



**TOGETHER**  
*for a sustainable future*

## OCCASION

This publication has been made available to the public on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.



**TOGETHER**  
*for a sustainable future*

## DISCLAIMER

This document has been produced without formal United Nations editing. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries, or its economic system or degree of development. Designations such as “developed”, “industrialized” and “developing” are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgment about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process. Mention of firm names or commercial products does not constitute an endorsement by UNIDO.

## FAIR USE POLICY

Any part of this publication may be quoted and referenced for educational and research purposes without additional permission from UNIDO. However, those who make use of quoting and referencing this publication are requested to follow the Fair Use Policy of giving due credit to UNIDO.

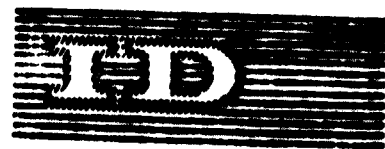
## CONTACT

Please contact [publications@unido.org](mailto:publications@unido.org) for further information concerning UNIDO publications.

For more information about UNIDO, please visit us at [www.unido.org](http://www.unido.org)



05631



United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Distr.  
LIMITED

ID/WG.183/10  
24 July 1974

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Seminar on the Furniture  
and Joinery Industries

Lahti, Finland

29 July - 17 August 1974

THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN MALTA ✓

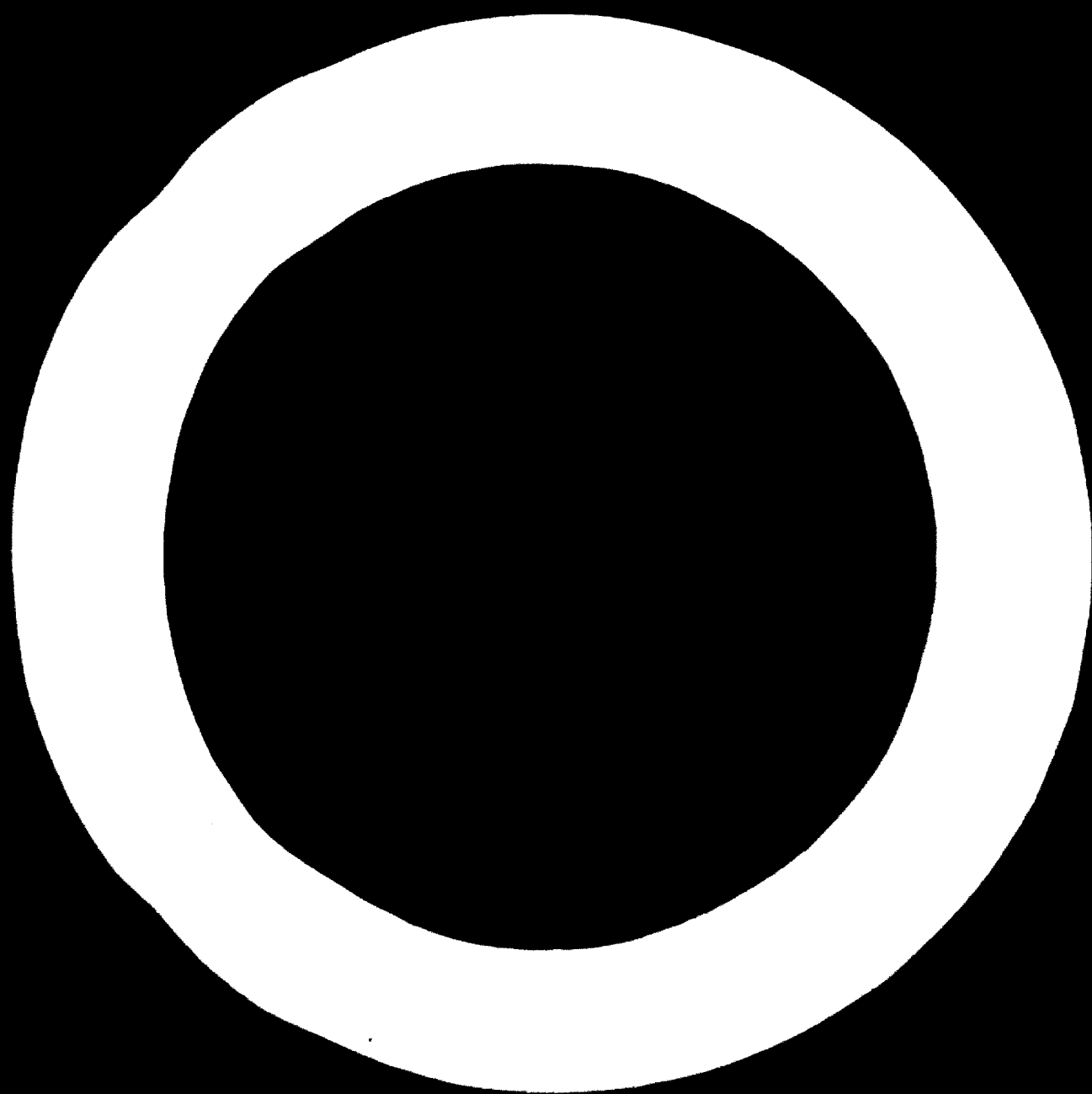
by

Lawrence Vella\*

\* General and Technical Manager, Wood Ware Limited, Malta

✓ The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the secretariat of UNIDO. This document has been reproduced without formal editing.

We regret that some of the pages in the microfiche copy of this report may not be up to the proper legibility standards, even though the best possible copy was used for preparing the master fiche.



The Maltese islands, with an area of 121 square miles and a population of about 300,000, are situated in the middle of the Mediterranean sea, with a typical Mediterranean climate, having mild winters and warm summers. Our islands do not pose any real climatic problems to the woodworking industry. Mean temperatures vary from 12.8°C during January to February to 27.8°C in August, with maximum temperatures of 32°C from June to September. The prevailing winds are north-easterlies and only the Sirocco, which blows from the south east of the island after picking up moisture from the sea, is oppressively humid. However only a minimum number of houses have been lately installed with air conditioning apparatus.

