

PEMBROKE GARDENS

An urban space in

JOHN EBEJER

Pembroke Gardens was opened a few weeks ago. This was a Malta Tourism Authority project, part-funded by ERDF funds under the Tourism Priority Axis.

The implementation process started in 2006. As consultant on product development, I was requested to identify potential projects for which MTA could apply for ERDF funds. Pembroke

Gardens was one of the projects identified and which was considered sufficiently doable to be included in an application for funding from the European Regional Development Funds.

Inevitably, the search for viable tourism projects zoomed in on tourism zones, one of which was St George's, an area with a concentration of hotels. A major weakness of this zone was the absence of a sizeable urban space

that could be enjoyed by tourists residing in nearby hotels. There is the St Julian's promenade nearby but this has its limitations as an urban space.

Another weakness St George's had as a tourism zone was a large area in the vicinity of the hotels that was in shambles. Part of the site was flat, close to the shoreline, and was used in part for dumping of waste building material. Another part of the site was at

a higher level, closer to the hotels and consisted of roads that were excessive to the needs of traffic in the area. A notable feature of the site was the substantial difference in levels. The difference in levels was a drawback yet at the same time provided an opportunity.

The proposal was for a garden occupying both the upper and lower level of the site to maximise the use of space. The idea of a garden addressed the zone's weakness of not having a viable urban space.

The site's proximity to the sea is a feature that added potential. The garden slopes towards the sea to allow people to enjoy the sea views as they walk from the entrance right down to the lower edge of the garden. Sea views are often taken for granted by Maltese but for people coming from a landlocked city, views of the sea make for a more enjoyable experience.

The difference in level was also a challenge in terms of ensuring full accessibility for people with mobility difficulties. The design as conceived provided for an unobstructed footpath down the site, thus allowing for slopes that are manageable and accessible for all.

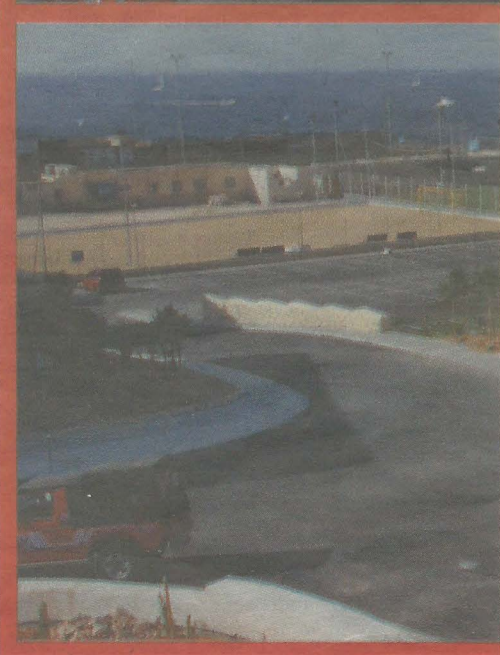
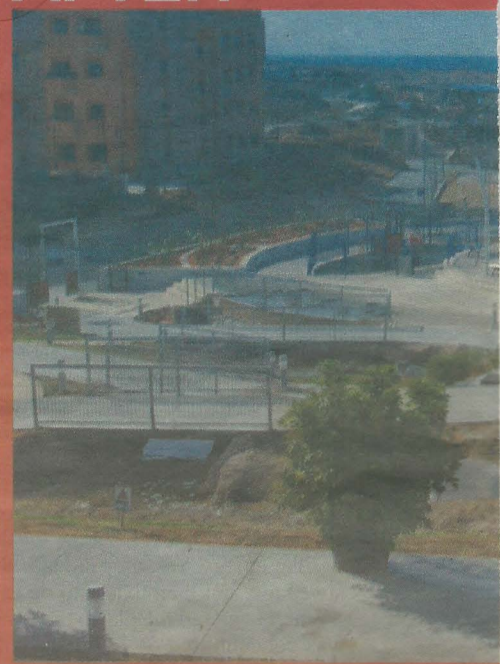
The concept also envisaged the inclusion of a cascading stream down the site so people could enjoy the sound and sights of flowing water, while also enjoying the open sea views. The resulting concept was for an urban space within two minutes walk of several important hotels – a space where tourists can spend some time and enjoy the sea views.

This was the concept of the gardens for which MTA applied for ERDF funds. Architects Bencini and Associates were subsequently engaged for the project. The project architects succeeded in transforming this concept into an exceptional design with careful attention to the overall layout, as well as to visually interesting details.

Apart from Pembroke Gardens, another project identified for the area was a Garigue Heritage Park along the Pembroke coastline. This involved a pathway from Pembroke Gardens to Madliena Tower – a distance of approximately 2.5 kilometres. The pathway can be used for walking, jogging and cycling. Besides ensuring a safe ride for cyclists, the trail is meant to highlight the beauty of Malta's natural coastline garigue and rocky shorelines. Madliena Tower is also to be restored. The walking/cycling footpath provides a leisure facility for the winter and shoulder months, a time when there are fewer opportunities for tourist leisure. I am informed that this project is now nearing completion.

These two projects add value to St George's as a tourism zone. It is hoped that hotels in the area will promote these new leisure facilities with their guests. It is also

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hoped that the nearby hotels contribute to ensure that the quality of the urban space is maintained.

The project was not about the upgrading of an existing space – it was the conversion of a dead space into a lively urban space for

BEFORE



ENS: the making



people to enjoy.

Soon after ERDF awarded the funds, I was no longer involved in the project as I moved on to other work.

This was not a simple project to implement. It required discussions

and negotiations with many stakeholders, including the operators of nearby hotels, Pembroke Local Council, Pembroke Athleta, and others. Well done to the Tourism Ministry and Malta Tourism Authority personnel who believed

in this project and who were instrumental in its implementation.

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