

COLLISION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT PROFESSIONALS

The small nation of Republic of Maldives known to the public for its tropical weather, white sandy beaches and the clear blue lagoons has many other faces to it. Aspects that if explored further will lay out what is preventing or slowing down the development of the country in terms of standard of living and living cost. Although the connections are indirect, the impact on overall development is a direct result of those issues. This essay will look at Maldives in a different perspective trying to highlight as briefly as possible the problems the country is facing due to the lack of laws and in certain cases implementation of existing rules and regulations due to the collision between the built environment professionals in the public and private sector. If the country continues to let the existing system go on as it is with no calculated measures and set goals and timelines it is individual citizens who will remain suffering and the public image of the country will soon take a negative turn and the one thing that keeps the country running, 'tourism' maybe lost. Islands housing resorts and clubs have a set of guidelines from the ministry of tourism however whether the relevant authorities go through quality control, remains a question. The Tourism ministry can only cover according to their professional limitations. The Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Environment has a large role to play in controlling and maintaining the fragile natural resources like preventing low laying beaches from erosion and protecting the coral reefs in the lagoons. Currently those private parties who have nature's best interest at heart are limiting themselves to their own guidelines even though costly while the rest are not willing to spend on precautions for something that is not required by law. This is the aspect the essay will further look into in a wider perspective from different areas of urbanism itself.

To begin with Maldives does not have a building act to govern codes, rules, regulations and guidelines that fall under it. This is a rather unreal matter because one would wonder if this is a system at all given the chaos. Architects, Engineers and Quantity Surveyors have a registration procedure to follow. But there is no sensible basis so as to requirements of registration. As of recent a building act was drafted under the watch of construction industry development department in The Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure with the help of experienced senior private practitioners. The contradictory part is that what was submitted for parliament's approval, by the Ministry at the end of the sessions differ from what was agreed and drafted through out the many sittings. This is just one issue amongst many to express the nature of the setup of alterations to rules by the regulating body. The fact that individuals officially under jobs of regulating body are allowed to practice and participate with equal rights in the private sector further explains the issue. Beginning of this year licensing of professions was implemented with suspension and barring from practice alongside it by the same authorities. This is the definition of conflict of interest. And yet this is what is currently being followed in the country. The private sector architects and other professionals work under the fear of losing their license to practice or means of income in case of some practitioners. The private sector is trying to fight the setup but falling behind at every attempt due to lack of collaboration among the firms mainly due to competition and personal issues. The public sector is manipulating laws to keep them in business too while the private sector is going around the laws to stay in business. The end product is what we see in the current capital city, Male'. Unless a more effective system to follow is put in place the country is going to continue to have unplanned cities just like the capital.

A major concern of the citizens, which is the result of the combination of aforementioned issues, is higher fees charged from individual citizens due to the approval of detail design process that is enforced. City Council's fees, Consultant's fees for engineer and architect in some cases sums up for a client to almost half of what an individual may spend on building a project. By the time the person reaches construction almost 40 percent of the planned budget is spent on detail design and approval fees. Not to mention the speed of approval. A construction drawing of a 200 2qft residential building may take three months for approval with no explanation given for the delay. The frequent changes in the process of approval drawing submissions and forms to be filled and requirements for it contributes to the already slow process. In fighting to stay in business given these constraints private sector struggles at the same time to produce a quality output that would be a positive addition to the overall development of the country. It is almost as if architects are presented with a choice to make, quality over quantity or quantity over quality?

With all this chaos Maldives National University started offering architecture degrees, which is a positive addition that this education can be gained within the country. Especially at a time where there is a lack of building professionals in the country. However there is no system of monitoring and quality control of course content and structure. This if not looked into could be the adding reason for an unexpected feud of which signs are already visible amongst practitioners. Perhaps trying to acquire an affiliation with an established or recognized faculty might be a starter for improving standards. At present the tutors and lecturers are fresh bachelors graduates. Would it not be better if experienced practitioners and public sector individuals stepped up to contribute to help create a better education system in the faculty? Perhaps discussions held here regarding current issues could help get fresh ideas from a less involved party's point of view that can contribute in betterment of certain elements.

