Glossary (left margin)

Architect

A person who is qualified to design buildings and to plan and supervise their construction.

Perit (1)

"'perit' defined in the law as. "the profession assuming responsibility for the design and, or, construction of building works, under the generic title of Perit and includes works in architecture and civil and structural engineering."- – Chapter 390 – Periti Act, 1999, Constitution of Malta

Perit (2)

The "perit" owes a duty of care towards his client, but also towards society and the environment in general. - Kamra Tal-Periti

Absolute

The dictated absolute minimum dimensions define space.

Absolute 2

Viewed or existing independently and not in

Preamble

This study solely addresses Malta, whereby it was after leaving the island that I felt a growing devotion and sense of patriotism toward what I had left behind.

In its irony, choosing to leave the country to better it, as to broaden perspectives and break from the shackles of the norm, proves challenging. However, in shaping my professional career, how could I surround myself with warranted professionals within the built environment who advocate for better while playing imperative masquerading roles in formulating the worse?

Exposed to a new Dutch environment, I was able to critically reflect on the typical Maltese streetscape, convinced that the architect can play a more significant role in pressing issues the country faces.

Although I do not relate to the systems the Maltese architectural scene operates within, it became apparent that to have a valued perspective and say within the system, one must understand it, or at the least grasp its principal values.

To better understand such complexities, I formally reached out to various agencies playing essential roles within this framework today, intrigued by their contradicting principles and perspectives[1]. The insight gained through these interviews serves as an underpinning for arguments raised throughout the text[1]. Therefore, it must be noted that the arguments raised address the current situation in Malta heading into the 2030s decade.

Glossary (middle margin)

relation to other things; not relative or comparative

Ambient Noise

As I write this, I have been conditioned to the numbing of a precise and noise. A constant noise pertaining to construction I hear everywhere. Chasing, excavating, digging, the rumbling of trucks on speed bumps, reversing of large vehicles, driving of pile foundations…

Annex 2

- Height limitations in metres will now be governed according to the interpretation provided in Annex 2- DC15

Building Height

The maximum allowable distance in metres, measured vertically from the finished pavement level up to the top of the roof parapet wall of additional setback floors taken at the highest road level, established within the Local Plans. In the case of shared

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Structure

The structure of the findings is therefore divided into two, whereby an objective understanding of such governing systems is organised into the chapter's main arguments. These arguments provide a framework of economic, cultural, and political understandings, which are then personally reflected upon at the end of each chapter, personifying the architect centrally in these critical reflections.

The following text seeks to address two audiences being
- Maltese Architects, on whom the research is centred upon,
- An academic Dutch context under which this research is carried out.

1, The reason for conducting extensive interviews with several agencies came from a need to understand each agency's role better. The individuals interviewed remain anonymous, directly referring to their insight through unreferenced quotations. This anonymity arises from the sensitivity of the current topics discussed and primarily because the study does not strive to 'point fingers'. Instead, the insight gained serves as a somewhat practical backbone, that compliments or counteracts theoretical arguments, relating all issues back to a Maltese context.

The individuals interviewed represent an agency in giving objective specifics on what the agency strives to do and what standpoints and actions it takes on the matter. The relationship with each interviewee varies drastically and must be acknowledged in affecting directly what is shared and in what way. Regardless of aspects of comfort and trust in confiding such insight, almost all interviewees expressed frustration and anger throughout the discussions. Essentially, each interviewee gave explicit reasons for Malta's current situation, giving specific, contradicting solutions highlighted throughout the text.

space urban environments (that is, urban environments having a common, uniform surface used by both pedestrians and vehicles) the pavement level will equate to the finished official road level itself.- DC15

Compromise

The expedient acceptance of standards that are lower than is desirable.

Conflict

A serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one.

Compliance

The action or fact of complying with a wish or command.

Corruption

"He made a political decision"

Corruption (2)

"In the interest of I don't know who, it has to be demolished"

Contradiction

a situation in which

Agencies

• Owners
• Residents
• Mayors
• Private Practising Architects
• Educators (pertaining to architectural education)
• Malta Developers Association
• Local Council Association
• Policy Authors/ Urban Planners
• Non- Governmental Organizations
• Superintendence of Cultural Heritage
• Planning Authority
• Ministry for Public Works and Planning

The agencies in question operate on different scales, at varying degrees of influence and have differing ambitions. Some place the individual central to decision-making, while others represent the community's interest. For coherency in analysing feedback given through the interviews, the same questions were asked of each agency. These questions were mainly centred upon;

    • What is your agenda?
    • What other agencies influence your ambitions?
    • How do you manage conflict?
    • How do issues of privatisation of land affect

development?

inconsistent elements are present.

Contradiction (2)

The action or fact of complying with a wish or command.

Cultural Heritage

"means movable or immovable objects of artistic,architectural, historical, archaeological, ethnographic,-palaeontological and geological importance and includes information or data relative to cultural heritage pertaining to Malta or to any other country. This includes archaeological, palaeontological or geological sites and deposits, human remains, landscapes, underwater and seascapes, groups of buildings, as well as scientific collections,collections of natural specimens and art objects, manuscripts, books,published material, archives, audio-visual material and reproductions of any of the preceding, or collections of historical value, as well as intangible cultural assets comprising arts, traditions, customs and skills employed in the performing arts, in applied arts and in crafts another intangible assets which have a historical, artistic or ethnographic value"– Chapter 455 – Cultural Heritage Act, 2002, Constitution of Malta

Through naivety, a continuous search for

'Another Architecture' prevails.

Environmental & Planning Review Tribunal

- Approved on the basis that the developer had a right to build according to the height limitation set out in the local plans- EPRT Malta

Local Plans

"A Local Plan deals mainly with land-use planning and development issues, and indicates where development can take place, the type of development permitted and the criteria against which development proposals are to be assessed by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA). Its main function is to guide development by seeking a sustainable balance between the economic and social needs of the public (e.g requirements for homes, shops, employment, transport, recreation and community facilities) and the need to protect and

improve the existing urban and natural environment and to meet future demand sustainably. This is a complex task as requirements are diverse and very often conflicting"- ARL Int.

Local Plans (2)

The plans approved in 2006 are to be reviewed after 10 years

Malta

The origin of the name "Malta" is uncertain

Maximum

Within the maximum height limitation, each floor shall have a minimum clear internal height in accordance with Sanitary Law.- DC15

Policy

from Old French policie 'civil administration', via Latin from Greek politeia 'citizenship', from politēs 'citizen', from polis 'city'.

Policy (2)

Policy/

regulation which is to have the most onerous weight out of all the document's provisions in the assessment of development proposals and where every effort is focused on objective criteria, not subjective ones -DC15

Populist

"Leaning on the same populist rhetoric as the elected party struggles at the polls."

Public Space

Any area to which the public at large has free and unrestricted access, including urban spaces such as streets and squares, landscaped and recreational open spaces.

Third Country National

Third country nationals wishing to reside and work in Malta need to apply for a Single

Permit (including Residence and Work)- Jobs Plus Malta

Transition Zone

Transition zones/areas, as defined within the Local Plans, have a distinct character. In these zones/areas, particular attention is to be given to bridging between the adjoining areas, each having their own specific characteristics.

Urbanism

"Urbanis doesn't exist in Malta"- Urban Planner

F'kull post ta' Malta,
Il-wiċċ tal-pal tal-bajtar,
Iħares lejja.

Anton Buttigieg, 1953

in every place in malta/ the faces of prickly pears/ stare at me

*"Architects only do
what they are paid to do"*

Architecture Graduate

Introduction

1. World Bank, Eurostat

The archipelago of Malta comprises a total of 316 km2, covering slightly less area than that of Rotterdam. Two-thirds of this land area makes up the main island of Malta, which is larger than the other two islands, Gozo and Comino. A quick image search on Malta displays a strong sense of architectural identity, prevailing in a harmonious use of limestone, scale, and landscape, echoing past ambitions. However, most images portray scenes from Valletta, Malta's capital and the EU's smallest capital, and its previous capital, Mdina, together forming less than 0.5% of the total area[1]. The fortified capital is enlisted as a UNESCO World Heritage site, while Mdina is placed on a UNESCO tentative list.

2. National Statistics Office, NSO, Malta, 2023

3. See p.96 Appendix; *1. Pencil Developments*

Contradictingly, a more recent report published by The Sunday Times in 2021 headlines how "Malta's rapid building boom leaves locals in the dust", denoting a new image of the island.

Therefore, this research focuses on the apartment typology, which comprises "68.7% of the total number of approved dwellings"[2] in 2022.

4. Mayo,1996

5. Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development, 2015

The demolition of mostly modernist 1970s-80s townhouses made way for pencil developments[3], which portray an image of individual self-gain, flourishing throughout many villages and cities across the islands. Here, the advocacy of such conventional architecture projects is diluted to serve immediate ends[4], regardless of context, policy, and community.

6. DOGMA, 2021

7. Jones, 2009, p. 2521 cited Larson, 2004

While accelerated development occurs not only within Malta, development here has happened within a dense geographical context. It is, therefore, intrinsically influenced by that same [developing] context[5].A personal reaction to this development typology is the departure point in further researching the implications of such a sprawling typology.

Through pencil developments, this research attempts to tie in political, economic, and cultural factors that shape and produce the built environment, revealed through architecture[6]. Such spatial impact, therefore, puts the architect at the forefront of decision-making and production of this type of architecture.

If "architects are reliant on their clients' patronage in ways that other cultural producers are not"[7], what is the culture of the Maltese people, as a citizen, neighbour, developer, contractor, and architect?

