

# Technocracy in Planning Policymaking: Authority and Decision-Making in Urban Development

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## Abstract

The study examines the role of technocracy in fostering good governance by promoting transparent, accountable institutions that uphold the rule of law and sustainable, people-centered development alongside representative democracy. Using a qualitative approach, it analyses Malta's Planning Authority as a case study, focusing on its technocratic role in policymaking, policy formulation, and execution within the planning and development sector. The Authority regulates land use, ensures sustainable development, protects cultural and environmental resources, and promotes orderly land use planning. The study traces the Planning Authority's transformation from an independent technocratic institution to one increasingly influenced by political interests. Politicians, Planning Authority officials, and technocrats were consulted to explore how technocrats influence policymaking. Drawing on the philosophies of Habermas and John Dewey, the paper evaluates the effectiveness of a triangular model involving scientific experts, politicians, and knowledge-based interest groups. This model supports the development of credible policies focused on the common good, free from electoral or lobbying pressures. The findings affirm the value of technocratic expertise in all policymaking stages. The triangular model is deemed essential for crafting sustainable policies with a long-term vision that addresses economic, social, health, and environmental needs.

## Keywords

Technocracy, Governance, Sustainable Development, Policy Making, Planning Authority, Triangular Model, Malta

## 1. Introduction

The interaction between technocracy and democracy has often been debated, with analysts proposing technocratic governance to improve policymaking by reducing

undue influence from popular opinion or vested interests (Cotta & Verzichelli, 2018). Conversely, critics argue that technocracy undermines democratic principles and political ideologies (Esmark, 2017a).

This research examined how Planning Authority technocrats influence policy-making in Malta's planning processes. It explored the intersection of technocracy, governance, and democracy. Good governance, characterized by equity, transparency, accountability, and adherence to the rule of law, is a core aspiration of democratic governments (United Nations System Task Team, 2012). In theory, independent public institutions like Malta's Planning Authority provide non-partisan expert advice to policymakers (Government of Malta, 2022). However, Malta has struggled to address the role of technocrats in governance effectively (Comodini Cachia, 2023).

In the 1970s and 1980s, planning culture in Malta was weak, marked by a lack of clear planning policies and decisions made unilaterally by the minister. In 1987, a planning policy framework was introduced to address this gap. The Planning Authority was established in 1992 as an autonomous body, with the aim of "independently guiding government policy while prioritizing community welfare and sustainable development" (Cassar, 2009: p. 29). Over time, political interference eroded this autonomy as successive governments prioritized electoral commitments over technocratic advice (Aquilina, 2015).

Reflecting Dewey and Habermas' philosophies, the research emphasized the value of a triangular policymaking model involving experts, politicians, and knowledge-based interest groups. This approach enhances policy credibility while safeguarding against undue influence from lobbyists (Festenstein, 2019; Krick, 2014). The "discuss-display-decide paradigm was proposed as a strong foundation for evidence-based, consultative policymaking" (Cassar, 2009: p. 189).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Technocracy and Governance in Representative Democracies

Governance is the exercise of political and administrative authority and provides an environment for public service and regulatory institutions that uphold inclusive policies and strategies to achieve the rule of law (United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (United Nations System Task Team, 2012). Malta's Constitution allows for a representative government within the Westminster model of public administration, with an independent, non-partisan civil service that advises on, and implements, decisions of the elected government. Civil servants hold permanent appointments and can expect merit-based selection processes and continuity of employment when governments change. These specialists are essential as expert advisors to policymakers, and they implement policy in a non-partisan manner.

As a representative democracy, Malta's constitution provides for the public service, whose role is to implement policy (Government of Malta, 2022). Permanent secretaries lead the public service. The civil service is composed of ministries, departments, agencies, and other government entities. These public organizations advise ministers in the fields falling within their competence and implement gov-

ernment decisions. Some of these organizations have an independent role, in the form of regulatory authorities overseeing particular sectors, as is the Planning Authority. The public service includes regulatory institutions that serve as a technocratic arm of government, offering non-partisan advice on proposed policies. Regulatory institutions have administrative and supervisory roles, which may include aspects of delegated technical policymaking within a distinct area (Bulmer, 2019). These institutions have practical and operative autonomy over decisions that “for the sake of good governance, continuity, long-term planning and technical competence”, must be kept distant from politicians (Bulmer, 2019).

Technocratic advocates of regulatory bodies believe that the economy should be entrusted to knowledgeable and independent experts who advise decision-makers, and decision-makers who actively seek advice from scientists (Friedman, 2019). The complementarity between technocracy and democracy underpins arguments that support technocracy in governance, strengthening representative democracy while ensuring autonomous decision-making by experts in the interests of the people (Bickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2020).

## 2.2. Technocracy in Evidence-Based Policy Making

Technocracy is the exercise of political power by an elite group of experts, based on their competence, efficiency, impartiality, and expertise (Lavezzolo, Ramiro, & Fernández-Vázquez, 2021). Technocrats can lead regulatory institutions that contribute to policymaking and play a critical role in policymaking by providing technical expertise and analysis to support decision-making processes. Using their knowledge and skills in specific sectors, they evaluate the potential impact of proposed policies and make recommendations based on data and best practices. Public institutions require technical experts to evaluate the impact of policies on the country. Such bodies take “the politics out of policymaking: they reduce every issue to technical questions that can best be answered by specialized expertise and evidence” (Christensen, 2021).

Habermas (1968) argued that “the scientific knowledge possessed by technocrats enabled them to craft efficacious policy means to political ends”, but that technocracy also eroded the people’s right to participate in discussions on policies that impacted their daily lives (Bohman & Rehg, 2017). John Dewey’s philosophy showed the efficacy of scientific experts advising decision-makers and of politicians seeking advice from scientists. This mutually beneficial relationship matched the practical needs of the executive with the democratically elected representatives, legitimizing both (Friedman, 2019). The paradigm of “discuss-display-decide” complements Dewey’s philosophy, proposing an ideal foundation “to ensure focused, long-term policymaking decisions, based on evidence and consultation” (Cassar, 2009: p. 189).

## 2.3. Technocracy in Governance: Balancing Expertise and Representation

Esmark (2017a) argued that the technocratic scientization of politics leads to the

depoliticization of issues, facilitating social progress. Similarly, the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030 represents a global technocracy aimed at promoting sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and reducing inequalities (Wood, 2018). By appropriating control over natural resources, the UN imposes a duty on governments to enact legislation aligned with its agenda, effectively superseding elected legislators' responsibilities to serve their electorate's interests (Wood, 2018). While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global vision for advancing policy, they exert pressure on governments through mechanisms like naming and shaming for non-compliance, amounting to a form of scientific dictatorship (Hartley, 2020).

