An aerial, black and white photograph of a coastal city built on a steep cliffside. The buildings are densely packed and appear to be made of light-colored stone or concrete. A large ship is visible in the water to the left. The overall scene is dramatic and urban.

# THE URBAN CHALLENGE

The *Kamra tal-Periti* is the only recognised professional body representing architects and civil engineers in Malta. It is established according to regulations made by the Minister responsible for Works in terms of the provisions of the Periti Act (Chapter 390 of the Laws of Malta). Its mission is to support members of the profession in achieving excellence in their practice of architecture and engineering in the interest of the community. It is also delegated with the duty of enquiring into any charge of professional misconduct or abuse made against any periti in connection with the exercise of their profession or with professional matters.

The administration of the *Kamra* is entrusted to its council which consists of periti elected from amongst its members. The council is supported by the Secretariat and several Standing Committees including those for the Built Environment, Professional Conduct, International Affairs, Education, Professional Practice, Events, Communications and Finance. A separate workgroup is looking into the setting up of a Centre for the Built Environment.

The *Kamra tal-Periti* is an active member of the Architects Council of Europe (ACE) and the Union of Mediterranean Architects (UMAR). It is affiliated with the International Union of Architects (UIA), the European Forum for Architectural Policies (EFAP) and the Commonwealth Architects Association (CAA). The *Kamra* currently has observer status with the European Council of Civil Engineers (ECCE).

The *Kamra* has representatives on several bodies in Malta including the Warranting Board tal-Periti, the Building Industry Consultative Committee (BICC), DOCCOMOMO (Malta), and the Users' Committee (MEPA).

The *Kamra* is the organiser of Architecture Nights, a series of public lectures by internationally acclaimed architects or architectural critics, and Time for Architecture, an annual architecture festival held in October to commemorate World Architecture Day.

The *Kamra* also publishes a journal on a quarterly basis called The Architect (tA) and communicates to its members through a monthly electronic newsletter.



**K A M R A T A L - P E R I T I**

*to support members of the profession in achieving excellence in the practice of architecture and civil engineering in the interest of the community*

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# THE URBAN CHALLENGE

OUR QUALITY OF LIFE  
AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

# PREFACE

In July 2004, together with the launch of the *Kamra tal-Periti*'s redesigned journal, *'the Architect'* (tA), the *Kamra tal-Periti* presented a discussion paper called **'A National Policy for Architecture in Malta – Is it worth it?'** The opening statement said;

*"Governance is a key tool: it allows the political aspects of effective cooperation between the actors of government, the professions and networks to be taken into account in new policies and legislative proposals. Culture is an intangible asset that has measurable impacts and therefore its inclusion in all policies is an unquestionable requirement."*

The intention was a clear one. The *Kamra* wanted to place high on the national agenda the debate on architecture and quality of life. For many weeks after the launch, the Built Environment in some form or other occupied much space in the local media, the hype probably generated in no small way by references made to statements attributed to J. Quentin Hughes in a special issue on Malta in the English journal *'The Architectural Review'* of July 1969 titled *'Malta; Past Present Future'*.

Hughes was then Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the University of Malta. Together with Peter Richardson, then also a lecturer at the Faculty, he concluded the *AR* special with an essay called *'Malta, Future'* and closed by making a statement that is, at the minimum, equally relevant now as it was then.

*"This survey is concerned with ways in which Malta can be preserved, because what it has now is its greatest value and quite unrepeatable. The unthinkable alternative is that Malta should choose to neglect her heritage and join the development rat-race. Yet she is already trying to do this. If Malta accepts laissez-faire development, the whole island will be obliterated by buildings. And this will take very little time. It will happen unless the planners, architects and the legislators take action very soon. Malta could lead Europe into a new era of environmental and cultural re-evaluation, or it could become, through a laissez-faire attitude, just another blighted area of exploitation."*

The reaction to these references was enough to encourage the *Kamra* to engage in a process that led it to present this document to promote its urgent call for a vision for a more sustainable development of the built and rural environment and to endorse the need for quality in design as an essential tool for the nation's economic and social development.

The *Kamra* did however consider that real commitment to this cause would have to start by the profession recognising its own faults that have also led to the current situation. But it cannot meet the challenge ahead on its own – Hughes and Richardson had already indicated that planners, architects and legislators needed to collaborate to achieve the desired results. Indeed today that list needs to be extended. The intention of this statement is to continue to stimulate the debate and to widen the discussion to include for other participants in the process.

The *Kamra* has been exposed for several years now to the workings of the Architects Council of Europe (ACE) and the European Forum for Architectural Policies (EFAP). Its active participation in the workings of these organisations has increased its awareness of the current landscape in which its members are called to provide a service and the processes it needs to participate in to achieve more sustainable quality in the built and natural environment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# SCOPE

In February 2001, the Council of the European Union had agreed on a Resolution on architectural quality in urban and rural environments that called on the European Commission to:

- a. ensure that architectural quality and the specific nature of architectural service are taken into consideration in all its policies, measures and programmes;
- b. seek, in consultation with the member states and in accordance with the rules governing the structural funds, ways and means of ensuring in the application of those funds a wider consideration of architectural quality and the conservation of cultural heritage;
- c. in the context of existing programmes:
  - foster measures to promote, disseminate and raise awareness of architectural and urban cultures with due respect for cultural diversity,
  - facilitate cooperation and networking between institutions devoted to upgrading cultural heritage and architecture, and support incipient European-scale events,
  - encourage, in particular, the training and mobility of students and professionals and thus promote the dissemination of good practice;
- d. keep the council informed of the implementation of such measures.

Although this resolution also has important economic and social dimensions, the initiative has been taken up principally by the Ministries for culture of the European states. In this regard, Catherine Tasca, then French Minister for Culture and Communication had said;

*"The time has come now after half a century of reconstruction and growth to truly take up the challenge of the quality of our built environment. The very concept of sustainable development must be placed squarely upon a forceful and repeated declaration and understanding that architecture, beyond the confines of markets, is an intellectual, artistic and cultural service. This is where our shared values lie. It is therefore necessary that the European Union also becomes active in the common endeavour. Europe must ensure that architecture and urban quality become and remain an integral part of its choices, procedures and operations, in view of the cultural and political importance they represent."*

The *Kamra tal-Periti* has for a long time been the only institution in Malta representing architects and civil engineers and their profession. It has, as part of its mission statement, the role of promoting values of economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability amongst its members and promoting beauty in architecture and the built environment. On 9th October 2007, the Council of the *Kamra tal-Periti* unanimously approved a Position Paper on the Built Environment, now aptly titled **The Urban Challenge: Our Quality of Life and the Built Environment**.

The document has already been circulated among the members of the *Kamra tal-Periti*. It is now time for it to be presented to other entities and the general public. It represents a synthesis of the *Kamra's* proposal for the way forward, to cause real, tangible and beneficial change. The *Kamra* has no interest in promoting **'The Urban Challenge'** as the final word on the subject. It does wish however that it become the catalyst for a common effort to meet the urban challenge to better our environment and the quality of life of all citizens.



David Felice

President of the *Kamra tal-Periti*  
on behalf of the Council

TO PRESENT THE VISION OF THE *KAMRA TAL-PERITI* FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUILT AND RURAL ENVIRONMENT

TO ENDORSE THE NEED FOR QUALITY IN DESIGN AS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR THE NATION'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

TO INTRODUCE THE DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY FOR ARCHITECTURE BEING PREPARED BY THE *KAMRA TAL-PERITI*

TO STIMULATE PUBLIC DEBATE ON WHAT CONSTITUTES AN APPROPRIATE APPROACH TO ACHIEVE QUALITY IN DESIGN FOR THE ISLANDS

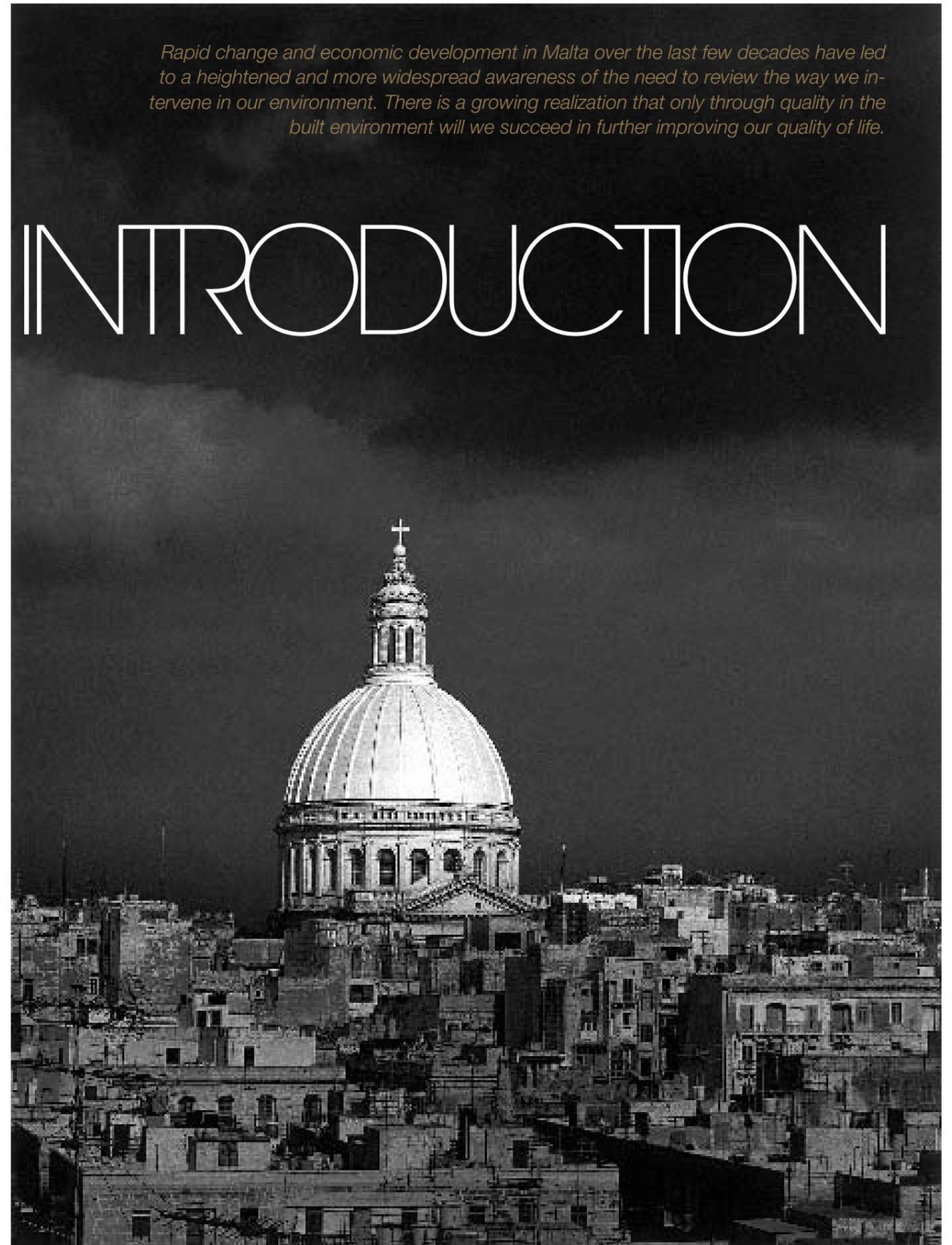
TO PROMOTE THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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“The café on the market place, the art museum, the football stadium or their own four walls – when asked about their favourite places, citizens in Europe give a wide range of different answers. They reflect people’s need for protection and security, for shared experience and interaction, for beauty and joy – in other words, their personal pursuit of happiness. People often only realise how important good architecture and urban planning are for their lives, and how their daily comfort is determined by spatial design, when their positive perceptions change. It is only when the environment becomes a burden that people pose questions about its genesis.”

