

**Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City
(Pre-Conference Session) Cities, Civilisations and Geopolitics: In
Conversation with George Yeo and Liu Thai Ker**

By Sufia Maisarah



Caption for photo: Mr George Yeo (left), Dr Liu Thai Ker (centre) & Ambassador Chan Heng Chee at NUS Shaw Alumni Foundation House.

The Singapore Perspectives pre-conference session on 11 January featured former Foreign Minister Mr George Yeo and Dr Liu Thai Ker, former chief executive officer of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), and current Chairman of Morrow Architects & Planners. It was moderated by Ambassador Chan Heng Chee, Ambassador-at-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Professor of Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design.

Opening Remarks

Ambassador Chan Heng Chee began the session by looking back in history. She noted how the word “city” evokes one’s imagination and is linked to the great civilisations of the past and the busy metropolises of today. She mentioned that cities are important actors in politics and some think cities are moving faster than the state. Next, she asked the speakers to share their views on the role of cities today and how the latter could rise or fail.

Discussion

Mr George Yeo started off by acknowledging the different functions of cities throughout time, which include political, administrative, religious and cultural centres. He then shared his view

of cities as nodes in a neural network. The wider the network, the richer it becomes and gives rise to opportunities of generating ideas and attracting talent. He also mentioned that despite the availability of the internet and the instant connections it provides, face-to-face connectivity will always remain paramount. He proceeded to describe the importance of trust and the ability to negotiate among cities. Mr Yeo said that when members of a tribe feel respected, they bring along not only their brains and expertise but also their own networks. This is then tied to the fact that Singapore is a centre where different networks of people from all around the world intersect; and it is crucial to negotiate and deal according to the familiarity and customs of different people.

When questioned about the future of Singapore in the next 10 to 20 years, Mr Yeo said it is important for Singapore to reconnect with ASEAN. He stated that Singapore was more familiar with America and Japan than with nearby countries. He did not think this was sustainable; it would be best to reconnect with the region in case of any future uncertainties. Mr Yeo mentioned one of the biggest uncertainties that could affect Singapore in the decades to come was the tension between the US and China. Rediscovering Singapore's neighbours is akin to rediscovering our local neighbourhood, he said, which should have been done from the very beginning and was now impacted by restricted travel during the pandemic. He concluded by emphasising the importance of good leadership that Singapore would need to carry it into the future.

Dr Liu Thai Ker shared his experiences in urban planning during the early days of Singapore's independence and reflected on the remarkable transformation that had taken place since then. Despite being widely celebrated as the "father of urban planning", Dr Liu said credit should go to Singapore's first generation of political leaders — as the driving force behind the transformation of a poor backward city into an affluent global city. He attributed this success to the attitudes of these leaders, as they chose to make pragmatic and practical choices over chasing iconic flashy buildings in early urban planning. He noted that it was with good legislation, hard work and fair policies — not just pure luck or merely good intentions — that improved infrastructure here and liveability for the people. The good choices and regulations eventually made Singapore a garden city that was attractive to foreign talents and investments. Dr Liu also emphasised that cities could possibly fail if iconic structures were prioritised instead of practical solutions and designs.

He then moved to the issue of Singapore's progress. Although Singapore developed extremely quickly over the past decades, he expressed his worry that Singapore's position as an affluent city could lead to future generations being complacent — particularly of the potential speed of larger Asian powers in development and progress. Singapore could reach a point where it could no longer keep up with other fast-developing powers, he said. He also said that the future generation would need to sustain and refine the crisis mentality that the first generation of leaders had — in order to stay ahead or at least keep in pace with its larger neighbours.

Question & Answer

A Q&A session was held with questions from the audience. Mr Yeo was asked how Singapore as a city-state would continue to thrive in the context of conflicting spheres-of-influence between China and the US. Would we have to compromise on our sovereignty? He replied that people would have to define what it meant to become Singaporean, and this hopefully

would mean that one becomes bigger and more understanding in accepting the differences amongst ourselves. This, he noted, would make becoming Singaporean more attractive for people to accept.

Dr Liu was asked how cities could better prepare for the impact of climate change on their growth and future prosperity, particularly for an island city-state like Singapore in the face of potential rising sea levels. He answered that there were two main areas, the first being the protection of big ecologies in which tiny Singapore had done as much as it could; the second was the burning of fossil fuels in which Singapore has tried to reduce by ensuring an excellent bus and train system and avoiding severe traffic jams, which are not only inconveniences but also burn up energy.

Many cities focus on certain areas (cultural hub, financial hub, transport hub). As a city-state, what does Singapore need to be and where should it focus on to be globally competitive? Mr Yeo said Singapore's economy is at heart arbitrage. Therefore, it is important to understand different markets and domains in order to maintain economic competitiveness.

The speakers were also asked about the push for more self-sustaining food supplies and how city planning can enable this. Dr Liu said that growing some vegetables in Singapore is a good move, but it would be difficult to be completely self-sustaining. Mr Yeo also noted the importance of local production, but Singapore cannot be completely self-sustaining given the complex division of labour globally.

The next question was from Ambassador Chan on the possibility of city diplomacy having a real place and being able to push things much faster than the sovereign state, to which Mr Yeo replied that due to the Westphalian system of nations, cities and states have to work within national policies. He gave examples of Singapore's good autonomous relations with the states of neighbouring countries, which came with the blessings of the capitals.