Recent economic crises and the inadequacies of multi-level governance have heightened the demand for expertise in government (Alexiadou, 2020). In technocratic models, high-ranking civil servants, policy experts, and experienced professionals from private and public sectors wield significant influence (Esmark, 2017b). The executive often delegates critical decisions to technocrats, mitigating electoral pressures when enacting unpopular yet necessary policies (Bertsou & Caramani, 2020). Technocracy promises "rational, professional, and politically disinterested decision-making", particularly in economic planning (Khoo, 2013: p. 415). For instance, Italy's economic crisis (2021-2022) brought Mario Draghi to power, demonstrating the electorate's preference for expertise during crises and the availability of qualified technocrats to address complex challenges (Bertsou & Caramani, 2020).

Drawing on Habermas and Dewey, political representation benefits from technocratic input in policymaking, fostering a mutually legitimized relationship between scientific experts and policymakers (Friedman, 2019). In this context, Malta's Planning Authority was envisioned as a technocratic institution where policymakers and technocrats could collaboratively design policies promoting sustainable development for the common good (Cassar, 2019).

#### **2.4. Technocracy and Governance: Expertise in Malta's Public Administration**

Malta has a representative government with the Westminster model of public administration. This is a UK democratic system of governance, characterized by a parliamentary framework. It features a ceremonial head of state and an executive led by the Prime Minister, who is typically the leader of the majority party in the house of Parliament. The model emphasizes parliamentary sovereignty, collective cabinet responsibility, and accountability to the legislature, with governments required to maintain the confidence of Parliament to remain in power. The Westminster model is known for its flexibility and focus on responsible governance. The administrative branch encompasses various levels of expertise in the organizational and technical aspects of government, and technocratic ideology and rationality holds the government to account (Esmark, 2020a).

The Public Service includes government departments and statutory authorities

and agencies. Employment opportunities for technical or scientific officers are sought within the Public Administration and regulatory bodies where their expertise is essential. They “keep up to date with advances and changes in their area of expertise...(and) comply with any relevant legislative, industrial or administrative requirements” (Public Service, 2023). “The Public Service is an administrative apparatus that is immensely experienced, fields an astonishing range of specialists and technocrats for its size and is capable of mobilizing quickly and effectively in response to challenges” (Warrington, 2012: pp. 26-27).

Malta’s political environment differs from the global technocratic model because of the extreme partisan environment that defines policymaking and governance in Malta. Research showed that partisan interests have obscured the original intent of a strong public service that serves as an expert advisor to policymakers and implements policy in a non-partisan manner to ensure the common good and the country’s interests. “Incidents of conflict between ministers and civil servants, and the persistence of a bitterly adversarial partisanship, diminish regard for the ethic of neutrality, and place a premium on the loyalty—variously interpreted—of officials” (Warrington, 2008: p. 58).

“The smallness of Malta produces a constant blurring of private and professional relations between citizens and politicians” (Veenendaal, 2015: p. 1040). Research exposed the importance of regulation to eliminate patronage from manipulating the independence of institutions set up to provide expertise in policymaking and to prevent powerful actors from compromising good governance.

In the past years, the Planning Authority has become an obscure institution where deferential individuals dole out policy decisions and interpretations that are not necessarily conducive to the common good (Bonello, 2022). Within the Planning Authority, appointed boards and committees provided strategic guidance and expert advice to the directorates to ensure that the organization fulfilled its functions and legal obligations efficiently and effectively (Cassar, 2019). An example of this political encroachment on the civil service is the Planning Authority Board itself, which includes two members of the Board who are appointed by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and only one member representing the independent environmental NGOs. In accordance with parliamentary oversight, the Chairperson of the Board appears before the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee before his nomination is fully approved. However, the majority of the committee’s members are from the governing side, compromising the impartiality of the nominee (Sansone, 2022).

Despite the presence of the Ombudsman’s Office as a constitutional body to scrutinize the administrative actions taken by or on behalf of the Government and other authorities, the Ombudsman has accused the government of disregarding regulations, including development regulations, and of lacking accountability. The Ombudsman also noted that the Government appoints carefully selected representatives for the key planning positions in the Planning Authority, whom it could rely on to approve the Government’s planning policies (Ombudsman, 2021).

“Governing bodies such as councils, committees, directorates and cabinets bestow supreme power on scientists, engineers and other experts appointed on the basis of strict meritocracy rather than popular election” (Esmark, 2020b: p. 79). This statement suggests that institutions, like the Planning Authority, were intended to be technocratic in nature, ensuring good governance in the planning sector by maintaining a balance between technocrats, as experts, and politically appointed officials.

### 3. Technocracy and Politics: The Evolution of Malta's Planning Authority

Technocratic influence, in the context of Malta's Planning Authority (PA), refers to the extent to which decisions about land use, development permits, and spatial planning are shaped by experts—such as architects, engineers, environmental scientists, and lawyers, rather than by elected politicians or broad public consultation. In this system, authority is often vested in technical experts whose decisions are based on specialized knowledge, regulations, and data-driven assessments rather than political negotiation or public sentiment.

City planners (and architects) perform as technocrats who deliver expert professional services with integrity (Purbani, 2017). They are autonomous, make impartial decisions that are free from political pressure and ensure long-term planning and technical competence (Bulmer, 2019).

In Malta's case, the Planning Authority is meant to operate as a regulatory body ensuring that development follows the Strategic Plan for Environment and Development (SPED), local plans, and detailed planning guidelines. However, technocratic influence can manifest in various ways. Experts within or advising the PA may draft complex, highly technical policies that few outside their field can fully critique. PA boards sometimes prioritize technical reports, environmental assessments, and regulatory compliance checks over community objections or broader social considerations. Because decisions are often framed as “technical necessities”, it can obscure or sideline public debate, with stakeholders being told that certain outcomes are simply “what the law or guidelines require”, even when there might be room for interpretation. Politicians may rely on the technocratic structure to deflect blame for unpopular planning decisions, arguing that the “experts” determined the outcome based on objective criteria.

Autonomy of decisions, transparency in the decision-making process and the involvement of stakeholders to promote better-informed decisions are crucial in the planning process (Ebejer, 2015). However, the draft legislation on development in 2015 had proposed dispensing with important principles that opened the door to overt political influence and the government's involvement in the appointment of the Planning Authority's Executive Chairperson and Executive Council which rendered them susceptible to political pressure (Ebejer, 2015).