Architecture and Quality of Life, Architects’ Council of Europe, 2004, p 6



Recent decades have seen a dramatic change in the Maltese environment. In the post-war period, the built-up area of the Maltese Islands has grown more than four-fold. The rapidity of the changes has been such that their impact has not yet been fully assimilated, culturally or socially. As a nation we are perhaps learning to better appreciate the environmental damage caused through a scarcity of quality development and well considered forward planning, although we remain reluctant to acknowledge the associated damaging economic impacts. There is no doubt that the pace of change will continue for the foreseeable future, as Malta's economy develops further.

Membership of the EU and the imminent adoption of the Euro are intended to make the islands more attractive for foreign investment, which should lead to further economic growth. How are we, as a nation to maximize on the opportunities these developments offer our citizens? Better education, more skills, greater investment in research and innovation and less bureaucracy are all factors requiring attention and action. Yet it cannot be denied that the quality of our environment has an economic role too. In our globalised world, our country's ability to attract investment while retaining those of our citizens whose abilities and ambitions may well take them elsewhere is also dependent on the state of our social, economic, but also environmental fabric. Our towns and our remaining tracts of rural environment are the resources available to us upon which we aspire to develop meaningful and healthy places to live, work, play and prosper.

In recognition of the need to make better use of these limited resources, the Development Planning Act of 1992 introduced measures to organize land use, and established regulations for anticipated future development, overseen by the Planning Authority. The Structure Plan formulated in a comprehensive manner a written strategy for development over the next decade or so. The Act also provided for a much welcome measure of transparency in the planning regime and introduced the concept of public participation in the process,

Through the Local Plans, our village cores were designated as Urban Conservation Areas, in recognition of the need to preserve the character of our towns and villages, and reconfirmed development boundaries, a measure intended to limit the rapid rate of urban sprawl which the island had till then been experiencing. The system is acknowledged to be far from perfect, yet we all appreciate that a strong planning regime (however criticized or despised) is essential for our islands' sustainable development.

The vast majority of Maltese live in urban areas and the quality of our built environment has a considerable impact on our quality of life. Regrettably, as we all too frequently experience, and despite the measures implemented, too little is built with any consideration for context and there is little investment in public open space. As a nation, we have yet to learn that the state of our public realm reflects the status of our society.

Pressures on our limited land resources and open space remain enormous. Due to our size limitations, it is difficult that this will change. It is understandable therefore that the state of our built (and unbuilt) environment has become a principal topic of public debate, concern and negotiation.

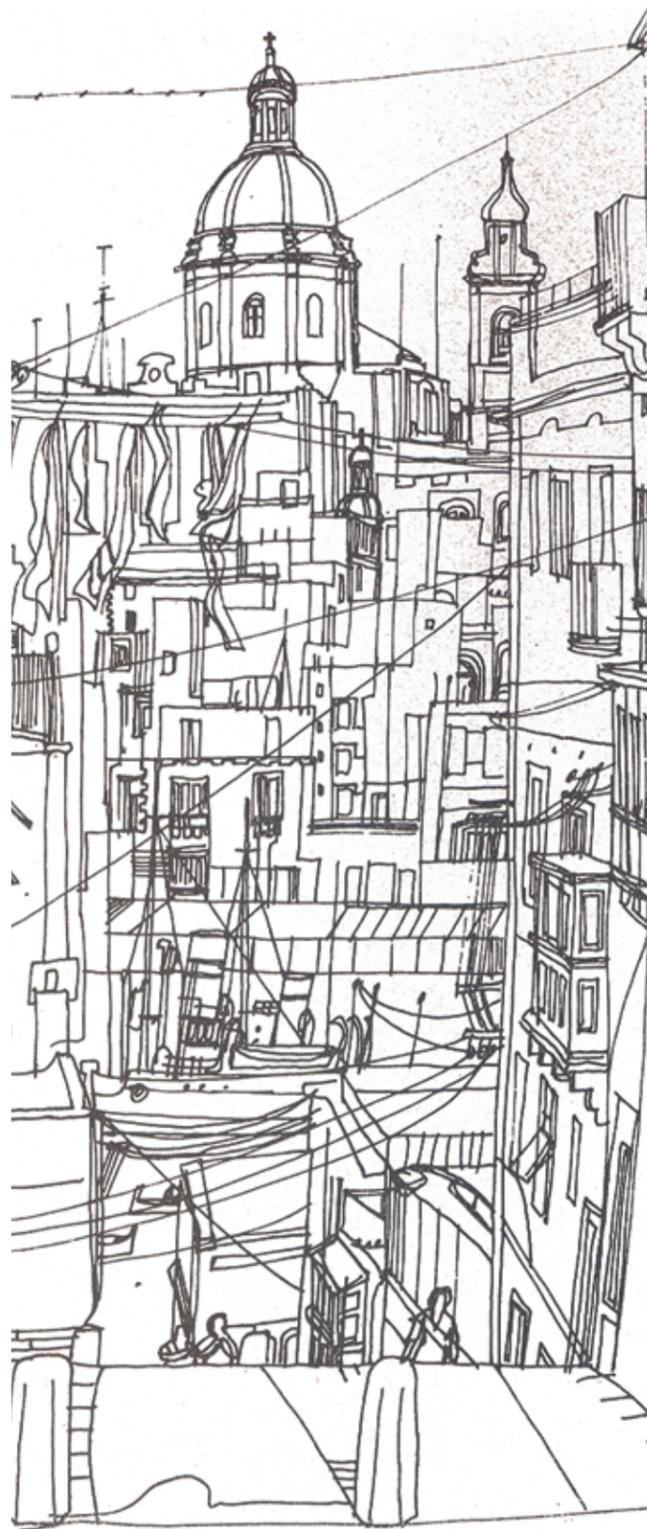
We are fortunate that there appears to be a growing awareness of the need for a better built – and unbuilt – environment. It is our understanding however, that this can only be satisfied by a commitment to quality by all the stakeholders involved in the procurement of the built environment including: politicians, public authorities, land/building owners, developers, investors, architects and other building consultants, building contractors and suppliers to the construction industry. The media, the environmental and heritage lobby groups but also the public at large, all have a significant role to play.

The different perspectives of all of these various sectors cannot be ignored. The differences could however, through proper debate, lead to a better understanding of the nation's real future requirements. As we intervene in our environment we need to pose ourselves the fundamental question: what do we want our environment to be like, for us and for our children? There will undoubtedly be different answers but there will also be common ground, upon which a clear direction towards a better built environment needs to be charted.

Quality is not an abstract notion. There is a growing understanding, in Europe as to what constitutes good quality design and a wealth of research and best practice guidelines aimed at delivering it. An understanding of what constitutes quality is key to a collective commitment towards it.

In his *De Architectura*, the Roman architectural historian Vitruvius defined architecture by the maxim Firmness, Commodity and Delight (*Firmitas, Utilitas, Venustas*). This definition forms a valuable basis for our understanding of quality architecture: Firmness – of sound construction, adequate for use; Commodity – responsiveness to society's needs; Delight – appealing, to the visual and other senses. These same qualities can also be used to define a quality built environment.





Malta is a test case of whether our generation, with its increasing leisure, mobility and taste for foreign travel is capable of dealing sensitively and intelligently with an environment it takes over as a playground, or whether it only knows how to exploit such an environment commercially until its charm and character have gone, and then move on to do the same elsewhere.

There is still time to save Malta, though only just; and the first step towards saving it must be to value what there is to be saved. If the various authorities on the island, the developers who hope to profit from its new role and the visitors who come to it from abroad, were fully aware what a unique and wonderful place it is, public opinion would begin to build up in favour of intelligent conservation and control against short-sighted exploitation; for a strong public opinion is the basis of all successful official action.

...the architecture of the Maltese islands has just time to recover from its rather unstable beginning, and to eradicate its initial mistakes, which have largely been due to inexperience. The search must continue for a valid architecture of today... which will meet without disaster the enormous, indeed explosive, building programme necessary for Malta's future economy.

J Quentin Hughes, Malta: Past, Present and Future, in the Architectural Review, July 1969, the Architectural Press

*The complex and sometimes conflicting demands placed on our land has dramatically altered our landscape. The substantial funds funneled into the construction industry over this short period have led to voluminous and ubiquitous development, regrettably generally of poor quality, a result of economic expedience, but also of a faltering aesthetic appreciation and insufficient social responsibility. Despite attempts over the years to introduce elements of control to limit the damage, we have not had considerable success. The urgency now is to find alternative solutions.*

# AN EVOLVING URBAN LANDSCAPE

The economic, social and cultural developments in the post-war period in Malta, as in much of Europe, have been substantial. Land use requirements, family structures and their housing expectations, and mobility have all witnessed significant rapid change responsible for delivering a radical and ongoing transformation of the urban and rural environment. Towns merged to form a single, largely suburban conurbation around the two main harbours. Large tracts of countryside were consumed by non-descript badly planned dormitory suburbs considerably reducing vital amenity spaces (essential for fresh air and recreation purposes), either within or adjacent to urban centres. The resulting shift in the environmental balance has affected air quality, water management, biotic support (the environment's ability to support other species) and the delicate symbiosis of the built and unbuilt landscapes.

The car became a defining tenet of urban space as ownership increased dramatically, a result of greater affluence, longer travel distances and the absence of adequate, reliable public transport. Historic village cores were taken apart in the post war decades to free up access through and to their centres. The design of new streets

and urban areas paid little attention to alternative modes of transport which were never considered, or to the convenience of pedestrians. Our by-passes disrupted the once smooth transition between village and countryside. The private car and its associated effects came to dominate the topography of the Maltese townscape.

As is characteristic of periods of rapid growth, particularly in the absence of an adequately managed planning system, much of the development of recent decades has been largely utilitarian, quality in design and construction subordinated to immediate exigencies and economic expedience in the absence of a real culture of the aesthetic, of a true appreciation of the worth of built and environmental heritage and of a recognition of the value of place to societal identity.

Throughout the process of economic and social transformation, investment in building retained a disproportionately large role in the economic growth of the country. Fuelled perhaps by a shortage of alternative investment opportunities and the security offered by rising land values, property speculation became a widespread phenomenon.

Simultaneously, however, social and cultural advances and an increasing awareness of our environmental degradation, coupled with the global warming scare have led to increasingly vocal calls for new responses to our urban challenges.

The challenges presented by these developments are by no means unique to Malta. Indeed the experiences of other countries provided several examples we have attempted to learn from. Yet a search for better quality for our environment demands responses specific to the local context.

Over the years, measures have been taken to tackle our particular malaises. In planning terms, the Temporary Provision Schemes of 1988 established draft boundaries in an attempt to restrict urban sprawl. The Development Planning Act of 1992 introduced the Structure Plan, and set the scene for the creation of a more professional Planning Authority, more adequately structured to protect our environment,.

Other initiatives followed, including a waste management strategy, the closure of our dumping sites, the introduction of the first parts of a set of Building Regulations, the creation of a National Commission for Sustainable Development (although their Strategy Document of 2006 has not yet been adopted), afforestation projects, heritage protection and the restoration and rehabilitation of monuments and sites, and the recent announcement of the Construction Site Management regulations.

Much has been done and continues to be done. The signs indicate, however, that all is not yet well, and Quentin Hughes' words (quoted here) ring as true today as they did in 1969. The push and pull of differing concerns debating and negotiating the future of our urban environment is natural and healthy; yet without harmonious commitment to value what is left of the rich built and natural heritage which we have inherited we risk being unable to afford our children an environment with which they can identify and which truly represents a just inheritance.

If we want the best for our successors, we cannot afford to be complacent. Neither can we afford quick-fix solutions or grand projects that have no relation to a wider overall context. We need to take a long hard objective look around us. What do we demand of our urban and rural areas? How do we see our islands in five, ten, or fifteen years' time? Why have the tools at our disposal and the opportunities offered us not been successful in creating a quality environment our people deserve? What is the process we need to design to lead us to achieve our goals? As a country we can no longer delay the pursuit of a visionary, well-researched, holistic strategy which respects our needs and those of our children for a healthy, well-designed and soundly-constructed urban and rural environment.