The next question asked if Singapore was becoming overcrowded, and about the issue of reclaiming land and balancing between nature and development. Dr Liu answered that for Singapore to stand economically on par with surrounding countries, a population growth is to be expected, with the possibility of reaching 10 million within the next century. Mr Yeo sympathised with Dr Liu's view and stated that it would be better to plan for more; if Singapore does not reach those high numbers, it would still be spacious.

The final question from the audience was on slogans. If we were to design a slogan for Singapore now, what would it be? Mr Yeo said this question would require more thought than a casual remark while Dr Liu said that if a slogan were to be designed it would be important that it is action-oriented and useful as a city-wide concept. Ambassador Chan concluded the session and thanked the speakers for sharing their views.

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**Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City
Forum 1: Keynote Speech by Minister Ong Ye Kung — Cities, Countries and
Resilience**

By Eddie Choo



Caption for photo: Minister Ong Ye Kung giving his opening remarks

The opening keynote of the Singapore Perspectives Conference, held with an online audience, featured Mr Ong Ye Kung, Singapore's Minister for Health. The question-and-answer segment was moderated by Dr Woo Jun Jie, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies.

Three Kinds of Cities

Minister Ong Ye Kung described three kinds of cities at different times and places, and what they represented. He shared about Jericho, one of the oldest human settlements dating back to 9,000 BC. Jericho represented how hunter-gatherers congregated in a close-knit way to build a city. He then described a next category of cities — political capitals that often combined the attributes of economic prosperity, that were defensible and the centre of political activity. The third category of cities includes the global cities of today, which form the key nodes in a globalised world.

For Minister Ong, Singapore has the qualities of each of the three cities. Singapore is a global city; without a natural hinterland, being connected to the world is the strategy for viability. Minister Ong likened Singapore to a smartphone, with several apps and essential services, making it hard to turn away from such appealing offerings.

From the examples of political capitals, Minister Ong pointed to the importance of governance. Singapore has developed good governance and public institutions. Governments today are concerned about issues of growth, inequality, redistribution and resource exploitation. A strong state is needed to reconcile the contradictions in these issues. Singapore also cannot afford the divisive politics seen in other countries, he added.

For him, the most crucial aspect of the ancient cities would be the example of Jericho — to have a sense sharing “a common fate and destiny.” Minister Ong pointed out that nation-building is an ongoing process and the “one united people” in the national pledge is an ideal to work towards. As people went through difficult circumstances together, a sense of togetherness might emerge and transcend social divisions.

Minister Ong ended his speech with how, at the Bicentennial Commemoration in 2019, people had chosen “self-determination” as the best descriptor of the “Singapore DNA”. He shared his thoughts about why Singapore exists and what makes a Singaporean: Singapore is an important node in a globalised world, connecting the East, the West, and across different parts of Asia, creating opportunities that transcend physical borders for Singaporeans for many generations to come. Singapore should continue to have public institutions to ensure justice, fairness, meritocracy, and transcend social divides, he said. People who call Singapore home would feel a sense of ownership towards Singapore, getting along with one another despite social differences.

Question & Answer

Dr Woo Jun Jie asked about the lessons that Singapore could learn from COVID-19 and the financial crises, and what might allow cities to rebound from them. Minister Ong noted that there would always be external shocks. Singapore is particularly vulnerable as a city-state. On the other hand, Singapore did have buffers from having a diverse economic base. Even if pandemics destabilise cities, cities are likely to endure if they can remain the hub of opportunities. The pandemic represents a rich learning experience, from which Singapore and many other cities are sure to learn.

A participant asked about balancing the needs of different groups of people and across different sectors. Minister Ong replied that as a global city and being subject to various external influences, effort would be needed for everyone to work and live together in harmony. The challenge is for people to feel confident and have a sense of ownership in Singapore. For Minister Ong, social integration and harmony are crucial, in which the state has a key role.

A participant asked about what Singapore’s competitive advantage might be going forward. For Minister Ong, Singapore does have a natural advantage being positioned in Southeast Asia between Northeast Asia and South Asia. On top of this geographical advantage, Singapore has been able to connect different cultures.

A participant asked about how might Singapore balance between the competing logic of being a global city and a country at the same time. Minister Ong said there were several principles to follow: rule of law, education, taxation, infrastructure, minimising corruption, and be plugged into global trade. There were also three major challenges to address — protectionism, inequality and climate change, that require a strong state. Minister Ong reiterated the point about being a close-knit people of strong mutual trust was important in managing these issues.



Caption for photo: Minister Ong responding to a question during the Q&A session.

A participant asked about national identity and the government’s role in identity formation. Minister Ong pointed out that Singapore is still “young”, having achieved independence for just 56 years. Governance is crucial in enacting effective policies, sometimes forcing people to live together and go through common experiences together. He cited how the policies in addressing COVID-19 have to make sense. There was a similar question on identity, on how to engage major countries such as China and India without diminishing the Singapore identity. Minister Ong noted that in diplomacy, Singapore does not wish to choose sides between US and China. He noted that Singapore appreciates both systems. Dr Woo asked about the possible advantages of interacting as a city-state, based on the minister’s experiences. Minister Ong described about how he was able to toggle between different cultures, from serving as a negotiator in the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, and while working on the Guangzhou Knowledge City project. He pointed out that bilingual policy and exposure to different languages in preschool are important.