Critics argue that in Malta, technocratic influence in planning can sometimes serve powerful private interests if technical justifications are selectively applied or

if regulations are interpreted flexibly for favored projects. Others argue that strong technocratic oversight is needed to protect Malta's limited land and heritage resources from unchecked political or economic pressures. Technocratic expertise is essential to regulating development. But in Malta's Planning Authority, technocratic influence can sometimes shield political and private interests from wider public accountability, depending on how expertise is used or interpreted.

The changes in the institution's name and its legislative framework changed from the Planning Authority in 1992 to its rebranding as the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) in 2002, and its return to the Planning Authority in 2016. The key milestones in the evolution of the Planning Authority's legislative reforms (**Table 1**) include the following:

**Table 1.** Changes in institutional name and legislative framework.

1992	The Development Planning Act (Act 1 of 1992) established the Planning Authority (PA) and its directorates for development control and policy preparation.
2002	Act VI of 2002 formed the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA), tasked with implementing the Environment Protection Act.
2010	The Environment and Planning Act (Act X of 2010—Chapter 504 of the Laws of Malta) was enacted.
2016	The Development Planning Act 2016 reestablished the Planning Authority (PA) and created the Environmental and Planning Review Tribunal (Act V 2016).

Source: Laws of Malta, 2025.

Political influence has been strong since planning and the environment have always fallen within the remit of ministers, whose portfolios ranged from the environment to public works. The exception was in 2010 when the prime minister took over the portfolio of MEPA, following the Opposition's insistence that the environment and planning aspects should be demerged (*Zahra, 2008*).

The Planning Authority strives to balance competing interests while protecting the common good. In line with technocratic principles, expertise and community involvement are vital to successful policymaking. *Scalpello (2020)* emphasized the importance of involving experts because of their knowledge on the technical and environmental requirements. "The crux of planning is to accommodate demand without damaging what is important for the country, the public and the individual, including parties who hold a powerful influence over the evolution of national sectors" (*Scalpello, 2020*). To be successful, Policymakers must actively seek expert advice and adapt policies to evolving circumstances. Technocrats at the Planning Authority use their expertise to assess infrastructure, land use, transportation, and environmental impacts, recommending evidence-based, impartial policies (*Environment and Development Planning Act, 2014; Gunn, 2019*). They sup-

port development evaluation and ensure planning policies are effective, equitable, and sustainable.

The Authority operates through various boards and committees, including the Executive Council, which oversees development applications. Specialized bodies like the Agricultural Advisory Committee and Design Advisory Committee promote sustainability and assess urban projects, while funds like the Development Planning Fund focus on environmental investments. *Development Planning Act (1992)* modernized planning legislation, creating MEPA, later restructured into the Planning Authority and the Environment and Resources Authority (Cassar, 2009).

The 2016 reforms aimed to enhance transparency and environmental representation (Musumeci, 2023). However, critics argue political influence undermines these goals.<sup>1</sup> The Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED, 2015) sought to integrate land and sea management with socio-economic considerations but faced criticism for vague provisions that risk favoring developers.

Ombudsman's annual report 2021 highlighted issues within the Planning Authority, including enforcement failures and political interference, noting a decline in impartiality (Ombudsman, 2021). Bonello (2022) observed that political interests often override sustainable development goals. Calls for replacing local plans with master plans aim to ensure strategic governance (Galdes, 2023).

Despite challenges, the Planning Authority occasionally demonstrates independence, as in the 2022 rejection of a controversial Hondoq Bay proposal (Galea, 2022b). Research indicates that technocracy can effectively manage crises due to its resistance to political pressure but struggles to balance expert-driven policies with democratic values (Hanley, 2018). Habermas and Dewey's philosophies support harmonizing political legitimacy with expert input to enhance governance (Camilleri Clarke, 2022).

Malta's public service, while historically impartial, faces pressures that compromise its role (Warrington, 2012; Mitchell, 2002). Strengthening institutions and fostering collaboration between technocrats and legislators is critical. Cassar (2009) encouraged a "discuss-display-decide" approach to enhance cooperation. Despite politicization, the Planning Authority remains, at times, an independent arbiter of sustainable development (Galea, 2022a). This research emphasizes the need for technocratic and participatory approaches to policymaking, validating Dewey's call for collaboration between experts and decision-makers.

#### 4. Research Methodology

Using a qualitative methodology, the study involved document analysis and semi-structured interviews as primary sources. It began with a review of literature on the pros and cons of technocratic expertise, followed by interviews with former politicians, Planning Authority officials, and planning experts. The collected narratives were analyzed and categorized into themes to identify commonalities and

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<sup>1</sup>P. Caruana Dingli, personal communication, 2017.

contrasting opinions. This thematic analysis helped assess whether the research supported Dewey's philosophy and the proposed paradigm for effective policy-making.

#### 4.1. Research Design

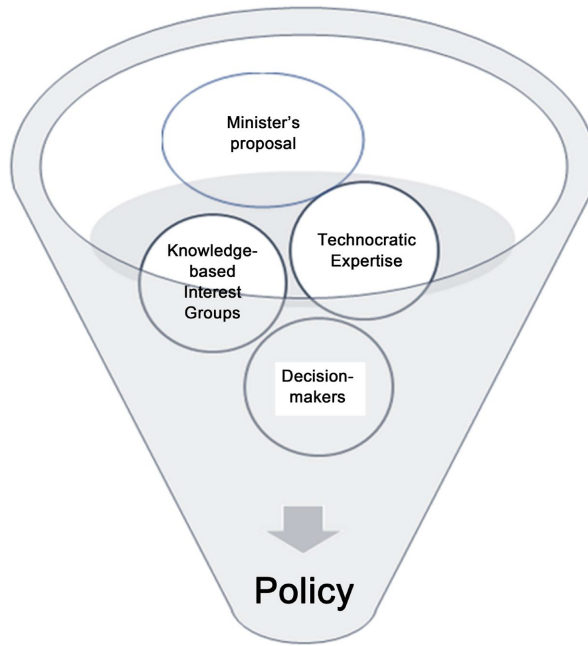
The qualitative research was designed to demonstrate that a properly functioning public service provides unbiased, expert advice to legislators and managerial expertise to implement policy. In reviewing the interaction between elected decision-makers and unelected technocrats, the research sought to determine how such interactions shaped policy and impacted the governance of a country. The research followed the methodology proposed by Munk Christiansen, Niklasson and Ohberg, who conducted a series of interviews to determine whether "politics crowd out professional competence" (Munk Christiansen, Niklasson, & Ohberg, 2016: p. 1232).