The construction activities of society are one of the reliable indicators of change. The built environment records the mood of society more than any other form of cultural expression. Society's economic and social efficiency is made legible through the way it treats its public spaces and through the nature and extent of its construction activities. A fully functional, quality and well-managed built environment has a motivating effect on society, it sustains its identity and propels it to excellence in all of its undertakings.

Architecture and Quality of Life, Architects' Council of Europe, 2004, p 13

*Our urban environment reflects our social and economic aspirations. Our economic development will increasingly depend on our environmental standards. Only by defining an appropriate vision for Malta where social, economic and environmental objectives work together harmoniously can we achieve lasting sustainable development. This will require us to be courageous and visionary working towards strategic long-term objectives and resisting the temptation to be derailed by short-term expediency or the concerns of specific interest groups.*

# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

## DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE

### **Economic Development and our Environment**

The choices a society makes in the fields of economic and social policy inevitably influence the way it deals with its urban environment. Conversely, the state of the environment will have a profound effect on the country's social and economic wellbeing.

It is not possible therefore to discuss directions for change in the built environment without setting these within the context of the social and economic choices that Malta makes as it seeks to define a role for itself in the global economy. This choice must be a conscious one, if we are to harmonise our efforts to develop Malta as a place for living and a destination for investment and for visiting. Is Malta likely to benefit most by becoming a little bit of everywhere for everyone or is there more scope in defining a distinct quality product with a specific offer?

Being on the periphery of the EU, Malta cannot rely on the benefits of a central location. It must recognize its own advantages, specific to its position and context and build on them in order to compete in a more targeted manner. Our specific advantages include the security, freedom and democracy we are accustomed to, our quality of life, our culture and language skills and those environmental assets we manage to conserve (not just our sun, the sea and the cleanliness of our waters, but also our heritage, the accessibility of the landscape, and our unpolluted night skies, etc). And though our size and our peripheral location may at first glance present insurmountable drawbacks, they might also prove to be the very assets we need to emphasize since they are the determining factors distinguishing us from other more central locations.

The investment we seek to attract or support must be compatible with these same qualities. Our commitment to our urban and rural environment is therefore an integral part of our social and economic development. We cannot allow environmental priorities to become emergencies. Courageous and uncompromising decisions are required to safeguard our environment. Half measures will simply not address some of our ills. Innovation and an unflagging commitment to quality by all stakeholders in the production and consumption of the built and rural environment are essential for the successful renewal of our urban habitats. We cannot allow land and development to be controlled by sectarian interests. Neither must we succumb solely to the seductive attractions of short term financial gains.

Our goals should be to invest in strategic tangible projects capable of providing enduring dividends in the medium to long term. Our development strategy will prove more successful were it to reflect the needs (aspirations) of all the community rather than those of specific interest groups. It is this approach that will prove most socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

### **The Role of Culture and Education**

Together with the environment, Education in Culture, and instilling a Culture of life long learning are perhaps the other key areas which deserve addressing. Investment in education is evidently key and recognized to be a pillar for our future development. Investment in

culture is however equally necessary for the social and cultural advancement of our own citizens, and for their ability to recognise and appreciate Malta's assets and qualities. Cultural education will equip us with the knowledge to value the conservation of our cultural heritage, built or unbuilt.

Yet our museums, libraries and theatres remain to this day insufficiently supported despite the setting up of Heritage Malta to manage them. Some of our most remarkable art heritage, for example, is inadequately housed and cannot even be displayed. Our Neolithic temples, perhaps the oldest freestanding man-made stone structures in the world – a few included in the UN's list of World Heritage Sites – remain poorly marketed, very crudely presented and badly protected, exposed to the threat of vandalism and erosion from the elements. Where investment has been made however, e.g. in the case of the Hypogeum, the results have proved to be very positive. The majority of our cultural institutions, those inherited from our forefathers, (for we have long neglected to invest in new museums and cultural/educational attractions) remain at most interesting for a short visit by only the most curious of our tourists. They remain largely unable to attract regular public patronage from our own citizens. Effectively our society is being deprived of a sound education into its own heritage.

The *Kamra tal-Periti (KTP)* is a body of design professionals focused on the built environment sector. It therefore has a particular insight into the topic and a duty and responsibility to contribute to the urban debate. The purpose of this paper is to identify priority areas which require attention in the quest for a better quality built and rural environment.

These priority areas are of a twofold nature: issues which deal with the complex processes of urban change such as transport, planning and heritage management and issues which deal with the 'production' process of the built environment such as the quality of its procurement and construction.

The approach takes a long term outlook towards the achievement of healthy places to live and work, an environment which is well constructed and looks, feels, sounds, and smells better, an environment which also stimulates the mind and the imagination.





*The quality of our urban open and built spaces is lacking since we often fail to appreciate the value of quality in design and planning. Our educational system ought to promote more emphatically independent thinking and innovation. Creativity must be encouraged at all ages and in all spheres, but most notably in design, architecture and urban planning. Development proposals should be assessed qualitatively (rather than solely against quantitative criteria) and appraised from the point of view of their contribution to society and the built environment. An independent Design Review Commission would be more appropriate to take on this task. It would also consult Government on all its urban development strategies and policies. Above all, quality in architecture deserves greater attention through the adoption of a National Policy on Architecture, through improving the level of education in the built environment, and in particular, through strengthening the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the University.*

# QUALITY IN DESIGN

## **Better Public Spaces, Parks and Gardens**

Much of our public space is the un-designed leftover between road engineering and the design of individual buildings. Despite the occasional isolated embellishment project by local or central government, the public realm is on the whole an ad hoc collection of minimum dimension, badly constructed pavements and a varied infrastructure of randomly placed, utilitarian street furniture. All too often, landscaping is neglected, an expensive accessory of secondary importance. Little or no planting is introduced to offer visual or other sensory interest or respite from the elements. Our once elegant, respectful piazzas are now no more than congested traffic junctions or informally arranged car parks, where pedestrians are at the mercy of vehicular traffic. Public art particularly that which provokes pedestrian interaction, is almost completely absent. Our public spaces are far from the Vitruvian maxim of commodity, firmness and delight and due consideration needs to be given to urban design and architecture if we want a public realm which is healthier, more attractive and more pleasant for all.

This same urban landscape forms, in the minds of most of our citizens, the basis of our mental 'urban landscape' and hence our culture of the aesthetic. The notion that design has value remains far from public perception and, so too, far from our building culture.

There is a need to move towards an understanding of the value of Today's Buildings as Tomorrow's Heritage not only in terms of cultural or architectural considerations but also in terms of the sheer resource cost involved in constructing poor quality buildings and urban habitats with a short life span.

A special mention must be made of the importance of the concept of beauty, which is not just a subjective appreciation of a facade or an object, but a central element of the feeling of well being that citizens can have of their living environment. In fact beauty is an element of quality that is as important as each of the others. It may be difficult to objectively describe what it is that renders an object beautiful, but it is easy to recognise when beauty is absent. The psychological benefits of being surrounded by beauty assist in the creation of a balanced and well functioning society and therefore efforts must be made to instill concepts of beauty into the projects that make up the occupied environment.

Architecture and Quality of Life, Architects' Council of Europe, 2004, p 27





### Design Education

Furthermore, our educational system requires a new focus generally towards encouraging more independent thinking. Our children deserve a sound education in design and innovation, starting at an early age, not simply to raise the cultural (and scientific) awareness of our citizens but also to engender a culture of creativity and independent thinking which stimulates pride in one's own work, and where quality has value.

Creativity is no less important in the teaching of architecture and urban planning. The structure and content of the course at University need to be rethought to accommodate today's realities. The spirit of innovation in the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering should be re-nurtured to bring out nothing less but the best from our students. For far too long has the Faculty suffered from apathy and stagnation. Investment in human resources and facilities has for several years been totally inadequate, while the rigidity of the university structures and mechanisms, and the political manoeuvring internal to the establishment do not permit the sort of independence and flexibility the faculty requires for it to flourish.

### Creativity and Planning

Creativity and innovation ought to play a more prominent role too in our national planning process. For several complex reasons, the planning process is too heavily dependent on a quantitative assessment of development applications with too little attention being given

to the qualitative aspects of the proposals and of their contribution to the built environment. Although a mediocre project which meets set parameters may be speedily approved, innovative solutions that cannot readily be categorized into the standards often encounter insurmountable hurdles, the result of a system which fears innovation, favouring instead the reproduction of basic stereotypes. Given the absence of an agency responsible for and equipped to assess the quality of design, an appropriate alternative mechanism is definitely required to ensure that the design of our towns and villages, roads and landscape no longer deteriorates, but improves.

### Design Review Commission

One feasible proposal is the introduction of a Design Review Commission, a public body formed by a panel of competent, learned professionals from diverse sectors of society. Also a research and educational body, its role would be to advise government, private developers and MEPA on design quality in architecture and the built en-



vironment, to disseminate best practice advice and to review design quality of the larger projects and of those of national importance. The assessment of development proposals needs to shift away from the mere compliance to a set of purely quantitative checklists – a practice largely responsible for driving the mediocrity in our built environment – towards a more qualitative analysis of development proposals. Architects, developers, MEPA and all other stakeholders need to place the public's well-being at a par with their particular interests. Development projects, large or small, building or landscape, need to be assessed on the basis of what they contribute to society.



### National Policy for Architecture

However, above all the adoption of a National Policy for Architecture will give clear prominence to Government's commitment to quality architectural design and to the value of quality architecture in the public perception.

The *Kamra* in conjunction with Heritage Malta has embarked on the process of coordinating the drafting process of a National Policy for Architecture.

This raises two not unreasonable questions: "What is a National Policy for Architecture?" and "Does Malta need one?"



The scope of this drafting exercise is first to understand the local conditions and milieu and to recognise boundaries within which the industry is encouraged to operate in the interest of society. As a result of this information and knowledge, the decision-makers shall seek to promote policy changes directed towards improving the quality of life in Malta, with particular attention to economic, social and environmental well-being.

The Council of Ministers of the European Union had approved Resolution No. 2001/C73/04 on Architectural Quality in Urban and Rural Environments on 12th February 2001. This stimulated the drafting and promulgation of a number of national policies in several European Countries. In 2004 the Architects' Council of Europe, to which the *Kamra tal-Periti* is affiliated, issued all-encompassing guidelines titled "Architecture and Quality of Life", encouraging the adoption of national policies.

The scope of the local National Policy for Architecture is to be:

- to foster consumers informed of their rights to enjoy a built environment which is socially, economically and environmentally sound;
- to work towards achieving a sustainable built environment for today's and tomorrow's beneficiaries;

- to become aware of and protect cultural aspects of the built environment; and
- to contribute towards achieving good governance in architectural matters.

Once adopted, the National Policy for Architecture will therefore be expected to include policy recommendations to stimulate and expect:

- quality in both the built and rural environment,
- quality in the provision of architectural services,
- quality in education at all levels,
- sound sustainable development strategy,
- consumer protection and informed purchasers of goods and services,
- innovative public finance strategies,
- aesthetic value in our choices,
- good governance,
- a society content with the quality of life afforded by its built and rural environment,
- a holistic approach in developing policies in favour of sustainability and economic growth, and
- a fair distribution of responsibility amongst all players and beneficiaries to provide a pleasant environment for our citizens.

*The revised building height designations produced development frenzy in our towns and villages leading to the destruction of the very same qualities that made them attractive. Redevelopment ought to be redirected primarily towards those projects which seek to improve the condition of run-down or disadvantaged neighbourhoods. We need to continually study our condition and consider/ reconsider strategic policy decisions. The Structure Plan Review presents an ideal opportunity for an updated strategy defining objectives for urban change, reconsidering the appropriateness of past decisions within the present day context. The means and structures at our disposal today to manage the change process are unlikely to be sufficient to address some of our ills. Public participation in the process should be better structured to promote and safeguard the common good.*

# CHANGE MANAGEMENT

## Refocusing Development

The recent introduction of the local plans, with their revised building height designations for many areas from two to three floors (plus penthouse) instantly raised the value of land in these same areas, stimulating a redevelopment and transformation of these centres (as opposed to promoting their restoration or refurbishment,) so rapid and radical that it exceeded all predictions.