Today in Maldives, one third of the population is living in the capital city mostly in 300 square feet homes. We are known to be one of the most densely populated capital cities in the world given the land area. To find a solution we first need to raise the questions why and how this happened. To begin with, all incentives have always been focused on the capital city. This happened over the period of the thirty year dictatorship Maldives went through which was always publicized as a democracy throughout its time until the opposition party gained enough citizens to stand up for their rights and won over through the ballot. All existing laws are drafted and effective for the capital city only. Although not applicable practitioners are forced to follow the same in designing and building structures in rural areas as well, as there are no regulations in place. With all this many islands at this advanced time in the world are still living without a proper sewage system or means of consistent supply of electricity. It is time for people to look at the bigger picture, lose the idea of developing an already congested concrete jungle of a city and instead create better incentives on nearby islands and improve the transport systems to disperse the population evenly and form more effective concentrations of cities comprising of a number of islands not just one island.

Maldives being a country with a very limited amount of natural resources almost everything has to be imported. This leads to high prices in every area of the building industry as well. The designers' thinking has to always be limited to easily available and low shipping costs. This process is rather complex given that the country is a scattered chain of islands in the Indian Ocean. When one compares a developing country like Maldives to some place like Venice, a developed country's city to look at the effective public transport system it has, it is rather easy to dismiss the person saying the two cannot and should not be compared. I disagree with this. Maldives has one of the finest boat builders and boat building technologies that I have come across during my seven years in the field of architecture. Maldives has first class safaris designed and built in the rural areas, which cater for some of the world's most famous brands of resorts in the country. This skill level and talent is something that has existed in the country for a very long time as the only means of getting from one island to another is by a water boat. I wonder and question why this talent within the country has not been used by the relevant authorities to come up with an efficient system of transport to and from different islands. Why does Maldives not have a proper public transport system for the citizens while custom designed and manufactured fire detection and protection systems are implemented in five star resorts in the lagoon of each resort? People die waiting to find means of transport during times of emergency. Should the government be entirely blamed for this? Any responsible private person with the skills should try to find the means and fight to establish a system. Unfortunately many individuals have tried and failed. At some point through the process the authorities back out from providing the financial means. This is a serious issue in the country affecting the citizens at a much higher level than just increased prices of buildings due to unplanned logistics cost.

At this point in time having been part of the private sector during my few years of practicing I believe that the private sector has the advantage of having been through real life situations during different scales of projects, in coming up with a manner to tackle to void rules and regulations that make no sense or are biased. A strong point that the private sector can focus on is this experience they have from practicing on the field with real projects. Although there have been many failed attempts of creating an independent organization to represent the private practitioners I still believe that differences aside this is the best solution to tackle the issues from the private side. Coming up with calculated and measured plans in a collaborative manner to speak as one voice is the best way to bring about any change to the system at this chaotic time. If individuals are not willing to put aside personal differences and work with the best interest for the future of the country then there will be no positive progress. All that will be experienced would be the result of the refusal to voice out as one. Generations to come will see repetitions of the current capital city at a larger scale. If not for the country maybe even for few generations sake current private practitioners need to find a common ground to sit and discuss with solid proposals to improve and fight to establish better regulating systems.

Educated professionals need to work together to reinvent the cities created today as a result of lack of knowledge in urban planning alongside socio-economic problems. Living costs are at unaffordable levels without much progression in living standards. The country needs qualified professionals to find a solution. Professionals need to divide themselves amongst public and private sector to work towards creating fair rules and regulations and implementing these laws. Architects should prove to the people through designing, that sustainable architecture incorporating technological advancements is affordable and habitable by all classes. In doing so acquire more knowledge through experiences and work on projects with more focus on the process of creating for function not just banal architecture. Through the obstacles in establishing such a system one has to be determined to make a difference in the country using enthusiasm and passion in this field to ascertain better eco-friendly living conditions. This will ascertain that over the years tangible results will unveil.