

How to improve the Piano project

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The public consultation on the Piano project is about to end. It is the right time to offer some comments on points which, as far as I know, have not been raised or have only been lightly touched upon.

The idea of an open air theatre in Valletta, or anywhere else in Malta, is ludicrous. This idea has been the one most commonly criticised and needs no elaboration.

On the other hand, I do not think we should abandon the idea of having a proper Opera House but we have to think differently from what we have been doing so far. First, we should stop dreaming of Grand Opera.

We never had one nor will we ever have in the future, even if the theatre were to be as big as Valletta itself. Grand Opera is not simply a huge theatre. It is a combination of very expensive factors which under no circumstance could Malta afford. Even so, it does not always follow that the best ingredients give the best results. Opera, to be good, even excellent, does not have to be grand. Look at Gozo.

The open air theatre idea should be abandoned and another more dignified and appropriate design for an Opera House devised. I believe the changed circumstances, that is, the demolition of the police station, can give much needed space now sadly lacking.

The new circumstances envisage that the area cleared by the demolition is to be pedestrianised. I suggest a change that will influence the new design. First of all, I agree that underground dressing rooms be excavated and connected to the opera house by an underground passage.

But, additionally, the area above should be re-built into a custom-made extension of the opera house itself to store scenery, props and costumes, and house a workshop without which no proper opera could function.

This addition can largely compensate for the lack of space in the theatre itself and make possible what was not before.

The projected Parliament has other problems. Because of its very nature, a Parliament building is a very sensitive area for security both inside and outside it. For instance, there are no windows on the outside of the building through which firefighters could rescue people in case of fire.

Furthermore, its island structure makes it vulnerable from all sides to attack and ransack and the fact that it stands on stilts makes it possible to reduce into a heap of rubble in seconds simply by blowing up one or two of them. A doomsday scenario? Maybe and one hopes it will remain only imaginary. These possibilities, however, can no longer be considered far-fetched and, therefore, ignored.

Also, the main hall where the members sit looks claustrophobic. From the look of it, the present hall at the Palace seems to be more spacious. We do not want to effect change for the sake of change, do we?

Earlier on, Auberge de Baviere was considered and rejected. Has anyone tried to look anywhere else? Auberge d'Italie, for instance? Other possibilities exist and are worth examining.

One last point. The present design has no possibilities of extension. Our responsibilities in Europe are myriad and we have barely started to scratch the surface.

In the future, Parliament's work is likely to increase and more space will be needed. Why spread this activity all over the place when it could be all under one roof and precisely where the Speaker would have his offices?

I believe in the Piano project but also believe it could be improved.

Comments

Franco Farrugia (1 day, 4 hours ago)

Yes, indeed - I agree that the number of parliamentarians should be heavily reduced.

Antoine Vella (1 day, 7 hours ago)

Lawrence Mifsud "Why not reduce the number of MPs to 35? That would mean a smaller Parliament building." Why not reduce them to 1? Then we won't even need a parliament.

Astrid Vella (1 day, 12 hours ago)

A very good and balanced view of the Piano project, though no one is talking about grand opera, rather a multi-functional theatre to accommodate large-scale dramas, concerts, ballets and operas. The idea of using the over-ground space of the police station site for props and costumes would really maximise space at the theatre. The floors above ground level could also be used for related purposes like offices, tuition and music rooms. The theatre could be made fully financially viable and an architectural landmark by expansion onto Freedom square with its facade facing City Gate. The points raised about the Parliament building all seem very valid. FAA has repeatedly pointed out that in case of state visits, the standard practice of closing off the surroundings of the Parliament would paralyse the entrance to Valletta's commercial centre. This would not be felt as acutely if Parliament were at Main Guard, Conference Centre or Auberge de Baviere. By the way Auberge de Baviere has not been officially rejected as a possible Parliament site other than by the promoters of the Piano project. It has been restored at great public expense, with Parliament as one of the possible end-uses and it would be interesting to know what is now to become of it.

Lawrence Mifsud (1 day, 12 hours ago)

Why not reduce the number of MPs to 35? That would mean a smaller Parliament building.