The strong impetus for urban redevelopment has placed pressures on many of our villa areas (Swieqi, the Gardens, Madliena, Sta Marija Estate) and our urban cores (Sliema, St.Julian's, Mosta, Hamrun). There is overall, a strong drive favouring the replacement of larger properties with smaller units and standard apartments in preference to more traditional dwelling types. This is resulting in highly reduced differentiation in the market as well as increasing environmental pressures in the form of increased densities, more intense traffic and loss of private green spaces. We currently risk sacrificing to over-develop those very characteristics and qualities that attracted us (and foreign residents) to reside in our towns and villages in the first place: instant profit for the few at the expense of our citizens' quality of life.

More critically we are proceeding towards a fundamental shift in land ownership structures (from single to multiple plot ownership) which

will make any future attempts at the redevelopment or regeneration of these developments, many of which of poor quality, much harder. This issue represents a considerable challenge that can only be resolved through revisions in local legislation.

Focused redevelopment targeting specific areas may be positive if used as an opportunity to regenerate that quarter by providing a better quality environment. It is regrettable however, that most current building redevelopment is doing little more than generate more intense development, increased discomfort for the neighbourhood, with no significant benefits in terms of improved quality of construction, design or quality of the public realm.

Seeking more dense development in some areas (an objective of the Local Plan policy with respect to building heights) may have been desirable had it been accompanied by reduced demand for the uptake of undeveloped land. Whatever the eventual outcome will be, any exercise of this kind ought to have been carried out in a strategic manner, with density increases concentrated within those areas well placed to accommodate them, where transport, infrastructure and other amenities are sufficiently upgraded, and where demographic shifts warrant a further increase.



In principle, building investment ought to be directed primarily towards those areas which most need change: depressed town centres, heritage sites which have suffered severe degradation, and derelict brownfield sites in particular, but also suburban areas generally of poor quality and the more densely populated towns where additional local leisure and recreation facilities are required.

Any resulting large scale redevelopment should furthermore be subjected to design criteria, established perhaps through a well studied master planning process (awarded through a design competition) and adopted to ensure a final product of far better quality than its predecessor that contributes positively to its setting.

While building construction and redevelopment are necessary in any developing society, the location, type and quality of development needs to better reflect public needs. Ill-considered development of a purely speculative nature often leads to unfinished properties which blight our townscapes, or to the vast quantities of vacant property. This wastage of our natural resources is objectionable. We can no longer afford to allow development to take place on the basis of, or by facilitating, easiest profit. Development which provides little clear public benefit should be discouraged in preference for that which will

provide tangible and long term positive change.

## Tall buildings

One must therefore also question, as an example, the benefits that are to be had from the development of tall buildings, other than the obvious financial benefits for the developers through the provision of properties with stunning views. Will tall buildings in our local context provide any positive impacts to the built environment and, given that their potential negative impacts are universally well-established, how do we ensure that these are mitigated, and that our tall buildings are of the highest quality design and construction possible? What are the real costs involved in building good quality towers. Given the high proportion of vacant property, should we not be encouraging available investment to be directed elsewhere (new manufacturing and or servicing industries perhaps)? What will be the impact of vacant (or worse still, uncompleted) towers which, designed to meet specific briefs, tend to be difficult to convert to other uses? How do we ensure that the nation gains through a policy favouring the construction of tall buildings?

Certainly in the current scenario, it is difficult to deal with tall building



development in a strategic manner. The pressures on our planning authorities to build tall are such that it becomes difficult to plan in advance. Yet forward strategic planning is essential if tall buildings are to be included in future redevelopment programmes. The strategy needs to be based on sound urban and planning objectives intended to assist in the improvement of the built environment, in the regeneration of sub-standard quarters, and in adding value to the country's social and economic offering. A policy document for the development of tall buildings that only seeks to endorse existing and forthcoming planning commitments is as undesirable as it is misconceived.

### Forward Planning

These issues reflect the need for the forward planning department (without ignoring the requirements of other sections) at MEPA to be strengthened. Alternatively, a separate agency could be established to carry out research on urban matters, perhaps in conjunction with MEPA and the University to devise innovative solutions based on sound theoretical research, an appreciation of local contexts, a strong design consciousness and a clear understanding of the built form production process.

The conclusion of the long overdue revision of the 1992 Structure Plan is crucial to the definition of directions for urban and environmental change and to the re-establishment of the necessary links between strategic national objectives and the planning process. The revised Plan must be a device for the implementation of long term national policy goals rather than a series of individual disconnected statements open to ambiguous interpretation.

It is preferable that the revised Structure Plan allows for a different, more volumetric and scenographic approach in development planning, rather than the current plan-based quantitative approach to development control. This is particularly important for our urban centres but also for the transition areas, such as those between the urban cores and the surrounding suburbs of more recent construction or those on the edges of urban developments. In all areas, the role of urban design as a means to ameliorate and make the most of the existing urban status quo needs to be clearly understood and given due importance.

The process needs to be far more receptive to the diversity of our landscape. A more specific, case by case approach to the varied though equally legitimate issues faced in the different towns and villages is preferable. Measures deemed appropriate for the inner harbour conurbation are not necessarily suited for the Island of Gozo. Specificity reinforces identity, and belonging, which ought to be a primary goal of our planning process.

### Other Agents for Change

Further measures may be introduced to provide more responsive and proactive means to address the need for change in certain areas. The means employed to date (policy formulation, planning gain from major projects, embellishment projects and similar-scale central government intervention, and large scale private initiatives on privately-owned or government-leased land) are insufficient in themselves to address the inter-disciplinary nature of many of the social and environmental problems in our towns and villages. Concerted strategies, able management and funding, and the right mix of professional skills are needed.

The introduction of urban redevelopment agencies empowered to drive economic and social regeneration (e.g. in Gzira, Valletta or the Three Cities), initiate large-scale redevelopment (e.g. in Bugibba/Qawra) or to manage the reuse and redevelopment of underutilized government properties (e.g. Valletta) is worthy of detailed consideration. The workings of the Government Property Division warrant a review to permit the creation of these agencies. Certainly, the smaller bodies like the Valletta/ Floriana Rehabilitation Project (VRP) and its siblings need to be provided with better resources if they are to efficiently achieve the desired results.

Local Councils too can play their part, yet for them to do so the skills and resources placed at their disposal need to reflect the as yet untapped potential of their local knowledge, to make them real agents and drivers of change. While Councils are often aware of the social and environmental problems within their localities they are insufficiently equipped financially and in terms of their skills, experience and expertise to deal with them. It may be more feasible and financially viable to amend the system somewhat and to provide support for

Councils at a higher regional level where their facilities and resources may be shared. Many of the problems the councils encounter do in fact cross local boundaries necessitating a more comprehensive approach to solve them. Such support may also include assistance to Councils to help them to tap into EU funding for urban development programs.

The introduction of the Urban Improvement Fund (UIF) as a means of making funds available to the Councils for the improvement of amenities in their localities has been an important step. Many localities have grown substantially in population and land take up has reduced the space available for recreation with no alternative amenities created to replace them. As house sizes and private recreation space shrink, the quality of the public realm and the opportunities for recreation it offers grow in importance. So too does the availability of funds for providing these public facilities. Could not amendment to our own distribution of funds channel a larger portion of revenue to the regions, providing them with the opportunity to deal with their urban environment directly rather than relying on central government intervention?

### Participation in Planning

Above all, however, there is a fundamental need to restore the public's faith in the transparency of the Planning system and the equality in the eyes of the system between private individuals and the wealthy, unscrupulous or influential. The process needs to be made more accountable through an unflinching commitment to public participation at every stage of the process so as to restore public confidence in the structures and procedures, to instil a sense of ownership of and responsibility towards our heritage, and to avoid a culture of indifference. The engagement in public participation should neither be feared nor dismissed as an unwanted procedure. On the other hand, it must be recognized by all that public participation will only be fruitful provided the debate is open, and mature, based on well-informed, factual considerations which recognize that the common good takes precedence over the concerns of specific interest groups.

It is also important that the role of Government in planning is not obfuscated. Government needs to set overall strategy based on social, economic and environmental objectives, supported by the technical

input from experts in the field. It also has the duty to provide the planning process with:

- A the physical set up and the financial resources, to be able to employ the right highly skilled human resources with a sound understanding in design as well as planning;
- B an adequate structure and complement to carry out its role in a manner that has the full confidence of the administration and the public.

The Authority's role is then;

- A to implement strategy through the timely formulation of sensible, well thought out policies, and policy revisions, based on research and technical advice and involving a public consultation process;
- B to interpret that policy in a manner that is coherent with the general principles of the policy, that is cognizant of the particular conditions of each case, yet which leaves sufficient room for flexibility in the decision taking process to be able to reward good design and incentivise contribution to the built environment;
- C to carry out research; and,
- D to deliver a quality service respecting the best interests of its client, the public, when the latter is making use of the services of the authority, or is dependent on the authority for taking the decision best suited to the case at hand.



*Rising housing costs place great strain on our family structures. Often the product does not present value for money. As the financial burden grows and dwelling sizes shrink, quality outdoor recreational space takes on added significance. The Housing Authority's initiatives deserve to be acknowledged, yet require added impetus to encourage innovative quality design solutions.*

# HOUSING, LIVEABILITY & AFFORDABILITY

## **Value for Money**

The cost of housing is becoming a cause of great social strain. This problem is exacerbated when the corresponding built product is poor in quality and design, layout and construction. These problems hit hardest the more marginalised sectors of our society including those who qualify for social assistance, the elderly and the majority of our younger families, all of whom struggle to make ends meet so as to own a property that suits their basic requirements. The situation today contrasts radically to the wasteful land handouts – at minimum to no cost – of yesteryear.

Home ownership is certainly an attractive proposition. Should it however be the only strategy available to accommodate our people's housing needs, especially in the absence of adequate measures to alleviate the potential social consequences of excessively large mortgages on our society, the effects of which are becoming more pronounced as home ownership costs continue to rise?

Several attempts have been made to help alleviate the burden of purchasing properties, some more successful than others (eg, government subsidies on property prices and the shared ownership

schemes promoted by the Housing Authority) while other measures have only helped further fuel the escalation in property values (including the extension of the period of maturity of home loans).

Efforts to better the quality of the design and construction of buildings and urban spaces will not, of course, resolve the issue of affordability of property for those who cannot afford the property prices of today. It will however serve to ensure that purchasers will acquire a product that, as a minimum, provides good value for money, surrounded by high quality and safe public spaces that show people are valued.

The high cost of land is however putting pressure on developers to maximise on built volume and to minimize dwelling sizes, leading to higher densities and a shortage of much needed outdoor amenity space and often compromising the quality of the neighbouring environment. The decreasing size of new dwellings places greater emphasis on the need for an urban and rural environment which provides suitable outdoor spaces catering for the recreational needs of our citizens.

The risks now are that the issues related to affordability will create new undesirable residential quarters with poor quality dwellings in

inhospitable settings, resulting in new urban ghettos. The results could prove catastrophic for the quality of life of our citizens, leading to greater marginalization in society. The property market itself will also suffer as will the island's attractiveness as a centre for investment and/or residence.

### Property Prices

Available statistics from the 2005 Census show that over a quarter of the available properties in Malta and Gozo are vacant. In addition a large number of dwellings are annually granted development permission, numbers which exceed MEPA's own projections for expected demand. In almost all cases however, property prices continue to rise, leading some to conclude that the unutilized properties are not available on the market, but are being retained, either for use within the tourism industry, or alternatively for investment purposes, capital growth, or for trade and exchange.

Could alternative mechanisms be found to discourage hoarding, and to encourage the placing of unutilized properties onto the market? Could not attractive investment schemes be devised and offered as alternatives to redirect excess funds away from property speculation?