The research question asked: How do technocrats in the Planning Authority influence policymaking in the planning processes? Using the Planning Authority as a case study, the paper analyzed the positive or negative technocratic influence on planning and development policymaking decisions in Malta. The research examined whether Dewey's philosophy is already replicated in Malta in the public service, complemented by the interest groups' contribution to the decision-making process through analysis of policies and advice to politicians and the government.

A review of the role of technocracy in institutions examined its contribution to good governance. The analysis of the Planning Authority established that it was envisioned to be a technocratic institution that safeguarded the environmental sustainability of the country. Successive governments gradually eroded their powers to appease the powerful development and business lobbies that finance the political parties (Ebejer, 2015). Through academic research, the research probed whether a model of collaboration between technocrats and policymakers, enhanced by the contributions of knowledge-based interest groups, would serve the country better, guarantee transparency and accountability, ensure widespread participation, and positively influence practical policymaking processes in a democracy (Figure 1). Additional sources of information described ongoing challenges in the planning sector and gave visibility to the penned opinions of stakeholders in the field, including the perspectives from the former director general of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Cassar, 2019).

#### 4.2. Data collection

Two research instruments were adopted. The first step in data collection was an in-depth document analysis of the existing literature on technocratic expertise and its contribution, or otherwise, to policymaking. The literature was carefully selected to include academic studies on the role that technocratic expertise played as a vital and indispensable tool in decision-making processes. An examination



**Figure 1.** Discuss-display-decide model of consultation.  
Source: Authors' compilation 2025.

of the structures of the Planning Authority traced the legislation (**Table 2**), that established its technocratic role and the subsequent reforms that alternately strengthened and eroded its role.

**Table 2.** Official documents.

	Name of Document	Published Date	Type	Number
1	Development Act	1992	Law	Act I
2	Malta Environment and Planning Authority	2002	Law	Act VI
3	Local Plans Interpretation	2007	Policy	
4	Environment and Planning Act	2010	Law	Act X
5	Development Planning Act to establish an Environmental and Planning Tribunal and an Environmental and Planning Review Tribunal	2016	Law	Act V
6	Strategic Plan for the Environment	2015	Policy	
7	Planning Authority Annual Report	2016	Report	
8	Planning Authority Annual Report	2020	Report	

Source: Authors' compilation, 2025.

These documents provided contextual richness to the analysis of the pros and cons of technocratic expertise in policymaking. Document analysis was carried

out to analyze whether Malta's public service works efficiently as the technocratic arm of government in policymaking, eliminating the need for an earth-shaking reform of Malta's legislative and political process.

Using Putnam's research as a model, the second research instrument was semi-structured in-person conversations with interviewees because "the best way to learn how politicians and bureaucrats think is to talk with some of them" (Putnam, 1973: p. 262). The interviews sought to determine whether policymaking required the collaboration of government, technocrats, and representatives of knowledge-based interest groups and whether such a model was viable and acceptable as a form of democratic good governance.

### 4.3. Mapping the Actors

The study involved eleven participants in total from the political sector, the Planning Authority, and planning technocrats, all of whom influence policymaking with their expertise. These included three former politicians from both major political parties, namely the Nationalist and Labour Parties, four Planning Authority high level officials, and four architectural and planning technocrats.

Using a tailored interview guide, semi-structured interviews explored the role of technocrats in policymaking and the influence of politicians on their work. Participants shared insights into their roles, views on expert contributions to governance, and the Planning Authority's function as a technocratic, non-partisan advisory body on planning policies.

Eleven interviews were conducted, primarily in-person, at the participants' offices, lasting at least an hour. One interview was held virtually, and written responses were collected when in-person meetings were not feasible. The semi-structured format allowed participants to expand their views and provide detailed, personal opinions. Notes from the interviews were transcribed, verified by participants, and anonymized, identifying individuals only by their roles as politicians, officials, or technocrats.

### 4.4. Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis of the eleven interviewees' responses was carried out, and six common themes were identified from the findings. An in-depth analysis of these themes provided a new interpretation of the collaborative role between a technocrat and a politician in the Planning Authority. The data were analyzed and presented common and opposing trends that support or reject the role of technocrats in policymaking (Durdella, 2019).

### 4.5. Ethical Considerations

Efforts were made to ensure inclusivity and balance in political, professional, academic, and social perspectives. All interviewees answered the same set of questions, with some providing concise responses and others offering detailed insights based on personal experiences.

The study adhered to ethical standards of trust, accountability, respect, and fairness (Resnik, 2015). Guided by the University of Malta's Research Ethics Committee, participants were assured of ethical treatment, including prior consent and objective presentation of their views (Saunders et al., 2003). Email invitations included a consent form explaining the research purpose and requesting signed permission for summarized, anonymized responses to be included in the analysis. Anonymity was maintained to encourage honest feedback and alleviate concerns about identification.

#### 4.6. Limitations

The qualitative research analyzed data from document reviews and semi-structured interviews with carefully selected participants based on their political, professional, and social expertise (Macdonald & Headlam, 2008: pp. 35-43). The small sample included former politicians from both major political parties, nine architects, a lawyer with extensive Planning Authority experience, and a strategic manager. Efforts were made to balance political affiliations, official roles, and technocratic experience to ensure data validity. Interviewees responded to similar questions, with answers based on personal experience, offering both subjective and objective insights into the technocratic role in policymaking and the Planning Authority's strengths and limitations.

The study examined academic literature on technocracy and identified themes related to expertise in policymaking, supporting John Dewey's idea of collaboration between experts and decision-makers, alongside a "discuss-display-decide" model. The findings emphasized the benefits and challenges of technocratic expertise in promoting evidence-based policies and good governance.

An analysis of the Planning Authority's structure showed its initial autonomy in policy design and implementation, which was gradually eroded by reforms. The 1992 Development Planning Act protected board members' autonomy, allowing removal only for misconduct by parliamentary resolution. However, the 2016 Act shifted authority to the Executive Council with ministerial approval, reducing the institution's independence (Development Planning Act, 1992; Development Planning Act, 2016).

### 5. Analysis and Discussion

To explore the role of technocracy in the Planning Authority, key officials were asked: "How do technocrats in the Planning Authority influence policymaking in the planning processes?" Additional questions examined interviewees' views on the influence of technocrats on policy formulation and governance. Participants included three former ministers, four Planning Authority officials, and four planning technocrats, providing insights into technocrats' contributions to policymaking and good governance.

