



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Housing for Tomorrow

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
The Vision of Housing in Malta by Hon. Roderick Galdes, Ministry for Social Accommodation	4
Foreword by Leonid McKay, Chief Executive Officer, Housing Authority	6
Sustainable Communities, Housing for Tomorrow by Rachael M Scicluna, Chairperson Sustainable Communities Board	8
What are Specialised Housing Programmes?	10
The Board	11
Social Thinking from the Start	14
How to include Social Factors in Design and Service Provision	16
Inclusive Design: A Modern Housing Perspective as a Key Aspect in Successful Programmes	21
National and International Case Study Summaries	24
Useful Resources for Applicants	32

The Board of the Sustainable Communities Projects (SCP) would like to thank the Ministry for Social Accommodation (MSA) for allocating the funds to the Housing Authority (HA) in order to implement the *Sustainable Communities, Housing for Tomorrow* policy. This policy drew on insights from the final research outcome of the White Paper, *Renting as a Housing Alternative*, commissioned by the Parliamentary Secretariat for Social Accommodation (PSSA, 2019) as well as the research of others.

Special thanks also to the Kamra tal-Periti (Chamber of Architects and Civil Engineers) for being a main supporter and collaborator in the organization of the Design Competition that the MSA and HA launched for the first time on the 7th October 2019, which coincided with World Architecture Day – Housing for All.

Many thanks to our other supporters in the third sector who also contributed in the process through their participation in both the Information and Briefing Sessions organized by the SCP Board.

Special thanks also to all Board members – Mariella Mendez Cutajar, Carmen Bernadette Briffa and Stephen Farrugia whose expertise in social policy, architecture and social work respectively was invaluable to the planning, implementation and operations of this policy.

Rights

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the author.

First published in March 2019 by the Parliamentary Secretariat for Social Accommodation and the Housing Authority.

Cover design by FIVE STAR PRINTING SERVICES

Internal design and layout by FIVE STAR PRINTING SERVICES





RODERICK GALDES

Minister for Social
Accommodation

The Vision of Housing in Malta

A good indicator of a positive sense of wellbeing stems out of stability, belonging and security. Homes form a big part of wellness. In today's world, rapid demographic changes, economic growth and climate change are putting pressure on communities globally. This brings about new patterns of living, which in turn bring about new local realities, including new housing needs. Malta is no exception. Housing can play a central role in ensuring the sustainable development of cities, communities and a person's wellbeing.

The Sustainable Communities Board is seeking to implement a modern approach to housing, mainly through inclusive planning and service provision in order to offer a soft landing to primarily vulnerable groups.

Good housing is about connecting citizens through a holistic vision which considers the social dimension in its planning phase, alongside the economic, environmental and governance dimensions, if it is to be a sustainable development. Such a vision is often based on community engagement and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The government has recognised that good

housing may facilitate community cohesion and interaction. Due to this understanding, the government is taking a progressive and innovative approach in developing a national housing framework through various budget measures.

The Specialised Housing Programmes will follow this integrated framework which is in line with the EU2020 Agenda and SDG 11 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The government further understands its duty to ensure that all citizens have adequate housing. Thus, one of its aims is to broaden the meaning of social housing in order to capture changing domestic realities. In fact, it is following the Economic and Scientific Policy for Social and Specialised Housing in the EU, which states that there are three common elements in defining social housing across EU Member States: a mission of general interest, the objective of increasing the supply of affordable housing, and specific targets defined in terms of socio-economic status or the presence of vulnerabilities.¹ Therefore, the government has committed itself to diversifying the housing market through a combination of short-, medium- and long-term goals, namely: the regulation of the private rented sector, the development of affordable housing and specialised housing programmes through the regeneration of abandoned and dilapidated properties.²

1 Braga, Michela and Pietro Palvarini. 2013. Policy Department A: Economic and Scientific Policy. 'Social Housing in the EU'. *European Parliament*. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/supporting-analyses-search.html>

2 In order to address housing from a sustainable and holistic perspective, the government made sure to increase housing supply through different means such as, the building of social and affordable housing and the regeneration of dilapidated stock. For information: Renting as a Housing Alternative (Sections 6 and 7) https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MFSS/Documents/White%20Paper%20Booklet.pdf (accessed 29/01/2019).