Whilst most underdeveloped countries, due to their geographical position, abound in forestry regions, Malta severely lacks this commodity. A thin soil and the absence of surface water have resulted in a natural vegetation of a poor garrigue type: brooms, tough grasses, bulbous plants and an occasional dwarfed carob tree.

All the timber requisites for the woodworking industry in Malta must be imported and the most widely used timbers are white deal and red deal, Mahogany (utile), iroko, beech and ash. Other main materials used in the manufacture of furniture and interior doors are plywood, fibreboard, chipboard and block board. These are available through the local importers, who adequately supply the demand as regards softwoods and wood based panels, but are quite deficient in the hard wood sector. The qualities of the timbers imported are sometimes quite below the standard required. This is a direct result of the purchasing importer's bargaining aspect - the manufacturer being the loser. Furthermore, it is imperative to mention that no seasoning facilities are available on the island, which results in manufacturing problems and ultimately poor quality products and creates a hindrance to the much needed boost in the exporting sector.

Laminated plastics are imported in quite an extensive range of quantity and colours, but the range of hardware is quite limited, often impeding the introduction of new designs. Abiding by the traditional methods, manufacturers have opted to use P.V.A. glues in replacement of the older animal glues. Since the introduction of laminated plastics, contact adhesives have come more in use, utilizing the barest of equipment.

Lack of technical knowhow in the gluing process has been detrimental, time consuming and costly. Many of the manufacturers who own cold curing presses can, at a small initial expense, convert them to heated multi-plater presses, thus enabling them to use better quality glues, gain precious time and trim down production costs.

Due to the lack of mechanical devices, both in the aspects of finance and technological experience the laborious methods of french polishing are still widely in use by the smaller type (1 to 10 employees) manufacturers. The larger concerns, which are usually equipped with conventional spraying equipment, tend to utilize cellulose lacquers. Some experimenting is being undertaken in the use of more sophisticated types of lacquers, such as polyester. Although electrostatic, material saving equipment is easily within reach of many a manufacturer's pocket, the lack of organized long production runs makes it impractical to instal such equipment.