Six themes emerged from the analysis: 1) The importance of technocratic executive functions; 2) Technocrats' influence on policies; 3) Their role in policy for-

mulation and consultation; 4) Political influence on technocrats; 5) Morale under political pressure; 6) The use and development of technocratic skills. The research also analyzed John Dewey's philosophy, which advocated for the role of scientific experts advising decision-makers and politicians seeking expert guidance (Friedman, 2019), alongside the "discuss-display-decide" consultative model (Cassar, 2009: p. 189). The aim was to assess how Dewey's approach could promote good governance.

Through document analysis and interviews, the study found that, since 1992, the Planning Authority was initially conceived as an independent institution free from political influence (Interviewee 1). Over time, however, governments recognized the need for political input in strategic planning, and the authority's autonomy diminished. The Planning Authority Board gradually became politicized, with decisions often reflecting political priorities rather than expert advice. Members of the Board are appointed by the Government and are its executive arm (Interviewee 8). While technocrats were employed to offer guidance political influence often outweighed their recommendations (Interviewee 7). Interviewee responses, along with accompanying data, highlight both common views and contrasting perspectives.

#### Theme 1: Importance of Executive Functions of Technocrats

At the political level, the unanimous view was that technocrats should not have an executive role but solely provide advice on technical policies, as is the current practice. Two executive-level interviewees noted that technocrats had both executive and advisory roles since development control functions were executive functions. They noted, however, that at the strategic planning level, technocrats provided advice as is the current practice. 73%, including all the political-level and technical-level interviewees, agreed that technocrats should not form part of the Executive Board of the Planning Authority, but two technical-level interviewees argued that the technocrats' expertise should not be limited to sharing advice but should also shape the decision-making process. "There is a legal requirement for technocrats' contributions at all levels of policymaking" to ensure evidence-based policies that promote sustainability (Interviewee 6). "The inclusion of technocrats in executive decisions will ensure that technocratic aspects are included in the decision-making processes" (Interviewee 7).

Decision-making technocrats should not be recruited from within the Planning Authority but should be appointed from other entities to provide their expert advice on the case in question, especially when a development plan impacts cultural or historical heritage. However, engaging experts from outside the Planning Authority may not always be necessary since the development applicant is currently responsible for providing technocratic reports, such as the environmental impact assessment and the transport impact assessment, among others (Interviewee 3) (Table 3).

#### Theme 2: Influence of Technocrats on Policy

**Table 3.** Importance of executive functions of technocrats.

	Important that Technocrats should have an executive role.	It is not important that Technocrats should have an executive role	Ambivalent as to whether Technocrats should have an executive role
Interviewees	18%	73%	9%

Source: Authors' compilation, 2025.

Reflecting definitions of technocracy, interviewees unanimously agreed that technocracy is the exercise of political power by an elite group of experts, based on their competence, efficiency, impartiality, and expertise (McDonnell & Vabruzzi, 2014). “A technocrat is an expert in his/her field who proactively provides advice based on knowledge and experience” (Interviewee 1). The interviewees noted that technocrats should be impartial and design, advise and apply policies with integrity within the defined regulatory framework, a practice that is not always respected. There was unanimous agreement that technocrats should be experts in their field, having received appropriate training and qualifications to fulfil their role as well as a significant number of years of experience in the field.

A total of 64% of interviewees at political, executive, and technical levels agreed that technocrats had significant influence in the policymaking process. However, two technical-level interviewees argued that technocrats did not have a significant impact on policy because the “role of politicians was to propose and fulfil an electoral program that includes innovative policy proposals”, and such policies must be implemented. “This leaves little space for technocratic influence” (Interviewee 3). This opinion is supported by Parliamentary figures showing that 21.2% of the permits granted by the planning authorities in the last 15 years were initially recommended for refusal by the application’s case officer (Galea, 2022a). At the executive level, interviewee 7 argued that technocrats wield significant influence “if politicians are willing to listen”. Decision-makers at the executive level must have significant knowledge of planning (e.g., knowing how to read a site plan) and experience in the field to ensure holistic decisions based on evidence (Interviewee 10).

All interviewees, at political, executive, and technical levels, agreed on the importance of evidence-based data from technocrats and proposed “technocrats must present convincing arguments to support their [technical] advice” (Interviewee 6). They also agreed that Board decisions should be transparent and proposed that “clear justifications for decisions should also be presented for scrutiny to enhance the Board’s intended role as an impartial, non-partisan authority” (Interviewee 9). At the technical level, three interviewees stated that technocrats have little influence because conflicting interests compromise their advice, and the Planning Authority Board interprets planning policy selectively, either to appease political pressure or pressure from developers (Table 4).

**Table 4.** The influence of technocrats on policy making.

	Important Technocrats' influence on policy making	Not important Technocrats' influence on policymaking	Ambivalence on technocrats' influence
Interviewees	64%	27%	9%

Source: Authors' compilation 2025.

### Theme 3: Role in Policy Formulation and Consultation

The political, executive, and technical levels agreed that “as public servants, technocrats proactively advise the Executive Branch of government” (Interviewee 4). “There was a specific hierarchical process to formulate policy”, with the government tasking the Planning Authority technocrats to formulate a policy, after which it was open to a consultation process to include contributions of knowledge-based interest groups (Interviewee 9). For example, in 2023 the Planning Authority was tasked to draw up a policy and design guidance document for a crematorium, which was then launched for public consultation (Planning Authority, 2023). In general, once the policymaking process is complete Parliament would approve the policy, as was the case with the development of the Parliament’s underground level parking (Mill-Parlament, 2019).

There was agreement at all levels that consultation is essential because “planning is a multi-disciplinary sector” (Interviewee 7). The interviewees agreed that the practice of consultation with knowledge-based interest groups, including environmental and heritage groups, was very important and that decisions should be influenced by widespread consultation. It was important to strengthen the processes because “public consultation provides a further layer of feedback, where the applicant, objectors, and other interested parties have their say” (Interviewee 1).

Interviewee 2 described “a triangle of technocrats, politicians and interest groups”, replicating John Dewey’s philosophy which recommends a partnership between policymakers and technocrats to design policy (Friedman, 2019). Such a partnership would decrease the frequency of contestations between the Planning Authority Board, developers, and interest groups over development projects, which lead to controversial decisions and, in some cases, referral to the Courts of Law. In a recent case, a decision by an appeals court ruled that the Planning Authority was unjustified in having granted a permit to build a pool and ancillary facilities at a Minister’s private residence in the hamlet of Santa Katerina (Reference: PA 34/2022).