Within the up-market luxury sector, as properties become scarcer (larger properties get redeveloped into smaller units) and demand increases (foreign residents and greater affluence), it is difficult to contemplate a situation in the near future where prices will come down. With our continued focus on attracting high value Foreign Direct Investment we cannot expect anything else.

The lower end of the market remains attractive for the entry level sector, and as an investment opportunity. The challenge here is to impose and ensure adequate quality of design and construction, to provide value for money. We need to educate consumers and inform them of

their rights to enjoy a built environment which is socially, economically and environmentally sound.

### Social Housing

As a major land owner, government has a unique opportunity to lead the way in developing sustainable communities. In particular, the Housing Authority's resourceful initiatives over the years in the housing field have helped mature the processes by which social housing is made available. The Housing Authority continues to provide an enterprising approach in its search for means to provide affordable housing to address market needs. Measures to alleviate the cost of housing and improve its quality will continue to merit attention, and the Housing Authority deserves our continued support, and full encouragement to seek innovative quality design solutions to provide for the contemporary housing needs of its clients in a cost effective and sustainable manner.

Other initiatives still need to be taken on board to further improve the quality of our public and private housing developments. These should include more encouragement for the introduction of domestic energy generation from renewable sources and the promotion of the conservation and re-use of the existing building stock as a means of discouraging further development.

Our aim is to pass onto our children a better country than we inherited. It is for this very reason that we compare our environment to a treasure, something we place our energies in, to protect, care for and improve. The environment encompasses all - nature, cultural and architectural heritage, towns and villages, the countryside, the seas and air. We believe that together we should carefully plan so that our heritage, this gem which we treasure, will not fade away.

# BUILT HERITAGE



## HERITAGE PRESERVATION BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPE & NATURAL RESOURCES

*We often talk about the need to protect and upgrade our environment (both built and natural), even if – regrettably – frequently only for the benefit of a seemingly insatiable tourism industry. On the other hand, in our irrepensible drive to modernize, we fail to recognize the errors committed by not conserving what is truly representative of our culture, fruits of our forefathers’ achievements. We are often faced with a widespread lack of appreciation for what is worthy of preservation. We need to identify and protect our heritage, better manage our environment, and safeguard it from exploitation for the benefit of specific market sectors. What measures are required to increase the level of protection afforded to national heritage?*

### Heritage Conservation

The preservation of heritage, out of a concern for its intrinsic value to place, identity and uniqueness for present and future generations is key to a long term strategy for quality in the built environment. As urban change continues, the assertion of heritage protection becomes increasingly more important for our own education as a nation and to the marketing of our country as a heritage destination.

Greater protection should be afforded to our built cultural heritage, through better enforcement of existing legislation, but also through the strengthening of the listing process. In recognition of the value to the community of the preservation and maintenance of properties scheduled for conservation, fiscal incentives and/or tax refunds should be introduced to compensate for the additional expenses involved and for the loss of potential earnings.

### Heritage Management

Similarly there is merit in the purchasing of buildings of heritage importance particularly when these are under threat. Mechanisms such as the sale of surplus government property may be employed to allow such purchases to be made. Contributions towards inheritance tax can all be used as an incentive to return heritage buildings to public ownership. Clear priority can also be given to the renovation and upkeep of heritage areas and buildings by means of fiscal and other incentives that encourage their occupation and adequate maintenance. In terms of social justice, and in terms of the potential damage to heritage buildings because of poor upkeep, a resolution of the rent laws issue is also needed.

The management of built heritage provides another opportunity for Government to lead by example and to manage its own heritage





buildings in an exemplary manner. Rather than offer heritage sites on long term lease to private investors, Government may wish to better safeguard public heritage and opt to develop and administer these projects itself through its development agencies thereby preventing excessive speculation which threatens the context of the heritage buildings.

Relatively recent buildings could potentially also be of heritage value

requiring protection as worthy expressions of the culture and aspirations of an age. The sad incident last year of the demolition of the Qala school in Gozo, an exemplary work of modern architecture by a Maltese architect, Joseph Huntingford, highlights the need for a wider appreciation of what constitutes heritage. The *Kamra* has embarked on a campaign to raise awareness and encourage the preservation of modern movement buildings in the Maltese Islands. It is currently working on a list of buildings that merit protection.



# NATURAL HERITAGE

## The Value of Rural Environment

Given Malta's size, and the scarcity of land as a resource, supreme efforts need to be made to preserve the remaining countryside and to include it in any long term vision for the Maltese environment. The value of the countryside, whether for agricultural production or as an outdoor amenity space increases in significance as urban densities grow while housing sizes shrink and developed land increases. Investment in orientation centres, appropriate management structures and educational resources to ramblers, walkers, cyclers, climbers, etc, will go a long way to enhance the public experience of the countryside. The importance of our environment, of our tranquil fertile valleys, our harsh windswept hills and cliffs, and our stunningly diverse shores, in the formation of our national cultural identity ought not to be underestimated.

It is critical that land is not allowed to be controlled by sectarian interests. The temptation to allot further land or heritage buildings for development, to allow prime tracts of unspoiled countryside to be developed for tourism or other purposes or to allow individual interest groups to take over the countryside must be resisted at all costs.

Serious consideration should also be given to the introduction of schemes permitting the acquisition by central government of countryside sites of strategic value which, if left in private hands, risk being developed.

The same may apply to sensitive sites which, at a time when Malta's economy needed nurturing, had been assigned to the construction of (mainly tourism related) projects then considered necessary for economic progress. In today's global realities, where the balance has shifted to more desirable leisure destinations, the opportunity should be taken to re-acquire these lands, to reuse or dismantle the no longer serviceable properties and preferably to reclaim these sites for public advantage. Our natural environment is our common heritage and deserves to be safeguarded for the enjoyment of future generations.

## Gozo

Gozo in particular must be safeguarded assiduously before it suffers the same fate as Malta. While working towards the further economic advancement of the island and its residents, measures and projects to be implemented should be carefully assessed to ensure that they do not detract from the intrinsic character and charm which render the island a unique place of tranquillity, and a desirable and much sought after retreat.

There may be concerns that such an approach deters investment and hinders social progress. On the other hand one must consider whether it has not become too easy to exploit land for profit, stopping our entrepreneurs from looking at other investment opportunities which may be more lucrative. Indeed, Gozo's unique setting has a distinctive appeal which in itself should attract a particular kind of quality investment that deserves encouragement as much as it requires diversification.

## Agriculture

The role of agriculture in the preservation of the landscape has to be understood and internalized in our policies. Although the further development of agricultural activity is to be encouraged, the impact of the sector on our limited water resources and on our water table, the choice of crops and the industry's production methods, not forgetting the increasingly widespread occupation of open land with 'greenhouses', all ought to be evaluated and balanced with the need to safeguard our natural environment. Similarly, the process to relocate our dairy, poultry and swine farms away from our residential areas to newer, more sanitary facilities on undeveloped land, built to meet the required standards should not be undertaken at the expense of the natural beauty of our open countryside.



# NATURAL RESOURCES



## Water, Air and Stone

As limited as they are, the preservation of natural resources takes on greater significance than in most other territories since the potential consequence of our decisions are disproportionately larger here, than elsewhere.

Fresh water supply is scarce, made available at great economical and environmental cost. Even as we drain our water table in a manner considered unsustainable, we neglect to collect the abundant rainfall which occasionally floods our streets en route through our valleys to the sea. Especially in a period when even the climate is uncertain, every effort should be made to tap this free natural resource.

The cleanliness of our seas ensures the success of our leisure tourism industry. Yachting, deep sea diving, and even mass tourism are all markets we have indicated we wish to nurture. None will flourish should we not ensure our coastline stays clean and our waters are of the purest quality.

Air quality, the protection of urban green spaces and biotic support, should also be key aspects of a drive to safeguard the environment and natural resources. The Foresta 2000 project is a positive step

with regard to tree planting and its associated benefits.

The nation also needs to take stock of its main construction resource: its stone. Our stone is to this day widely used, misused and way too often abused. Inexplicably still the cheapest building material available to us, its worth is not yet appreciated. Measures to safeguard stone resources for use in heritage buildings and to ensure sufficient supplies for the future are worth considering. Our quarrying industry requires added stimuli to become innovative by diversifying its product range beyond the standard sized traditional stone block, and by introducing new cutting and finishing techniques and technologies, to create a cleaner, more efficient industry.

## Energy Supply from Alternative Sources

In a global economy, which is increasingly under threat of ransom by the oil industry, investment in renewable energy resources is a long term investment of inestimable value, particularly for a small economy as ours, wherein the effects of rising fuel prices could prove catastrophic, if not simply unpleasant. There should be greater willingness, and a more determined commitment by the utility providers, and government, to provide simple, cost-effective fiscal incentives to encourage the consumption and private production of energy from

renewable sources, the surplus of which will be made available on a national scale.

Other European countries have proven the success of the system, that by raising the rate of return for the private investor, the goals which Malta is committed to attain to meet its international and European obligations become far more achievable.

There is no doubt that now more than ever, every effort must be made for Malta to invest significantly in the development of renewable energy resources for its economic and environmental benefits.

## Reuse of Waste

We have yet to move away from the traditional idea of the flow of materials from raw resource to products, consumption, and on to landfill as waste. To do this we need to promote further the polluter pays principle, to encourage the reuse of building waste and to make the industry responsible for the products they introduce to the country once they become waste.

The construction of offshore islands, through land reclamation,

may well be an ideal means to provide the vast land area necessary for solar or wind energy farms. Given the pressures on existing land areas, sensitively devised land reclamation projects could offer alternative, sensitive opportunities to accommodate those uses which an independent nation deems of economic and political significance, but which for reasons of space limitations can simply not be accommodated on-shore.

The vast quantities of construction waste generated, regrettably still not recognised as a valuable resource, could readily facilitate the development of additional reclaimed land. Not only will it be possible to release some of the pressure on undeveloped countryside and safeguard our existing rural environment, but it may well assist in liberating certain on-shore areas for assignment to more sensible uses.

*Environmentally, socially and economically the need to alter the trend in private vehicular use towards other, more sustainable modes of public and private transport is ever more fundamental. Our search for solutions to our transport needs must be holistic, uncompromising, forward looking and innovative, based on a long term vision and on the potential benefits to commuters, rather than on short term economic expediency. We must consider an effective nation-wide integrated public transport strategy conceived to improve current transport patterns, basing our decisions on a detailed assessment of key movement routes. Within our urban centres (as well as elsewhere), the strategy should, through urban design and landscaping, provide an environment which encourages commuters to journey shorter distances on foot or by bicycle.*

# TRANSPORT & MOBILITY

As noted earlier, private vehicular use has a profound effect on the urban environment. Heavy traffic has a severe visual, noise and air quality impact which makes the environment much less comfortable for pedestrian activity. This is particularly the case in Malta's cramped urban environment, where the car dominates the streetscape and other transport modes are sparsely provided for. The weakest segments of society are worst affected; the marginalized and the less well off. The impacts of private vehicular use in Malta include air and noise pollution, traffic congestion, accessibility and parking problems, and a less physically active society. Environmentally, socially and economically the need to alter the trend in private vehicular use towards other, more sustainable modes of public and private transport is ever more fundamental.

Recent initiatives like the CVA and the electric taxi service in Valletta are encouraging first steps in this respect and the effects appear to be favourable. The effort spent to improve the state of our roads must also be commended. Despite the possibilities offered us by the TEN-T programme however we must reconsider our dependence on the private vehicle as a means for transportation. Would we not benefit more were we to provide an effective nation-wide integrated public transport strategy conceived to improve current transport patterns? Basing our decisions on a detailed assessment of key movement routes around the islands – current as well as anticipated – is it inconceivable to envisage the implementation of a transport system focused around strategic movement corridors offering a high frequency service, faster, more reliable, and with more convenient connections than the current radial bus system?