Left/ Right
(Screenshots)
Image search
results for
'malta' & 'malta
architecture'
respectively
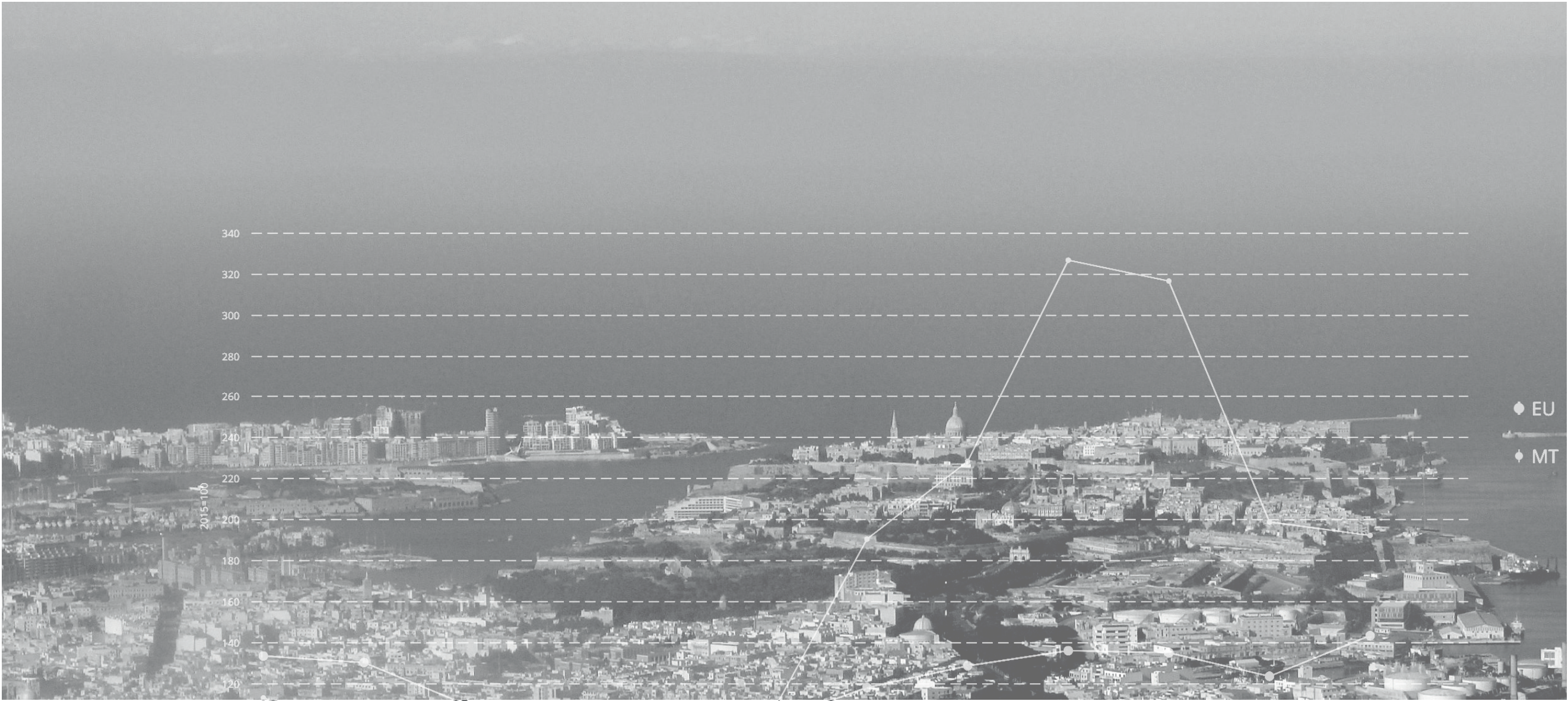
Image
Aerial image of
Valletta peninsula.

Graph
Residential
Building Permits,
Malta vs. EU

340		
320		
300		
280		
260		◆ EU
240		◆ MT
220		
200		
180		
160		
140		
120		
100		
80		
60		

2015=100

2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021

Aerial view of the
city of Mosta, Malta

Left
Coastal limits of
Mellieha

Right
Development along
Xemxija Bay

Towards Policy

1. Malta Ministry for Development and Infrastructure, MDI, 1990

Malta's first zoning laws and land use plans were enacted in 1992. These declared just under 80% of the island as being Outside Development Zone (ODZ) in seeking to channel development through existing dense localities, mainly found around Valletta and its many harbours in the eastern region of the island, as well as the south, harbouring Malta's only freeport[1]. Dispersed villages and towns shape the northern region and the agricultural land to the west. Today, accelerated development has blurred the distinction between the densified urban and rural areas.

2. See p. 97 Appendix; *2. Village Core*

It can be said that two driving policies establish what development may be considered in a particular area in Malta in the present decade, being;

      1. Local Plans, 2006, &
      2. Development Control Design Policy, Guidance and Standards, 2015.

Local Plans began being consulted for development planning purposes in 2006. Essentially, Local Plans established parameters for all 68 localities, ranging from villages to larger towns, grouped into six regions. The use of simple lines varying in size, colour and pattern defines the extent of the locality, development typologies, maximum heights in floors, ODZ areas, and designated areas such as village cores or Urban Conservation Areas (UCA)[2]. Through actions of exclusion and inclusion, drawing a line becomes exceptionally political. Given this simplicity and often unclarity in reading such thin, overlapping lines, they possess a high degree of weight for urban planning purposes, despite more critical urban planners

3. DC 15, 2015, p.26

arguing that "Local Plans today were obsolete the moment they were published" **(Minister)**.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

However, with the conception of the Development Control Design Policy (hereinafter referred to as DC 15), such Local Plans have been rendered redundant, merely used as a reference. This policy, enforced in 2015, replaced the previous DC 07, now striving for "collective commitment towards good design in our built environment"[3]. Authors of the policy describe being given a broad brief by governmental bodies, however, "being deliberately defined to do certain things" **(Author)**. Development was to be stimulated via an apparent political agenda, yet free, through authorship, in determining the matter in which development was to be directed.

Urbanism was therefore introduced and pushed as a primary avenue for this development, introducing urban jargon and design principles to the Maltese-built environment for the first time. The context was established as a leading principle and starting point for any development while also acknowledging that "context differs and that 'one-size-fits-all"[4] solutions do not exist.

Therefore, the document adopted a tiered policy system, using three development constraint levels. Policy, indicated in red, were given the most importance and least leniency. Good-practice Guidelines (orange) and universal Technical Standards (yellow) sought to guide development to more context-sensitive design solutions, stimulating architects' creativity in flourishing through such interpreted guidelines.

This interpretation is represented to the reader of the document primarily through the language used. Being a predecessor to the older document, DC 15 states how "a significant effort has been made to correct any vague or unclear definitions, statements and policies presented within (DC 07)"[5], yet it is through interpretation of the document that calls upon architects to navigate the varying contexts of their projects creatively. The complementing use of motherhood terms throughout the document also serves as a "best way to manage conflict and remain very superficial" (Author) in dealing with the many agendas and visions this document was to incorporate.

6. DC 15, 2015, p.106

The crux of such language is best represented through Policy P35, which states that;

"a building shall not exceed the permissible height as established in the Local Plans, which shall be interpreted to Annex 2 of this document"[6].

This statement allowed for a numerical shift in determining building heights, whereby through a conversation chart in Annex 2, building heights presented as floors in Local Plans were numerically translated to absolute heights in meters. This allowed developers to wedge in more floors between the ground floor and the absolute height by reducing floor-to-ceiling heights to a minimum of 2.6m, whereby Local Plans drew upon higher internal heights. The infill block, therefore, became subject to a rapid, unprecedented pace of development.

The immediate physical effects of this policy put it under heavy scrutiny by planners and the public alike (those whom which had yet to benefit from this conversion).

The policy's author here embodies contradictions projected by the government and other business interests in designing solutions for the document. Through the document's conception, therefore, it can be argued that the document becomes a product for operating under the umbrella term capitalism. Advanced capitalism can, therefore, flourish in producing the built environment through such government involvement. Nevertheless, the infamous conversion was defended by stating that "if three floors-plus-semi-basement gave you four units, the four full floors also gave you that, so it was an equivalent density" (**Author**), claiming that the removal of the semi-basement was imperative for the vitality of the streetscape.

In his paper 'Crisis, planning and the Quality of Life', published in 1982, sociologist Manuel Castells outlined how the implicit effects of policy on an economic, cultural and political level influence and reform spatial form amidst crisis'. He argued for a need to control and effectively manage the division of labour

7. Castells, 1982, p.18

8. Aureli, 2011

9. *Ibid.*

and resources amidst changes in the economic sector model. Precisely, such governmental/ political "ideology that shapes the built environment, which then structures and physically helps define everyday life"[7] while also shaping the culture that carries out the private architecture project. Through this, speculators value land and property mainly through its redevelopment value, instating a sacred 'Legitimate Expectation of Development' upon purchase.

In accounting for the complex expansion of the Roman 'Urbs', Pier Vittorio Aureli similarly suggests how form becomes crucial in finding architecture's political and social dimension, not programme and function[8]. Manifesting a 'Possibility for an Absolute Architecture', Aureli suggests how urbs, the agglomeration of an expanding village in the Roman Empire, allows form to become crucial in finding architecture's political and social dimensions, not programme and function. This form of expansion transcends a "universal and generic condition of cohabitation"[9], rooted in such socio-political dynamics.

