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How to mitigate the effect of construction on the tourism industry

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by **Angelo Xuereb**

THESE TWO main sectors of the Maltese economy are my daily breadwinner, therefore this contribution is based on hard facts and seen with a practical eye. Tourism is vital to our islands as around 35 per cent of our economic activities are generated by this industry, thus creating a multiplier effect.

Construction is another major



CONTRACTORS undertaking road works should be responsible for appropriate signage

player in our economy since there are numerous trades and services associated with this sector. I do not agree with the statistics denoting that construction only generates around five per cent of our economic activities. The basis of the computation is old and is based on building structure and quarrying.

Construction encompasses all the finishing trades, fittings and

services. In fact I've read somewhere that the local banks' lending portfolio to property and construction is as high as 90 per cent, including home loans.

Just imagine if this sector, or rather this industry, were to experience a sudden drop during this period. This could lead to a serious recession.

This explains why both industries need to continue to flourish

and we need to establish the best possible way to strike a balance.

The fact that our islands are mainly made of limestone and we still use stone blocks in our construction, which in its nature produces dust, coupled with a dry climate, it is inevitable that this sector generates more dust than in other countries.

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Construction sites should be protected

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Furthermore, naturally due to the limited size of our islands and the close proximity of our villages and towns, it is also inevitable that the effect of dust and other nuisances is felt even further.

Our challenge is how to reduce this impact on residents and tourism. From a tourism point of view, one would wish to put all construction activities within tourism-designated areas on hold during summer, but I do not believe this would be the right decision, since there are many other complications, such as completion timeframes, financial losses, ideal equipment, employment issues, etc...

In other European cities, they have managed to mitigate this impact and I do not understand why this cannot happen here too. Two years ago, in my capacity as president of the Federation of Building and Civil Engineering Contractors (FOBC), I was appointed chairman of a sub-committee of the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) to purposely deal with this issue.

A number of proposals were submitted to the government but, unfortunately, no action was taken. These are some of the proposals:

Fencing/hoarding and barricades

A developer should be responsible for providing hoarding and fencing to protect the public. A strongly constructed fence, hoarding or barricade not less than two metres high needs to be erected between the site under construction and the public way or open sides of a site to safeguard the public.

Construction sites could be protected by properly designed hoarding along their front. Design could be approved by local councils. Very often, in European cities and towns, design hoarding would be a print of the proposed elevation. All construction materials would be placed within a confined and enclosed area.

Covered walkways

The developer shall be responsible to construct an adequate, temporary, covered walkway to protect pedestrians from any falling debris. This walkway should have a clear internal width of not less than 1.1 metres and a height of 2.2 metres to allow a safe, clear passage for pedestrians.

Working hours within tourist designated areas (July 1-September 30)

Noise-generating working activities, namely excavation and demolition, will be carried out between 8.30 a.m. and 7 p.m., while it is acceptable for all other construction activities not to commence before 7 a.m. and end by 7 p.m.

Demolition plan and site supervision

All demolition works should be carried out under the supervision of a warranted architect or a demolition expert recognised by the Building Regulations Advisory Board, which would advise the developer on the best way to reduce inconvenience.

In addition, the developer is obliged to present a method statement approved by a demolition expert or warranted architect that any interested party may be informed when the works are to commence.

This statement shall be submitted to MEPA, following receipt of the building permit and at least two weeks before demolition works commence. No new demolishing and excavation works are to commence during summer within the designated touristic areas.

The method statement is to be approved by the Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA) to reduce risk of injury and catastrophe.

Chutes for waste material

Chutes for waste materials should be continuous from point of

loading to point of discharge and shall have proper coverage for containment. This could also be a must for every construction site.

Enclosure for waste material

Loose building materials, such as gravel or sand, should not be allowed on the streets, but deposited within the approved fenced-off area; otherwise these materials should be delivered and stored in covered containers.

Dust generation

Work activities generating excessive dust, such as stone grinding etc., shall be controlled with proper coverage or proper extraction equipment. The developer is to take necessary action to reduce excessive dust generation.

Sanding down of buildings,

façades or walls by any electric power tools, unequipped with a dust collecting bag, should be prohibited. Alternatively, these specific working areas should be fully enclosed with dust-proof material.

Communication on site

The use of two-way radio equipment is a requirement on construction sites measuring 500m² or larger so as to reduce the loud communication habits between plant operators and foremen.

Signs for directing traffic

Contractors undertaking road works are to be responsible for appropriate signage and warning lights to be placed from a suitable distance ahead of the actual place of works. These are to include warning signs as well as signs indicating recommended deviation routes for motorists; road works on

arterial works or other main roads could be extended to longer working hours to complete works within the shortest time possible.

Award of contracts

Government should award contracts not entirely based on costs but should give due consideration to past performance of the contractor and his present workload commitments to establish the capability to undertake the contract to the expected quality and timeframes.

These measures are practical and could be implemented within a reasonably short period. I'm not saying there will not be any inconveniences, but definitely it would be a big step in the right direction.

We need to act now. Tourism is very fragile and the dissatisfied tourist could mean a harsh blow to the whole industry.



MALTA FEDERATION OF INDUSTRY

Call for applications

The Malta Federation of Industry (FOI) seeks to employ Executive Staff. The posts include coordination of activities related to the Mediterranean Trading and Innovation Centre project (METIC), a joint-initiative aiming to create industry-academia links.

Post of Project Manager Project part-financed by the European Union Community Initiative Interreg III

The chosen candidate will be experienced in Project Management and will specifically have knowledge and experience of EU projects and mechanisms. You will create and execute EU-related project work plans and revise as appropriate to meet changing needs and requirements. It will be your role to identify the resources needed and assign individual responsibilities. You will be expected to manage day-to-day operational aspects of EU-related projects and their scope, review deliverables and effectively apply FOI's methodology to ensure project standards. The selected individual will ensure project documents are complete, current, and stored appropriately. Fluent Italian is a must for the successful candidate as is a graduate degree in Business or Economics.

Post of Communications Executive

Under general direction the chosen candidate will perform tasks related to the management of FOI's membership base and other stakeholders. The position requires the coordination of the integrated internal and external communications objective, vision and strategy. You will develop and maintain an organizational issue management strategy, develop and refine a comprehensive integrated communication plan, and ensure the most effective engagement with members and stakeholders. You will administer FOI's public information policies and programmes, manage media contacts, represent the organization amongst the membership community, and establish relationships with business leaders enhancing FOI's good will. You will possess a working knowledge of the media, understand both EU and local governance systems, be familiar with Government and local institutions, as well as possessing strong communication skills. Ability to establish and maintain good working relationships with staff, public officials, community leaders and the general public is essential.

Applications, including a full CV and references, are to be addressed to:

The Director General
Malta Federation of Industry
Casa Leone
Pjazza Robert Samut
Floriana

By not later than September 8th, 2006.

Structural funds Programme for MALTA 2004-2006



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Those interested and possess the right qualifications should submit their C.V to

hmizzi@wellbeingmalta.com

or send to

Factory A25F, Industrial Estate, Marsa

by not later than Thursday, 31st August 2006

All applications will be acknowledged and treated in strictest confidence.