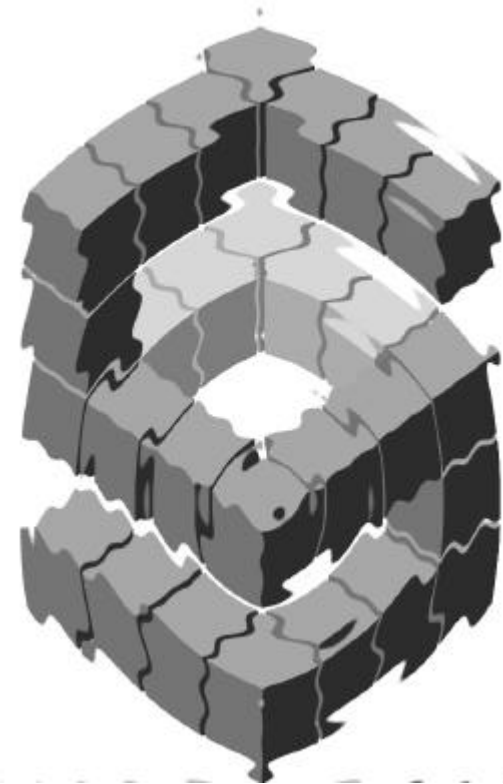


STRUCTURE PLAN FOR THE MALTESE ISLANDS



**Executive Summary
PUBLIC ATTITUDE SURVEY
SEPTEMBER 2000**

BACKGROUND

This document summarises the findings of a Public Attitude Survey carried out by the Planning Directorate in July 1999. The Strategic Planning Unit designed the questionnaire (attached), analysed results and prepared the reports. MISCO International were consulted on the content and design of the questionnaire, and were entrusted with mailing the survey, operating a free-phone service, data coding and input. The survey was undertaken as part of the Structure Plan review process, its purpose being to examine the views of the Maltese public on a number of land-use issues.

CONTENT

The content of the questionnaire was formulated upon an analysis of the issues highlighted by the Structure Plan Monitoring Reports (produced by the Planning Authority in 1997 and 1999 respectively), and following extensive internal consultation and specialist external advice. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 46 closed statements, including 5 statements reproduced from the 1990 Public Attitudes Survey, two open-ended questions, and a section requiring socio-economic information about respondents. Statements included in the questionnaire dealt with a variety of issues significant to the review of the Structure Plan, and to local planning. The issues included development and conservation, monitoring and enforcement, housing and urban conservation, transport and public utilities, commerce and industry, leisure and recreation, tourism, waste management and quarrying, coastal strategy, rural strategy, social facilities and community care.

The wording of the statements was chosen so as to be unambiguous. For closed statements, respondents were instructed to *"indicate to which extent you agree or disagree. There is no right or wrong answer! Your opinion matters."* The questionnaire was anonymous so as to

dispel any fear of repercussions and to discourage respondents from submitting replies which they may have regarded as "the right answer". In drafting the questionnaire, attention was paid to the fact that each statement expressed only one opinion, so that respondents would not be asked to express an opinion on two things at once. Care was also taken to avoid double negatives. The questionnaire was printed in Maltese, however an English version was available on request.

METHODOLOGY

A postal survey was undertaken, the typical response rate being around the 20 per cent mark. To ensure an adequate response, a sample of approximately 15,000 was randomly generated from the electoral register, structured so that it included 5 per cent of each age cohort and 5 per cent of the population of each locality of the Maltese Islands. The same questionnaire was also distributed to 600 persons between 10 and 19 years of age at secondary, pre-university, private, (church and state) schools. Several incentives were provided to ensure that an adequate response was received, including free-post, free-phone, a lottery and advertising. The survey was undertaken during the months of June and July 1999. A total of 5,719 valid responses were received, representing over 38 per cent of the 15,000 sample. Frequency distributions were generated for all statements. Sub-sets of the main data set were also created at a Local Plan and at locality level.

SAMPLE PROFILE

The national sample represented 1.5 per cent of the entire population of the Maltese Islands. 98 per cent of the respondents were Maltese citizens. The male:female ratio of the sample was 54:46, and the average age of the respondents of the sample was 42. Two-thirds of the respondents were married and just over half of the females had one child or more (with an average of 2.4 children per mother).