A participant asked about the need to have a strong state and the necessity of a strong opposition. Minister Ong replied that due to Singapore’s small size, it is not likely for very different political views to appear. There are various mechanisms for checks and balances; the public service was non-political, the judiciary system takes rule of law seriously, and other statutory bodies maintain the integrity of the system, with the political opposition being another factor.

The last question was about taking care of marginalised members in society. Minister Ong replied that inequality and social mobility are a priority for the government. Resources have been invested to uplift people and future generations as well. On the issue of migrant workers, the focus is on reforming industries and improving living conditions. Part of this is also about moving with society in terms of their social attitudes because different generations have different perspectives.

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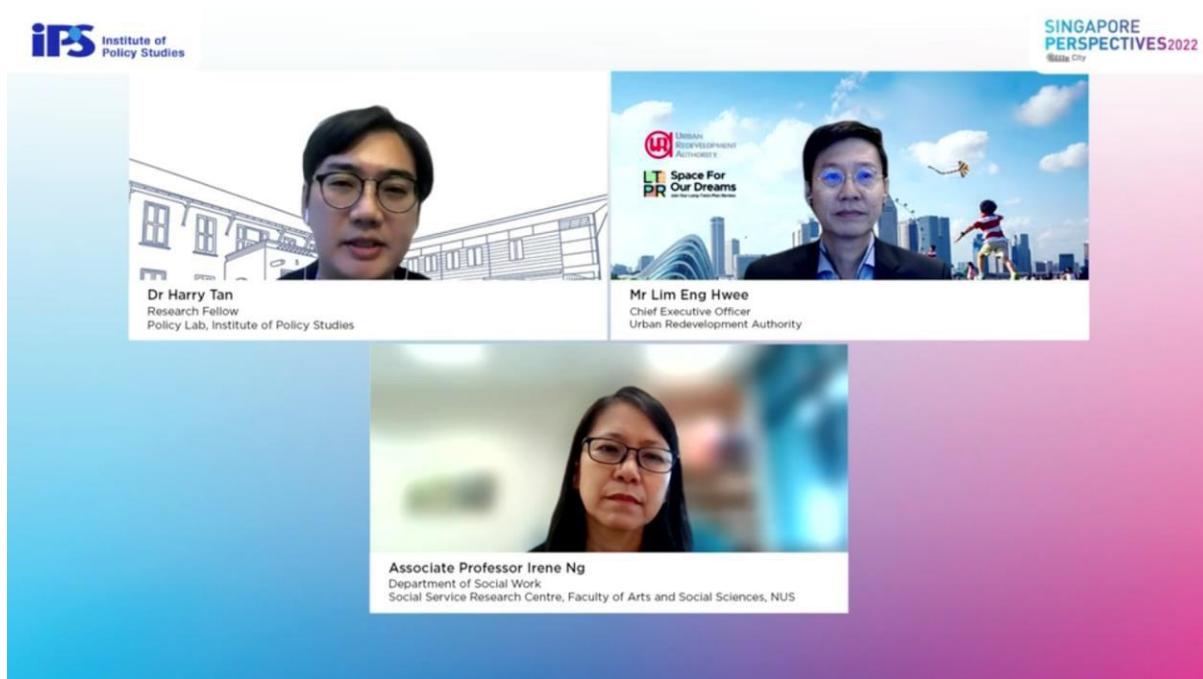


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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Forum 2: City as an Inclusive Space

By Beverly Tan



Caption for photo: Dr Harry Tan introduces the panellists for the session on “City as an Inclusive Space”

The second forum, on “City as an Inclusive Space”, was moderated by Dr Harry Tan, Research Fellow at Policy Lab at the Institute of Policy Studies. The speakers of this session were Professor Saskia Sassen of Columbia University’s Department of Sociology and Mr Lim Eng Hwee, Chief Executive Officer of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). Associate Professor Irene Ng from the Department of Social Work at the National University of Singapore’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences was the discussant. Dr Tan opened the forum by introducing the concept of global cities as strategic sites of managing the world economy and production of services, highlighting the inequality between professionals and builders, although both are equally essential. He posed the question of how cities can become more inclusive and liveable, and how Singapore can become such a city.

Opening Remarks by Professor Saskia Sassen

Professor Saskia Sassen spoke about transnationalism and the increase of specialised actors in her pre-recorded remarks. She first established that it was cities, instead of governments, that were transnational, and explained the importance of protecting the urban condition. Prof Sassen also spoke of the rise of specialised actors, capabilities and constructing innovation, although when exactly these changes occur is difficult to determine. She highlighted the surfacing of a new modernity that has led to physical and digital innovations, which has empowered the transformation of less developed cities from a decade ago into “brilliant” and “exceptional” ones.

During her remarks, Prof Sassen emphasised how pandemics are a significant enemy of cities. She drew a distinction between dealing with pandemics on a broad, national level, and dealing with it in a more localised manner in cities. Some cities have access to all the resources they require to fight the pandemic, while others do not, drawing on the examples of Kolkata in India and parts of the US where people were “simply dying on the street” if they have been hit by the virus. Prof Sassen stressed the importance of developing analytics that enable citizens to understand the problems that the city faces. The obligation of protecting the city is no longer solely on the government, but also should be shared by citizens, despite the difficulty of this becoming a reality.

