



# Construction BOOM!


*The goal of satire is not to mock, but to generate debate. By placing us in the role of the contractor, downloadable board game Construction BOOM! forces us to take a long hard look at the construction industry and wonder if it really is 'booming'. Words by **Sam Shingles & Bethany Wootton.***

Arriving in Malta this Summer from the UK, neither of us thought that our lives would become consumed by construction. The hammering of nails woke us up in the morning, while angry, beeping cars prevented us from much walking. Construction led to our apartment being flooded.

The culture shock hit us as we got off the plane. Malta lacks trees, has an intense sun, and its skyline is littered with cranes. Walking around showed the immense infrastructure being built. With time, we saw the construction industry's recklessness and how powerless many Maltese feel.

After a few months working at the University of Malta (UM) we learnt about the game Construction BOOM!, a two-player satirical tile-laying game on the construction industry, created by the Institute of Digital Games, UM.

Curious to find out if the game reflected our experience, we downloaded and printed a copy, then played a few rounds. The idea of the game is to get one over on your opponent, trying to undercut them with the promise of building cheaper and somewhat dubious structures, while the other player tries their best to tear them down. The game accurately reflected what we saw happening in Malta. To learn more about the game's origins we spoke to the game designers.

Stefano Gualeni and Jasper Schellekens created the game to channel their personal frustration. Jasper recounted with a smile, 'funny enough, while we were creating the game, the building we were in was set to be demolished!' The construction industry in Malta had come to them with its faults laid bare for all to see as construction workers bulldozed the building next door. 'We were yelling out of the window telling 



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Game artwork depicting the design landscape of Malta



The game allows for buildings of all shapes and sizes, does this look familiar...



We even tried out the game! See if you can guess who was winning...



them to stop, but they said, "don't worry, don't worry!" Then they hit our building, which shook and cracked all of our walls,' Jasper describes, laughing at the absurdity of it all. He continues to recount how the construction also led to a burst water pipe 'spraying water all over the institute' with the construction workers 'almost surprised that these things were happening.' These experiences are in the game's artwork. The game might seem exaggerated, but the events it portrays are normal for many in Malta.

The game creators have personally experienced the negative impacts of the construction industry. Lives have sadly been lost due to building collapses in Malta. Many old, cultural buildings have been reduced to rubble. Construction BOOM! uses satire to echo these ideas. As Jasper highlights, satire is 'usually a tool used by people who feel powerless. In the local context, that is where we are coming from. We are not involved in the construction industry in any way, but we see it and are constantly impacted by it. Our perspective is that of powerlessness, the everyday citizen.' Yet, in the game, Stefano and Jasper have 'flipped the script' and put the powerless citizen in the position of power: the contractor, or as Stefano puts it, 'in the shoes of the bad guys!'

The game has even reached the shores of Japan. A Japanese intern working with Stefano and Jasper wrote an article about the game and also translated the instructions into Japanese. Japanese players understood the game's context, even if they did not attach it to Maltese satire.

The game has received some backlash in Malta. Not everyone agrees that construction is negative. Stefano recalls a quote by the famous English writer Rudyard Kipling, 'What do they know of England, who only England know?' He hopes that the game can provide a way to 'create some critical distancing,' helping Malta's residents, who may know nothing else, to realise the absurdity of it all. **T**

If you'd like to try the game for yourselves, which we think you should, then visit: [boom.gua-le-ni.com](http://boom.gua-le-ni.com)

