

Għaqda Residenti Sliema

Sliema Residents Association
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Subject : press release on Architecture Deans' Comments

SRA notes the comments by the Dean of the Faculty for the Built Environment at the University of Malta, Dr Torpiano, during the graduation ceremony held last week. The Dean is quoted as stating that *'Higher density should not be a "dirty" term' in urban development because he sees 'more high density urban development as a way to avoid eating into more of Malta's limited virgin land'.*

Preserving the countryside need not condemn the urban population to live in squalor or within a perpetual demolition site. MEPA already protects 'virgin countryside' through approved development plans which designate certain areas as Outside the Development Zone (ODZ).

SRA applauds the Dean's comment *'Rather than teaching our students how to design houses and apartments, it is ... important that the faculty addresses ... wider issues, in technological terms, but also in a socio-political context'* since this acknowledges the faults of a piecemeal approach to urban planning.

SRA remains concerned about the implications of 'high density' urban development as there are side effects - as Sliema amply shows - in the absence of effective planning and infrastructure management.

What the Dean failed to mention were the problems associated with high density development such as increased social stress and decreased privacy (already prevalent issues in Malta), higher energy requirements in modern developments, raised ambient temperatures within the urban area, evacuation concerns from tall buildings, social isolation for apartment dwellers - especially those with restricted mobility. Increased hard surfaces from high density developments contribute to greater water run-off after rain causing floods and overload to antiquated drainage systems.

Such issues may be mitigated if green areas are kept or introduced within the city area. So far, green areas have been sacrificed without hesitation in Sliema and other populous towns.

High density development in Malta inevitably equates to more vehicular traffic bringing air quality problems and undesired health issues. There is also the landscape value and cultural meaning of our urban areas for existing residents; any drastic change to the townscape may feel like a personal loss.

SRA is not against development if sympathetic to its context. The economic driver for re-development can benefit from the renovation or conversion of existing properties - rather than their replacement by incongruous apartments.

The Dean is reported as saying *'that Malta need(s) beautiful urban spaces'* and *'The environment is an important part of our life'*. SRA contends that the environment is not just the flora, fauna and countryside. It is also our surroundings in the urban areas which should nurture all.

Development should not degrade the built environment through short term profiteering. It is the role of MEPA to provide holistic planning, administered in a rational and even handed way, and protect those who are most impacted. The Dean and MEPA need to give attention to the liveability of our towns now and for a sustainable future.

The SRA Committee

L-Ghaqda Residenti Sliema nnotat id-diskors tal-gradwazjoni minn Dott.Torpiano, Dekan tal- Fakulta' ta' Ambjent Zviluppat fl-Universita' ta' Malta, lejn tmiem il- gimgha li ghaddiet, fejn gie kwotat li qal li zvilupp b'koncentrazzjoni gholja ta' bini urban ma ghandhux jitqies bhala xi terminu dispregjattiv, peress li dan it-tip ta' zvilupp urban hu mod kif ma jittiehedx aktar minn dak li fadal mill-art fi stat naturali.

Insosstnu, izda li biex tigi mharsa l-kampanja ma ghandniex nikkundannaw lir-residenti f'lokalitajiet urbani jghixu f'ambjent degradat bhal li kieku f'xi sit perpetwu ta' kostruzzjoni. Ta' minn ifakkar li l-art fi stat naturali suppost li hi diga qed tigi protetta mill-Awtorita' Maltija ta' l-Ambjent u Ppjanar (MEPA) permezz ta' Zoni l-Barra minn dawk ta' l-lzvilupp (ODZ).

L-Ghaqda Residenti Sliema taqbel mal-kumment tad- Dekan dwar il-htiega w l-importanza li l-Fakulta' ghandha tmur l-hinn aktar mit-taghlim ta' kif jiffasslu djar, appartamenti u teknologija u termini teknici, peress li hu importanti ukoll li ghandha tghallem lill-istudenti ukoll biex jigi kkunsidrat l-isfond u funzjoni socio – politku ta' l-izvilupp. Dan peress li l-lokalita' tas Sliema tinsab imgarrba sew bin-nuqqasijiet serji ta' ppjanar ta' zvilupp urban bl- imqjeta.

L-Ghaqda Residenti Sliema tesprimi thassib dwar l-implikazzjonijiet ta' zvilupp b'koncentrazzjoni qawwija ta' bini urban minhabba l-effetti negattivi li dan igib mieghu, bhal ma jirrizulta fil- kaz ta' tas- Sliema, fejn jinhass in-nuqqas ta' ppjanar u ta' maniggjar effettiv ta' l-infrastruttura.

Ninnotaw li d-Dekan izda, naqas li jsemmi l-problemi marbuta ma' zvilupp b'koncentrazzjoni qawwija ta' bini, bhal nghidu ahna aktar tensjoni socjali, nuqqas ta' privatezza, nuqqas ta' hajja komunitarja, htiega ta' aktar uzu ta' l-energija, kif ukoll aktar tendenzi ta' gharghar fit-toroq u fawran tas-sistema (qadima) tad-drenagg bl-ilmijiet tax-xita.

Dawn il-problemi jistghu jigu mnaqqsa sew billi jigu mharsa l-ispazji miftuha u postijiet mhux mibnija gewwa l-lokalitajiet urbani. Hasra li f'tas- Sliema w f'lokalitajiet urbani ohra, hafna spazji miftuha gew sagrifikati ghal zvilupp urban qawwi minghajr ebda hniena.

Koncentrazzjoni ta' bini nvarjabbilment igib mieghu aktar traffiku w ghalhekk zieda aktar ta' tniggis ta' l-arja b'konsegwenzi hzienu fuq is-sahha u l-kwalita' ta' hajja tar-residenti. Zvilupp qawwi f'lokalitajiet urbani jbidel ukoll l-valur tax-xenarju u tal- kultura kollettiva tar-residenti li f'xi kazi tinhass ukoll bhala telfa personali.

L-Ghaqda Residenti Sliema ma hix kontra kull zvilupp sakemm dan isir b' rispettt tal-kuntest socjali w b'armonija ma l-ambjent ezistenti. L-Ghaqda tifhem li hemm zvilupp li

jrendi finanzjarjament f'lokalitajiet urbani b'xoghol ta' tigidid u konverzjoni fuq proprjetajiet ezistenti, minnflok jinbena bini goff u bla karattru ta' appartamenti.

L-izvilupp ma' ghandhux jiddegenera lokalitajiet urbani għall-profitti ta' xi whud. Huwa r-rwol ta' l-Awtorita' Maltija ta' l-Ambjent u Ppjanar li tassigura ppjanar razzjonali b'vizjoni wiesgha li jhares l-interessi legittimi ta' dawk kollha li jkunu se jintlaqtu bl-izvilupp. Għalhekk L-Għaqda Residenti Sliema ssostni li sew id- Dekan kif ukoll L-Awtorita' huma fid- dover li jagħtu attenzjoni mehtiega biex il-lokalitajiet urbani jkunu adegwati biex nghixu dicentament fihom fiz-zminijet prezenti kif ukoll dawk futuri.

Il-Kumitat ta' l_-Għaqda Residenti Sliema.