Prof Sassen emphasised the importance of cities remaining inclusive, despite the inadvertent rising of smaller, more affluent cities, who want to separate from their larger counterparts. Larger cities, despite housing a working class that is essential to the survival and maintenance of the more affluent cities, are less desirable. Prof Sassen drew on the example of global cities, including Singapore, where she noted that all kinds of knowledge were at play. She said that unlike Singapore, most cities are “small and poor”. As such, there is a need to pay attention to cities that lack resources and are struggling to retain their talent. She underscored the importance of looking at the bigger world, which includes modest cities struggling to retain their resources.

She concluded by saying that cities vary enormously and are marked by specific differences in resources or value and emerge because of opportunity.

Opening Remarks by Mr Lim Eng Hwee

Mr Lim Eng He’s presentation focused on land use planning in Singapore. He discussed affordable housing, social and community facilities and leveraging digital technology to promote inclusivity and liveability.

Mr Lim shared some of the considerations of the URA in making Singapore a more inclusive and liveable city, despite the unique social and physical context of the island state, which makes land use planning complex. There is a need to facilitate mingling and interaction among various ethnic groups, yet there is limited land. The country has a high population density and needs housing, amenities and protection, solidifying the need to optimise the available land. Mr Lim defined liveability as having a good quality of living within a highly dense environment, where inclusivity simply means liveability for all. Mr Lim outlined the structured process of city planning undertaken by the URA, which strives to ensure a highly liveable environment. This includes regularly reviewing, synthesising and addressing land use requirements in the long

term and the short term. He shared that the URA is committed to secure housing that is adequately provided for, equitably distributed to and inclusively designed for citizens.

In the second half of his speech, Mr Lim described how the URA and other social community agencies contribute to inclusivity. He listed four ways this is being and elaborated on them.

First, the URA provides an increased variety of affordable housing island-wide to cater to evolving needs and socio-demographic trends, such as Community Care Apartments and 2-room flexi flats. He highlighted policy changes that make housing more accessible and inclusive, such as the Prime Location Housing model at Rochor and new estates that mix rental and sold flats. Second, the URA also strives to provide sufficient, well-distributed social and community facilities that integrate vulnerable groups with the wider community, such as Enabling Village and Kampung Admiralty. Additionally, the Singapore Green Plan is slated to bring parks within 10 minutes of walking distance to all Singaporean households by 2030. Third, in terms of improving economic spaces, the URA has been planning for a range of economic spaces to increase access to economic nodes and job opportunities for citizens, making Singapore more convenient for workers and facilitating innovative business models. Lastly, by leveraging digital technology, the URA is able to make more informed decisions regarding land use by tracking population mobility and amenities usage, among other things.

Mr Lim concluded his speech with a brief overview of the URA's Long-Term Plan Review (LTPR) 2022, which considers inclusivity and liveability amid an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world by seeking feedback from different segments of society.

Opening Remarks by Associate Professor Irene Ng

The session's discussant, Associate Professor Irene Ng started by describing Singapore as a role model for city planning, especially when it came to diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion, highlighting the success of the ethnic integration policy. She also lauded Singapore for its ability to make social and community facilities widely accessible.

However, Assoc Prof Ng stressed that despite Singapore's intention to be inclusive, more needs to be done to include the most excluded groups that tend to be overlooked. She gave the example of at-risk youths to illustrate why it is important to build into policies the groups who tend to be most overlooked or excluded.

Assoc Prof Ng explained that while Singapore has become wealthy, it has also become stratified, and that to prioritise inclusivity, more can be done to reorientate the principles of the country's operation. She used the example of her involvement in a digital inclusion campaign during the Circuit Breaker period in the pandemic, aimed at helping those who did not have enough resources for their children to engage in Home-Based Learning (HBL). Assoc Prof Ng made the recommendation for agencies to consider policies and test them on the most vulnerable groups first before rolling them out. This recommendation is in spite of Singapore doing a commendable job collecting data and feedback from the ground through focus group discussions or surveys on various policy ideas, as these channels for feedback may not be easily accessible to the most vulnerable or excluded groups. Assoc Prof Ng suggested seeking out proxy voices for these groups of people in the form of social service professionals,

or intentionally identifying the vulnerable or excluded to ask for their opinions as these groups might not even be cognisant of their deficiencies.

She concluded by emphasising that data is normative and excludes the most vulnerable who are usually outliers or missing in the data. Thus, this reiterates the need to test out new plans on the most vulnerable first, similar to Taiwan, which rolled out their 5G initiative in the most rural and disadvantaged communities first. She also highlighted the relational lens of policymaking, where citizens or users are sometimes not consulted. Using the rapid development and changes in technology as an example, Assoc Prof Ng recounted her own challenges with the influx of applications placing a heavy load on her devices, much less those who are less digitally savvy or are less able to afford powerful devices. As such, it is imperative to get on the ground and understand whether initiatives made sense for those they are meant to serve, instead of relying on technical expertise alone.

Question & Answer

Mr Lim, Assoc Prof Ng and the moderator Dr Tan discussed Singapore's increasing population and its effects on liveability, heritage preservation as well as tangible and intangible aspects of inclusivity.

A participant asked how the country could make foreign workers — which Singapore depends so much on, feel more at home on the island. For Mr Lim, Singapore will continue to see a foreign workforce. The measures taken to make this foreign workforce feel more at home depend on the profiles and roles of these workers. He reiterated that facilities in Singapore needed to cater to all segments, regardless of nationality, and the importance of engaging different segments. Assoc Prof Ng added two contexts for considering the issue, the first being the inequality and the second being the marginal costs and benefits. She highlighted the interconnectedness of various issues pertaining to the migrant workforce, ending off with how employers should be the ones to provide for these workers.

