

What About Tomorrow's Generation ? Are We Moving Towards Sustainable Development ?



One can surely notice that Malta is densely crowded with households most of which are vacant. This has brought its consequences which aren't being felt by the present generation, but will surely be felt by tomorrow's generation.

Building methods used nowadays vary from those of the past . Back in the past the building of townhouses and farmhouses used to be very sustainable. This was due to the fact that the limestone was excavated from a quarry nearby and which later on could serve as a water collection cistern. However, lately the building of houses , flats and other developments has become very unsustainable and threatening towards the environment.

There are many issues that relate to the increase of new buildings in Malta. In the 20th century, people started to enjoy a higher standard of living as more jobs were provided. This was also due to the fact that in the beginning of the 1990's land was very cheap, so people were encouraged to invest in a second piece of land which would usually serve as a summer or holiday residence. Additionally people started to build many apartments for business and commercial use, furthermore increasing the new construction of buildings.

This increase in buildings lead to the degradation of the environment. There are now, less rural areas and due to this there are less trees. Moreover , new construction technologies are being used as they facilitate things in the development of the building. These require a lot of energy and so more carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases emissions are created, furthermore increasing the greenhouse effect. Additionally people living near building developments are suffering more from air and noise pollution.

This also lead to the unsustainable use of the globigerina limestone, which makes part of Malta's architectural heritage. This resource is running out as more buildings are being built. The consuming of globigerina limestone could be reduced by builders

using bricks with only the façade built with limestone. On top of that one could use stone quarried on the site. Studies showed that in the early 21st century, 20 % of Malta was built up. Compared to its small land area of 316 square kilometres, it is a very high percentage. Many people associated this to lack of planning, lack of legislation enforcement and an irregular way of issuing building permits. In the 2011 census it was indicated that there were over 70,000 vacant households.

As education increased with it also increased environmental awareness and the concept of sustainable development was introduced. In Malta urgent social, economic and environmental changes need to be made in order to reach sustainable development. People's mentality is that all resources are infinite. That nature has an infinite capacity for our waste, that success is reached by material acquisition and that technology can fix and solve every problem. A political and economic problem is that of urban development in sensitive areas such as the ODZ, which are Outside Development Zones. This problem is very difficult to tackle but not impossible to overcome as in 2005 it was recorded that 34.4% of all development took place in these sites.

One can increase awareness in order to reduce the harmful impact of over-development. One can be encouraged to invest in a vacant household instead of building a new household. Laws could be enforced in releasing permits for building, by making a difference between building for business use or building for residence use, as nowadays to buy a house is quite expensive. By increasing Outside Development Zones one will be reducing the loss of rural areas. Also by encouraging people to invest in building on brown field sites. Where derelict land and abandoned developments are renovated and rebuilt that way one would be reducing the development of rural areas. An example where this is taking place is in the limits of Xemxija where an abandoned hotel, The Mistra Village, is being renovated and rebuilt.

There are multiple reasons to ensure that Malta's building industry is towards sustainability. One should enforce legislations about building permits. This should include the digging process, the transportation and that the material is energy efficient and energy saving such as insulation. These can help achieve sustainability as the building is developed in an eco-friendly way by reducing the emissions of the greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide and other unnecessary air and noise pollution from the beginning. The buildings must also have a law that is associated with the conservation of the environment in places that are sensitive such as in coastal zones. One has to be strict on processing and releasing permits. Many permits for the demolishing of terraced houses have been issued in order to make way for apartments which are of an eye-sore and bring about other consequences. Furthermore, permits for development in Outside Development Zones should be avoided.

An Environmental Impact Assessment is a study carried out before a new building is given the development consent. Here the public is able to give his opinion about the development taking place.

Non-Governmental Organisations such as Nature Trust Malta, 'Din l-Art Helwa' and 'Flimkien Ghal Ambjent Ahjar' , educate and raise awareness within the people about the impacts on the environment suffered by developments. These organisations have quite an impact , they carry out public awareness campaigns by using the media, petitions by involving the public's views and by protests.

Sustainable development has to meet the needs of our present generation but without compromising the future generation to meet their own needs. For Malta sustainable development is not an option as whatever we choose to do will effect the future generations. We should conserve our environment as the future generations also have a right to enjoy it.