The range of products of our local wood industry is quite extensive, ranging from modern to antique furniture and from heavy aperturers to light handicraft.

Original furniture design on the island is practically non-existent and the industry follows continental trends and designs. The small concerns (which constitute over 90% of the manufacturing firms) cater for individual tastes and only a couple of firms operate on batch production basis.

Basic machinery is found both in the small workshops and in the larger factories, although not fully utilized because of the lack of basic knowledge in proper jiggging. No automation as such exists, but three of the larger firms tend to specialize in a limited range of products using semi-automatic machinery. However even these cannot use the full potential of their equipment as the small demand for their products compels them to operate on short runs. This is also a direct cause for time wasting in tooling up.

Both high speed steel and carbide tipped tools are used through the local industry but they are giving the adverse result in production owing to the lack of rudimentary knowledge in tool maintenance and skilled personnel to cater for such difficulties.

Another shortcoming which the technically-minded enthusiast comes across is the lack of consultative establishments which can help him with his difficulties and again it is only the bigger firms that can afford the time lost in consultations with continental establishments.

The influx of school leavers from technical schools into the woodworking trade has more than amply furnished the industry with skilled and semi-skilled labour at shop-floor level. However, there has always been a deficiency in highly skilled personnel. There is good reason to hope that this deficiency will be annihilated with the introduction of the lately established vocational trade schools.

With the exception of the larger firms, managerial posts are held by the owners themselves, who, having had no training whatsoever in this capacity, cannot to all intents and purposes run their factories on a sound scientific basis. It is worth suggesting that both managerial and technical expertise should be made available to one and all, as the present situation of the woodworking industry badly needs a radical change in running and set up. This would be a service from which the whole woodworking industry can benefit, through the introduction of methods such as plant layout, costing systems, quality control, work study, personnel management and improved techniques. Such a system would in future help towards better quality and competitive products with the aim of boosting the needed export potential.

The output capacity of the woodworking industry is absorbed by the local market and only an insignificant percentage is exported. There has been a marked expansion in home made products, which contributes by substituting imports and creating jobs for the local people. There is even more scope for expansion as a substantial amount of furniture is imported from the continent. This growth is an encouraging factor and it is hoped that the present trend of development will continue so that by the above-mentioned improvements in the industry the export probe could be realized.

Distribution of the finished product to the local market is a direct transaction between manufacturer and consumer, although a number of the small firms rely on retailers.

Future achievements for the woodworking industry depend largely on a joint effort which will have to be organized by an independent body. The most pressing matters requiring attention are:

- the availability of raw materials
- the establishing of kiln drying facilities
- provision of expertise
- channelling of individual efforts
- provision of export market

UNIDO could assist by providing the experts to implement such a scheme and also an immediate measure to furnish local manufacturers with technical data and informative and descriptive literature of the latest developments in the woodworking industry.

#### Government Incentives for Industrialization

1. Government factories at low rents.
2. Government land for building of own factories, serviced with roads, water and electricity with low lease.
3. Employment subsidy.
4. Low rates of interest on loans for investment purposes.
5. Investment allowance (20% of invested capital exempted from taxation during first 3 years).
6. ~~Reduced~~ rates on company tax (if profits are used for financing investments for export goods).
7. Exemption from custom tariff for industrial machinery and raw materials for export goods.
8. Unlimited repatriation of capital and profits.
9. Accelerated depreciation allowance.

(Statistics extracted from census of production report for 1972 obtained from the Department of Information, Valletta).

