



FOUNDER & PUBLISHER Kowie Geldenhuys

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Paulo Coutinho

Macau, Wednesday, October 17, 2018

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LEGAL WISE | MASTER PLAN STILL BEING PLANNED

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2016 - 2 YEARS AGO NO COMMENTS 2,479 VIEWS

After decades without any consistent urban development regulations, the enactment of the Urban Planning Law in 2013 raised the expectations of all stakeholders for how it would positively impact the development and use of land, the protection of the environment and historical landmarks, the design and construction of properties and infrastructures, transportation, and the communications and utilities networks. However, as we usually say in the legal sector, the creation of laws is irrelevant if implementation fails.

To kick-off the execution of the law, the former Secretary of Public Works hired a well-regarded mainland company to design the Macau master plan, which represents the basic foundation of the urban planning of the city. The project was doomed from the beginning, as the awarded company had no experience in Macau projects and its consultants were found to have no knowledge of the specificities of the Macau territory - which are many and complex. This, of course, caused a significant delay in the whole process.

The appointment of the current Secretary of Public Works and of a new director of DSSOPT in 2014 - who are both proving to be significantly more proactive and focused in solving the longstanding problems of this sector - brought new hopes that a master plan would finally move forward as would subsequent much needed detailed plans for several areas of Macau. This is especially important as the Government is pushing (again) for diversification of the economy.

However, until now, no visible progress has been made. There is still no master plan and only a few areas of Macau have specific planning due to special constraints such as the urban plan of the Ilha Verde and the North area of Taipa, the detail plan of the village of Coloane, as well law 11/2013 (Safeguard of the Cultural Heritage), which raises urban planning restrictions in certain historic areas. This is clearly insufficient.

It should be noted that the Urban Planning Board holds meetings on a regular basis to discuss the urban conditions for the different plots of land within Macau, but it is still an ad-hoc and lengthy process which does not have the consistency and reliability that is essential in urban planning regulations.

The realpolitik in Macau, which is driven by the need to diversify the economy, means that urban planning will necessarily play a crucial part in creating the conditions necessary for the development of sectors other than gaming, since it is evident to all who visit Macau that the city is too much focused on the gaming sector.

There are now a few private institutions trying to help the Government in moving forward with setting up a sound, balanced and efficient urban planning for the city. For example, the Taipa Village Association, in which I am personally involved, is seeking to group all retailers, merchants, food and beverage dealers of the Taipa Village into a collective which collaborates through a variety of promotions, events and activities so as to draw traffic and visitors to the area, as well as reinforce the tourism and cultural development of the region. They are also, of course, very much keen on seeing the master plan finally approved so that a more detailed plan for the Village can finally be a reality.

The Macau Urban Planning Institute has also been a strong voice in the advancement of the public discussions among all stakeholders regarding these matters, but they - as with many other private institutions - cannot substitute the Government in the political and administrative process required to move urban planning in Macau forward.

It is now time for the Government to refocus and invest on urban planning so that Macau can become not only a prime destination for tourists to visit, but also for residents to live in. **Tirso Olazábal**, Senior Associate, MdME



Tirso Olazábal

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