Our search for solutions to our transport needs must be holistic, uncompromising, forward looking and innovative, based on a long term vision and on the potential benefits to commuters, rather than on short term economic expediency. Unless we take some determined



measures, the sheer economic cost of the current transport scenario to the nation in terms of importation and fuel costs and loss in productivity amongst others, can only continue to grow. Also bearing in mind the social and environmental costs of land take up and the effects of air and noise pollution, these concerns render the pursuit of a holistic transport strategy highly opportune!

We can no longer rely on the current public bus system alone to resolve the now familiar traffic gridlock and its associated effects. Alternative mass transit systems must be given serious consideration in the light of their long term benefits and despite the initial capital outlay. It is not unreasonable to expect that there may be a need for Government subsidies (not dissimilar to those currently given to the buses) in the short to medium term. However, if the introduction of light rapid transit systems were to be coupled with disincentives for the purchase of private vehicles, the nation will only benefit in the long term through reduced economic costs, better health for all and improved environmental quality. Better public transport will also markedly assist in the regeneration of our towns and villages.

The integration of land and sea based modes of public transport (e.g. water borne – ferries and taxis –linked to bus/taxi stations and parking areas), vertical movement systems (e.g. public lifts, funiculars in key areas to facilitate transit across our hilly terrain), mixed-mode solutions (e.g. a CVA system for the Sliema area, thereby liberating space for pedestrian use) and more affordable and amenable taxi services will also be needed if the strategy is to achieve real long term results. The

further rationalization of the road network, making our roads smoother and more efficient, will evidently necessarily remain a priority.

Within our urban centres (as well as elsewhere), the strategy should provide an environment which encourages commuters to journey shorter distances on foot or by bicycle. This highlights the need to cater for the proper design of our streets (rather than their occurrence by default), where bicycle lanes are included and pavements are of adequate width and sufficient quality of construction, designed to cater also for the needs of the disadvantaged. The design of roads and piazzas must include holistic urban design for transport modes other than the motor vehicle.

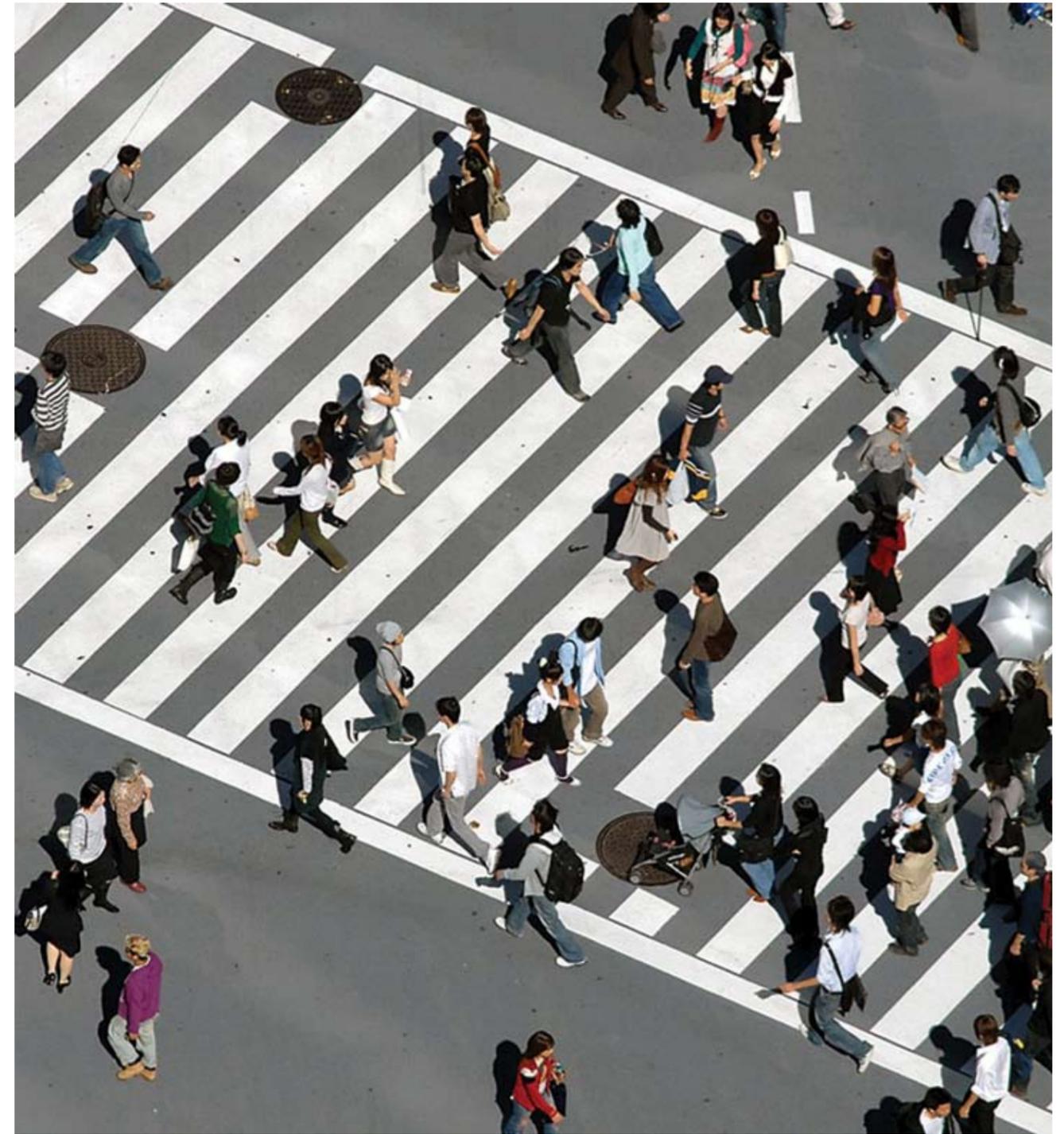
It is furthermore unfortunate that the landscaping of our urban public spaces is all too often neglected, considered an expensive and inconvenient accessory, and not sufficiently appreciated for its sensory contribution to public space or for the provision of shade to provide more comfortable walking environments.

Moving forward with reform of the transport sector clearly requires that the public interest is not held to ransom by the concerns of specific interest groups. The importance of well managed, efficient, environmentally conscious, cost-effective bus and taxi services will not diminish if Malta moves towards reduced private car use, even if additional modes of public transport are introduced. In the meantime until we implement these alternatives, the efficiency of our buses and taxis will remain fundamental for the quality of our tourism offer.



Good co-ordination and integration of development and transport policies is an essential requirement for a fully functional local community.

Architecture and Quality of Life, Architects' Council of Europe, 2004, p 2



*Quality of construction needs to be improved. New regulations are necessary and welcome but should be backed by adequate research and funding to ensure they truly provide value for money to society. The establishment of a 'Construction Platform' would provide a clearer reference point for developers, design professionals and the general public. Continual training and professional development, the certification of tradesmen and the licensing and classification of service providers will help ensure that construction practice improves. An adequate level of protection and cover for all stakeholders will ensure clients' interests are better protected. Likewise improved site management and project administration, and a greater awareness of Health and Safety issues will help to ensure that safety risks and inconveniences to neighbours are reduced. While measures to improve the quality of construction will undoubtedly result in a higher cost which will eventually be passed on to the consumer, this will provide better quality buildings which last longer and cost less to run.*

# QUALITY IN CONSTRUCTION

Far too much of recent construction is inadequately built, with a general absence of attention to detailing both in the design, as well as in the implementation stages of the project. The principal issues are two:

- a. inadequate response to the local climate, and
- b. insufficiency in detailing and workmanship to meet requirements and standards.

Our buildings' ability to retain heat in winter and prevent solar gain in summer and to deal with water ingress and humidity are commonly debated facts. So too is the quality of our construction and its longevity.

As the cost of land and hence the cost of property spirals upward, the quality of our construction has remained relatively unchanged (with evident exceptions). A large proportion of our recently built properties however, are affected by the familiar problems arising from inadequate detailing and bad workmanship. They are wasteful of energy, over-dependent on fuel resources for heating and cooling and ventilation. They also require constant, frequent and costly maintenance programmes to keep them in adequate condition. The industry often misguidedly insists on reducing the initial capital outlay to a minimum, and although this evidently benefits the developer, the consumer/purchaser is often placed at a considerable disadvantage since he/she is expected to bear the long term expenses on maintenance and upkeep.

The *Kamra tal-Periti* has long favoured the introduction of Building Regulations setting minimum standards for all buildings, whether residential or otherwise.

The recent transposition of the EU Directive on the Energy Perform-

ance of Buildings into local legislation through the newly issued Document F, Energy Conservation in Buildings, one tome in a series leading to a full set of the Building regulations, is a positive step in principle, though it highlights the *Kamra's* concerns that the introduction of regulations is not always carefully thought through. All regulations should be backed by adequate research and funding to ensure that they truly provide value for money to society (e.g. although these regulations have been published, there is no relevant data on local construction materials against which to benchmark the performance of new buildings).

Furthermore the introduction of new regulations needs to be accompanied by a widespread education campaign to provide professionals with adequate knowledge to implement them and to alert the public to the value of the investments they will be required to undertake. The proper training of other stakeholders in the construction industry to ensure that they too understand their responsibilities and obligations is also critical. Together with architects, developers, contractors and clients all share in the responsibility for quality in construction and for the adherence to regulations.

And while the introduction of new regulations to meet today's requirements is important, equally important is the need for existing legislation to be brought up to date with modern construction methods, new materials and technologies and updated planning policies. Several older documents, including, for example, the building regulations in the Code of Police Laws of 1854 have become barely relevant or workable in today's scenario. These older laws need to be continually assessed and reviewed to ensure that they evolve with changing building practices and that they truly provide the means for expected targets to be achieved.

The continuing increase in the volume of regulations which affect building development also warrants the establishment of a 'Construction Platform' made up of a network of the various agencies involved in the compilation of regulations affecting construction to create a more consistent and comprehensive approach to their preparation, administration and enforcement, for the dissemination of best practice advice, and for the certification of the finished product. This will provide a clearer reference point for developers, design professionals and the general public.

Other measures ought to be introduced to ensure that the building industry gains a more professional footing, in order to deliver the best product possible through best practice. These include:

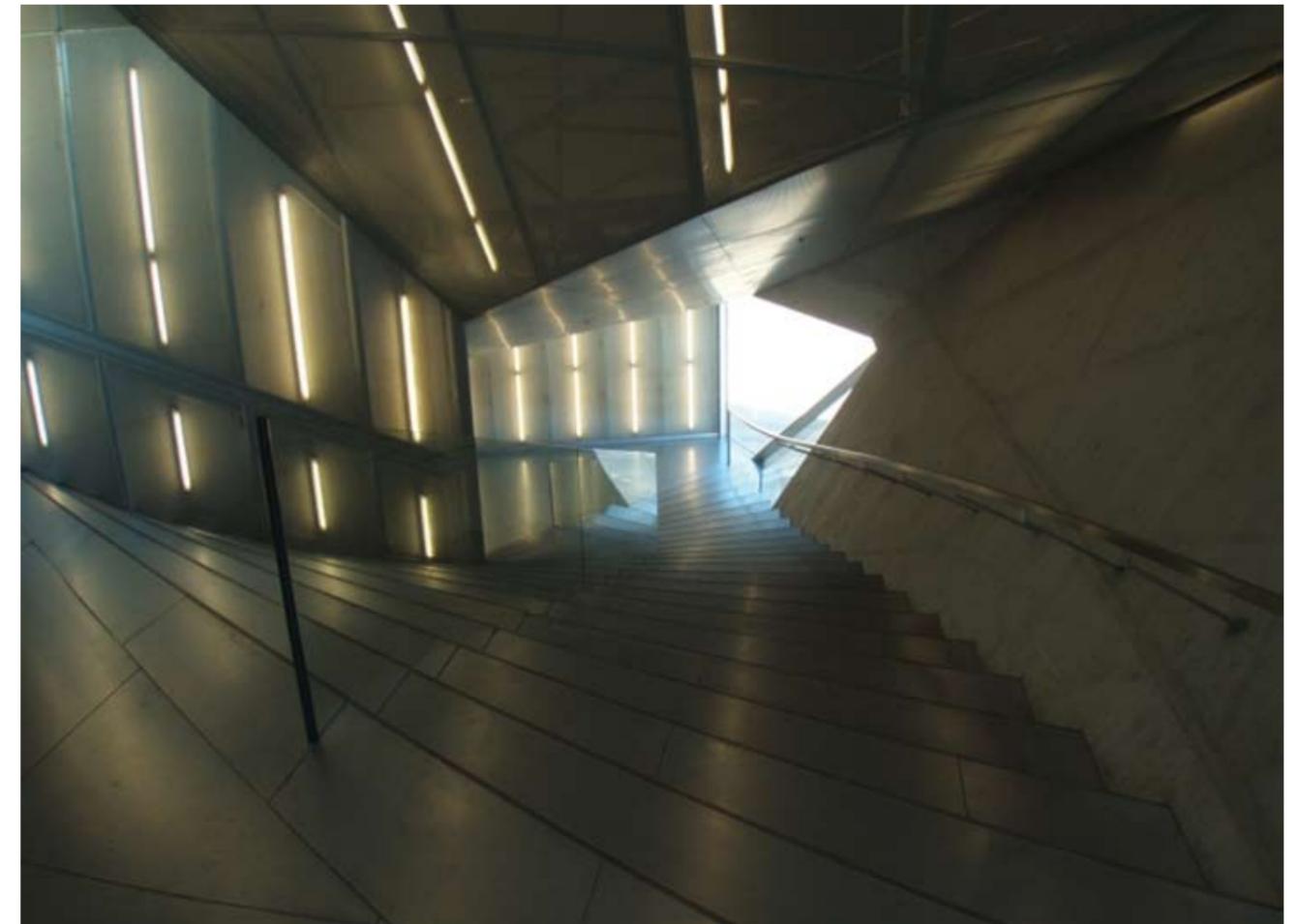
A Continual training and professional development for consultants, but also for service providers (through the existing and successful courses at MCAST or through other means), which will not only ensure that they are kept abreast of the latest technological advances and practice methodologies, but which will add flexibility to the employment market in the industry.

B The certification of tradesmen and craftsmen and the licensing and classification of service providers which will give confidence to society that their needs are being met through the employment of the right skills and qualifications.

C An adequate level of protection and cover for all stakeholders which will furthermore reassure clients/end users that they have suitable means of redress should it ever be required.

Acknowledging that the construction industry causes a level of inconvenience to society through continual disturbance, pollution and the generation of waste, better site management and project administration are critical in order to minimize the impacts of development sites on their immediate neighbourhood. Our Health and Safety record on building sites remains poor. Despite an increase in the level of public awareness of the need for controls and better enforcement, the disregard for safety procedures is regrettably still too common on our construction sites. It is to be acknowledged that the recent introduction of the Construction Site Management Regulations is very positive although better clarity is required in the limits of responsibility of the different roles of the Site Manager, the Site Supervisor, any appointed project manager, and the perit. If endorsed by clients and contractors alike, the new regulations will help ensure that safety risks are minimised and that respect for neighbours and the community are given greater importance in the culture of construction.

While measures to improve the quality of construction will undoubtedly result in a higher cost which will eventually be passed on to the consumer, this will provide better quality buildings which last longer and cost less to run. Delaying the introduction of these measures will allow increases in the cost of land to further push the boundaries of affordability but without an equivalent gain in final product quality and value for money.



*Periti (architects and civil engineers) owe a duty of care to their clients. Their work has a profound and long lasting effect on the community at large. As projects grow in scale and complexity, there is a growing awareness of the need for the profession to meet today's challenges and demands and deliver its product at a level of quality commensurate with today's expectations and standards of living. The Kamra tal-Periti is working to improve its structures and those of the profession to allow its members to better serve their clients and society through their work.*

# QUALITY OF SERVICE

## Self Regulation

In common with other professions, periti (architects and civil engineers) owe a duty of care to their clients, but they have greater responsibility than most in that their work may well have a profound and long lasting effect on the community at large. The *Kamra tal-Periti* is very much aware of the burden of responsibility on the perit towards society.

A large part of the existing local legislation regulating the profession is regrettably antiquated and often obsolete. In this regard the *Kamra* is committed to revisiting all regulations and to proposing amendments it deems appropriate. These include Chapter 390 of the Laws of Malta (the 'Periti Act') and the associated Subsidiary Legislation which together establish and regulate the Profession, the Code of Professional Conduct, the Regulations of the *Kamra tal-Periti* and, the relevant section of the Code of Civil Procedures which regulates the profession. There is a pressing need to update our laws to ensure their relevance to today's needs.

To bring the practice of the profession in line with the free market economy championed by the European Union, the impetus is to move away from fixed fee scales towards more open competitive tendering, the perit charging rates he/she considers appropriate for the work to be done. There is a point though below which the perit will not be able to give a satisfactory standard of service without the risk of being unprofessional. The challenge for the future is to reconsider statutory fees while ensuring an adequate level of service to the client, adjusting fees to reflect not only the volume and type of work



expected, but also the nature and complexity of the commission and the facilities and standard of service the perit or practice offers. In line with the recommendations of the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE), the *Kamra* is working towards establishing a database of fees – referred to as a Cost Information System (CIS) – which will provide the professional but also his client with guidance on what may be expected.

Are periti delivering what they promise and what they are charging for? Is the quality of service given by periti of an acceptable level? Does the perit visit the site as often as he should? Does the quality of design seek to achieve a standard of excellence that improves the built environment? Similarly we may ask ourselves: Does an employer appreciate the type and level of service required for a particular project?

The *Kamra* envisages shortly being able to introduce Standard Forms of Agreement for the Provision of Services by a perit. These would clearly define the services an employer may expect and a perit would be requested to deliver, the fee structure and the manner in which the services are delivered and remunerated.

It is furthermore understandable that the employer is not always fully aware of the complexities of undertaking a construction project, the risks involved and the time frames, costs and procedures they face on the road to achieving their goals. The *Kamra* is looking to boost its capacity to provide an Advisory Service for periti as well as for their clients as part of a future Centre for the Built Environment.

## Standard Forms

As projects grow in scale and complexity, there is a growing awareness of the urgent need to reform the building industry so that it may meet today's challenges and demands and deliver its product at a level of quality commensurate with today's expectations and standards of living. The *Kamra tal-Periti* is working on the preparation of various standard documents including:

- Standard Forms of Agreement for the provision of Services
- Standard forms of Building Contracts.

## Professional Indemnity Insurance

In addition to all other common forms of insurance cover normally required, Professional Indemnity Insurance is possibly the most important area of insurance for all architects. The *Kamra tal-Periti* believes every practitioner should have an adequate level of insurance for the benefit of both the perit and his clients. Once again, there are several obstacles that still need to be overcome in order to ensure that this initiative is successful, and viable, not least the excessive liability period the perit is subjected to. At present, the *Kamra* is engaged in seeking ways to ensure that all periti can obtain an adequate, if not only a minimum, level of PII cover.

## Continuing Professional Development

Although Continuing Professional Development is not currently a requirement locally for the perit, it can be argued that CPD is always an obligation of a professional advisor. In other words, a professional is obliged to keep up to date with the fast evolving technological changes in building and material technologies and practices, as well as the ever changing regulations. CPD should however not only provide for this, but it should also ensure that the professional develops expertise in particular areas.

The *Kamra* has over the past few years started along this route by organizing, on its own or in collaboration with other parties, refresher courses in subjects related to the profession. Over the next few years, in the interest of the profession and the environment, it will continue to seek ways to further encourage its members to undertake CPD courses in a coordinated and planned manner, and it hopes to issue guidelines and explanatory notes to assist them in enhancing their professional abilities, expertise and the quality of service they provide.

## Professional Conduct and Competence

A Code of Professional Conduct is entrenched in the Regulations comprising Subsidiary Legislation 390.01 of the Laws of Malta. The object of the Code is to promote the highest standards of professional conduct, or self-discipline, required of the *Kamra's* members in the best interests of the community. The Code seeks to regulate the behaviour of members between themselves, towards their clients and towards the general public, putting into words what clients would expect of their professional advisors in whom they place their trust. The revisions to the Code of Professional Conduct which the *Kamra* is currently contemplating are intended to renew the level of trust expected and desired between the perit and his clients, by obliging all the members of the profession to maintain the highest standards of behaviour and conduct.



*A client with a commitment to quality is as important to the achievement of a good quality building or development as is a capable perit. Quality in design and construction is the only means to a sound investment and to derive lasting value from building development. A clearer understanding of construction procurement and of the value of a well-formulated client brief and budget is crucial to the smooth process of building design and construction. The selection of architectural and other consultants should be made on the basis of quality of service. In particular, the Public Sector has a special responsibility to society, and Government's unique position makes it an ideal champion for good design. Design competitions can be used on projects of scale and importance to ensure that the public is provided with the best quality project possible.*

# QUALITY IN COMMISSION/ PROCUREMENT

“All construction has an impact on the public, so all actors involved in construction must not only think of their own needs but also act in the public interest. Informed building owners are therefore just as important in the achievement of successful projects as, for instance, well-trained architects who are skilled at developing the best possible solution for the respective task.”

Architecture and Quality of Life, Architects' Council of Europe, 2004, p 9, 10

A client with a commitment to quality is as important to the achievement of a good quality building or development as is a capable perit. It is crucial for clients to understand that quality in design and construction is as much an expense as it is the only means to a sound investment and to derive lasting value from building development. Client education is hence a fundamental step towards better quality development.

In architecture there are few standardized building solutions and most buildings represent tailor-made designs for a particular site and client. The element of risk is thus inherent in the design of every new building project. The minimization of risk through the formulation of a clear client brief and budget is crucial to the smooth process of building design and construction as it ensures that the final building product is not compromised by changes that occur late in the design or construction process. An understanding of construction procurement is also important to the client's role as it can facilitate smooth and timely delivery of a building product on site.