In this case, the contrasting form of the expanding apartment typology took precedence in breaking the uniformity and making the street susceptible to further redevelopment. The apartment typology, conceived predominantly within infill plots, served as the perfect form for individual gain for anyone involved in the development, apart from tenants. The perfection of this architectural form in allowing for cheap, simple construction reduced the architect as a mere 'cog in the machine', happy, however, "to be making a piece of the large pie" (**Private Architect**).
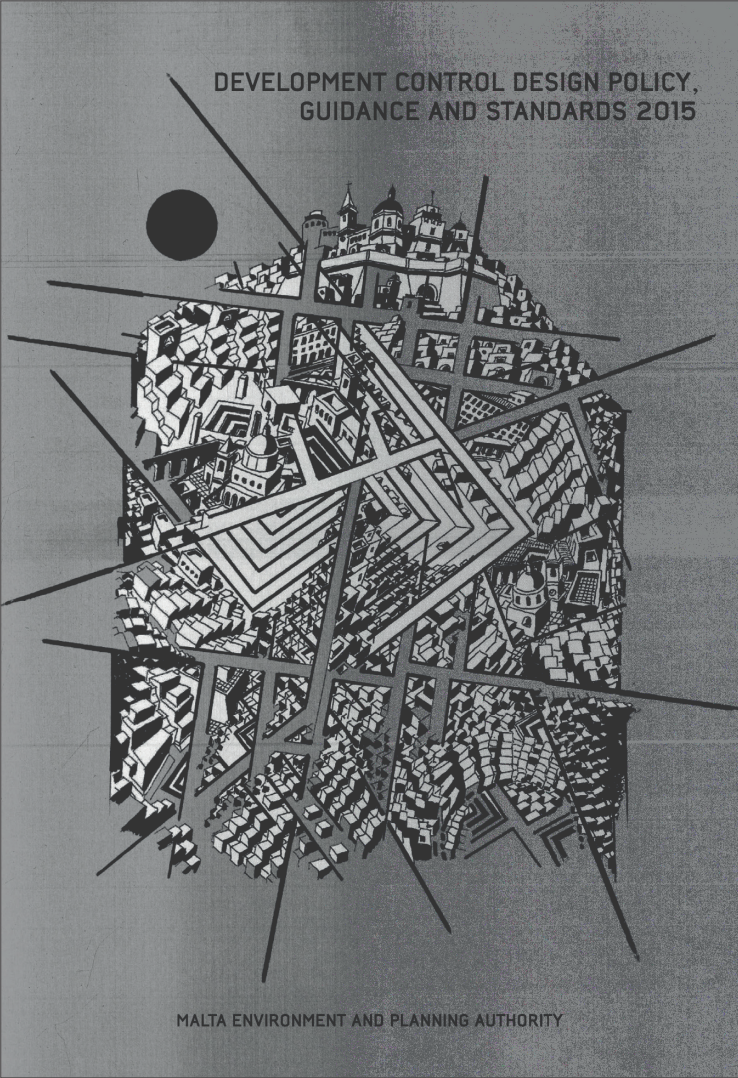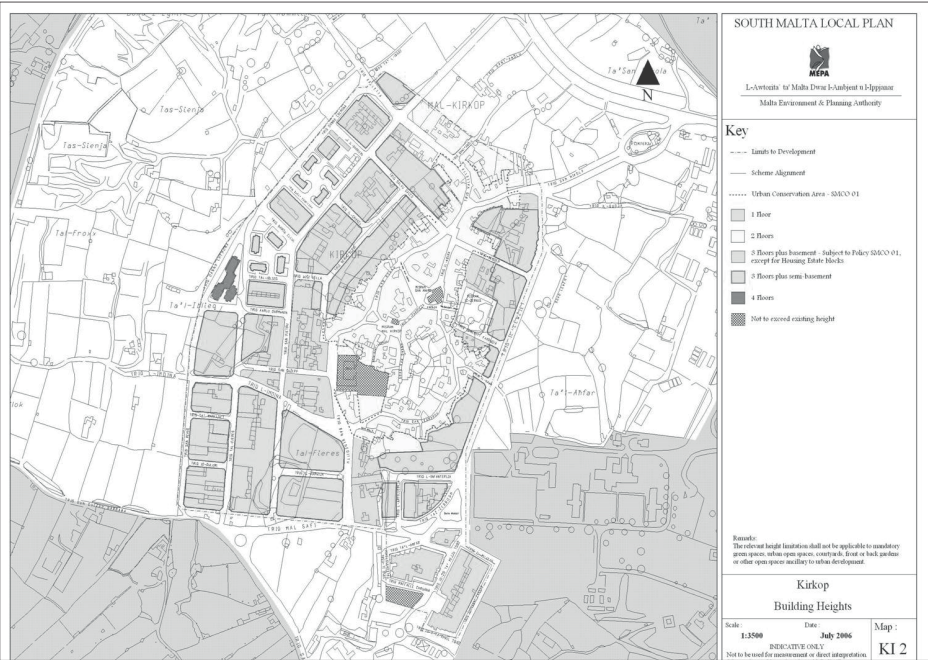
Annex 2: Interpretation of Height Limitation

Height limitation shall be interpreted as follows:

Number of Floors	Allowable Maximum Height in Metres Without Basement	Allowable Maximum Height in Metres With Basement	Allowable Maximum Height in Metres With Semi-Basement
1	7.70	8.60	9.80
2	11.40	12.30	13.50
3	15.40	16.30	17.50
4	19.90	20.80	22.00
5	22.90	23.80	25.00
6	26.90	27.80	29.00
7	29.90	30.80	32.00
8	33.40	34.30	35.50

Left
DC 15 Policy Cover

Right
Annex 2
Conversion Chat
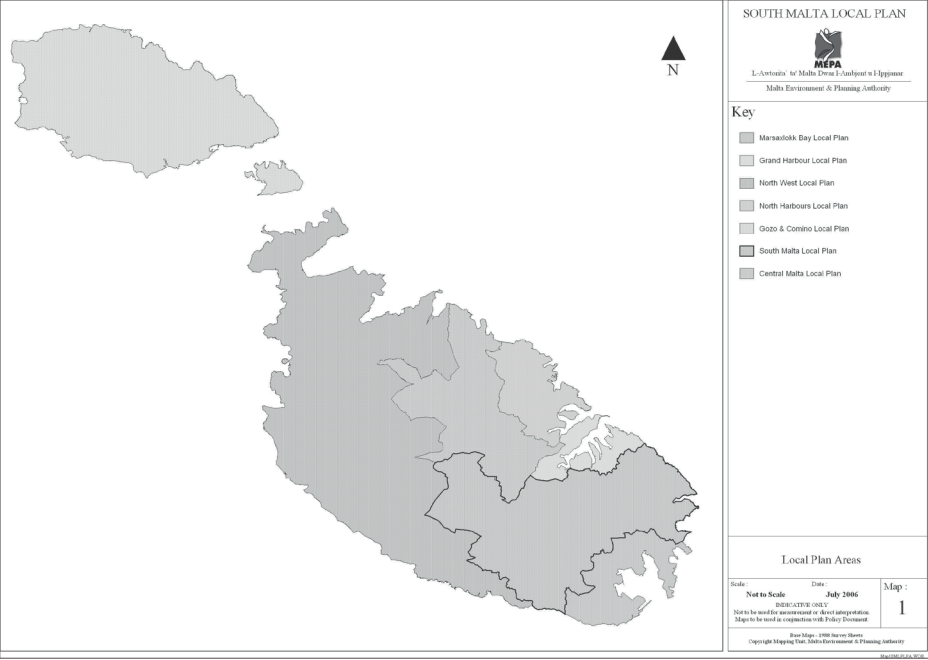
Upper Left
Local Plan Areas

