Filling a gap: the clandestine gang fixing Rome illegally

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

• What was the last bit of home or garden repair work you did?
  for example, fixing a dripping tap, repairing a broken wall, replacing a missing or broken tile
• Did you do the job by yourself, or did you pay someone to do it?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

Key words

permission maintenance pavement pedestrian crossing scooter

1. a path with a hard surface beside a road __________________________ (para 3)
2. the right to do something that is given to you by someone in authority __________________________ (para 3)
3. work that is done to keep something in good condition __________________________ (para 4)
4. a vehicle with an engine and two small wheels that looks like a small motorbike __________________________ (para 4)
5. an area where cars must stop for people who are crossing the street __________________________ (para 6)

bypassed authorities discourage leaflet anarchists

6. a printed sheet of paper, usually folded, that is free and gives information about something __________________________ (para 8)
7. organizations or institutions that control something, often a public service __________________________ (para 8)
8. avoided dealing with someone because you think you can do something more quickly without them __________________________ (para 11)
9. stop someone from wanting to do something __________________________ (para 12)
10. people who believe that there should be no government or laws __________________________ (para 13)
Filling a gap: the clandestine gang fixing Rome illegally

Giorgio Ghiglione
10 April, 2019

1 It is 6am on a Sunday, and the streets of the Ostiense area in southern Rome are empty. The metro has just opened, and nearby cafés wait for their first customers.

2 Seven men and women are working hard. Their faces are covered by scarves and hoodies as they take bags of cement and sand from a car.

3 They are not criminals. They are members of the secret GAP organization. They hide their face because what they are doing – fixing a broken pavement without permission – is illegal.

4 City maintenance has been a big problem in Italy’s capital for a long time. There are about 10,000 holes in the city's roads – this makes life difficult for the many Romans who travel by scooter. Rubbish collection is also a major problem.

5 The seven secret GAP members are part of a group of about 20 people quietly doing the work that the city has not done. GAP stands for Gruppi Artigiani Pronto Intervento (“groups of artisan emergency services”).

6 GAP have been busy. In December, 2018, they repaired the fountain, built in the 1940s, of the Principe di Piemonte primary school. In January, 2019, they painted a pedestrian crossing on a dangerous major road. Their latest work, fixing the pavements in Ostiense, included filling a deep hole that filled with water when it rained.

7 They always leave their logo of a hammer and screwdriver, either painted on the ground or on a piece of paper.

8 They also leave leaflets that say: “The GAP are a secret organization – we make repairs where the authorities fail. Find your goal, organize and repair: become a GAP member yourself!”

9 Peppe (not his real name) thought of the idea because his child goes to the primary school with the broken fountain. A few months ago, he says, city authorities came to fix it but only repaired the pipe, and the fountain could not be used. “So we decided to come at night …”

10 Peppe says GAP sometimes have to break the law. To repair the fountain, they entered the school without permission, and to paint the pedestrian crossing, they blocked a road without permission.

11 “It is true that we have bypassed the local government,” says Renato. “But nobody was going to fix the fountain for at least two years, so we said to ourselves: let’s do it and see what happens.”

12 Critics say that groups like GAP discourage the government from doing its job: why spend time and money on fixing holes when residents are doing it for free? But GAP members hope their actions will encourage the local authorities to do more.

13 “We’re not a group of anarchists,” says Renato. “We’re just people living here in this neighbourhood, trying to make things better.”

14 After about an hour, the pavement is fixed, and the group leave their logo in the wet cement. As the street starts to fill with people going to work or walking dogs, the group get into their car and leave.

15 “I hope other people will do the same,” says Nadir. “I would love to hear that GAP groups have formed in other cities.”

© Guardian News and Media 2019
First published in The Guardian, 10/04/19
Filling a gap: the clandestine gang fixing Rome illegally

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

3 Comprehension check
Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? Correct any that are false.

1. GAP is a secret group of people who work for the Rome authorities.
2. They have already done a lot of repair work in the city of Rome.
3. The GAP members are not breaking any laws when they do their work.
4. GAP are a group of anarchists.
5. After they have fixed something, the GAP group leave some tools – a hammer and screwdriver – behind.
6. GAP hope that other people in other places will form their own groups and fix their cities.

4 Using the key words
Use key words from task 2 to compete these sentences.

1. The children are learning to cross the road safely at the nearest ________________________.
2. That car should not be parked on the ________________________ – people have to walk into the road to get past it.
3. I lost my identity card and had to go to the ________________________ to get a new one.
4. There’s a lot of ________________________ work on the motorway in the summer holidays – you’ll probably need an extra hour for your journey.
5. Excuse me. Do you have ________________________ to do that?

5 Discussion
Read paragraph 12 again. Who do you most agree with? Give reasons for your answer.

☐ I think the critics are right.
☐ I agree with the GAP members.

6 Group task
In your group, think of something that should be fixed in your area. For example, holes in a road, broken park benches, a fountain that doesn’t work. Discuss:

• how long this has been a problem, a danger, broken.
  e.g. not very long, one to two months, at least a year

• who would be happy if you fixed it.
  e.g. cyclists, children, old people, dog walkers

• what tools and materials you would need.
  e.g. paint and paintbrushes, hammer and nails, bricks and cement

Report back to the rest of the class.
Filling a gap: the clandestine gang fixing Rome illegally

KEY

2 Key words

1. pavement
2. permission
3. maintenance
4. scooter
5. pedestrian crossing
6. leaflet
7. authorities
8. bypassed
9. discourage
10. anarchists

4 Using the key words

1. pedestrian crossing
2. pavement
3. authorities
4. maintenance
5. permission

3 Comprehension check

1. F – GAP is a secret group of people who fix things in the city that the Rome authorities do not fix.
2. T
3. F – Sometimes they break laws when they do not have permission to do something.
4. F – They say that they are not anarchists. They are just a group of people trying to make their area better.
5. F – After they have fixed something, the GAP group leave an image of a hammer and screwdriver behind.
6. T