The next question was directed to Mr Lim on defensive and hostile architecture, as well as how Singapore plans to resolve the issue of overcrowding. Mr Lim drew on the examples of parks and green spaces, which are accessible for all and free of charge, as well as the requirements of building public plazas into development plans. Regarding overcrowding Mr Lim highlighted URA's efforts to build higher as well as building underground, to free up ground space. He also mentioned creative design solutions to create the illusion of more space. Dr Tan expanded on the question by asking about accessibility features that might be hostile or defensive to certain groups. To that, Mr Lim restated the importance of considering the majority users of the space, as it will not be possible to cater fully to every single person.

A question about balancing the land use for heritage conservation and future needs was asked. Assoc Prof Ng summarised that in a city there will always be tension and contradictions in determining the pace of development that Singapore needs, and balancing such needs when Singapore is now a mature society. Mr Lim added that heritage and greenery are part of the URA's main considerations in city planning, and that the preservation of key heritage sites will depend on the relevance of these sites in the future. As Singapore matures as a city, the challenge is the selection of newer buildings to be retained when the time comes.

When it came to the impact and benefit of inclusive and liveable city plans on the underbellies of global cities, Assoc Prof Irene spoke about how oftentimes policies are made to be implemented fast and to be relevant to the population at large, potentially missing the most vulnerable groups. She suggested that there could be a slowing down of the rest of the society in order to help those who are excluded — to lessen the growing gap. Mr Lim added that, from a city planner's perspective, it boiled down to job security, quality of life and access to opportunities. He agreed with Assoc Prof Ng that it is important to target vulnerable groups specifically to help them catch up with the rest of society.

When asked about inclusivity specific to disabilities, Mr Lim illustrated the URA's efforts in making universal access a priority by being mindful of the various needs of citizens, as well as doing on-the-ground testing and crowdsourcing to bridge gaps in creating more wheelchair-accessible pathways.

This was followed by a question on the intangible aspects of inclusivity and how to turn lip service into reality. Assoc Prof Ng shared that even though the physical aspects of a city are easy to change, the social aspect such as acceptance towards certain groups may not be the same. She encouraged more open discussions between diverse profiles and reiterated her earlier suggestion to first test policies on the most vulnerable groups to ensure their needs are also being met. Mr Lim added that it takes everyone to achieve a city that makes sense, and that after discussion and engagement with different groups, action and ownership need to be taken.

The final question posed to the panel was on transnational mobility and the increasing transitory nature of people. Assoc Prof Ng started by speaking about how digitalisation has enabled transnationalism and that the divide between different groups in the city now are far too distinct, for example, between citizens and permanent residents. She expected a further blurring of boundaries that policies will have to account for in the future. Mr Lim concluded by stating the importance of how Singapore could best use this translational mobility to its advantage, and how Singapore needs to find ways to endear Singaporeans to the country as it develops.

Dr Tan wrapped up the session by highlighting the tangible and intangible aspects of inclusion, the importance of inclusion not being simply normative, and the transnational nature of a global city, which means there is a need to engage people from all over the world.

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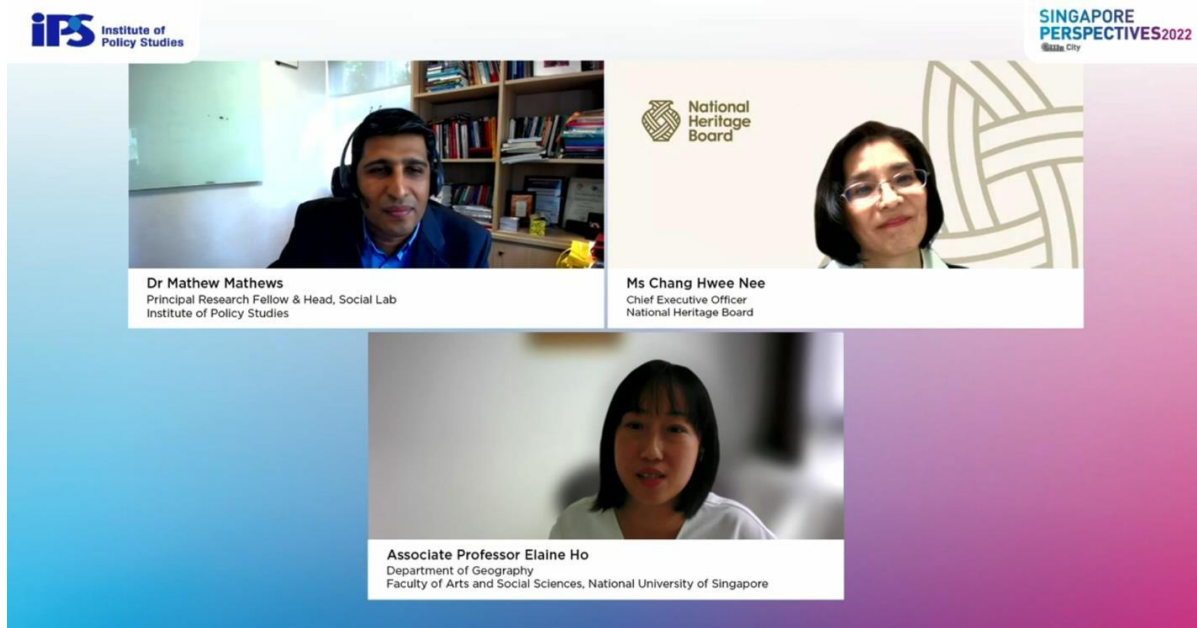
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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Forum 3: City as a Cosmopolitan Space