Bottom Left
Building Height
Zoning,
Kirkop Local Plan

Right
Village Core, Kirkop

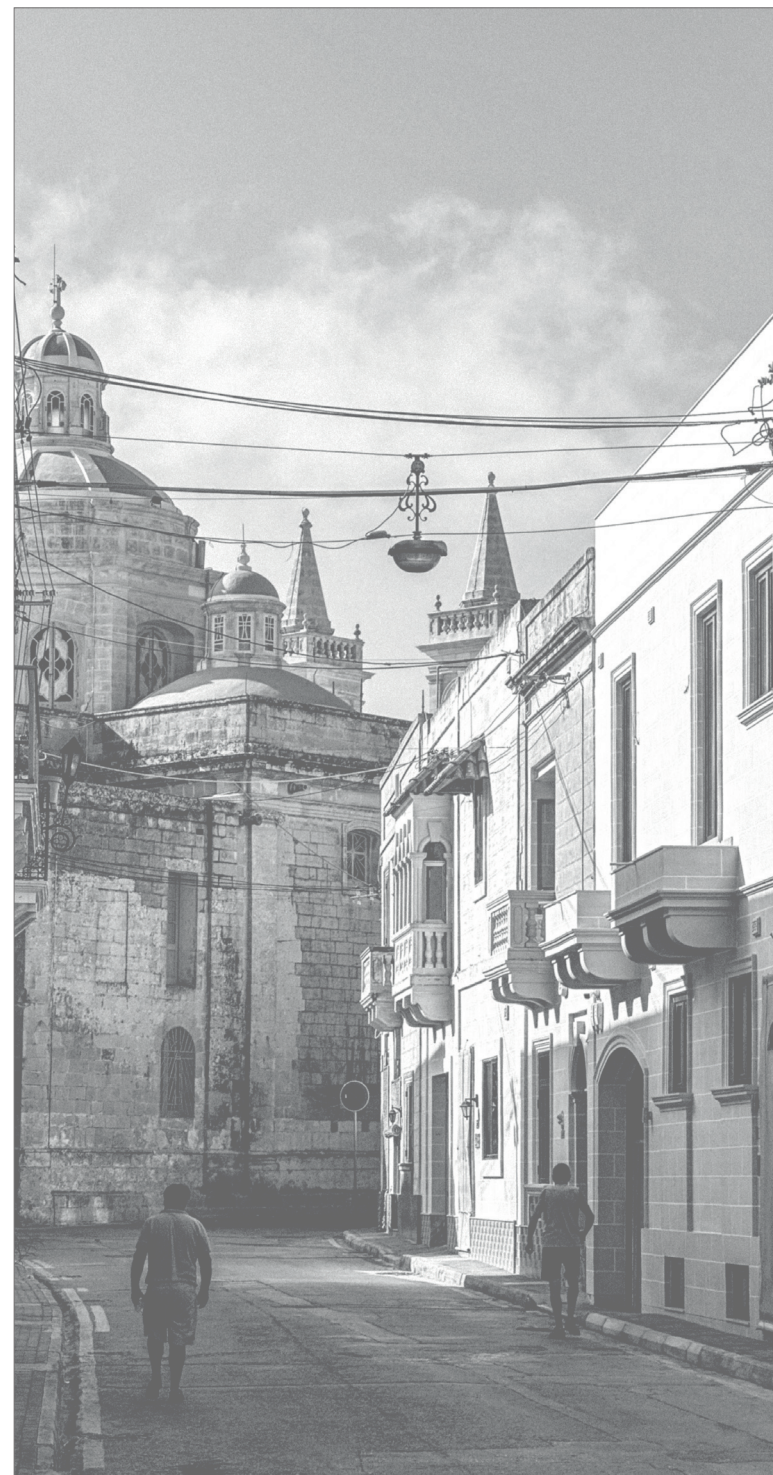**Left/ Right**
Village Core, Kirkop

40

"The best way to manage conflict is to remain very superficial"

Policy Author

1. Public Consultation Document for Malta's Economic Vision 2021-2031, p.18

2. A population increase from 417,000 in 2011 to 542,000 at the end of 2023. NSO Malta, 2023.

3. See p.45

4. Borg, 2023

Balancing Economies

In a Public Consultation Document for Malta's Economic Vision 2021-2031, the mission is to "ensure Malta's future success by emphasising community vitality, visualisation, and innovative solutions" achieved through "a strong infrastructure, technological prowess and robust government policies aimed at fostering creativity, courage and compassion"[1].

Having one of the highest population densities in the EU, deciding upon the most suitable way forward proves challenging, resulting in infrastructure pressures and land distribution issues. Given this density and size constraint, precise planning and clever design must prevail.

The local Government's agenda has been to drastically increase its population within the last decade, allowing for a demographic dividend reliance[2].

This has driven development projects throughout the island, affecting various sectors[3]. Following a survey by EY Malta in 2022, "an overwhelming majority of foreign businesses in Malta believe that the country's infrastructure is woefully unprepared for population growth"[4].

"In Malta, the laws of Supply and Demand do not apply", stated the President of the Republic of Malta, arguing how people buy property as an asset holding tool, as a function other than keeping money in the bank, or rather than investing in something else. Moreover, speculators respond to this by building more, hoping for a perpetual system.

5. MDA, 2023

6. Mr. Stivala during the MDA Annual General Meeting 2023; Vital Issues in the Construction Industry

The infill block turned apartment became the "most cost-effective, easy money project anyone can do" **(Policy Author)**. However, the sub-par living conditions presented, especially to third-party nationals within the apartment block, cause concern. The tenant opts for a co-sharing apartment block with no alternative, paying from €200-400 per space.

The Malta Development Association (MDA), self-proclaimed as having "the highest body and voice of the Real Estate and Construction Industry in Malta", calls for a need to streamline processes within the industry, which is hindered by a bureaucratic maze[5]. In giving its Annual General Meeting for 2023, the MDA president argued how the industry currently must navigate through consultations with over 21 institutions without deriving any noticeable improvement in quality or additional benefits", echoing the struggles in contradiction and essentially compromise felt by policy writers. Former MDA President Mr. Michael Stivala stated that, "The MDA represents a workforce of over 30,000 individuals in direct employment". Stivala expressed how a "slowdown or halt in our sector would profoundly impact the nation's economy"[6].

3. Leading economic sectors in Malta include the service, tourist, and real estate industries (NSO Malta, 2023), all of which require extensive land to operate on. Market competitiveness is a crucial driver for generating wealth, ideally underpinned "by adequate physical infrastructure, leading to a better quality of life by citizens" (Malta Economic Vision, p.18).

A heavy reliance on a foreign workforce persists in supplying these service-based industries, particularly attracting *third-party migrants[7]*, who made up just over 80% of Malta's total net migrants in 2022. This creates a high demand for cheap accommodation, which aligns precisely with the developer's post-policy agenda, a precise economic curation. Twenty-eight thousand non-EU nationals were granted a work permit in 2022, granted only upon successful housing registration. For the first time that same year, apartments and penthouses dominated the housing stock, with just under 50% for new builds, housing 50,000 non-Maltese residents, driving profits for developers and homeowners alike (NSO Malta, 2023). "Malta's economic history shows that if the construction industry is doing well, there are multiplier effects, and everyone gets a piece of the pie" **(Urban Planner)**.

7. The Finance Minister pointed out that "to maintain an average economic growth rate of 4.2%, the population would have to increase to 800,000 by 2040 unless a new economic model was developed" (Balzan cited Minister Caruana, 2023 https://newsbook.com.mt/en/no-to-foreign-workers-who-are-not-needed-abela-warns/).

Towards the end of 2023, the populist opinion started to sway the government agenda in "ensuring that only quality workers come to Malta"… "workers who serve the Maltese first and foremost" (ibid.). The Prime Minister, calling for safeguarding the dignity of foreign workers, will permit workers "when and where they are needed". Such discussion may profoundly impact the population, now sustained by the continuous construction of ample housing stock. "Construction is arguably the most essential pillar of our financial system, and as our most recent global crisis also demonstrated, it is a potential source of its collapse (de Graaf, 2023).

"on an island with excess sun,
we have properties that see no sun"

Minister

SEE PERSONAL NOTE 2

Planning Authority

1. MEPA, 2016

"I would much rather see the (rental) market regulate itself."

This statement by a former Prime Minister set the tone for a somewhat anti-development planning government in the years following the publication of DC 15 up to the present situation.

2. See p.52

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) is an independent body from the Government, with the sole purpose of safeguarding the environment and regulating development. MEPA "draws up plans and provides a licensing regime"[1] through directives, decision making and regulations. However, this mandate has changed since its dissolution in 2016 to create two current regulating and monitoring authorities, the Planning Authority (PA) and the Environmental Protection Authority (ERA)[2].

3. Namely previously stated policy P36 in allowing for an interpretation of building height limits through Annex 2

The Malta Independent published an article in February 2023 headlining how "PA does not do planning, just application processing", referencing a strong statement by the executive President of the Non- non-governmental organisation Din L-Art Helwa (loosely translated to this beautiful land). This statement sheds light on the fact that development applications are filed based on the interpretation of policies (DC 15) by both developers who file their applications and the respective figures who process the applications within the PA. Permits are therefore issued based on such policy[3]. and local plan interpretation, but "that is not spatial planning" (**Educator, Architect**).

4. Jones, 2009

5. Jones, 2009, p.2520 cited K. Frampton, 1990, p.9 & 17

6. Jones, 2009, p.2520

7. *Ibid.*

8. Aureli, 2011, p.1

In 'Putting Architecture in its social place' (2009), author and sociologist Paul Jones highlights the importance of regulation agencies worldwide in taking "seriously the highly aestheticised soft elements of architecture, including those of discourse"... "and hard political and economic relations, the contribution of which characterises the parameters of the architectural field and structures its hierarchy"[4]. This regulation, he argues, highly influences the role of the architect, who is either romanticised as an artist or operates through a social/ cultural dissidence. Through this, Jones highlights the serious repercussions felt throughout the architect profession and the built environment in Malta. The interpretation of policy and leniency by authority figures shapes the actions of a society, now enticed and encouraged to develop. Essentially, Local Plans establish what may be considered for development, yet the Planning Authority approves or dismisses applications. Issues arise in the ease of transition from policy/plan to authority, whereby if it is stated in the policy as such, it is given for a development to be issued a permit.

Once a development attains the status of a permit, it holds monetary value; the holder now acquires a right to development, which, if denied, is entitled to monetary compensation, with the possibility to take any agency denying this right to court. In this sense, the architecture and architect succumb to the forces that condition their projects, becoming the most diminutive autonomous form of cultural production[5]. Due to such social forces, "it becomes crucial in concerning the nature of regulation and social function of architects and architecture"[6], a profession "subjected to its own technical methods and productive forces lying outside itself"[7].

