



THE CHURCH IN MALTA

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THE STUDY BY MDA ON PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT CANNOT SUBSTITUTE A NATIONAL PROPERTY STUDY BY GOVERNMENT

The Church Environment Commission (KA), whilst acknowledging the benefits of a study on Property Development such as that commissioned by the Malta Developers Association (MDA), stresses that the government and the competent authorities, including the Planning Authority, should still take the initiative and launch a national study on property, as they are duty bound to do. Such a study would go beyond the interests pertaining to a particular section of Maltese society, in that it would take into account every aspect related to the quality of life of one and all. Only in this way will the study serve as an effective instrument for the implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development, and the setting out and execution of the Local Plans.

In December 2015, following the publication of Pope Francis' **Laudato Si'**, the KA had presented a set of proposals to the local civil and ecclesiastical authorities, hoping that these would serve us as a suitable point of reference in the formulation of policies, if we really cherish the good of our country and of planet earth, our common home. The following is one of these proposals:

We invite Government to fund a long overdue and truly national study on the demand and supply of Maltese properties and the fiscal and economic environment that has a bearing on them. The terms of reference for such study should be issued for public consultation and enjoy the widest agreement possible by all stakeholders.¹

The KA has reiterated its appeal in a communication to the Government before the presentation of the budget for 2017 and in a number of other times. But no such study was forthcoming.

The KA is somewhat surprised that just a few weeks after the President of the Malta Developers' Association (MDA) declared on a radio talk show that there was no need for such study², the MDA is now commissioning a study that will tackle some of the aspects that the KA thinks should feature in a similar study.

¹ Laudato Si' – **Mid-Dokument għall-Azzjoni** - Conference organized by the KA 4/5th December 2015.

² Recording of the programme may be heard on <http://rtk.com.mt/mt/posts/64226/dritt-ghall-punt---16112016>

The KA believes that the fact that the study by KPMG is being carried out, is a positive move, since, although it is impossible to predict the future with certainty, it would be folly to take rash decisions on issues that are so crucial given the limited space of our islands. While a contractor or developer is free to risk his financial capital in any way he pleases, our country cannot continue to put up with building projects which have been declared as failures (or, as they are more commonly known nowadays, “unsustainable”) by whoever was responsible for them.

Given the enthusiasm shown by the Government at the launch of this study, the KA believes that such study should have been commissioned by the Government itself through the relative competent authorities.

Since the promoter of the study comes from the private sector, one risks ending up in a situation where the inferences drawn from the results would not be holistic enough to allow for the right decisions to be taken on a national level, both by the government and by the planning authority, simply because such a study would be satisfying the remit of whoever would have commissioned it. The KA feels this is implied in the inaugural speech by the MDA President when he states that the association wished to carry out this study “*to substantiate our long-held beliefs*”³; also “*we will be examining the outcome so that the policies that are put forward and the MDA’s proposals, among other stakeholders, will have greater credibility and you (Prime Minister) will be more comfortable understanding why we are proposing certain policies*”⁴.

The feeling that one is already aware of what the results of a study will show **before** the completion of such study, does not augur well. This phenomenon (which, one must admit, has characterised many similar situations in the near and distant past) has always worried the KA since its inception in 2003. Since then, facts show that the KA has never refrained from expressing its concern in this regard. For this reason, it is important that the interpretation of the results be carried out in an objective way and without any prejudice whatsoever. Otherwise it would be useless to carry out the study in a scientific and scrupulous manner.

The KA has always insisted that the progress of a nation should not be based simply on how flourishing its economy is, without taking into consideration the social and environmental aspects, and how these are affected by the decisions taken. It, therefore, finds very disturbing, that when referring to the building industry as the backbone of the Maltese economy, “*we (the MDA) want what we do to be done with a certain sustainability and certain responsibility*”.⁵ Why “**certain**” sustainability?

“Living sustainably is no longer an option but a responsibility. It would be a mistake to promote lifestyles or allow developments that put in jeopardy our common heritage, so as not to upset

³ Sandro Chetcuti, President MDA - Inaugurative Speech - 13th January 2017

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

the personal interests of a minority of individuals."⁶ Therefore *"when someone dreams of doing something"*⁷, one has to give priority to the common good, without ever ignoring the limitations of our country. We can no longer regard the building industry as if it were the only industry that sustains the economy of our country. We need to seriously consider the effect of the lack of space and building trends on the quality of life on other industries and on the Maltese themselves.

Once again, *"The KA appeals that as a nation we would learn from past mistakes, and commit ourselves to a more sustainable future, where the indicator for a good quality of life would not be financial gain, but a sense of justice, respect for all creation and solidarity; such values will enable us to regard the good of our islands as a legacy bequeathed to all present and future inhabitants."*

⁶ *Pajjiżna ma jiflaħx aktar għal żvilupp li mhux sostenibbli* – Opinion Paper - Kummissjoni Interdjoċesana Ambjent - 15th October 2013.

⁷ Sandro Chetcuti, President MDA - Inaugurative Speech - 13th January 2017.