LEONID MCKAY
Chief Executive Officer,
Housing Authority

Foreword

Different policy challenges require different policy responses. This also holds true for the housing sector in Malta. The Housing Authority is sparing no effort to move away from the one-size-fits-all approaches to more comprehensive ones that best fit our country's needs; ones that are tailor-made to target specific policy challenges and address different cohorts of our society. Through our policy mix made of different schemes and incentives, we tried to design policy solutions that help address these specific issues. This is what lies at the heart of the specialised housing programmes.

Having experienced the non-governmental sector first-hand, I understand and know fully well the efforts that these organisations invest to formulate specific projects to cater for their clients. And they have to face financial and all sort of other constraints in doing so.

This programme is dedicated to alleviate such pressures and support these NGOs in their valuable contribution to our society. Through the allocation of a government property, chosen NGOs will be able to offer tailor-made programmes in a tailor-made environment. An environment that offers infrastructural and physical space to beneficiaries as well as specialised attention and an opportunity for them to re-integrate in society. This coupled with a support network which will help us achieve social mobility rather than social dependency.

Our raison d'être is simple. Experience has taught us that for specific cohorts, social housing is not enough. It is not enough to offer an apartment to someone, if their needs are not met through specialised care. Individuals and families will be supported in order to make the desired leap forward. Over the years, I met many such individuals who had explained these difficulties to me. People who now I can tell that we are doing something for them and that we will help them to keep moving forward. This is why we believe that with the introduction of these programmes and our policy mix we are truly addressing the housing sector holistically.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. We remain committed to introducing a new approach to housing provision, one that promotes decent social and affordable accommodation which offers stability and social mobility.



DR RACHAEL M SCICLUNA
Chairperson,
Sustainable Communities Board

Sustainable Communities, Housing for Tomorrow

What is a home? At its most basic, home may refer to a physical site – a house – but it may equally be a symbol of individual and collective values, aspirations, and memories, that act upon and attach people just as surely as an actual dwelling may do. Homes also shape our architectural landscape and transform impersonal spaces into local neighbourhoods and communities. People live within, and engage with such spaces creating a mutual relationship between the two. Looking at home in this way – as ~~both~~ a space, material object, and as socially constructed symbol – helps to explain why there remains a general need for housing policy to embrace and attend to the diverse mix of happenings that impact our homes and daily lives.

It is exactly this perspective on homeliness that these *specialized housing projects* are seeking to obtain. I am very aware that our society is experiencing deep cultural, economic

and political transformations through rapid urbanization, economic growth, low fertility rates, climate change and an ageing population. These, undoubtedly, put unprecedented pressures on urban communities, which in turn are having a dire affect on our sense of wellbeing.

In light of the above, the Board purposely chose to base the underlying framework of these specialized housing projects on the concept of *sustainable communities*. This means that neighbourhoods should be planned places; and that homes are accessible and inclusive, aesthetically pleasing, and safe while offering good access to public services, facilities and open spaces. The sustainable approach of these projects also lies in its operational side. This was carefully planned by creating a much-needed *web of lateral networks* between the state, architects and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which was facilitated through a Design Competition. Through a Briefing Session organized by the Board, architects received research-based briefs from the two shortlisted NGOs in order to make sure that the residents remain the protagonists of the final design.

Finally, I am pleased to see these two projects come to life as it adds to the weight of evidence that a fairer and more equitable approach are urgent, including investment in homes and communities, if inequalities are to be reduced and a society based on a wellbeing model is to be realised.

What are Specialised Housing Programmes?

The Ministry for Social Accommodation has designed Sustainable Communities Fund a measure that will specifically create housing and an integrated service provision that offer solutions based on the needs of primarily vulnerable groups.