Therefore, cultural production is stimulated by a society that, due to the unseemly issuance of permits by a development regulation agency, is conditioned to have a false belief of an inherent "right to build" (**Architect**). Aureli (2011) further notes how this increasing popularity in architecture is coupled with an inverse awareness of architecture: "political powerlessness and cultural disillusionment many architects feel about their effective contribution to the built world"[8].
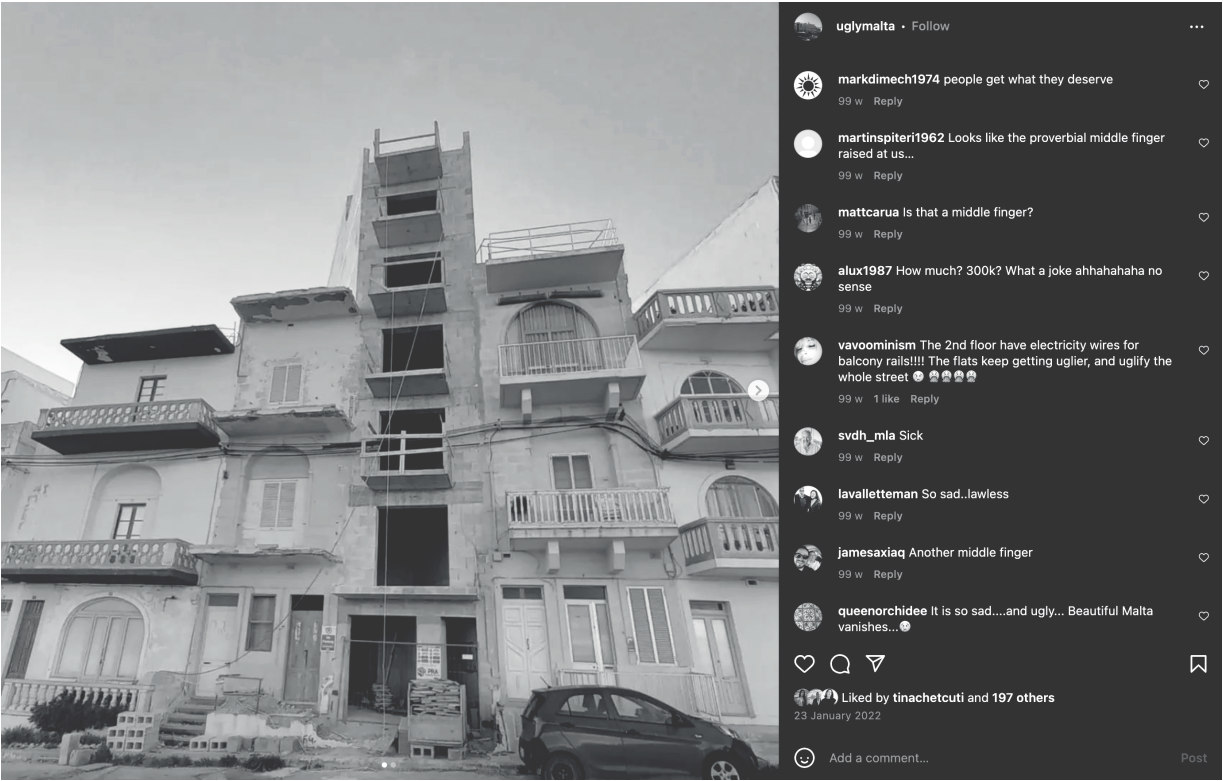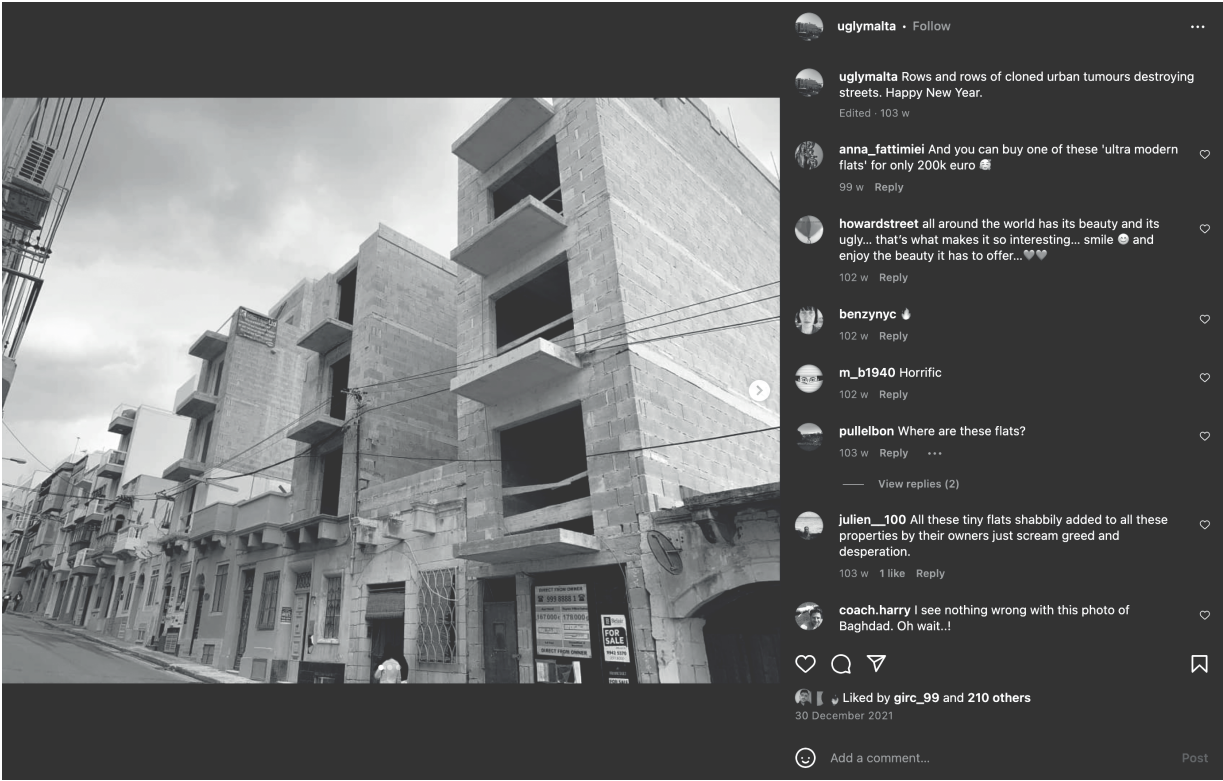
In its mission statement, the Planning Authority states how it "endeavours to provide a better quality of life for the community"...
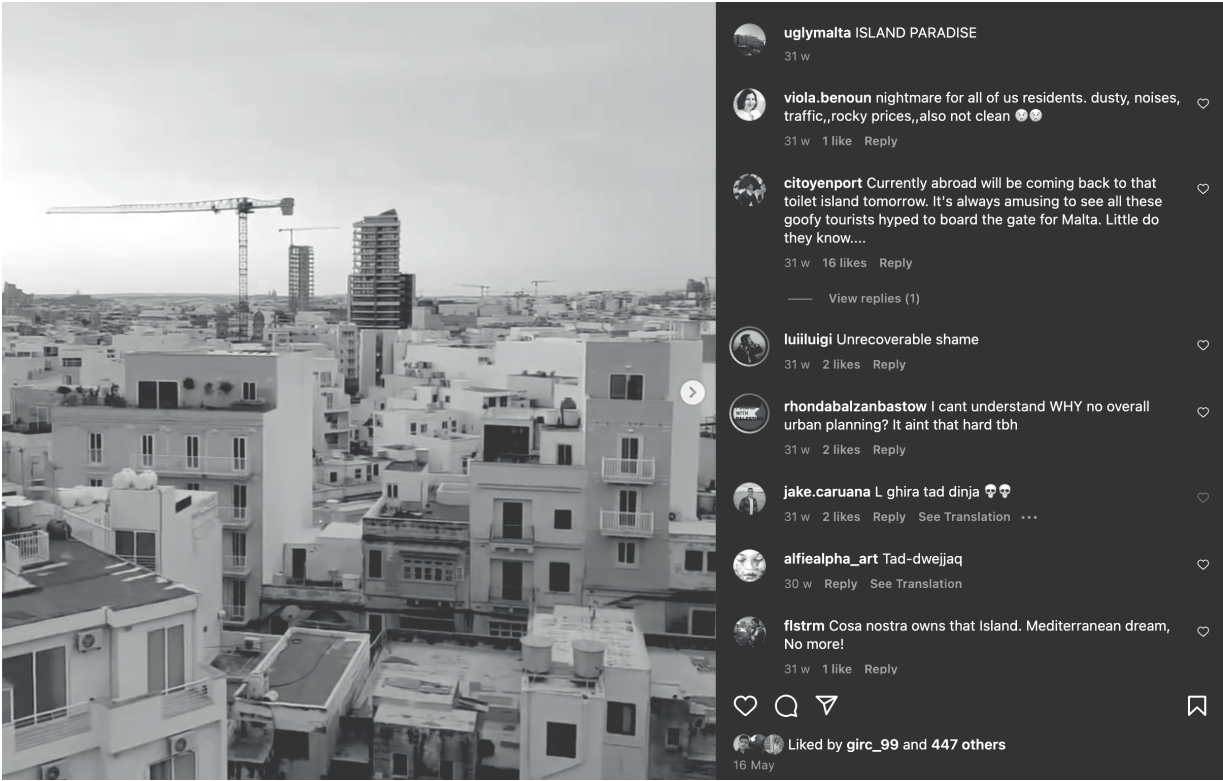
9. PA Mission
& Vision,
*https://www.
pa.org.mt/en/
mission-and-
vision*

"acting on behalf of the community, to provide a balanced, sustainable environment"[9].