Although the practice of consultation already exists and is applied, the process is heavily skewed against interest groups because current legislation allows only one seat for civil society groups of the ten seats on the Planning Board (Development Planning Act, 2016). The interviewees agreed that a formal triangle of consultation with politicians (from both the government and opposition), technocrats, and interest groups is required with equal representation for all parties. They

highlighted the ethos of the Planning Authority, which is “transparency, integrity and fair” planning services to promote sustainable development (Planning Authority, 2023).

However, they expressed concern that “personalities and personal agendas, even among interest groups, could sabotage the consultation process” (Interviewee 8). Sometimes interest groups raised objections “with no evidence to back the objections” (Interviewee 5). For example, *db Group*, a leading Maltese company, stated that objections made by NGOs regarding the former Institute of Tourism site application were based on false claims (db Group, 2020). However, a report by the National Audit Office expressed concern about “the development of site by db Group (NAO, 2020), giving weight to the NGOs’ objections.

#### Theme 4: Prevalence of Political Influence on Technocrats

“Political influence is invasive, and the Planning Authority Board is just an extension of government and has no independent power” (Interviewee 10). This view supported the research that revealed that political influence had a very significant impact on technocrats’ advice and the independence of the Board (Ebejer, 2015).

Although the Planning Authority Board should make independent decisions, free from political influence, within the framework of policy and guided by the regulatory process, in practice, the Board selectively chose the advice it preferred to follow or misinterpreted recommendations to suit a political agenda (Interviewee 10). A case in point was the Planning Authority’s decision to interpret DC 15 (Development Control Policy and Design Guidelines), which established the maximum allowable stories, to reflect a specific height in meters, granting developers more liberty in setting building heights (Debono, 2016).

Since a democratically elected government sets the agenda and direction of the country, the motivation to ignore technocrats’ advice is quite strong, and since the government appointed the Board, it retains a significant influence through its appointees (Interviewee 8). In a recent interview, construction magnate Joseph Portelli said he met regularly with politicians “to speed up the development process” (Zammit, 2021) giving weight to concerns that the interests of big business and the political class have a significant influence on planning decisions (Torpiano, 2021).

A total of 18% of executive- and political-level interviewees, however, noted that although policy proposals originated with the government, it did not interfere in the decision-making process or suppress the advice of technocrats. On the other hand, “politicians may suppress the recommendations of technocrats” to placate pressure by developers or constituents (Interviewee 7) and “the independence of the Planning Authority was compromised by politicians imposing decisions and having the final word” (Interviewee 8). These views emphasized that political influence was pervasive and led to policies being changed to suit the agenda of the day, a trend that was “crazy, insane”, and compromised the independence of the [Planning Authority] Board (Interviewee 10).

In accordance with parliamentary oversight, the current Chairperson of the Board appeared before the Parliamentary Public Appointments Committee before his nomination was finally approved. However, the majority of the committee's members are from the governing side and do not generate confidence in the impartiality of the nominee (Sansone, 2022). The Chairperson of the Board "should not be appointed by the government but by the President to remove any political leverage" (Interviewee 4), a practice of good governance, recommended by the Venice Commission, in which political influence on appointments in key sectors is removed by impartial commissions (Council of Europe Venice Commission, 2018). The European Commission for Democracy 2020 (Venice Commission) is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Prevalence of political influence on technocrats.

	Political influence on technocrats was prevalent	Political influence on technocrats was not prevalent	Ambivalent
Interviewees	82%	18%	0%

Source: Authors' compilation, 2025.

Such a high percentage of views on the prevalence of political influence is of concern because it demonstrates the lack of impartiality in decision-making processes, which compromises good governance.

#### Theme 5: Morale under Political Influence

On the issue of morale, interviewees expressed a variety of views. About 9% argued that morale was high because technocrats had a significant role in providing guidance and expertise. 64% of interviewees at all levels argued that underutilized or marginalized technocrats would leave, as has already been the case. Of these, 30% argued that demoralized technocrats would become subservient and not take any initiative. A deliberate ploy is for the government to appoint "subservient board members" who take direction from the minister (Interviewee 2).

Technocrats become "sterile, a state that is worse than subservient because it indicated a need to survive in an unhealthy atmosphere that provided no incentives" (Interviewee 11). In contrast, "I have never experienced an oppressive scenario, and technocrats generally leave to seek greener pastures" (Interviewee 9) (Table 6).

#### Theme 6: Use and Development of Technocrats' Skill

On the issue of investment in training, all interviewees agreed on the importance of continuous professional development and cross-training organized by similar institutions overseas to learn new best technical practices. As an expert, a planning technocrat must not be confused with an architect (Interviewee 10). The difference between the two professions is significant, urban planners decide what can be built where and how outdoor areas will be used, while architects

**Table 6.** Morale under political influence.

	Interviewees believed that political influence has a negative impact on morale	Interviewees believed that morale among technocrats was high	Ambivalent—this depended on the situation
Interviewees	64%	9%	27%

Source: Authors' compilation, 2025.

create the actual design. As such, urban planners focus on the big picture of community needs and the impact on surrounding areas, while architects are primarily concerned with their client's requirements (Interviewee 8).

The Planning Authority regularly tapped into European Union funds for training and collaborated with the University of Malta and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) to ensure that local planners were academically and professionally qualified (Interviewee, 4, 9). For example, the University of Malta's Department of Spatial Planning and Infrastructure focuses on sustainable planning and development. There are on average ten students per annum in recent years. MCAST offers courses in building and construction engineering. Despite these opportunities, there was little incentive for students to take the urban planning courses offered because "external forces had a negative impact" on planning technocrats' ability to influence developers who wield significant power in the sector (Interviewee 10). A summary of the key findings is mapped out in **Table 7** and organized according to the themes.

The findings that emerged from the thematic analysis reaffirmed the findings in the literature review, demonstrating that a technocrat is an expert in his/her field. A technocrat has an interest in the sector and studies all the technical aspects of an issue in the interests of the common good without pandering to the wishes of individuals or certain sectors of society (McDonnell & Vabruzzi, 2014). The literature review of the Planning Authority's history and legislation that shaped the various iterations demonstrated that this public institution has always been a cause of disagreement among political parties, knowledge-based interest groups and commercial interests (**Table 1**).

The research question how do technocrats in the Planning Authority influence policymaking in the planning processes? verified that a planning technocrat proactively provides expert advice based on knowledge and experience. Therefore, the contributions of qualified planning technocrats are very important since planning is multidisciplinary and impacts all human activity. As Dewey's philosophy proposed, planning requires the input of the government, a variety of experts in various fields related to planning, design and sustainable development, and knowledge-based interest groups. This triangle of cooperation and practice of "discuss-display-decide produces a policy that is transparent and accountable" (Cassar, 2009: p. 189).