The focus on the relationship between vulnerabilities, housing, wellbeing and socio-economic status builds on the EU2020 Strategy which has put the prevention of social exclusion as one of its core goals in order to address people who are significantly more at risk than others. For example, those who are likely to suffer from social exclusion more than any other sub-group are people who might be experiencing: low income; family conflict; being in care; school problems; being from a sexual and gender minority; being an ex-prisoner; being from an ethnic minority; living in a deprived neighbourhood in urban and rural areas; mental health problems, age and disability. This approach aims at providing a sustainable service and will be based on preventative measures which recognise social exclusion indicators from the start.

In short, the scope is for user-groups to thrive and for SHPs to facilitate integration in society. The design of the actual home will play a crucial role in enabling a positive atmosphere and a successful outcome which will benefit residents across socioeconomic statuses.



The Board

These SHPs will be managed by a Board within the Housing Authority. The Board comprises a multi-disciplinary team of practitioners with expertise in urban anthropology, social policy, environmental architecture and health and social care. Its purpose will be to assist the SHPs proposed by organisations operating within the non-profit sector. The assistance will come in the form of funds which will regenerate dilapidated properties as well as setting out best practice guidelines. The Board will be involved in the short-listing, assessment and decision-making of all applications.

WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

We are interested in potential programmes that seek to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the relevant sector that the applicant organisation operates in; how the project will help improve the general housing situation and establishing best practices that will inform the Housing Authority

and service provision within the relevant sector. Additionally, each proposal will be assessed on the best cost saving method while ensuring best value, namely that which promotes the social aspect of its proposed project.

All applicants need to include a direct housing element in their proposal, and clearly state how such a project will improve the quality of life of the service-user group and the respective neighbourhood.

The Board encourages applicants to propose innovative design which seeks to find solutions by: 1) taking into consideration the needs of a specific user-group; 2) basing its proposal on relevant research 3) offering service

“

“The aim of the Foundation is to work for the respect and dignity of prisoners during and after their detention and give support to the families of prisoners and ex-prisoners in the difficulties they face. This specific project would enable us to put into practice our vision for the families of prisoners and provide us with the opportunity to offer a therapeutic centre, where, together with IFT Malta, we are aiming to provide support, professional counselling and information to families and people in prison.”

MID-DLAM GHAD-DAWL FOUNDATION

”

“

“Among the biggest challenges which NGOs face when trying to start up a new service are identifying appropriate premises, and having the funds to refurbish the premises to serve as healing architecture which is conducive to the objectives of the project. Through the specialised housing fund, the Secretariat for Social Accommodation and the Housing Authority are making available premises together with the resources for their refurbishment, addressing these two major challenges. The competition launched by the Kamra tal-Periti will ensure that the resources are used to give the best possible outcome. Through the SHP, the Government is supporting NGOs to reach more vulnerable persons and help them get a second chance at life.”

RICHMOND FOUNDATION

”

provision that is person-centred and family-centred and 4) proposing a long-term provision that is financially realistic, proactive and inclusive.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THESE FUNDS?

Any legally established organisation coming from the non-profit sector can apply and benefit from these funds according to the priority areas set by the Board. Community-led programmes by local citizens will be considered if there is a clear business plan, a legal framework (e.g. housing cooperative) or a secure relationship with the non-profit sector.



Social thinking from the start

SHPs are seeking to promote a new approach to housing provision in the third sector namely through the combination of *inclusive domestic design* and *specialised service provision*. This budget measure is a direct reaction to the rapid change in the Maltese household and family and the formation of a new class system.¹ A changing society needs to consider its changing household if it wants to seriously address the emerging issues and challenges that prosperity brings about. Therefore, through its integrated approach these programmes seek to be preventative through their services by pre-empting vulnerable groups from entering institutional poverty and homelessness.