"But will the people's right to build be taken away?!"
(**Residents/ Owners**)

2. Initially, MEPA had a "monopoly over the supply of a resource that cannot be easily substituted, developable land" (Caruana-Galizia, 2017, p.23). Today, the ERA and PA hold similar authority, working simultaneously on separate issues, keeping each authority under constant watch of the other. All development applications are processed under the remit of the PA, made up of a Planning Board and several Commissions and Committees, issuing permits, recommending design decisions, and providing advice on issues of sustainable development. The ERA similarly monitors activity in impacts relating to the environment and environmental integration considerations within development processes. An Executive Council solely takes Development planning decisions, which explicitly decides on land use policy, zoning, and development permits. Having seven seats, this Council allows for two of these seven seats to be claimed by the ERA authority (Caruana-Galizia, 2017, p.5). The remainder comprises government appointees. Given a brief overview of Planning and Regulation bodies, a better relationship may now be established in acknowledging current pertaining issues the authorities and, subsequently, the built environment face.

Left/ Right
(Screenshots)
Ugly Malta Instagram account;
Pencil Developments & respective photos comment section.

uglymalta ISLAND PARADISE
31 w

viola.benoun nightmare for all of us residents. dusty, noises, traffic,,rocky prices,,also not clean 🤭🤭
31 w   1 like   Reply

citoyenport Currently abroad will be coming back to that toilet island tomorrow. It's always amusing to see all these goofy tourists hyped to board the gate for Malta. Little do they know....
31 w   16 likes   Reply

　　　　View replies (1)

luiiluigi Unrecoverable shame
31 w   2 likes   Reply

rhondabalzanbastow I cant understand WHY no overall urban planning? It aint that hard tbh
31 w   2 likes   Reply

jake.caruana L ghira tad dinja 💀💀
31 w   2 likes   Reply   See Translation   ···

alfiealpha_art Tad-dwejjaq
30 w   Reply   See Translation

flstrm Cosa nostra owns that Island. Mediterranean dream, No more!
31 w   1 like   Reply

Liked by **girc_99** and **447 others**
16 May

uglymalta • Follow

uglymalta To a 2021 of receiving fewer images of architectural diarrhoea like this one. Unlikely, but we can always hope.
155 w

ninagerada one of these tower houses once belonged to my great grandparents. the house had a high level garden and at the back of the garden a room that had a spiral staircase that led to a boathouse on sea level. it was beautiful, fun, dreamy... such a great design .. they f**ed it, it would have been better to demolish the lot and start again building something of some kind of merit.. so so tragic.
69 w   Reply

amysarahlottering @antgil22 and again
144 w   Reply

suzanne_sharp This is so tragic on every level. 🌑
147 w   Reply

snapshot_gozo Lol ✏️
148 w   Reply

maltesque It hurts my eyes just to see it on a photo.
155 w   Reply

toilofexistence lol ahahah
155 w   Reply

dannymuscat Fuck the PA
155 w   Reply   ···

Liked by **nigel.cini** and **168 others**
29 December 2020

Add a comment...   Post

Left/ Right
(Screenshots)
Ugly Malta Instagram
account;
Pencil Developments
& respective photos
comment section.

Left/ Right
(Screenshots)
Ugly Malta Instagram
account;
Pencil Developments
& respective photos
comment section.

Case Studies

1. MDA on Santa Lucija Board hearing, as cited by Debono, 2023, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/

The Malta Development Association calls for "consistency across the board"[1] when discussing an owner's right to develop land. Acknowledging that investments in land and developments are arguably the most significant investments in the average person's lifetime, the MDA calls for respecting an individual's choice for purchasing land under the doctrine of a "legitimate expectation for development"[2]

2. *Ibid.*

The arguments raised are illustrated through two key case study development projects in Malta in 2023 being;

1. A Case for Santa Lucija
2. The Context for a Family Home-Turned Apartment

A Case for Santa Lucija

Santa Lucija is a small village in the Southern region of Malta, comprising a total footprint of 0.7 km2, enclosed within its green perimeter. Due to its irregular green perimeter, "it has earned the name Garden City," termed by the Local Government Division (http://santalucija.gov.mt/location/), however, it is nothing Ebenezer Howard would be proud of.

The locality was developed during the 1960s and is bound by two arterial roads connecting it to larger industrial areas servicing the southern ports of Malta and agricultural fields along its other two sides. A glance at local plans shows a stricter grid planning system comprising wider streets and dividing housing typologies into two. Housing here is predominantly governmental social housing blocks of 3-5 storeys, with lower-lying 2-storey terraced houses and villas making up the remainder of this residential village. Garage entryways dominate streets, yet front gardens and green allotments define the particular greener context Santa Lucija has to offer.

This idea of an apparent vested right was challenged in a recent court case pertaining to the area, gaining media attention due to its implications for future developments. The case pertained to a 5-storey pencil development in an uncommitted street of a row of townhouses, having a unified streetscape. The Local Plan marks the area scheduled for redeveloped as limited to a maximum of "three floors plus basement", converted to a maximum height of 16.3m (today 5-6 storeys) through DC 15. The PA initially turned down the application; however, the Environment and Planning Review Tribunal (EPRT), on behalf of an infringement of the applicants' rights, filed for an appeal.

The focus of the EPRT is to "review 'the decisions of the Planning Authority and the decisions of the Environment and Resources Authority"... "reviewing planning and environmental decisions in terms of law and fact within the parameters set out in the EPRT Act", (EPRT, 2023 https://www.eprt.org.mt/about-eprt/) protected by Law in

Malta. The strong authority of the EPRT expressed in court how an "applicant should not be denied of the rights given to him by the Local Plan" (EPRT on Santa Lucija Board hearing, as cited by Debono, 2023, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/). As stated in the introductory chapters of this text, the Local Plans became subject to interpretation by the numerical conversations provided by DC 15. Therefore, the architect's proposal comprised five floors, the topmost most recessed and reaching the maximum determined by such a conversation.

Architects expressed how, in drawing up such development plans and submitting applications, the architect "feels an obligation to get finalised approved permits for their clients" (Private Architect). This follows the stated obligation of an architect/ perit as expressed by the Kamra tal- Periti (KTP/ Maltese Chamber of Architects) as a "duty of care towards his client, but also society and the environment in general" (KTP Roles & Responsibilities of the Architect, https://kamratalperiti.org/profession/roles-responsibilities).

This statement embodies the contradictory roots surfaced by this specific court case. The Tribunal further argued that "if the intentions were to limit development in the area to two floors, the Local Plan would have explicitly limited development to two floors". Through this, the Tribunal expresses priority of policies relating to height above all other policies. This vested right, the sole driver for challenging the refused application, is enforced by lawyers. The discussion here shifts from one of spatial planning and urban/ architectural qualities to a more legal debate. Educators teaching within the Faculty for the Built Environment in Malta further note that a few architecture graduates are now deciding to take up law due to its increasing intertwined importance. "The discussion becomes about the comma and the wording" (**Professor**) of the policy, written in a way that allows for creative interpretation. The final verdict argued in favour of the dismissal by the PA, condemning the EPRT for not acknowledging other policies of the same importance accounting for context and visual impact of the harmonious streetscape. The EPRT also failed to acknowledge the guidance from the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and allowed for a "greedy rape" (**Architect**) of a perfect environment.

Raising similar issues with private local architects, a general understanding prevailed in acknowledging that;

"it is their (the owner's) land, and they do what they want with it. You must be stupid not to grasp an opportunity to redevelop" (**Private Architects**).

A Family Home turned Apartment

This previous statement can be used as a general perception of architects' presumed rational thinking, although it pertains to a different specific development. In this case, the pencil development in question relates to the erection of an apartment, initially catering for a low-rise family house. The spatial circumstance dictated that, due to overlooking neighbouring third-party apartment developments, the towering blank party walls framing a view of the family's proposed back garden was a strong enough image to acknowledge the redevelopment potential of the plot of land into apartments. This enforced the idea that once a street becomes committed to such apartment typologies, each proposed development maintains a similar understanding and, in doing so, increases the area of influence for the further spreading of this apartment typology. Besides, who enjoys swimming in a swimming pool which is shaded for

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An interview conducted by The Malta Independent early in 2023 shed insight on how the Prime Minister "declared that government could not amend local plans if this meant some people would lose their perceived right to build and would sue for compensation". The consensus here is an acknowledgement

that despite Local Plans instating rights to owners, they are outdated and, as with standard urban practice, should be amended to reflect the present situation, drastically different from the time of their conception in 2016.

A summary of the situation expresses how, with one mistake being made, this mistake (rooted in policy or 'the first' pencil development) was used to justify other applications and developments equally mistakenly.

Jones directly addresses such a social situation, stating that the dominance of political and economic actors condition the architects' (and similarly urban planners) practice "and how architects rationalise this reliance" (2009, p.2521) is condemnable. "Architects (locally) are now more concerned with playing around with the law instead of something that simply looks good" (**Urban Planner**). This act of "playing around" or eschewing is precisely the opportunity Bourdieu presents to the architect. Bourdieu (1988) calls for an "eschewing or inverting of the rules and regularities that constitute the economic field" (p.4) in giving the architect agency for allowing his work to amplify good design at the expense of the political-economic ambition.

"I don't agree with everything that's in the local plans but the fact is that these plans gave rights to property owners. The government can't simply change the local plans and take their rights away from them; **things don't work like that."**

Minister

Upper Left
Developed back-garden
(left) overshadowing
retained back-garden with
orange trees (right)

Bottom Left
Contrasting architectural
treatment of dwelling
entrances;
townhouse (left)
pencil development (right)

"If I don't do it, someone else will"

1. Mayo, 1996, p.18

The statement "If I don't do it, someone else will" (voiced by several **practising architects**) serves as a driving hypothesis to test the relevance of this apparent shrugging off by professionals working under 'this capitalist regime'.

2. ibid. p.78

The un/conscious controlling and limiting of architecture relies on functions shaped by political constraint. In his elaboration of "The Manifestation of Politics in Architectural Practice, Mayo (1996) describes how these functions are "directives, based on values that oblige an architect to recognise in design"[1].

