



MASTERPLAN: Failure to adopt a multi-dimensional approach to sustainability could see Masdar become an environmental oasis but a cultural and social desert.

CITY LIMITS



The vision of a truly sustainable city presents project planners with a raft of challenges but perhaps the most difficult, says **Martyn Best** at Cultural Innovations, is preserving and integrating a sense of cultural identity.

THE DRIVE for economic development, and for a more equal standard of economic prosperity across different regions, has given rise to a hectically competitive race between nations for inward investment, both of financial and intellectual capital.

This is especially so amongst developing countries, who need the investment to fuel the implementation of the domestic economic infrastructure which will help them 'catch up' with the more established Westernised economies. But in this objective they all too often have to grapple with a chicken and egg problem: without inward investment they cannot create the infrastructure necessary to attract inward investment.

It is this latter conundrum, in particular, which is leading to the emergence of a fascinating new trend across the developing world, led by the Middle-East and Africa: the rapid creation of large, spectacular off-plan 'instant cities' and economic urban zones.

But what challenges do these latest new city projects present for the project management discipline? Let us take as an example, the recently announced Masdar Sustainable City in Abu Dhabi, which will have a planned population of 90,000 new citizens with 40,000 as permanent residents.

Abu Dhabi is progressing at a phenomenal rate, and indeed in some ways it is an atypical developing nation – it is geographically compact and

accessible and, due to its oil revenues, its per capita wealth is high. But many economic, commercial and societal infrastructure challenges remain, and Abu Dhabi's rulers know that for the country to mature as a balanced sustainable economy and society these challenges need to be addressed.

Hence, major new projects are coming on stream continuously. A few of these have real potential for global significance in conveying a forward-looking, energetic, modern national identity whilst at the same time still embodying the real traditional values of Abu Dhabi. The exciting Masdar City project has the potential to make this contribution, but there are many

issues to be cracked if it is to do so and not go the way of other failed grand plans for new cities.

Sustainable

At first sight, Masdar is an example of Abu Dhabi taking on a challenge that appears Herculean in scale and scope. Yet the biggest challenge for the project management professionals who will be assisting the new city's authorities might just come, paradoxically, from its central stated purpose: sustainability.

These days the term 'sustainability' is all too often used as sloppy shorthand for environmental sustainability. If the Masdar project proceeds too literally against this yardstick, in my view it will be doomed to failure from the outset.

Successful cities cannot be shoe-horned into a single-dimensional existence. Sustainability is nothing if not a holistic, multi-dimensional concept. Masdar's objectives may be economically environmentally-focused, but true sustainability is about reconciling environmental, economic, cultural and social imperatives to create a richer quality of life.

Most great cities have acquired their multi-dimensional balance organically, through long evolution and as a reflection of the societies that created them, developed and are hosted by them. But creating a city 'instantly' from a blueprint

requires a coherent vision, a societal buy-in and executional excellence in which the contribution, and value, of all elements are recognised. In particular those planning and implementing such cities must, from the start, make even greater efforts – for example, through properly-conceived and tailored educational and cultural facilities and amenities – to inspire and engage the children and young people whose development assures any city’s long-term social viability and vitality.

Balancing and integrating all these disparate elements so that their synergy is assured is the stuff of great ‘total project management’ at the highest, most influential level. This sometimes necessitates recognising where client-side ‘silo management’ mentalities and attitudes are harming the integrated implementation of the project’s core objectives – and then either breaking down those silos or bringing the problem persuasively to the attention of those in authority who can.

Cultural

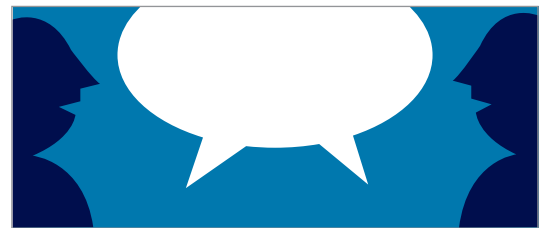
In any event, Masdar and other future new ‘sustainable cities’ will certainly require as much focus on cultural/social dimensions as on the environmental ones: moreover these cities must not fall into the developers’ trap of equating social sustainability with shopping malls and expat leisure amenities. Environmental efficiency objectives need to be complemented by cultural and social initiatives, processes and energies. A rich diversity of art, music, cultural facilities and museums etc, must be an integral part of any sustainable city development plan from the outset, not just later ‘add-ons’. All these must then be prioritised, scheduled and knitted together through brilliant total project management so as to create cities which are models of sustainability in its true, multi-dimensional sense.

By any stretch, this is a tough brief. But if it can achieve this, Masdar has the opportunity itself to become the first successful living embodiment of the future city – a model for and an emblem of what can be achieved. Indeed there is a tremendous opportunity, almost a necessity, to really learn from the experience of creating Masdar.

This experience and expertise needs to be explicitly captured, developed and communicated. For example a ‘Museum of Masdar’, dedicated to telling the story of the project’s vision and its implementation, could provide invaluable information and wisdom. But such a museum will need to be realised in a truly innovative and progressive way, and if it is to really convey the philosophy of true sustainability (in all its aspects) clearly its subject matter must look beyond energy conservation challenges.

In fact I believe its theme should be ‘The Future City’ – in all its dimensions. This could be the true international significance of Masdar, and Abu Dhabi’s gift to world development. And amongst the heroes of such a success story would surely be the city’s key project managers.

• Martyn Best, MAPM, is co-founder and chief executive of Cultural Innovations (www.culturalinnovations.com) a leading international consultancy specialising in the development and delivery of cultural programmes and projects. Martyn is an architect, project manager and design consultant with a background ranging from cultural programmes and museums to leisure developments.



CRITICAL PATH



PROJECT management is going through the most extensive and significant changes that I have seen over my 30 years in the industry. All being well the award of the Royal Charter will act as a catalyst to accelerate these changes to create a step change in the maturity of the profession.

The creation of these new standards for project professionals is the headline news that will gain the column inches outside of our profession. But this alone will not change the fact that too many projects still fail and that the public perception is too often is that projects are things that run late and over budget.

A cursory examination of studies of why projects fail shows that the causes of failure haven’t changed for over 30 years. We are according to one famous definition of stupidity ‘doing the same old thing and expecting a different result’.

The profession is not short of ideas on how to break the mould and try to make that step change in performance. The APM has its Body of Knowledge; Competency Framework and guidance on everything from risk to governance. The OGC has its process models for projects, programmes and portfolios; maturity models and guidance on support offices. Slowly but surely these numerous guides are evolving along common lines – but far too slowly.

We who are the profession’s insiders must remember that to others project management is just a delivery mechanism. They are not interested in the subtleties of our differing ways of looking at the discipline; they just want us to tell them how to make it work.

I believe that as a profession with aspirations for Chartered status we have a duty to develop a common but adaptable framework with a single terminology and flexible structure. The time has come to combine all these jigsaw pieces to create a unified picture of the profession and discipline of project management. Not to do this is tantamount to professional negligence on a grand scale.

Adrian Dooley, MAPM, was the original architect of the TPG Academy and has over 20 years’ experience in projects spanning both the public and private sector.

Fancy letting off steam?
Contact james@impact-now.co.uk.