These SHPs will be designed differently because they will include the *social dimension* from the start which is often a

1 For more information see, White Paper, Renting as a Housing Alternative, https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MFSS/Documents/White%20Paper%20Booklet.pdf (accessed 29/01/2019).

lower priority in urban development.² The idea is to include the needs of people at the planning, design and implementation phase. This will ensure that the needs of specific user-groups are at the core of the design and its service provision. This approach is innovative in the sense that design choice, no matter how small-scale it is, will from the very beginning incorporate the social dimension, as this can greatly influence individuals' interactions with one another, and facilitate a positive sense of wellbeing.

These SHPs will also incorporate *environmental well-being* where the final design will be mindful of the benefits of incorporating social thinking that improves the wellbeing and quality of life of the user-group. It will also abide by local building regulations and EU regulations that promote inclusive design (see below, Useful Resources for Applicants, *Access for all* and *Lifetime Homes Standards*).

Additionally, this approach is aiming to generate significant *economic benefits* as it will act as a cost-saving measure and release burden from other services by ensuring optimal quality and best value of resources. By collecting quantitative and qualitative data systematically through these programmes, it will be possible to demonstrate a more responsive way of delivering better services and design solution-oriented policies. Thus, one of the tangible targets is to design and promote best practices to other sectors and services.

2 For more information follow the link, <http://thecityfix.com/blog/new-approach-social-factors-urban-development-cathy-baldwin/> (accessed 04/02/2019).



How to include social factors in design and service provision

The incorporation of social input into design and service provision can be considered at various stages of the programme. For example, social objectives can be included into key stages of development plans, from the programme conception, design choices to ongoing monitoring and evaluation to bring lasting social benefits to user-groups, and society at large.¹

This means that applicants need to think about:

- the potential social benefit of a service from the start of the commissioning process, instead of treating it as secondary;
- the way the programme might improve the economic and environmental well-being of that specific sub-group in general; and
- the process of procurement, and how the programme aims to secure improvement in the relevant area of expertise that it operates in.

¹ This understanding is in line with recent literature on sustainable communities and development in urban contexts (see below, Resources).

HOW CAN SOCIAL FACTORS AND OBJECTIVES BE INCORPORATED IN DESIGN IN A TANGIBLE WAY?

- a. Consultation through participatory methods:** the engagement phase is important as it will inform the final design and service provision.
 - i. Engage with the specific user-group in order to collect data about their needs. This will inform the ‘brief’ that the appointed *per it*² will respond to when planning and developing an inclusive design;
 - ii. Providers and suppliers will also form part of the consultation in order to understand the brief better.
- b. Service provision:** writing the service specification/ proposal with the input from users, the wider community and the market.
- c. Post-implementation:** performance management to ensure that any social value requirement that is specified, or that a supplier specified, was delivered.
- d. Ongoing monitoring of social input:** this phase will ensure that social objectives are met, plans followed and future programmes are better informed.

² Appointed perit or partnership of periti should be duly authorised under Periti Act CAP. 390 of the Laws of Malta.



HOW CAN SOCIAL FACTORS BE INCLUDED IN SERVICE PROVISION?

Social factors have economic and environmental gains. Applicants can take various approaches in order to offer a sustainable service based on the below three dimensions:

Social dimension can take the following form:

- Employing a diverse workforce for the delivery of the service (e.g. ethnic minorities, LGBT+ individuals, etc.)
- Collaboration with voluntary and community sector, including users
- Using digital technology as an empowering tool of integration (e.g. Iċ-Ċavetta – Maltese Adult Literacy Online Programme)
- Approaches that encourage wellbeing (e.g. including green and co-living spaces)



ECONOMIC DIMENSION CAN TAKE
AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH:

- Job creation/employing disadvantaged groups
- Offer skills, training and recruitment at the workplace
- Opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises
- Borrowing a service that another organisation might have already built, such as a programme for the unemployed or those not in education/training or mentoring young people in the local community to help them with budget management

ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION AND DESIGN CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH THE:

- Use of sustainable infrastructure (e.g. solar panels, living roofs, communal spaces, rain gardens, etc.);
- Promotion of vernacular architecture when possible (e.g. the use of internal courtyards and the rehabilitation of abandoned properties);
- Environmental policy and prevention strategy;
- Energy efficiency through carbon reduction or offsetting (*Passivhaus* systems);
- Heritage protection (e.g. ERA guidelines, Sustainable Regeneration of Built Heritage Platform in Malta);
- Inclusive Design.