3. ibid. p.20

Expressing how architects practice under a "multitude of process contingencies"[2], their frameworks, role choices, institutions and work cycles help define what they produce[3].

4. ibid. p.24

Given these political constraints, the resulting design decisions and programmes that buildings incorporate serve the issues of a current cultural economy"[4]. He further suggests that a building programme has the potential to shape a political condition, "either for change or reproduction", through the overruling of planning commissions over the intent of a client/ developer[5].

5. ibid.

6. Mayo, 2013, p. 24

Additionally, Mayo (2013) summarises the complexities of these relations by stating that "architects practice within capitalist systems, and their design decisions tend to produce the system"[6].

Within the Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of Malta, the programme allows post-graduate students to specify in obtaining either a Master of Structural Engineering (MEng) or a Master of Architecture (MArch), with the latter allowing

7. Ibid.

8. See p.74- Technical Vs. Design Reasoning.

9. ibid.

10. Mayo, 1996, p.89

11. Aureli, 2015

12. Mayo, 2013, p.19

for specialisation in Urban Design, Conservation and Design. This split will eventually allow for a total dependence of a project to rely on two warranted individual signatures, driving a marriage of the design elements of a project to complement the structural integrity necessary. However, when reaching out to colleagues and professionals in the field, the predominant mentality favoured a more structural route in that it was more practical and applicable for post-university endeavours. This reflects Mayo's understanding that "under a capitalist economy, the structure incentives exist for people to prepare technical solutions, eliminating profit dysfunction and avoid risk"[7].

Technical reasoning[8], therefore, allows for a marriage between the required physical properties of form and human intent. However, technical reasoning prevails over a dependent design language. This justifies architectural decisions and "buries practical, symbolic and political questions which reproduce the status quo, rather than challenge it"[9]. The primary justification for allowing technical reasoning to prevail over design reasoning is that inherently, design reasoning relies on technical solutions for its conception.

Be it that the Maltese apartment block serves solely economic means, technical reasoning becomes essential in designing cost-effective solutions which allow for the cheapest form to be conceived. These demands, put forward by clients and developers, can either be blindly accepted by architects or challenged. Through accepting such demands, the architects inevitably face conflict. Mayo (1996) describes how this "modestly political act"[10] of acceptance places the architect in a position to justify their work to a confronting public policy. Therefore, architects' pragmatic procedures today have been conformed by past projects, while future projects shape future conditions for the architect. Therefore, each development has a political impact by embodying unpreventable conflicts[11].

Contradictingly, local practising architects express how "the private architect has no political agenda" (**Ex Minister, Private Practicing Architects**) and takes on projects for economic necessity. However, this economic necessity makes it "fully political"[12]. Architects find themselves operating within a perpetual system as, should they reject projects for ethical, contradictory reasons, "someone else will do it" (**Private et al.**),

13. Mayo,
2013, p.67

14. Stevens,
1998, p.88

15. Jones,
2009, p.2523

a somewhat tragedy of the commons, fuelling a resource-intensive, economically driven industry with helpless warranted professionals. "Architects become pragmatic and compliant for the sake of expediency or economic survival"[13], reducing design reasoning in succumbing to technical reasoning. In turn, architects are encouraged to value success by achieving economic status, further forcing the architect to become apolitical. Here, the architects become naïve builders by neglecting the contradictions they carry through the acceptance of work and the separation of design and technical reasoning. Paul Jones' summarising clarity on the sub-divisions presented within the status of the profession is worth referencing at length;

"Those architects able to aestheticise their practice simultaneously distinguish themselves from those subordinate parts of the field characterised by competition primarily over material capital (Stevens, 1998, p. 88). While all those architects recognised as such within the field accrue capital— within and without—thanks to this status, the capacity of those in the subordinate part of the field to aestheticise their practice is much diminished relative to those in the dominant part"[15]

Locally, the **architect** justifies their work by saying, "if the design is wrong, then the Planning Authority will reject it".

8. Within the Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of Malta, the programme allows post-graduate students to specify in obtaining either a Master of Structural Engineering (MEng) or a Master of Architecture (MArch), with the latter allowing for specialization in Urban Design, Conservation and Design. This split will eventually allow for a total dependence of a project to rely on two warranted individual signatures, driving a marriage of the design elements of a project to complement the structural integrity necessary. However, when reaching out to colleagues and professionals in the field, the predominant mentality favoured a more structural route in that it was more practical and applicable for post-university endeavours. This reflects Mayo's understanding that "under a capitalist economy, the structure incentives exist for people to prepare technical solutions, eliminating profit dysfunction and avoid risk" (ibid).

Technical reasoning, therefore, allows for a marriage between the required physical properties of form and human intent. However, technical reasoning prevails over a dependent design language. This justifies architectural decisions and "buries practical, symbolic and political questions which reproduce the status quo, rather than challenge it" (Mayo). The primary justification for allowing technical reasoning to prevail over design reasoning is that inherently, design reasoning relies on technical solutions for its conception.

"Facadism is not good practice in conservation, but in a situation where we are losing everything, that is a way forward"

Cultural Heritage Officer

Left
Ornate masonry work &
details around townhouse
entrance

Right
'Retained' niche integrated
within facade of pencil
development

Left
Adjacent townhouse front
garden entraways

Right
Irregular floors around
adjacent apartment
developments

SEE PERSONAL NOTE 4

Way Forward

1. Aureli, 2011, p.6

2. *Mayo, 1985, p.22*

3. *ibid.*

4. *ibid.*

5. Ghirado, 1984, p.111

Aureli, in his conception of the 'polis' (or city) he defines architecture as an "ideology of consensus" … as a "social process of shaping attention to built form"[1]. Nevertheless, locally I question with whom this consensus is reached. There is a discrepancy in what government agenda seeks and what society protests, a difference presented and embodied through the architect, urban planner, and policy writer resonating throughout the text. Rather than a consensus, I would call this a fragmentation, from which a consensus of a select few takes precedence. Mayo best concludes by stating that;

> *"architects alone cannot eliminate the contradictions of capitalism through architecture, but how architects form their beliefs and put them into action is important. If history is the history of class struggle, architects cannot ignore how the rational acts help shape it"[2].*

The architect must seek to raise moral and political issues but requires methods to navigate systematic distortion in their actions[3]. Only here, Mayo argues how only through education can architects "begin to raise moral consciousness in their profession"[4].

Failure to find specific, concrete examples of how this may be achieved, Diane Ghirado argues how "architects can distance themselves from such hard economic processes by emphasising their status as artists engaged in the production of aesthetically and socially meaningful form"[5].

6. See p. 98; Protests as Instigators

In undergoing an MA in Architecture, this statement puts me at ease in seeking a marriage of artistic and architectural endeavours in having an architectural say in Malta.

It becomes apparent that architecture is only an imposing outcome of a series of hidden political layers influenced by intense lobbying pressures. To further explain, I recall the recent tragedy of a young adult who lost their life in the collapse during the construction of an ill-designed factory. The Government was made to overturn its previous decision by forcing a public inquiry into the case[6]. Here, national outrage and protests profoundly and immediately impacted government decisions.

Left/ Right
Pencil developments
along streetscapes
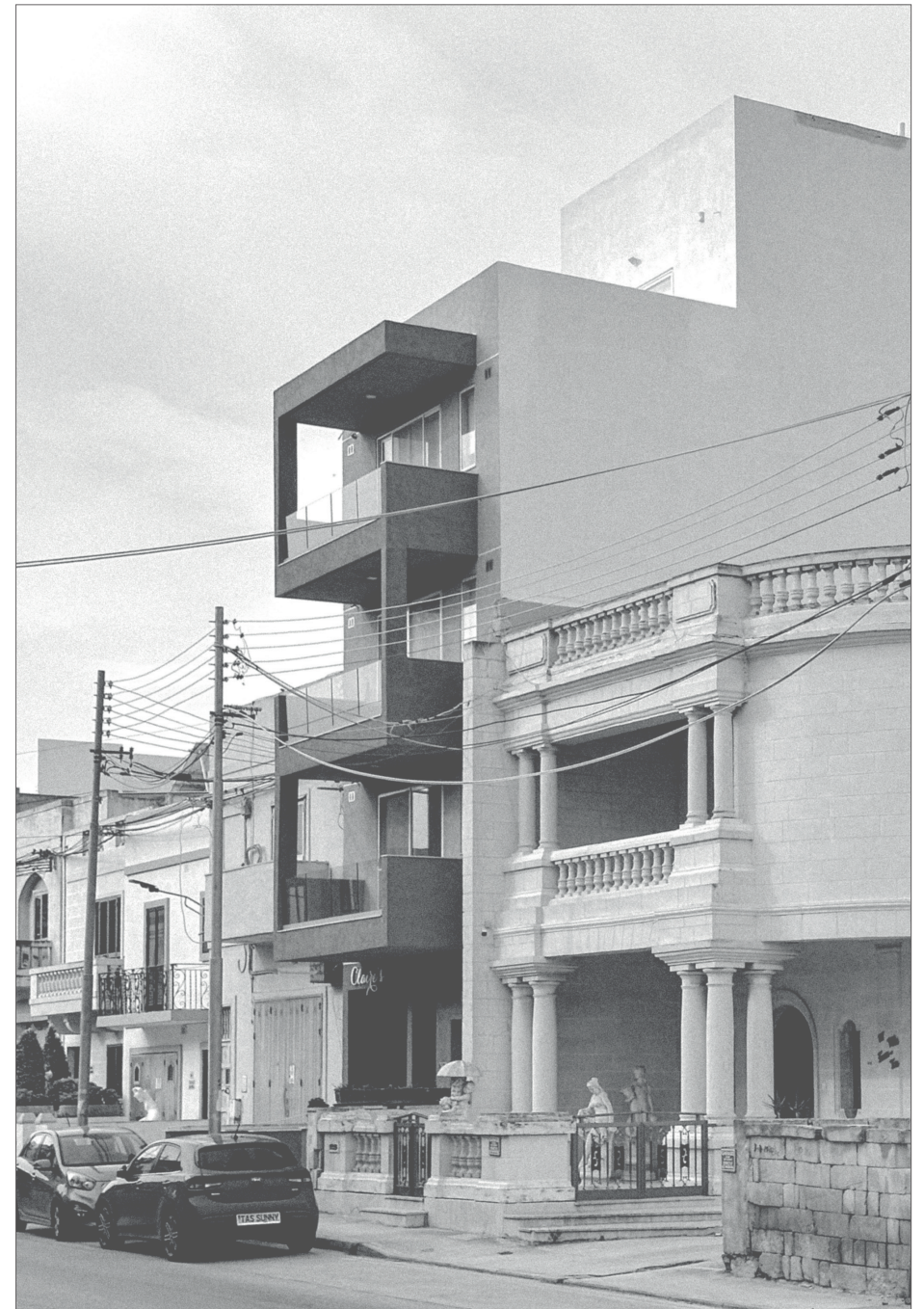
Conclusion

