realise that in effect it was just another quarry explosion. This has been going on for years and since a lot of properties have been damaged and numerous animals, not to mention human residents, have suffered and are suffering badly, something has to be done.

THE BOUNDARIES ISSUE OR THE SO CALLED RATIONALISATION PROJECT

I do not want to be seen as trying to favour the opposition but as in every other issue concerning the environment, the government's bureaucracy can be seen to be standing at its peak. Assessment reports were supposed to be commissioned before the approval by the members of the parliament and MEPA but until the seventeenth day of March i.e. today, neither of these assessment reports were commissioned and issued nor the governments' obligations were



Figure 2: It is of course such a pity that all this greenery is given away to developers..

fulfilled. To contribute to the fact that the Maltese government is bureaucratic and does what

is told by important figures in the economy, resources Minister George Pullicino himself had admitted that certain people were putting pressure on him to include agricultural land in the development zone.

Developers are currently applying for the so-called planning control applications in order to convert fields to building sites while speculators are selling the land, saying that the permits of these outside scheme sites will be issued soon. In a few years' time, our identity as a locality will unfortunately be "spoilt".

NGO'S URGE TO HALT THIS RATIONALISATION SCHEME

Several NGO's including the above mentioned Flimkien Ghal Ambjent Ahjar and the Ramblers Association insisted that the scheme should be subjected to public consultation and a strategic environmental assessment as demanded by EU law. Apart from this, these NGO's commented that there is also a problem with the MEPA website; it does not support searches for PC applications which makes it more difficult to have an idea of what is going on with this issue. This can be seen as a barrier to all those who would like to be informed so that later on they can air out their opinions.

However, in a reaction to the comments by the NGOs, MEPA said that no new land rationalisation exercise was being carried out. MEPA said the claim that it was becoming less transparent was unfair, since these same NGOs, over the past years have all been given free access to view the plans of all development applications online through its web portal. They had also been given credit facility to download case reports and organized discussion meetings with the Authority on numerous issues.

CONCLUSION

In my opinion, all Naxxar citizens should be aware of what is happening and give their support to these NGO's that although they only have strong currents against them, are persevering to keep our identity as a locality alive and protect endangered living creatures.

By Archbishop's Seminary, Tal-Virtu