

**Article****Crime Issues: when will the business community tackle the genie?**

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“Commercial and recreational areas are a mecca magnet for crime”... thus stated the crime analyst. “Nah”, retorted the entrepreneur, “it is only a figment of the imagination”. It is I daresay! Only a figment of a figment that these areas are safe, it is.... Such is the perception of safety that bothering to assess the reality is short of one line from the bottom of the to-do list. The need for an analysis of the impact that the industry (be it service or manufacturing or otherwise) has on the crime and its social impact is rarely expressed as against the oft-trumpeted impact of crime on the industry’s well-being. The need to think inversely should be pushed to the top of the agenda since the industry is fast encroaching on and likewise being boxed in by a growing population density, an exponential increase in dwelling density, a move toward intensive mixed use, the aggregation of businesses in concentrated areas as well as an evolution of recreation and leisure trends that are experiencing short-term concentrations of people and services in very small and highly vulnerable areas. The industry is also having a major impact on the surrounding areas beyond their mental-space which constitutes their turf-boundaries. The Swieqi and Pembroke councils (Figure 1) serve as a case in point: for over 20 odd years these residents have been suffering from the excesses of one industry that does not see beyond its proverbial nose, in this case the Paceville boundaries. Research shows that offences are categorised by distance from the handful of streets in Paceville, morphing to different crime types every 50 metres, from serious offences to bodily harm to vehicle and property damage to residential offences the further one moves from the core. The cause and effect are linked in a perpetual dance: a dance that can only see a bow-out should the industry put in its share of security for the whole region. Opportunities we make Recent reports on incidents that occur in Malta’s main recreational areas are increasingly dangerous lends nothing new to the debate: attacks on security officers, threats towards the police, attacks on Maltese and tourists alike, thefts and vandalism have been going on since the invention of the flute and will not succumb readily. But change the rates we can and it is irresponsible to assume that the Police should solely take the brunt of enforcement – it has to be a collective affair. Figure 2 shows that the weekend-weekday offence rates are exceptional for Paceville (San Giljan) taking up 25% of all crime committed during the weekend and 11% during the weekday. Recreational and commercial areas such San Pawl il-Bahar, Hamrun, Sliema and Marsascala follow suit albeit at a diminishing rate. This fact is stated but why does security fail to cushion the incidence and reduce it drastically? The answer is multifold: criminological studies show that the industry and its ware is not only a victim of offences, but also a willing attractor and in turn a participant in the commissioning of crime. Blatant lack of security personnel and monitoring and recording devices is one obvious issue, so obvious that it is laughable in its negativity. Sadly, a quick review of these services following a major offence proves the point: there is always that dirty camera, a faulty recorder, an inside wo/man. Such incidents serve as extremely

inefficient and dangerous marketing ploys. Other issues involve the lack of cooperation between traders in the setting up of a combined security protocol at a lower individual cost with a value-added instant response. Industry is also an opportunity creator for the offender: accessibility to wares and monies is a case in point, timings of transactions, storage units, closing times, lack of crowd control measures, are among many of the items omitted in a rush to cost-cutting and profit maximisation. Offenders are knowledgeable of the routine activities of both the business and its clients and strike when most opportune and least problematic for their withdrawal from the scene. Public-Private Partnerships The answer to the above is not a genie solution but a long and winding road that brings in the industry, the local enforcers, the police, the residents and the security companies towards a holistic approach to contain and in the longer term to reduce the incidents that occur. The current piecemeal process does not enhance the potential for success as the interests are sole and isolated from the rest of the community. The target should entail an integration of social participants, the industry's input to work in tandem and an integrated safety and security plan that brings together the requirements of each party. Forget waiting for the apple to fall, the cherry picker is a better alternative. Dr Formosa is a spatial environmental criminologist and is a senior lecturer at the Institute of Criminology, University of Malta and Director of CrimeMalta