Open Air Theatre - “Recreation for Reclamation“

The potential need for an „open air theatre“ in order to support year round tourism in Gozo was mentioned by the Gozo Tourism Association. Although there is an existing open air theatre, it is not designed for commercial enterprise. The theatre located in Ghammar Hill in front of Ta’ Pinu Church is owned by the church and is used for religious and cultural activities. There is limited space and access is difficult for visitors. At the same time, Gozo Island has some degraded areas, therefore it is strongly suggested that one of these degraded areas could be reclaimed into an open air theatre. The creation of an open air theater which can be used for opera (300-500 visitors) as well as rock concerts (max 1000 seats) in a very striking natural setting, is the subject of this proposal.

Based on the condition of land form in Gozo, which is hilly and has a number of quarries, there are some existing open air theaters which can be used as references. The most similar, quarry Amphitheatre in Perth, nestled in the midst of Bold Park, Perth’s largest bush land reserve, is a magnificent 640 seat amphitheatre cut from the limestone hills, featuring magnificent views and facilities. The stage size is 24m wide x 13.5m deep.

Important criteria for choosing a site for the open air theatre location:
1. Select a degraded area which needs to be reclaimed
2. Accessibility
3. Sufficient size of site
4. Attractive view
5. Minimum of ecological impact
6. Minimum of visual impact

Using site analysis to consider the criteria, the site of the quarry near Dwejra Bay (SG3) has been selected for developing ideas for a prototype of an open air theater in a former limestone quarry. The selected site has a specific form and north orientation toward the sea and Dwejra Bay, one of the points of interest in Gozo.

Fundamental to the theatre experience is the act of seeing and being seen. In fact, the word theatre comes from the Greek word *theatron*, meaning „seeing place.“ It is not the building that makes a theatre, but rather the use of space for actors to imitate human experience before audiences. The suggested concept is „experience“. Visitors should have experiences at every step moving through the site. A sequence of spatial experiences is created.

As design criteria for generating spaces for different experiences, the following have been chosen:
• Face away from the late afternoon sun
• Keep street noise away from the theatre
• Create an exceptional acoustical quality
• Provide a view of Dwejra Bay
• Design for people to experience the land
• Design the theatre and facilities as a park
• Use processing quarry to build the shape of proposed design
The stone walls of the quarry, sculpture, water, vegetation, boundaries of the quarry, and the sky are part of the scenery. Arranging elements of landscape is important to creating sequences for having different experiences.

**Visual Experiences**
A „frame“ is created for the visitors from the entrance at the edge of the quarry. A sculpture garden with limestone sculptures showing the time story of the mining exploitation causes the visitor to reflect on mining’s impact.

**Stage and Seats**
The stage thrusts out into the audience, which is protected from wind, sun and rain. A screen wall and an opening are at the back of the stage. These provide entrances and exits as well as space for scenery and visual elements. Capacity of the theater is 1,000 people and seats are created by using limestone from the quarry.

**Acoustical Quality**
Good acoustics are created by the slope of land and the noise of cars is kept away from the theater by the slope and using trees.

**Circulation and Parking Area**
The circulation and the parking area for visitors and staff or service are separated by zoning. The circulation and parking area for staff and service is near the stage and utilities building.

**Facilities for the Handicapped**
There are facilities for disabled persons, with several places for wheelchairs, ramps and special transport from the car parks.

Because the sculpture garden is beside the theatre, visitors could enjoy this area not only during show times, but also every day.

References:
MEPA, Malta Environment and Planning Authority (2002). Gozo and Comino Local Plan: Draft land-use policies for public consultation. MEPA: Gozo
„Opera Houses“, in: www.akustikon.se/eng/referenser_operor_e.html, 12/2004
Schematic cross-section: from sculpture garden to theatre

Sequence of experiences