INCLUSIVE DESIGN

a modern housing perspective as a key aspect in successful programmes

Potential programmes are expected to develop an inclusive design which looks at the built environment as an enabler of human contact and wellbeing. An inclusively designed built environment means planning, designing, building and managing places that work better for everybody – whether that place is a school, office, park street, care home or bus route. The idea is to achieve a sense of liveability that promotes the quality of housing conditions, its services and facilities. Inclusive design should take into consideration the quality of the social environment such as the safety of the neighbourhood.

Architectural design of proposed programmes is seen as a key aspect of its success. Inclusive design ought to reflect the diversity of people who will inhabit the place; thus, proposed programmes need to consider the relationship between *age, ability, gender, mental health* and *community*

as being the heart of the design process. This could be a way of challenging stigma, for example, which is related to mental health, ageing and disability amongst others. Participatory methods will also create the space for dialogue which would ensure that the community is not left behind.

The following are the main concepts that the Board expects proposals to engage with as much as possible:

INCLUSIVE HOMES

Inclusive homes are all about flexibility and adaptability. They are not 'special' but are thoughtfully and inclusively designed to create and encourage better living environments for everyone. From raising small children to coping with illness or dealing with reduced mobility in later life, inclusive homes make the ups and downs of daily living easier to manage. Therefore, older people's residential homes need not be so different from being at home at other stages of the life course and in other settings.

HOUSING SOLUTIONS THROUGH DESIGN

Public areas and homes are not treated as separate programmatic modules but as organic parts of the entire infrastructural network. For example, co-living can be developed through shared spaces such as passages, communal areas and visitors. Such design needs to be connected to the daily movements of all. Internal passages can, for example, allow dementia sufferers to wander safely. In fact, the Alzheimer Society states that wandering and walking are not problematic *per se* as they can relieve stress and boredom but require strategies and services to help prevent it from becoming dangerous.

A SUSTAINABLE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

It is envisaged that the programme will actively integrate within the existing social and infrastructural fabric of the village or town by becoming an extension of the neighbourhood. It will support existing businesses and lifestyles where locals, children and seniors amongst others can share experiences which enrich their life. An environmental strategy may incorporate functions which are organised towards sources of natural daylight, therefore minimizing the need of artificial light as much as possible. For example, limestone masonry may be exploited for its thermal mass, minimizing the solar gain to the structure, therefore leading to need less cooling.

Furthermore, the addition of vegetation in the area (e.g. green roofs/walls, rain gardens and raised beds), may provide an area of cooler air, working along with the sheltered area maybe typical Maltese architectural features such as arcades, which may help in passive cooling. In addition to this, PV panels (*refer to PV Grant Scheme 2016 provided by the Regulator for Energy and Water Services*) may be used to sustainably generate electricity as well as rainwater harvested to be used to maintain the green spaces in the project.

“

***From raising small children
to coping with illness or dealing
with reduced mobility in later life,
inclusive homes make the ups and downs
of daily living easier to manage.***

”



National & International Case Studies

Small-scale urban design choices can influence individuals' interactions with one another. The following case studies based on national and international programmes can be helpful in understanding how the social dimension can be incorporated in design through the smallest of details in design which lead for a user-group to thrive.

IL- BIĊĊERĪJA, MALTA

The Old Abattoir building (*Il-Biċċerija*) is currently being transformed into a community space for cultural and creative practice, called the *Valletta Design Cluster*. In this case, the organization made use of such as an “un-conference”, community tours, focus groups, online channels, and meticulous research in order to discern the functions of the various spaces aiming to give voice to the community needs of (creative) spaces in Malta.



