

The Sky is the Limit...or so they say...



As I look up from my books and glance at the sky from my classroom all I see are highly stacked bricks and cranes. They remind me of the Babylonians who thought that they could reach God by building an almighty tower far up into the sky. If they did, they assumed that like the Creator, they would become immortal and self-sufficient.

The neighbouring landscape is littered with towering cranes and building sites. They say that the sky is the limit? But is it? We seem to have reached that limit now. The sky is the backdrop of the life we lead and each one of us is entitled to soak in its pristine beauty, void of iron and the constant racket that has become an ordinary part of the noise landscape. Furthermore, dust clouds are often seen and then some classmates start to wheeze and sneeze and the windows need to be closed. **Does the construction have to take place all at once? Is there any analysis of the environmental cost or the well-being of those like us who have to bear it?**

Looking at the skylines of Sliema and St. Julian's the sheer number of cranes is overwhelming. Of course there aren't only tower cranes. On my way home there are even more cranes-mobile this time; excavators; jiggers; bulldozers and a multitude of other machinery that make the air heavy with dust and the noise pollution unbearable.

Dust Pollution

The construction industry is a major source of pollution in Sliema. Methods used in some demolition works need thorough investigation and better restriction control by the authorities. Construction activities that contribute to air pollution include: land clearing, operation of diesel engines, demolition and cleansing of stone facades. These generate high levels of dust typically from concrete, cement and stone, often over a long period of time. Construction dust is classified as **PM10**- this is particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter, invisible to the naked eye. Research¹ has shown that **PM10** penetrates deeply into the lungs and causes a wide range of health problems including respiratory illness, asthma, bronchitis and even cancer.

Dust clouds² have become too ordinary. Only last month, on the 2nd of February 2018³ to be precise, parts of Sliema were choked in dust. Similar issues had been reported by long-suffering residents and actual footage was sent to *The Planning Authority* asking them to implement dust-mitigation measures.

Noise Pollution

Construction sites produce a lot of noise, mainly from vehicles, heavy equipment and machinery, but also from people shouting instructions to each other or radios turned up too loud. Needless to say, the excessive noise is not only annoying but for us students it is also immensely distracting. Such sounds

¹ http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/189051/Health-effects-of-particulate-matter-final-Eng.pdf

² <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180202/community/haze-clouds-sliema-air-days-after-demolition-dust-complaints.669553>

³ <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180127/local/fortina-demolition-casts-a-dust-cloud-over-sliema-amid-reports-of.668983>

aren't just annoying. There is increasing evidence⁴ that long-term environmental noise above a certain level can have a negative influence on your health. These effects can be physical, mental and possibly even disrupt children's learning.

This is an overview of the situation in my hometown and its neighbourhood, but the reality is that building projects are being carried out everywhere in this country.

Can we stop it? I doubt it. However, I believe that with little cooperation and more control from the appropriate authorities, our standard of living could improve.

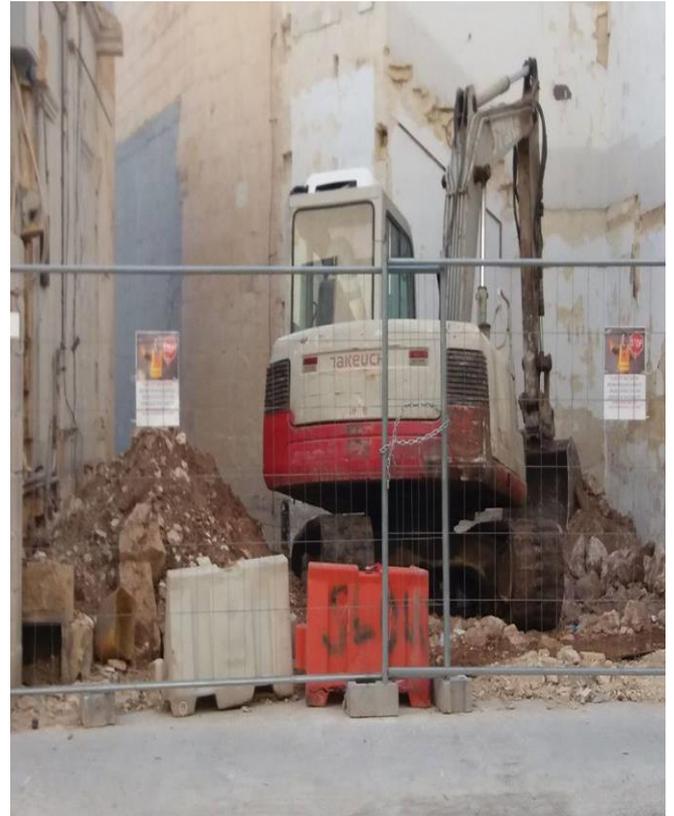
Recommendations

- It must be ensured that **all** construction sites use internal shafts and that no rubble is thrown down **any** number of floors in order to minimise excessive dust generation.
- Further development and permits for major construction should be **stopped** until contractors and developers regularise themselves and introduce new work practices across the board for the construction industry.
- Those who don't comply by these regulations should not only be fined (because often money is not an issue to such people) but stopped from causing further damage to the environment, by revoking for instance of licensing etc.
- When dust generation is considered excessive, the authorities should oblige dust misting systems to be used in order to protect both the residents and the workers.
- Screen the whole site (unlike in Picture A) to stop dust from spreading.
- Cover skips and trucks loaded with construction materials (unlike in Picture B) .

⁴https://www.google.com.mt/search?q=www.science+direct.com%2Fscience%2Farticle&rlz=1C1BLWB_enMT642MT642&oq=www.science+direct.com%2Fscience%2Farticle&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i60j0j5l2.2888j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8



Picture A



Picture B

Conclusion

I feel that that while policies are being stretched and adjusted to allow for further development, we the ordinary citizens have to adjust our standard of living and our lifestyles to the inconveniences caused by construction.

During an interview with an elderly gentleman who lives in the neighbourhood, I discovered his main concerns. He spoke about dangerous construction sites and gave me exact directions to these worrying sites, in order for me to carry out my investigations.

This picture, for instance was taken five minutes away from his house and our school. Apart from the obvious health hazard due to unprotected demolition, there is also the risk of electrocution where poles should have been erected to secure cables.



Throughout my investigations I took many other photos, one street for instance is so full of construction sites, that there is no pavement on either side. How can an elderly couple walk serenely here? Let alone someone pushing either a stroller or wheelchair!

Many pleas have been made, articles written and letters sent, yet they all seem to fall on deaf ears. Already in 2015, in an interview⁵, *Front Harsien ODZ* spokesman Michael Brigulio made the observation that almost all of us make on a daily basis-**‘Malta has become a permanent building site.’**

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21st March 2018

This photo has been included purely as evidence of the interview mentioned.



Other references:

<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120205/local/Sliema-is-like-a-war-zone-.405277>

<http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2015-06-02/newspaper-leader/Development-Malta-is-becoming-a-permanent-building-site-6736136577>