This body of research serves as a personal attempt to understand the complex political nature of the architecture profession in Malta. Through objectivity, I sought to unravel the ambitions of varying agencies and their interrelations. However, reaching out to such agencies gave a more practical outlook on how systems within the built environment work and how challenging it is to change such a system.

Structuring the presented text for the reader served as an exercise to help comprehend such new findings, coupled with personal thoughts and reflections. Writing down these reflections in tandem with carrying out interviews helped to analyse and highlight problems and opportunities for change, reflecting not only on what was expressed but also on my reactions and interpretations of what was said on a larger architectural scale.

It has become apparent that awareness must be instilled in society. Nevertheless, in seeking alternatives to the perfect fitting solution that is pencil development, I question with whom such awareness must be raised, if it is society at large or the architect practising within this stringent system.

In conclusion, I acknowledge two realities.

The first is that such frantic development will continue.

The second is acknowledging that should a society become empowered with visions of a better architecture, a vision they now embody, this collective overruling societal pressure can overthrow individual political lobbying. An outcome that any politician can now get behind and support for communal benefit.

What values can be extrapolated from the pencil development besides financial value? More importantly, how can social value catalyse the essentiality of financial value?

It becomes evident that the matter is not a question of stunting development but directing development to achieve a more positive architecture, maintaining its existing economic pillar and reinforcing social and environmental pillars.

Having conjured up a strong belief and ambition for better through an acquired skillset within an extensive period of academic architecture, solely as an observer, proves fruitful in potentiality. However, the need to engage locally within the 'real world' dynamics of the built environment scene has become evident. Sharpening present ideas through first-hand exposure, shaking hands, communicating change to people that matter, and overcoming adversity to achieve satisfactory architecture are clear, necessary next steps.

Left
Prominent Church node
protruding out of blank
third-party walls from pencil
development

Right
Contrasting Pencil
Development

Appendix

Pencil Development

is a term coined by the industry for referencing thin and tall apartment developments. These developments arise in the demolition of townhouses and the subsequent erection of the apartment on that same plot. Internally, pencil developments are achieved by producing the minimum enclosed space regarding building restrictions. Features include minimum ventilation flow, wet shaft sizes, internal and external area, staircase dimensions, and lift access. Such unfavourable characteristics condition inhabitants to low levels of natural sunlight and small outdoor balcony space. Issues such as drying of laundry and heavy reliance on mechanical ventilation prevail. These unavoidable conditions are due to developers' and contractors' ambitions for driving profits arising in cookie-cutter plans that use long, narrow corridors defining the apartment layout. An open-plan living room, a kitchen and a small outdoor space make up the front end of the plot, while bedrooms, bathrooms, and, on occasion, more luxurious ensuites and walk-in wardrobes make up the back end.

These unavoidable living conditions are presented solely due to ambitions as to why these developments are built to serve the minimum and physical plot restraints. The townhouse's long and narrow plot allows for a generous front and back garden. However, when tasked with occupying absolute necessities for an apartment, the result is an exhausted minimum number of services. Garage entryways and column-free basement parking dictate the building's skeleton structure and front entrances. Tight staircases are adjacent to central elevators and shafts, while partition walls divide space for maximum private dwellings.

In Malta, pencil developments target and exploit modernist townhouses built throughout the 1970-1980 era. The public, and by extension regulatory agencies, do not appreciate and acknowledge the architecture in this period to the same degree as, say, prevailing 16th Century Baroque, adding depth to the capital, Valletta, , and nor should they. Rather than calling for preservation across the board, Dr Antoine Zammit suggests that "the value of a terraced house should shift away from redevelopment potential, and instead recognise its unique status as a residential typology within certain zones" (Zammit). Therefore, calling for a re-adaptation of the townhouse requires a more clever approach to meet existing demands within the context of the somewhat outdated townhouse. He further elaborates that "similar to the consideration given to scheduled buildings, context-based planning should consider the historical, architectural, and urban characteristics of the area."

Village Core

is conditioned by limitations in building technologies of the past. The first documented village cores date back to 1907, comprising 33 villages. In these first plans, the Public Works Office, then under British management, marked each locality with two distinct lines. A black, thin line outlined housing blocks and seeming building lines, giving form to streets, widening in front of a marked central church. A thicker red line marked the limits of the village. A decade later, similar denotations can be seen compared to the still-ruling 2006 Local Pans. The initial organic layout of a village, which grew externally over time, comprises a tightly knit core divided by short and narrow winding roads/ footpaths, having two- to three-storey masonry dwellings on either side. The village core is best identified visually through the prominent Church, acting as a landmark protruding from lower-rising dwellings. Churches also incorporate a large piazza overlooked by the Church's symmetrical façade. This piazza is the village's centre, allowing for communal gathering spaces. In urban planning, the old village core encapsulates fundamental features that the controlling urban profession seeks to dictate. Facades' strong, homogenous rhythm presents similar treatments to materials and apertures. Washed masonry, stepped terrazzo entrances, traditional enclosed wooden balconies, and religious symbols portray the best finishes and ornamentation homeowners could afford. Coupled with limited building advancements, the village core possesses a prominant characteristic of an older society, a characteristic threatened by modern-day developments and advancements. The walkable village core becomes a niche today, an area to be respected when

intervening on. The village core presents to people who meander through its walkable streets an image of what was, now flooded with images of modern-day streets. Every stroll poses a question as to why we cannot achieve this again today, as images attempt to capture the current nostalgic atmosphere. Yet, many a time, each image is disturbed with a contrasting newer build in the background.

Protests as Instigators

Through Valletta's open public spaces in front of governmental buildings, including the Parliament and the Law Courts, the capital city provides effective space for people to gather and voice their opinions. Almost always, these take the form of peaceful protests. When a society acknowledges social injustices and needs to voice mistrust and anger towards authority, public space becomes the vessel for achieving this. DeLuca (2002) refers to protests as being "public acts of the global citizenry that suggest new conditions for the possibility of participatory democracy in a corporate-controlled mass-mediated world" (p.126).

The recently constructed Parliament Building by Renzo Piano incorporates such public space by raising the Parliament on thin steel columns, allowing for Freedom Square in Valletta to extend under the building. In opting for a design that portrayed government transparency by allowing the public to edge up to the glass walls of the entrances under the building, the government quickly amended such design ambitions. Ironically, following the murder of a journalist and a subsequent attack on freedom of speech, the government gated off this underside of the parliament, further separating the mass of protesters from government officials through two- rows of fences, still present six years later.

Similarly, recent gatherings occurred before the Auberge de Castille in the summer of 2023. The public space of Castille Square, overlooked by the Office of the Prime Minister, served as a direct platform for the public to voice frustrations. The gathering pertained to the recent death of a young adult working unofficially on a collapsed construction site. Public outrage incurred following the Prime Minister's decision to conduct a Magisterial inquiry into the collapse of the illegal construction. The public called for a public inquiry, gathering

in a vigil in light of the injustice felt by the majority. With a petition gaining just under thirty-thousand signatures, The Prime Minister overturned his decision. Through this, Habermas indicates how "the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason" (1989, p. 24), assumes "open access, [in] the bracketing of social inequalities, rational discussion, focus on common issues, face-to-face conversation as the privileged medium, and the ability to achieve consensus" (DeLuca, 2002, p.128).

The above examples are used as to represent the authority a public can acquire on political agendas, besides shedding light on the importance of public space. DeLuca argues how these reservations "revolve around the power of terms to shape and confine thinking" (2002, p.129). It becomes apparent, therefore, that such acts of "participatory democracy" are distilled in a presented critical theory to society, conscious of it or not. Kernell's argument, published over two decades ago, expresses how "a media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities" (1995, p.1).

The tool for such acquisition, however, is a double-edged sword. As public-space allows for a unified, now-aware society to react, so does public space play a role in this awareness. The same spaces Freedom Square and Castille Square host for protest are also ones for televised political meetings and post-election mass celebrations.

Left/ Right
Festivity gatherings around
Church entrance/ piazza,
Gzira

Left/ Right
Gated off Parliament
Building, 'Freedom' Square,
Valletta

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