Photo: Neville Borg

The organization embraced a user-centred design approach, engaging *early* and *often* with intended users of the space, and other stakeholders. This dialogue enriched the design of the building, and simultaneously helped cultivate the future community that the building aims to foster. For example, both the roof garden and the community kitchen idea emerged, developed, and were validated through community input.



Photo: E. von Brockdorff

At the same time, engagement with the project's community has led to the emergence of a community of future users, nurturing trust, belonging, and a set of shared values and interests. Organizers see these qualities as valuable assets that will support the future launch and operation of the space.

The space aims to empower potential users from diverse communities, including the cultural and creative sectors, local residents, students, start-ups, creative enterprises, civil society, retired people, and newcomers to Malta. The spaces will include a co-working space, a maker-space (workshop), an open-kitchen, studios for start-ups and creative change-makers, and a variety of indoor and outdoor meeting spaces. It will also promote openness and diversity to encourage methods which engage the community and create new connections between different users.





MULTI-GENERATIONAL HOUSING, BEEKMOS, HOUTEN, NETHERLANDS

The program is an inter-generational housing project for young mothers/young adolescents living with older residents in an “assisted living environment”. The project aims at creating an assisted living environment providing additional services to housing. Also, it responds to housing problems while attending to building social relationships.

Here, we find an exchange between the older and younger residents in order to create a positive synergy between the two groups. The elderly bring life experience and can offer useful advice which is profitable for the young women; while relationships are good for the elderly because it also alleviates loneliness.



The design and location of the building are important. The building itself is located in the city centre. That makes it easier for all residents to access services and goods. The seniors live on the ground floor while the upper apartments are reserved for the young mothers. The rooftop terrace, collective meeting spaces and consulting rooms create spaces that encourage meeting and intermingling.

Finally, the project was entirely designed and conducted through a partnership between third sector stakeholders from non-profit providers and social housing companies.

OLDER WOMEN'S CO-HOUSING (OWCH), LONDON, UK

One of Malta's challenges is its ageing demographic cohort therefore, by designing for our future selves we will be partially attending to designing products and services that are sustainable and meet the needs of as large a market as possible. In North London, a group of women over fifty known as OWCH created their own community in a new, purpose-built block of flats. As an alternative to living alone, they have friendly, helpful neighbours and use the concept of 'community' to live their life to the full.



The members of OWCH worked together for many years, pioneering the idea of a supportive community for women in later life. The women's **brief** to their chosen architect was very clear: their own sustainable homes, with shared facilities that create a sense of community. The collaborative design process that the architect facilitated was a learning exercise in understanding the realities of planning and building. The architects worked with the group to evolve a T-shaped layout focused around shared facilities and communal gardens that gave every home its own outlook and sunlight. Through this **consultation** process with the architect OWCH developed their ideal community on a site in Barnet.



Photo: Joe Okpako



The shared spaces at the entry are the hub of the community. The sociable common house meeting room, kitchen and generous dining areas are complemented by other practical amenities like a laundry and drying space arranged around the mews courtyard, and a guest room with balcony that doubles as a quieter meeting space.

Useful Resources for Applicants

- Lifetime Homes Standard. 2010.
<http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/pages/revised-design-criteria.html>
- An introductory guide to the Public Services (Social Value Act) 2012 for commissioners and policymakers,
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-value-act-introductory-guide>
- European Regional Policy. 2011.
Cities of Tomorrow: Challenges, visions, ways forward.
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow_final.pdf
- Access for all Design Guidelines. 2011.
National Commission for Persons with Disability.
<http://crpd.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Access-for-all-2011.pdf>
- PV Grant Scheme. 2016. Regulator for Energy and Water Services.
<https://www.rews.org.mt/#/en/a/112-pv-grant-scheme-2016>



MINISTRY FOR SOCIAL ACCOMMODATION

 **HOUSING**
AUTHORITY