Size of Woodworking Establishments

<u>Range of Employees</u>	<u>Number of Establishments</u>	<u>No. of Persons Employed</u>	<u>Gross Output 'M</u>
1-5	271	521	478,086
6-10	33	232	238,814
11-19	10	148	150,174
20-29	6	151 )	284,434
30-39	2	75 )	
150-199	2	333 )	831,079
300 +	1	309 )	
Total	324	1,770	2,032,587

Total Maltese labour force (1972) .. 100,408

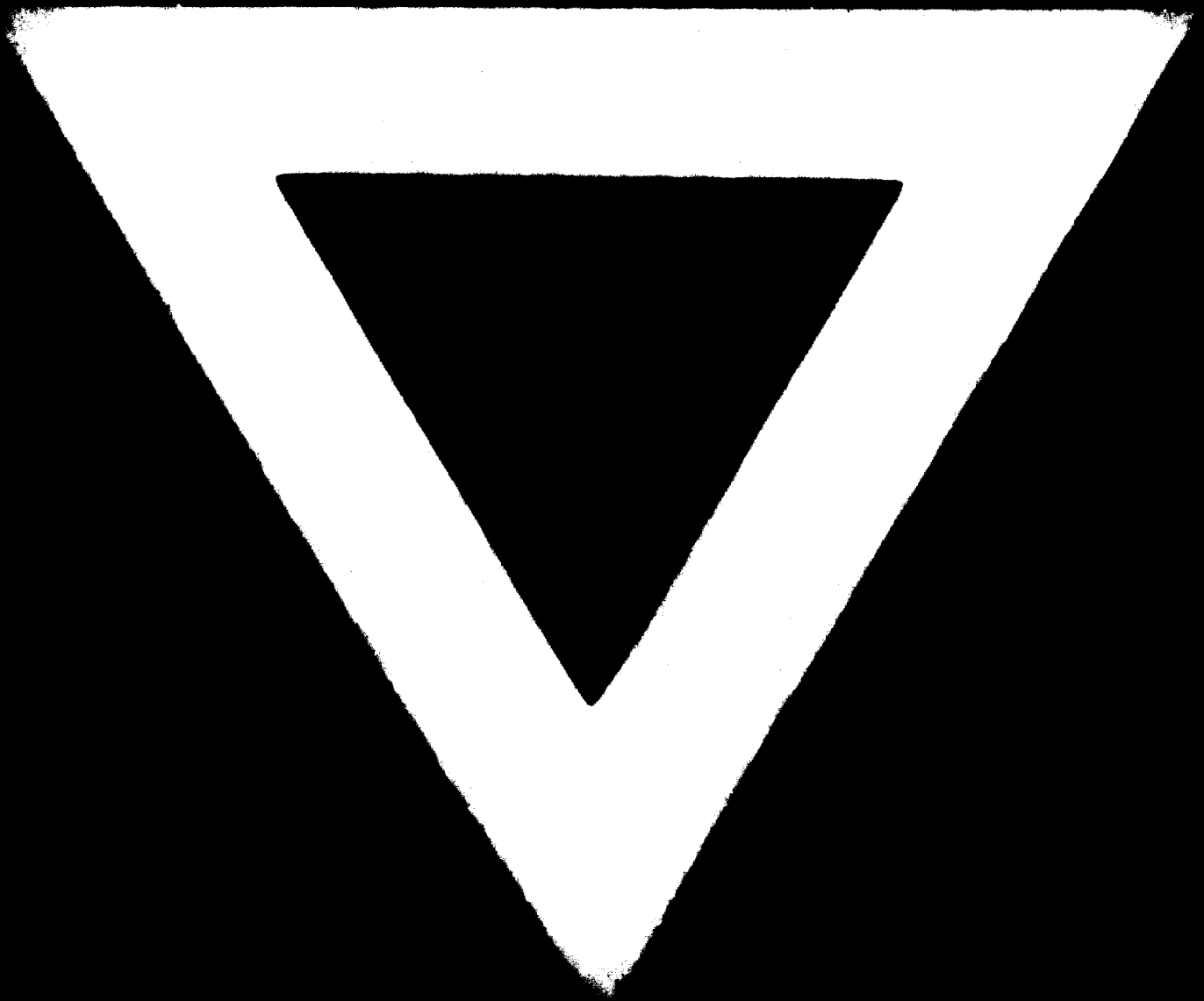
Furniture and Furniture Components Imports

EM

<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>
199,042	150,783	169,791







**74.09.30**