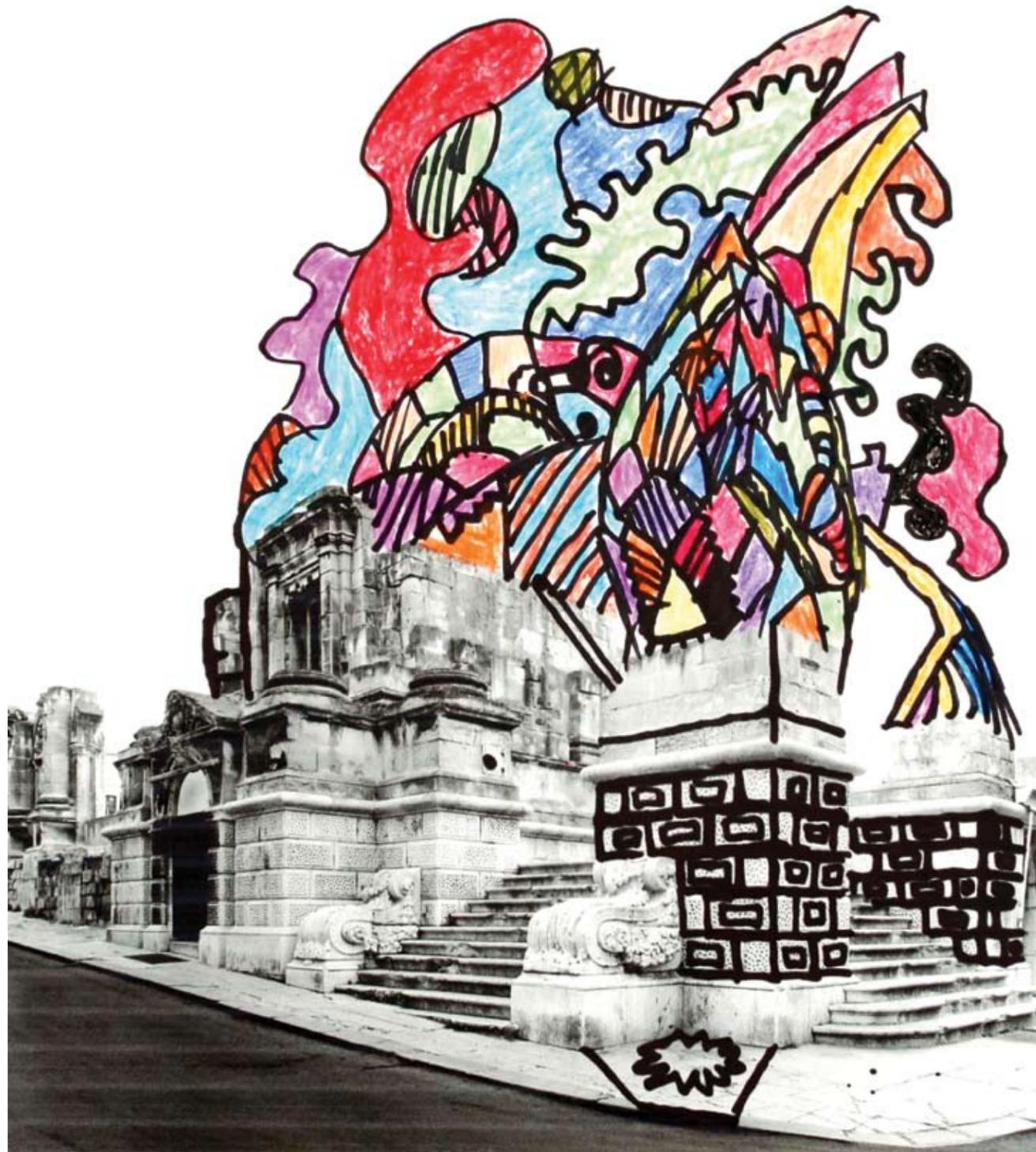
It is imperative that the choice of architectural and other consultants by the client is made on the basis of quality of service and on the basis of the specific requirements of the commission to ensure a quality final product.

In particular, the Public Sector has a special responsibility to society, in terms of the quality of design of buildings which are built with public funds. Government's unique position makes it an ideal champion for good design and all government projects should employ a best practice approach to design and construction, founded on a strong green procurement approach, to significantly improve development expectations and lead by example.

In order to ensure that the public is provided with the best quality project possible, then it would be better if all government projects of scale and importance should be awarded on the basis of design competitions, backed by adequate funding and evaluated from the point of view of their contribution to the social and built environment, again promoting a commitment to good design.

The selection of periti on the basis of price tendering for architectural services, in tenders for central or local government should no longer be pursued as it is contrary to the requirements of the Periti Act and is contrary to the notion of quality of service as the primary concern.

The challenges raised by our built environment can be overcome through a commitment to the development of a vision to work for better quality places that bring dignity, pride and real delight to their users. The definition of a National Policy for Architecture, championed by Government, is a critical step in this regard, presenting a clear national commitment to quality in architecture and the built environment and raising the profile of the architectural debate so as to form more informed and discerning consumers. The role of the media in forming public opinion is critical to raise the overall level of awareness of good design and to the pursuit of a healthy urban debate. The Kamra tal-Periti is working to promote the establishment of a National Centre for the Built Environment which would support research, education, heritage promotion, advisory and design review services to assist in the delivery of places that respect society's needs for an architecture and an urban and rural environment that truly uphold the maxim of firmness, commodity and delight.



# ACHIEVING QUALITY

The challenges raised by our built environment will not be easy to overcome but they can be with concerted action, shared responsibility and commitment to the development of a vision which catalyses all stakeholders to work for better quality places that bring dignity, pride and real delight to their users. The definition of a National Policy for Architecture is a critical step in this regard, raising the profile of the architectural debate and presenting a clear national commitment to quality in architecture and the built environment.

The European Council resolution of the 12th February 2001 emphasises Government's role as a leader in the quest for a better quality built environment. Government must become the champion for a better built environment, not only by investing in good design but also by being acutely aware of the consequences of its policy making and decision-taking in all fields. Investment in expertise is crucial to all clients and to government in particular and it is essential that government undertakes to provide itself with access to the best possible advice on development strategies, perhaps through the appointment of a commission of experts. A clear and unequivocal commitment to good governance at all levels of administration and a clear assertion of universal respect for the rule of law that truly puts the common good at its centre of focus is also crucial to the role of government at all levels. A National Policy for Architecture will help raise the awareness of the public, but also of the authorities. A better education system, more targeted towards promoting creative design and innovation to a wider public will create more informed and discerning consumers, who will demand a better built environment and a better building product.

Education is also fundamental to the critical role of the media in forming public opinion and it is crucial therefore that the causes championed by the press are not simply those which are controversial regardless of their real significance.

The Kamra tal-Periti is increasingly mindful of the obligations of its role and is working to promote the establishment of a National Centre for the Built Environment which represents a distinctive long term commitment to quality in the built environment. The Centre would provide for:

- A Centre for Research (to be run in collaboration with other bodies) dealing with issues pertaining to the Urban Environment, Sustainability and Energy Efficiency, Structural and Materials Technology;
- An Architecture and Built Environment Review Commission;
- An Advisory Service for periti and their clients also providing support for the organization of Competitions and Awards and issuing best practice advice in design and construction procurement;
- Educational facilities including a library, drawings and photographic archives, an architectural bookshop and a gallery for temporary and /or permanent displays;
- Heritage promotion through the local branch of the DOCOMOMO secretariat (a non-profit making international organization for the Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods pertaining to the Modern Movement) and through a drawing collection for the preservation and documentation of architectural works;
- Facilities to support continuous professional development;

The role of the Centre will be to create a 'home' for architecture and the built environment and to provide a platform for the Kamra, its members and society, to better engage in the production of a better quality built environment. It underlines the Kamra tal-Periti's commitment to the need to develop and to sustain a creative, visionary approach to the production of the built environment, based on sound research and development, which will deliver places that respect society's needs for an architecture and an urban and rural environment that truly uphold the maxim of firmness, commodity and delight.

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## THE URBAN CHALLENGE: OUR QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Rapid change and economic development in Malta over the last few decades have led to a heightened and more widespread awareness of the need to review the way we intervene in our environment. There is a growing realization that only through quality in the built environment will we succeed in further improving our quality of life.

The complex and sometimes conflicting demands placed on our land has dramatically altered our landscape. The substantial funds funneled into the construction industry over this short period have led to voluminous and ubiquitous development, regrettably generally of poor quality, a result of economic expedience, but also of a faltering aesthetic appreciation and insufficient social responsibility. Despite attempts over the years to introduce elements of control to limit the damage, we have not had considerable success. The urgency now is to find alternative solutions.

Our urban environment reflects our social and economic aspirations. Our economic development will increasingly depend on our environmental standards. Only by defining an appropriate vision for Malta where social, economic and environmental objectives work together harmoniously can we achieve lasting sustainable development. This will require us to be courageous and visionary working towards strategic long-term objectives and resisting the temptation to be derailed by short-term expediency or the concerns of specific interest groups.

The quality of our urban open and built spaces is lacking since we often fail to appreciate the value of quality in design and planning. Our educational system ought to promote more emphatically independent thinking and innovation. Creativity must be encouraged at all ages and in all spheres, but most notably in design, architecture and urban planning. Development proposals should be assessed qualitatively (rather than solely against quantitative criteria) and appraised from the point of view of their contribution to society and the built environment. An independent Design Review Commission would be more appropriate to take on this task. It would also consult Government on all its urban development strategies and policies. Above all, quality in architecture deserves greater attention through the adoption of a National Policy on Architecture, through improving the level of education in the built environment, and in particular, through strengthening the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the University.

The revised building height designations produced development frenzy in our towns and villages leading to the destruction of the very same qualities that made them attractive. Redevelopment ought to be redirected primarily towards those projects which seek to improve the condition of run-down or disadvantaged neighbourhoods. We need to continually study our condition and consider/ reconsider strategic policy decisions. The Structure Plan Review presents an ideal opportunity for an updated strategy defining objectives for urban change, reconsidering the appropriateness of past decisions within the present day context. The means and structures at our disposal today to manage the change process are unlikely to be sufficient to address some of our ills. Public participation in the process should be better structured to promote and safeguard the common good.

Rising housing costs place great strain on our family structures. Often the product does not present value for money. As the financial burden grows and dwelling sizes shrink, quality outdoor recreational space takes on added significance. The Housing Authority's initiatives deserve to be acknowledged, yet require added impetus to encourage innovative quality design solutions.

We often talk about the need to protect and upgrade our environment (both built and natural), even if – regrettably – frequently only for the benefit of a seemingly insatiable tourism industry. On the other hand, in our irrepressible drive to modernize, we fail to recognize the errors committed by not conserving what is truly representative of our culture, fruits of our forefathers' achievements. We are often faced with a widespread lack of appreciation for what is worthy of preservation. We need to identify and protect our heritage, better manage our environment, and safeguard it from exploitation for the benefit of specific market sectors. What measures are required to increase the level of protection afforded to national heritage?

Environmentally, socially and economically the need to alter the trend in private vehicular use towards other, more sustainable modes of public and private transport is ever more fundamental. Our search for solutions to our transport needs must be holistic, uncompromising, forward looking and innovative, based on a long term vision and on the potential benefits to commuters, rather than on short term economic expediency. We must consider an effective nation-wide integrated public transport strategy conceived to improve current transport patterns, basing our decisions on a detailed assessment of key movement routes. Within our urban centres (as well as elsewhere), the strategy should, through urban design and landscaping, provide an environment which encourages commuters to journey shorter distances on foot or by bicycle.

Quality of construction needs to be improved. New regulations are necessary and welcome but should be backed by adequate research and funding to ensure they truly provide value for money to society. The establishment of a 'Construction Platform' would provide a clearer reference point for developers, design professionals and the general public. Continual training and professional development, the certification of tradesmen and the licensing and classification of service providers will help ensure that construction practice improves. An adequate level of protection and cover for all stakeholders will ensure clients' interests are better protected. Likewise improved site management and project administration, and a greater awareness of Health and Safety issues will help to ensure that safety risks and inconveniences to neighbours are reduced. While measures to improve the quality of construction will undoubtedly result in a higher cost which will eventually be passed on to the consumer, this will provide better quality buildings which last longer and cost less to run.

Periti (architects and civil engineers) owe a duty of care to their clients. Their work has a profound and long lasting effect on the community at large. As projects grow in scale and complexity, there is a growing awareness of the need for the profession to meet today's challenges and demands and deliver its product at a level of quality commensurate with today's expectations and standards of living. The Kamra tal-Periti is working to improve its structures and those of the profession to allow its members to better serve their clients and society through their work.

A client with a commitment to quality is as important to the achievement of a good quality building or development as is a capable perit. Quality in design and construction is the only means to a sound investment and to derive lasting value from building development. A clearer understanding of construction procurement and of the value of a well-formulated client brief and budget is crucial to the smooth process of building design and construction. The selection of architectural and other consultants should be made on the basis of quality of service. In particular, the Public Sector has a special responsibility to society, and Government's unique position makes it an ideal champion for good design. Design competitions can be used on projects of scale and importance to ensure that the public is provided with the best quality project possible.

The challenges raised by our built environment can be overcome through a commitment to the development of a vision to work for better quality places that bring dignity, pride and real delight to their users. The definition of a National Policy for Architecture, championed by Government, is a critical step in this regard, presenting a clear national commitment to quality in architecture and the built environment and raising the profile of the architectural debate so as to form more informed and discerning consumers. The role of the media in forming public opinion is critical to raise the overall level of awareness of good design and to the pursuit of a healthy urban debate. The Kamra tal-Periti is working to promote the establishment of a National Centre for the Built Environment which would support research, education, heritage promotion, advisory and design review services to assist in the delivery of places that respect society's needs for an architecture and an urban and rural environment that truly uphold the maxim of firmness, commodity and delight.