By Fiona Phoa



Caption for photo: Panellists engaging in a discussion during the third forum of Singapore Perspectives 2022, moderated by Dr Mathew Mathews

The third forum of Singapore Perspectives 2022, “City as a Cosmopolitan Space”, was moderated by Dr Mathew Mathews, Principal Research Fellow and Head of Social Lab at the Institute of Policy Studies. The speakers featured were Ms Chang Hwee Nee, Chief Executive Officer of the National Heritage Board, and Associate Professor Elaine Ho, Department of Geography at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore.

Opening Remarks by Ms Chang Hwee Nee

Ms Chang Hwee Nee shared her insights on Singapore as a cosmopolitan space from a heritage perspective. She highlighted that while *cosmopolitanism* is commonly associated with modernity, progressiveness and seemingly the anti-thesis of heritage, it is also defined as having people from many different countries, who in turn influence culture. She suggested that cosmopolitanism is part of Singapore’s heritage, and heritage will continue to be vital in defining identity in the years ahead. She noted that myriad influences contribute to the Singapore identity, and shared that the challenge was in how heritage could continue to strengthen identity without stifling development. She added that individuals have multiple

identity markers as individuals and belong to different groups of society, and these differences may lead to tensions. Nevertheless, she recognised that these differences define our cosmopolitanism, and in turn, our heritage and collective identity.

By promoting the understanding of different cultures, the heritage sector aims to safeguard practices and expressions, while reinforcing pride in our identities and engendering intercultural understanding and harmony. Ms Chang shared, however, that the challenge was in achieving a fine balance between embracing differences and having a unified common identity. Ms Chang noted that our identity is an amalgamation of various influences over geography and time, and being a small young city-state has made it easier to understand one another's cultures because people live in close proximity. She shared that heritage and culture must continue to evolve to remain relevant, and that efforts are ongoing to involve the community on celebrating heritage.

Opening Remarks by Assoc Prof Elaine Ho

Assoc Prof Elaine Ho offered her perspective on how migration trends have changed diversity in Singapore. While cosmopolitanism is associated with urban branding and space making, migration policy is also integral to Singapore's cosmopolitanism today. She noted that even though cosmopolitanism meant being open to diversity and accepting of differences, there lies a tension between being a global city where cultural differences are respected, and a nation state where it is important to maintain social cohesion through integration. She highlighted different sources of diversity in Singapore that contribute to the cosmopolitanism character of Singapore, such as immigration, emigration and international marriages.

Assoc Prof Ho suggested four interventions for discussions on cosmopolitanism in Singapore. First, Singapore will need to move beyond the "Singaporeans versus Others" dichotomy and acknowledge the other aspects of difference making. She added that there are social divisions among immigrants and polysemic immigrant hierarchies exist where immigrants draw on differences among themselves to assert superiority. Second, she felt that Singapore should continue to build and capitalise on social anchors in urban spaces for diverse groups, to enable Singaporeans and immigrants to establish footholds that can help to connect diverse identities, provide emotional security and foster integration. Third, she shared the need to move from thinking about integration as an achieved homogeneous condition to recognising that there is differentiated embeddedness where Singaporeans and immigrants can be embedded in social anchors at different times and ways. Lastly, she suggested treating remigration positively by mobilising the affinity diaspora, where remigrants become informal ambassadors when they migrate to another country.

Question & Answer

When asked about the relevancy of CMIO categorisation in cosmopolitan Singapore and whether enough was being done to allow Singaporeans to accept the broader diversity in Singapore, the panellists maintained that the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) model remains relevant as a policy framework. Ms Chang shared that government agencies have been making efforts to promote understanding of cultures, and that more conversations on diversity would need to take place. Assoc Prof Ho shared that more attention could be given to interactions happening organically on the ground, and to promote understanding through

food. The panel also agreed that race and religion are closely related and one cannot be prioritised over the other when forging a cohesive cosmopolitan Singapore.

On the topic of Singapore's cosmopolitan identity, Ms Chang shared that Singapore has the ability to combine opposing elements, and that having a short history and nascent arts scene gives us an opportunity to innovate and progress. She said it is important to be forward-looking and to innovate, and efforts are being made to help traditional businesses digitalise. Assoc Prof Ho added that policymakers should be aware of the organic and spontaneous interactions happening on the ground which can help to foster deeper understanding among people, and stated that it was important to identify what brought people together. She shared that Singapore has a unique Asian cosmopolitanism, as Singapore blends different Asian cultures together while being comfortable with western ways of being.

When asked about the possible implications of removal of racist monuments in the West on Singapore, Ms Chang shared that it is important to respect history and recognise the ups and downs in our past and be confident with our own identity, in order to embrace diversity and our history. Assoc Prof Ho agreed, adding that history is subjective, and it was important to make clear different perspectives on monuments so that people can decide for themselves on their view on history.