Out of 5,719 respondents, 17 per cent were retired, 8 per cent were students and 6 per cent were unemployed or did not respond to the question. In terms of income, 61 per cent stated that their earnings fell within the Lm 0 and Lm 4000 bracket, 19 per cent stated they earned between Lm 4001 and Lm 6000, while 10 per cent stated they earned above Lm 6000. The majority of respondents (62 per cent) had received secondary (including post-secondary) level education. The rest had received up to a primary school level or tertiary education. 43 per cent of the sample respondents stated that they formed part of a non governmental organization. Many of the respondents (86 per cent) had never lived abroad. On average, some 1 to 2 per cent of the resident populations of each locality responded to the questionnaire, providing a geographical representation of the Maltese population.

While the sample broadly represented the socio-economic fabric of the Maltese population according to the 1995 Census, certain deviations must be taken into account. In comparison with the population of Malta according to the 1995 Census, the average age of the sample respondents was slightly higher and there were proportionally more males than females. A higher proportion of the respondents were married, although there was a lower average offspring per mother. There was a higher percentage of students and retired individuals in the sample when compared to the Maltese population. The sample also recorded higher educational and income levels than that of the Maltese population according to the 1995 Census.

SUB-SETS

Data sub-sets were created and analysed for each local plan area as well as for each local council (wherever significant in terms of sample size).

The Marsaxlokk Bay local plan sub-set consisted of 169 responses and represented 3 per cent of the total sample. A total of 412 responses (7 per cent) of the national sample originated from the Grand Harbour local plan area, while respondents from the South of

Malta (as defined by the local plan area) together formed the largest subset (1,699 responses or 30 per cent of the total sample). The Central local plan sub-set represented 29 per cent of the national sample (1,658 responses) and the North-West local plan sub-set made up 9 per cent of the national sample (531 responses). The 906 responses from the North Harbours local plan sub-set represented 16 per cent of the national sample, while respondents from Gozo (315) amounted to only 6 per cent of the national sample.

Responses varied among local plans. Variations can be partly attributed to different socio-economic profiles among respondents of various local plan areas. Responses to certain statements were particularly sensitive to the educational level of respondents, and to locality of residence. While findings in the Central and South local plan did not exhibit substantial variation from the national sample, other local plan sub-sets were small enough to deviate from the national frequency distribution for certain statements. The most pronounced differences between the national sample and local plan sub-sets were observed in the case of the Gozo local plan.

The questionnaire also contained two open-ended questions requesting respondents to name three areas which they would like to see protected from development and three environmental problems which concerned them most. These questions generated a wide range of submissions. For the purposes of analysis, 3,000 cases were randomly selected from the national sample of 5,719, thus reducing the response to a more manageable amount of variables. The sub-set did not register any significant variation in comparison with the national sample of 5,719.

RESULTS

The principal objective of the survey was to collect information about the perceptions of the Maltese public towards various land-use issues. Annex A attached, provides a summary of the results derived from the

national sample by topic. Given the interrelationships which exist among the various topics, various statements pertain to more than one topic. For ease of reference, statements are reproduced under more than one heading, in some instances. Statements included under the title "Development and Conservation", and "Monitoring and Enforcement" have relevance to all other topics.

In the previous survey of public attitudes (1991), what had emerged as the public's most important considerations for the future of the Maltese Islands were the problems of rapid building development, the importance of tourism and the need to tackle the problem of waste. Educational issues, a clean environment, protection of green spaces and old buildings, the need to enforce and the need to improve public services were also evident priorities.

The 1999 Public Attitude Survey, revealed that there is still preoccupation with building activity (especially outside development zone) and with the need for conservation (particularly recreational areas, historic buildings and archaeological sites). Concern with waste and public cleaning has also remained an important issue. On the other hand, the basic provision of public utilities and tourism related issues, no longer seems to be regarded a priority. Instead, the need to provide facilities in recreational areas generated strong reactions, as did environmental problems in coastal/marine areas, air pollution and transport-related issues.

