

Piano had no written brief

Kurt Sansone



World-famous architect Renzo Piano was not given a written brief for the re-design of Valletta's main entrance and the final designs were the result of a "process of interaction", according to the Investments Ministry.

If anything can be called "the brief", a ministry spokesman said, it would have to be the government's "extremely candid" statement at the beginning of the process that it wanted a Parliament building on the site of the opera house.

After the initial meeting between the Prime Minister and Mr Piano, the government changed its mind and agreed with the architect's suggestion to build Parliament in Freedom Square.

"The government did not hand over a document to Renzo Piano. The process of interaction between client and architect was publicly described several times by both the government and Renzo Piano," the spokesman said when asked whether the government was going to publish the brief it gave Mr Piano.

He explained that there were several meetings between Mr Piano and the government side, which was headed most of the time by the Prime Minister and on other occasions by Minister Austin Gatt.

It was during the first meeting held last year that the Prime Minister asked Mr Piano to come up with ideas for the City Gate area and to construct a Parliament building on the site of the opera house ruins.

The spokesman said Mr Piano came back in a subsequent meeting with the idea of using the space known as Freedom Square to develop Parliament because the opera house site was too small and it contained remains of architectural and cultural value.

The government was persuaded by Mr Piano's idea.

"Certainly the government passed on detailed information about its expectations for the administrative and legislative use of the Parliament building and also gave its feedback and reactions to the ideas put forward by the architect for all the other elements of the site," the spokesman said, insisting that the process that led to the final designs also formed part of the exhibition now at the Museum of Archaeology in Republic Street, Valletta.

"There is no other document or possible material that could have been published or exhibited and has been deliberately kept hidden," the spokesman said.

Reacting to a public request by the environmental group Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar for the government to publish the "brief" it gave Mr Piano, the spokesman described the organisation's cry as an attempt to drum up a "conspiracy of government secrecy".

"Astrid Vella could not bring herself to criticise Mr Piano for fear of being seen criticising an architect of world fame and repute. Instead, she attributed what she did not like in the designs to some conspiracy of government secrecy. There is no such thing," the spokesman said.

The government was convinced that Mr Piano's finished product was an "even better idea", he said.

"If we do not allow ourselves to be persuaded by people of the calibre, experience and reputation of Renzo Piano there is really no use in engaging such an artist for this project and instead commission in-house architects that we employ to draw up the designs of a pavement or a beach-side promenade," the ministry said.

Comments

Joseph Zerafa Boffa (2 hours, 23 minutes ago)
Who is the Government spokesman after all?

D Camilleri (2 hours, 34 minutes ago)

lets go for a cup of coffee, oh by the way, please build me a new parlaiment, Thats how it works why have so many overpaid MPs ? my thoughts exactly.

Joe Fenech (3 hours, 8 minutes ago)

So he had a carte blanche??? U ejja, iddahquniex!!!!!!!

Raymond Sammut (3 hours, 51 minutes ago)

@ D Vella Renzo Piano is advising the Maltese government courtesy the Italian government. I also would not take to liberty to speak on behalf of Maltese architects. They can speak for themselves. But as far as the unnamed government spokesman, I am in full agreement with you. There is absolutely nothing wrong with pavement construction, but it's not the kind of remark I would take very lightly. @ Ronnie Gauci What is wrong with an Arabian city? Is not Mdina an Arabian city? Mdina is one of the most elegant and stunning cities in the Med. In my view, Renzo's design is good in every way, and I gave reasons for my opinion in several other previous related blogs. I do not think it will be the PN who will ultimately decide whether Piano's proposal will go ahead. This is only just that for now -- a proposal. I personally hope that the Maltese people will give it the merit it deserves, and surely, while Malta is an EU member, the regular EU procedures will be followed.

D Vella (4 hours, 37 minutes ago)

@ J Martinelli Kindly don't be partonising and keep your pidgin italianised expressions to yourself! For the record what you see or don't see is totally irrelevant because you don't have a clue of what you're talking about. There is more than one local Perit willing to take on this project. The problem is that maltese people are so narrow minded and bigoted when it comes to engaging local skill over foreigners. I have no problem with Piano's engagement and don't doubt his great skills but I resent derogatory implications made towards the local profession by some political sycophant who probably can't find his own rear with an atlas! Your analogy regarding doctors is equally derogatory in that you are automatically rating Piano above all local professionals. Had you known what you were talking about you would realise that amongst local professionals there is at least one brilliant architect with skills to rival those of Piano. The only difference between them is one of reputation and exposure! ! ! Celebrity is no testimony of skill or brilliance but I suppose it requires an astute mind to figure that out!!

Anthony Magri (5 hours, 2 minutes ago)

@ Martinelli. The lawyer referred to himself gave that opinion to readers. Do you want to criticise him or agree with him.

Can you find in Valletta any street that is not at right angles with the others, even the shortest one. It seems you left Malta without ever having visited or lived in Valletta. By the Way, Now we are going to have one short street not at reight angles, but it is hidden.

As for the trunkated pyramid you did not notice it. And why are there no apertures on the model. It might make a lot o difference.

Piano needs no geometric lessons he manipulates geometry as he likes fit. Only great artists can do that! No!

Antoine Vella (5 hours, 26 minutes ago)

Daniel Russell

"I have just read this and the blog and find this unbelievable. "
Which blog would that be?

Daniel Russell (9 hours, 53 minutes ago)

I have just read this and the blog and find this unbelievable.

As an EU member, Malta will have to follow the OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) procurement rules which for a project of this type would have required a tender document and brief to be drawn up and also advertisement of the opportunity across the whole of the EU, a process which can take up to 6 months!

Also what about development in a world heritage site? I know at Ironbridge in the UK, the planning requirements for building a new visitor centre were unbelievable and there was a high emphasis on good design.

Have any planning agents actually advised the government?

David Mallia (11 hours, 50 minutes ago)

Piano had no brief.... I had asked this question in a previous blog..... so now I have my answer. No written brief, no contract?! no letter of engagement, no agreement to fees....

I will use the Maltese words which are more apt in response to the above 'spokesman' in respect of those architects who design pavements.... 'vera pastazz, miskomm tisthu titkellmu hekk fur min ghandu opinjoni differenti.... ghanda nies bravi u kapaci daqs haddiehor u vera thallini bla kliem titkellem b'din bl-arroganza ' if we want to argue and discuss and have different opinions, by all means, but do not disparage others when they do not agree with you.