Assoc Prof Ho also shared that people have been socialised to subscribe to a version of our national identity, and may not recognise that national identity continues to evolve with migration. Older cohorts of immigrants in Singapore strongly see themselves as Singaporean, and have stereotypes about newer immigrants. Hence, there is a form of difference making happening, and the challenge for Singapore is on how to accommodate multiple waves of identities as a nation in change.

The panel also agreed that beyond looking at common spaces, there could be more programmes to encourage Singaporeans to socialise with people of different groups and with migrants. They noted that it is important to have more ground-up initiatives and for people to take an interest to interact with different groups. In order to identify elements in the city's diverse tradition that value social cohesion and social well-being, the panel felt that there could be more dialogues with Singaporeans, and organic initiatives will be needed to foster connections across social differences, noting that these will require a whole of society effort.

The topic of how social media has changed the cosmopolitan space was also discussed. Assoc Prof Ho shared that the social media is a double-edged sword that enables greater connections but also allows for the perpetuation of negative stereotypes; it is a necessary evil. Ms Chang agreed and added that we will need to learn to live with social media in order to reach out to the youngest, even though social media can lead to echo chambers.

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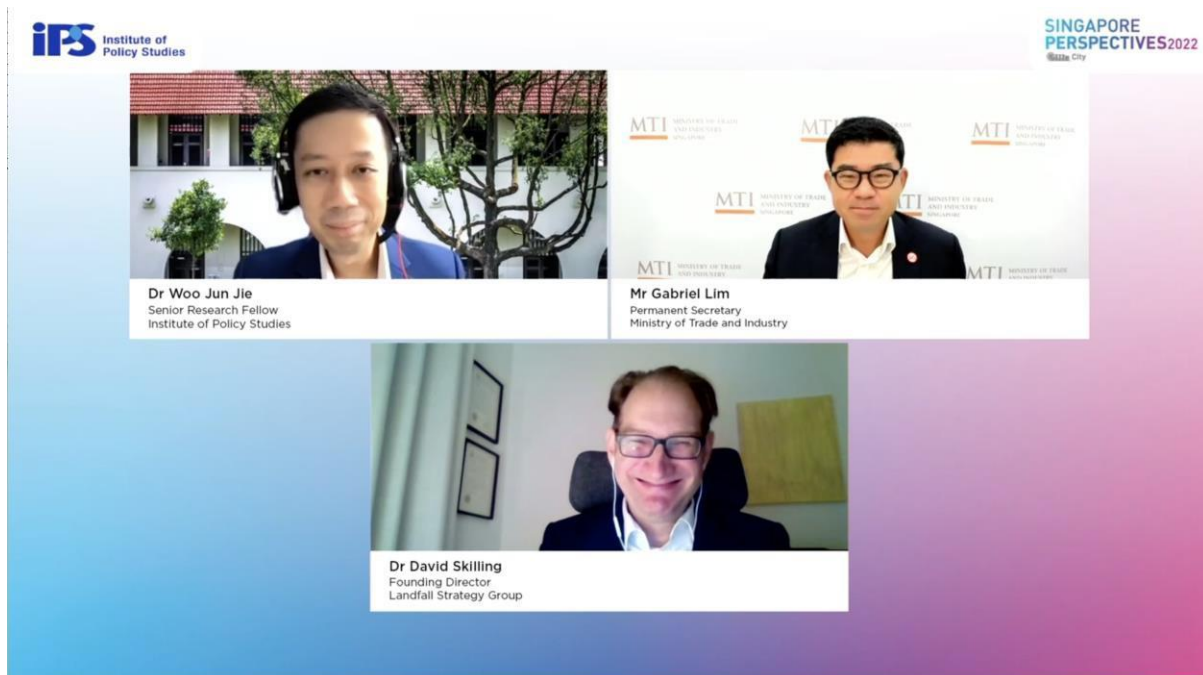
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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Forum 4: City as Economic Space

By Eddie Choo



Caption for photo: Panellists engaging in a discussion during the fourth forum of Singapore Perspectives 2022, moderated by Dr Woo Jun Jie

Forum 4: City as Economic Space of the Singapore Perspectives Conference was held on 17 January 2022 with an online audience. The forum featured Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry Mr Gabriel Lim and Dr David Skilling, Founding Director of Landfall Strategy Group as speakers. Professor Edward Glaeser, Chairman & Fred and Eleanor Glimp Professor of Economics at Harvard University gave a pre-recorded speech. Senior Research Fellow Dr Woo Jun Jie of the Institute of Policy Studies was the moderator for the session.

Survival of the City

Professor Edward Glaeser gave a presentation based on his latest book, *Survival of the City: Living and Thriving in an Age of Isolation*, co-written with David Cutler. Professor Glaeser shared about the “enduring strengths” of the city despite the many challenges to it. He started off by sharing about cities — as places where people come together in high densities — were

places of economic productivity; the denser the area, the more economically productive it was. For Professor Glaeser, economic development “ran through city streets.” Cities also had a long experience with diseases.

As to whether COVID-19 will decisively change the way people worked via remote working, Professor Glaeser said that in knowledge-intensive industries, in-person work would still have an important role. He added that the transmission of complicated ideas was better done in person than remotely. Remote work was also more compatible for people with higher degrees, compared with blue-collared workers. A world where remote work was pervasive would also mean difficult circumstances for people of lower education.

The rise of remote work would also enable Singapore to compete in terms of quality of life if global talent were to become more mobile. In all, cities are likely to prosper despite COVID-19.