The majority of respondents felt that Malta is too built up. Several mentioned "over-development" as an environmental problem. High levels of disagreement were registered for the granting of some permits outside existing schemes. There was also disagreement with zoning further land for development as well as with building up all land within schemes. Moreover, the majority of respondents agreed with building higher, and with penalties on vacant buildings. Almost all towns and villages in Malta and Gozo were mentioned as meriting protection from development, and Mdina and Valletta received the largest portion of mentions in this regard.

The majority of respondents also agreed that Gozo should not be built

up further, and several were of the opinion that all of Gozo should be protected from development. On the other hand, a bridge to link Malta and Gozo proved to be popular among Maltese respondents (albeit not among Gozitan respondents).

Several respondents felt that there is insufficient enforcement, and there was disagreement with sanctioning illegal developments (boat-houses). It was not evident that the majority respondents want more land-use regulations, however.

Respondents felt strongly about the need to conserve old buildings in towns and villages and there was a strong positive reaction to the need to look after archaeological sites. In fact, the two statements "Existing archaeological sites should be better looked after" and "Old buildings in towns and villages should be conserved" generated the strongest level of support in the entire questionnaire. In concordance, the statement "The use of aluminum frames should be permitted in old towns and villages" was the one which generated highest levels of disagreement.

The need to restrict cars in certain areas was strongly felt by those responding to the survey. Pedestrianisation of town centres and village cores, as well as shopping streets was met with a high level of agreement, as was the concept of traffic-free rural areas. The statement "There is need for improved accessibility for push-chairs and wheelchairs, even at the expense of car space" generated particularly high levels of support. Many respondents also stated they would make more use of public transport, were the service to be improved. For most respondents car-parks should not be more than 10 minutes walking distance from the center.

The results of the survey indicate that grocery stores are acceptable in residential areas, but that garage industries are not. Moreover, several respondents did not agree with the concentration of commercial activity in existing primary town centres, particularly respondents residing outside the commercial centres mentioned.

More sports facilities, parks and public gardens, are required in most localities, and only few of those who responded to the survey agreed

that there are sufficient facilities (like theaters, halls and workshops) for cultural activities. The majority of respondents would be pleased to see more recreational areas like Paceville, Bugibba and Marsascala.

The response to tourism activity tended to vary among localities, and on a national basis, there were mixed feelings as to whether tourists use too many resources, whether more accommodation facilities should be built or whether there are too many tourists altogether.

Waste was the issue of greatest concern to respondents, and while they agreed with separation at source, with bring systems (skips), and to a lesser extent, with incineration, they disagreed with dumping at sea as a solution to the problem. New quarries also received a thumbs down from respondents.

An overwhelmingly large portion of the areas mentioned by respondents as meriting protection from development were rural or coastal recreational areas. Buskett, Ta' Qali, Mizieb, Mtahleb, Ghajn Tuffieha, Wardija, Kemmuna, Bahar ic-Caghaq, Dingli cliffs, Selmun, Bahrija, and Chadwick lakes were among the most popular areas.

With regard to rural areas, respondents felt strongly that "Better facilities are required, such as car-parks and picnic areas", this being one of the most popular statements in the survey. Respondents were also very much in favour of having car-free areas in the countryside and of having foot-paths in the countryside. Hunting/trapping hinders other recreational activities from being practised in the countryside, according to many of those who answered.

Respondents tended to visit sandy beaches on weekday afternoons and Sundays. They were concerned with improving facilities beaches, and the statement "There are adequate facilities on major beaches" received a strongly negative response. The response on granting more permits for fish farms, on the other hand, was not categorical.

Undergrounding of cables would be popular with respondents, as would be the planting of more trees. With regard to polyclinics, residents of the Grand Harbour local plan were the ones who registered most frequent use, while those of Gozo and the North

Harbours local plans, least frequent.

It is important that these results are not interpreted as the unchangeable facts about public opinion, but as the opinion of a representative group of people at a particular point in time. It must be borne in mind that the attitudes expressed by respondents in this type of questionnaire may not be based on deep considered thought, but on volatile environmental values, which may well change over time in the context of changes in government policy, economic health of the nation, influence of media campaigns and communication etc.

However, the findings provide important pointers for the current work on the Structure Plan Review and provide further corroboration to the issues for consideration in the two monitoring reports published by the Planning Authority. For planning purposes, it is important to have regard to the issues of major concern aired by the public on key issues from time to time.