**Table 7.** Summary of findings.

	Executive functions of a technocrat	Influence of technocrats on policymaking	Policy formulation and consultation	Political influence on technocrats	Morale under political influence	Use and development of technocrats' skills
Political Level	Interviewees agreed that technocrats should not have executive functions.	Interviewees agreed on the role and advice from technocrats based on their knowledge and experience.	Interviewees agreed on the technocrats' "crucial" role in formulating policy and the importance of widespread consultation.	Interviewees claimed that political influence limits independence.	Interviewees said low morale led to an exodus and subservient technocrats.	All interviewees agreed on the importance of continuous professional development of technocrats.
Executive level	20 percent agreed on no executive role for technocrats. 60 percent said inclusion of technocrats in executive decisions ensured technocratic aspects were part of decision-making processes.	Interviewees agreed that technocrats had a significant influence on policymaking if they were listened to.	All interviewees agreed that the technocrats' role in policy formulation is "very important".	40 percent said politicians provided policy direction but did not interfere in decision-making. 60 percent said politicians suppress recommendations of technocrats for political expediency.	20 percent argued that the Board do esteem technocrats whereas 80 percent argued that demoralized technocrats became subservient to political power.	All interviewees agreed on the importance of training and development of skills.
Technical level	Technocrats should not have executive roles. The Board executives should have knowledge of planning and sustainable development.	Interviews claimed that technocrats have little influence because the Board interprets planning policy selectively and technocratic advice is compromised by sectoral interests.	All interviewees agreed that the technocrats' role was essential.	Interviews agreed there was significant political influence and was invasive.	60 percent of interviewees stated that there was an oppressive atmosphere which compromised morale.	Interviews agreed that continuous professional development is important but limited incentives were given to study urban planning due to external forces.

Source: Authors' compilation, 2025.

The themes that emerged from additional questions in the interview guide were analyzed, exposing an insignificant interface between policymaking and development control that led to a lack of transparency and accountability. The data collected from the in-depth semi-structured interviews revealed that Planning Au-

thority officials and planning technocrats believe that politicians have short-term visions that are conditioned by their electoral programs and the five-yearly general elections when they seek re-election. Therefore, politicians must embrace the expertise of technocrats to provide a balanced long-term vision and a reality check about the consequences of short-term and short-sighted decisions.

There is value in including technocrats also in the decision-making process if impartial technocrats are engaged from outside the institution itself. External technocrats are less likely to be influenced by internal politics or institutional biases, ensuring that decisions are based on objective, evidence-based analysis. Outsiders bring diverse experiences and viewpoints that can challenge institutional inertia and stimulate innovative solutions.

In a system like Malta's, where short-term political goals (often shaped by election cycles) clash with long-term planning needs, technocrats ideally serve as a stabilizing force. Their role should be to anchor decision-making in evidence, law, and long-term sustainability, even when this is uncomfortable or politically inconvenient. Specifically, the role of technocrats should be guardians of Expertise and Continuity. They offer institutional memory and long-term thinking in systems otherwise prone to "short-termism". Even when political leadership changes, the technical framework (plans, regulations, assessments) they manage provides stability against sudden, opportunistic shifts.

Technocrats act as internal resistance against harmful or reckless decisions. For example, when the government wants to approve a large-scale development quickly to create "economic activity" before an election, technocrats can slow down the process by demanding rigorous environmental impact assessments, public consultations, or proper planning studies. By insisting on transparent, rule-based processes, technocrats help protect the credibility of institutions like the Planning Authority. If they compromise their expertise too easily for political goals, public trust collapses, which can eventually backfire on politicians too.

Engaging impartial technocrats can enhance public trust, as decisions appear less influenced by vested interests and more focused on the common good. External experts often have specialized knowledge or skills not readily available within the institution, enriching the decision-making process. Including external voices serves as a counterbalance to internal influences, helping to ensure transparency and fairness. In practice, politicians tend to keep technocrats at a distance, as they are often reluctant to face challenges with their authority. Even if technocrats' advice is politically overruled, it matters that they put their objections on record. Formal dissent (through internal reports, public consultations, advisory opinions) creates accountability trails that NGOs, courts, the press, and the public can use later.

Analysis of the interviews confirmed the importance of consultation with knowledge-based interest groups and their responsibility to provide reasoned, unbiased, and researched objections to development plans. Decision-makers, technocrats and knowledge-based interest groups must engage regularly to discuss

and evaluate all points of view. This practice helps the officials to identify weaknesses, understand the challenges and transform them into opportunities for improvement, tangibly demonstrating transparency and commitment to finding solutions. The data exposed the critical importance of responsibility, with technocrats assuming full responsibility for their technocratic advice, politicians assuming full responsibility for political decisions and knowledge-based interest groups assuming responsibility for objections.

Undoubtedly, continuous professional development and cross-country training and experience are vital in the planning sector, and this practice must continue, including at an international level, to ensure training and professional development opportunities that will benefit the Planning Authority's employees but also the entire planning process.

## 6. Conclusion

The importance of technocratic expertise in the Planning Authority to promote good governance and evidence-based policies was analyzed. In Malta, some scandals (like the db project or fuel station permits) later saw leaked or published technical objections that had been sidelined and these fueled public backlashes. However, technocrats operate in a delicate space. If they resist too forcefully, they can be sidelined, replaced, or even politically punished (especially in smaller systems like Malta where networks are tight). If they comply too easily, they lose credibility, become instruments of political expediency, and undermine the very purpose of technocracy.

The real skill for technocrats in Malta (and similar places) is strategic resilience: Speak truth to power at the right moments. Document expert objections clearly and professionally. Build public and institutional support over time for evidence-based decision-making. Recognize that their authority comes from public trust in their expertise, not just from formal job titles.

The responses to the research question: How do technocrats in the Planning Authority influence policymaking in the planning processes? provided a range of views about the internal proceedings of the Planning Authority and the value that politicians and executives place on technocrats' advice. The majority agreed on the technocrats' role as impartial experts, setting the stage for further research on how to incorporate technocrats at every stage of the policymaking process. Most interviewees at political, executive, and technical levels agreed that technocracy takes the politics out of policymaking, providing an avenue for non-partisan deliberations.

Research showed that technocrats should be a compass pointing to the public good, even when politicians chase short-term electoral gains. But they must be tactically savvy, not just possess technical knowledge, to survive and remain influential in politically charged environments. The inclusion of knowledge-based interest groups ensures transparency, where all parties have an opportunity to air their views.

