



Richard Polkinghorne,  
MDI Country Manager for Malaysia.

Legoland theme park, with a hospital and shopping centre scheduled to start soon. Accommodations such as apartments are also targeted for completion by the end of 2012.

“The value we bring into this project is the expertise of getting the right people to develop and execute the business plan. And because it’s such a vast undertaking, our offices are full of design and planning graduates and masters’ graduates from the best universities in the world, and we combine that academic skills set with real-life practical experience,” Polkinghorne says. “Building a city, can you imagine? You can’t get the sewerage wrong by 10 per cent, you can’t get the Internet data speed wrong by 10 per cent, the buildings have to be beautiful and efficient, you have to get the right balance between shops, houses and offices. You have to think of absolutely everything; the buildings, the roads, the utilities, the public transport – all of it have to be right.”

“We’re there as the expert consultants, and then we say who the best people are - who’s required for each specific field, the architects, the accountants, master planner, social researchers – we select them, we brief them, we arrange the workshops, and we make sure everyone’s talking to everybody. And we manage the whole project,” he says, adding, “It’s horses for courses; we know master planning is very technical and we keep in good relationship with lots of brilliant people. We brought in Gensler, who did Canary Wharf in London and Dubai International Financial Centre, for the design of the commercial and high-density parts of the project because they were the right people for this job and Esquisse from Australia for the lifestyle part of the project because of their specific skills.”

The good news then, is that the final product will be a well-serviced, happy city and what Polkinghorne describes as a ‘sustainable city’. “Sustainability we take in a broad context. We put regulations in place to ensure these standards are met. We also look at people, and it’s not just about where they live and work, but the fact that they like being there, so they tell their friends to go there also,” he says. “So it’s things like parks and open spaces to make it pedestrian-friendly and a place where you can go biking or riding. We link the parks, and where the parks can’t link, there’s a nice wide footpath and shade, designed so that people can walk on it and feel safe walking along it.”

Most of all, MDI is working towards ensuring that its developments allow its citizens to, in the words of Polkinghorne, ‘get some fresh air and meet people’. “Communities are built when people look at each other’s eyes, recognise each other and greet each other” he says. “This builds a sense of belonging, and common ownership and responsibility. Crime comes down, quality of life goes up and if it’s sustainable in a social sense, it will be sustainable economically.”

In the development clusters tasked to MDI, Zone A will feature upper mid-range housing, schools, a big hospital, a major shopping centre and a bus/tram interchange to form the heart of the city. Zone B will be the business part hosting international financial institutions and commercial activities while, down in Zone F, a golf course and waterfront developments will offer people who buy in a chance for executive and retirement lifestyles, with MDI projecting strong interest from expatriates seeking to retire to warmer climes.

As the work carries on towards Medini’s eventual targeted completion in 15 to 20 years’ time, MDI has its plate full with the macro and the micro, including decisions on how to create an especially stunning golf course, which will sit on a nice hilly plot. “We need to find the niche; do you design a PGA-tournament course or a resort course?” Polkinghorne says. By now, however, it’ll be clear that MDI will soon have its experts over this pickle, gathering the necessary data to engage the ideal course designer.

Polkinghorne, who’s seen the beginning of this project, says he’s probably going to have to bring his grandchildren to see the finished product. “But 10 to 20-year rollouts for mega projects are fairly common,” he says. “Cities take time to build. If you go to Dubai, one of the problems was that it was too fast. It’s a collection of really nice buildings; but cities are about societies, interaction, cultural institutions, history and shared experience. Dubai will have these and be fine in 10 to 20 years... and Medini will take that long to mature because at the end of the day, cities are about the people and their communities.” ■