The research study explored the importance of technocratic expertise in policymaking and analyzed John Dewey's philosophy on technocratic policymaking. It proposed that policymakers and technocratic experts, together with knowledge-based interest groups, should engage in discussion to design policy, present proposals for wider consultation, and finally make decisions in a "discuss-display-decide" practice.

The efficacy of scientific experts advising decision-makers and of politicians seeking advice from scientists generates a mutually beneficial relationship that matches the practical needs of the executive with the democratically elected representatives, legitimizing both (Friedman, 2019). The paradigm of "discuss-display-decide" complements Dewey's philosophy, proposing an ideal foundation to ensure focused, long-term policymaking decisions, based on evidence and consultation (Cassar, 2009: p. 189).

A recurring theme in the research showed that a combination of political legitimacy and inclusive expertise enhanced good governance. Decisions should be made by experts who are qualified to do so, with the government providing adequate resources and expertise (Camilleri Clarke, 2022). Conclusions from the document analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews are drawn, recommending actions to enhance the policymaking process in the interests of good governance.

A recurring theme in the literature review established that a combination of political legitimacy and inclusive expertise enhanced good governance, as proposed by Habermas and Dewey. Accordingly, decisions should be made by experts who are qualified to do so, and the government should provide adequate resources to implement decisions (Camilleri Clarke, 2022).

Document analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews revealed "serious allegations of maladministration, illegalities, and abuse of power by many public officers and persons occupying key positions" (Ombudsman, 2021). Ministers interfere in the functions of the public service and sector by employing political appointees in government agencies that fall under ministerial portfolios. In the case of the Planning Authority, political influence limits the independence of the Board and exerts pressure so that development permits are issued in breach of planning laws (Aquilina, 2023).

Politicians tend to hold technocrats at arm's length, largely because they do not want their authority challenged. Technocrats, by nature, advocate for impartial, evidence-based decisions, which can often clash with political objectives driven by short-term gains or electoral pressures. This results in a tension between the political class and technocrats, as politicians may feel threatened by the independent advice and expertise that technocrats offer, which could undermine their political agendas.

The role of a properly functioning public service is to provide skilled public officers who contribute impartial, evidence-based advice and speak truth to power (OECD, 2019). However, in Malta, by the nature of the country's size and societal

factors, there is “a constant blurring of private and professional relations between citizens and politicians”, leading to a tendency to ignore technocratic expertise in favor of political expediency (Veenendaal, 2015: p. 1040). This weakness is evident in the Planning Authority, where 27% of interviewees stated that politicians did not appreciate the technocrats’ advice because it negatively impacted their objectives. The Planning Authority practices transparency by publishing development planning applications, enforcement orders, and policy development processes online, yet it remains susceptible to political influence due to the strong presence of political appointees on the Board (Ebejer, 2015).

Technocracy operates as an appendage of politically constructed structures and configurations of power; therefore, “highly placed technocrats cannot be mere backroom experts who supply disinterested rational-technical solutions...since they are engaged in inherently political exercises” (Khoo, 2013: p. 415). Nonetheless, politicians, driven by their desire to appease the electorate or financial patrons, often undermine technocratic institutions, compromising their ability to share expertise for the country’s benefit (Mitchell, 2002).

The Planning Authority, with its technocratic foundations, was originally envisioned to serve as an independent advisor, providing space for impartial expertise. However, successive governments have compromised its autonomy, turning it into an agent of political patronage (Torpiano, 2021). Recent court decisions, such as the ruling on a five-story pencil development (Debono, 2023), have provided encouraging news by reinforcing the legal authority of the Planning Authority’s decisions and empowering technocrats whose advice is often ignored (Galea, 2022a). These developments underscore the importance of ensuring that technocratic advice within the Planning Authority is respected and implemented for the common good.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the critical role of technocrats in promoting good governance and policymaking in Malta’s planning sector. It advocates greater autonomy for the Planning Authority, particularly in its policy application processes, and suggests appointing impartial technocrats from outside the institution to participate in policymaking. Additionally, it calls for legislative reforms to remove political influence from the Planning Authority and restore its original purpose. While political influence is a powerful force in shaping policy, this research emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that respects technocratic expertise while ensuring that policymakers act in the public’s best interest, thereby fostering sustainable and long-term policies.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the role of technocrats in policymaking within the Planning Authority, several key recommendations can be made to enhance the decision-making process, promote good governance, and ensure that the interests of the public are prioritized. Legislation should be introduced to restore the Planning Authority’s autonomy in applying policy decisions without political interference.

The autonomy of the Board should be reinforced, ensuring that it operates independently from political influence when it comes to land use and development matters.

The selection of executives at the Planning Authority should be based on merit and qualifications, rather than political appointment. An independent Public Service Commission should be tasked with overseeing these appointments to ensure the integrity and professionalism of key decision-makers. Impartial technocrats from outside the institution should be appointed to participate in policymaking. These technocrats should be selected by an independent ad hoc committee to ensure their expertise is utilized without bias or political influence. Technocrats should establish clear and consistent criteria for the design and interpretation of policies to ensure transparency, fairness, and consistency in the decision-making process.

As proposed by John Dewey's philosophy, policymakers, and technocrats, together with knowledge-based interest groups, should engage in an ongoing dialogue to design policies. This "discuss-display-decide" model would ensure wider consultation, transparency, and the inclusion of diverse views in the policymaking process.

The research findings pointed to the necessity for politicians to fully embrace John Dewey's idea of a more collaborative and consultative well-researched approach without political or sectorial interests and to introduce the practice whereby technocrats establish a set of criteria for the design and interpretation of policy, and a baseline to ensure transparency, consistency, and fairness in all decision-making processes.

Political parties should establish stronger internal mechanisms to scrutinize the behavior of their members. This would involve creating clear ethical guidelines and accountability measures to ensure that politicians prioritize the common good over individual or partisan interests.

The Planning Authority should consistently apply regulations, Local Plans, and SPED policies, ensuring that development aligns with sustainable and long-term planning goals. Politicians and technocrats alike should work together to create policies that support both economic growth and environmental preservation. Independent oversight bodies to monitor the implementation of policies and development permits should be established. These bodies would ensure that policies are adhered to and that any violations or deviations from the approved plans are addressed promptly.

By implementing these recommendations, Malta can strengthen its policymaking processes, reduce political interference, and ensure that decisions are made based on expertise, transparency, and long-term planning goals. This would help in achieving sustainable development while protecting Malta's cultural and environmental heritage. A triangular model of consultation with equal numbers of policymakers, technocrats and knowledge-based interest groups that engage in a discuss-display-decide practice would result in sustainable policies with a long-term vision.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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