City as Economic Space

Mr Gabriel Lim gave a presentation of Singapore’s economic space. He shared how Singapore’s GDP per capita still ranked lower than New York, Tokyo and London, and described three attributes that Singapore needed to thrive as an economic space. The first attribute was connectivity, the second was talent, and the third attribute was the sense of the ability to shape the future (or “carpe futura”).

Mr Lim discussed Singapore’s connectivity in various dimensions. Singapore’s network of free trade agreements (FTAs) covered 90 per cent of global GDP. He described the efforts of the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), and how they were continually updating their digital efforts with Singapore Customs, and more recently, with financial institutions.

The second attribute was talent, and he pointed out how Singapore had historically been focused on developing human capital in Singapore, and recent efforts in skills training.

The third attribute was the ability to shape the future. Here, Mr Lim described sustainability as a “challenge for humanity.” Mr Lim described Singapore’s vulnerability to the effects of climate change. He mentioned changes to come in the carbon tax system, and the focus on green financing as an important tool for the transition to a sustainable future. His hope was that Singapore could do with sustainability what was done with the issue of water scarcity – turning it into an issue that Singapore could lead the world with.

Mr Lim ended with a reflection of how Singapore needed to maintain a “sense of verve” and “derring-do” to overcome the challenges of being a city-state.

City-States and Small Advanced Economies

Dr David Skilling provided the perspective of small advanced economies and reviewed Singapore’s performance during COVID-19 and beyond.

He mentioned how Singapore, along with several small advanced economies, had generally done well over the past few decades due to a favourable external environment of increasing economic flows. Two other factors contributed to their historical economic performance. The first was intrinsic — strong social and political institutions that enable effective governments

and strong policy attention. The other factor was high-quality deliberate choices that enabled Singapore to position itself well in the global economy. Singapore's economic model had gone beyond being a hub of economic activities to being a platform from where value created, especially with innovative activities being based here, and with strong investment in research and development and in universities.

Next, he discussed small advanced economies in the COVID-19 pandemic. He observed that small advanced economies had usually done better than large countries.

The successes aside, Dr Skilling pointed out that there were several issues that small advanced economies would have to be ready for. He pointed out how globalisation was taking a more regional and local form than before. Small economies would have to pay attention to how to position themselves, with investments in research and development, human capital, and economic infrastructure.

Singapore's economic base was already well diversified, but it needed to be attentive to shifting business models and growth sectors. Climate change was also a substantial challenge, pointing how it could lead to changing investor and consumer preferences, just as COVID-19 had been.

Question & Answer

The first question was on how Singapore might maintain its competitive advantage despite low-cost competitors. Mr Lim said Singapore's connectivity was important and that consistent and rational policymaking created a favourable environment. He also noted that Singapore's government was pro-science. Dr Skilling mentioned how Singapore had been a leader in the cluster-approach of economic development. Singapore had been relatively successful in integrating knowledge-intensive activities on top of current hub advantages.

There was a question on the balance between multinational corporations (MNCs) and local small and medium companies, and how government needed to balance the two. A related question was on the balance between developing Singaporeans and tapping the global talent pool. Mr Lim pointed out that there were efforts to provide workers with the skills to compete. He also noted that being a global city created more opportunities for people of various skills, pointing out how the COVID-19 recession had affected lower-skilled workers harder. Dr Skilling explained that successful small economies in Europe combined strong economic performance with high levels of distribution. He also noted that Singapore's strategy of capturing growth through developing more local companies was a significant one.

A third question was about the balance between foreign companies and developing local companies. Mr Lim noted how the trends of MNCs in developing local supply chains had changed. The issue was on how to grow companies and increase Singaporeans' awareness of Southeast Asia as a growth region. Dr Skilling noted the difficulty of the issue given how the global supply chain was also becoming sophisticated. It might be difficult for local companies to develop the capabilities to fit. Dr Skilling thought that sustained policies in this area would be needed.

There was a fourth question on remote work and how to secure jobs for locals when companies can tap on global talent. Mr Lim thought that work would still need an in-person

element, for building camaraderie. He also thought that individuals needed to continuously upgrade themselves for companies to keep jobs in Singapore. Dr Skilling believed Singapore remained an attractive location in terms of quality of life. Given that Singapore was a high-cost, high-wage location, the issue was also about letting go of jobs and industries that might not be suitable anymore, that could be done in low-cost parts of the region.

The fifth question was on sustainability. Dr Skilling observed that there would have to be dramatic transformations in industrial systems. While some parts of the economy will suffer, there will also be significant opportunities in other parts. A price on emissions was important to attract more investment in green sectors. Mr Lim agreed with Dr Skilling, and that the transition might not be smooth. He reminded the audience about how Singapore turned water scarcity into an advantage, and how that might be possible with sustainability, carbon trading and green financing.

The last questions were on Singapore's prospects of being a "capital city" for Southeast Asia, and possible competitors and cooperation targets. Mr Lim shared that Singapore should continue to work with as many cities as possible, and that developments in the Middle East such as with Dubai in the United Arab Emirates were being watched very carefully. Within Southeast Asia, Mr Lim shared that Singapore could remain a hub and a platform that neighbouring countries could work through for the rest of the world, and for the world to work through Singapore to get to Southeast Asia. Dr Skilling noted that competition was intensifying and that Singapore would have to figure out how to adapt in its role as a hub.

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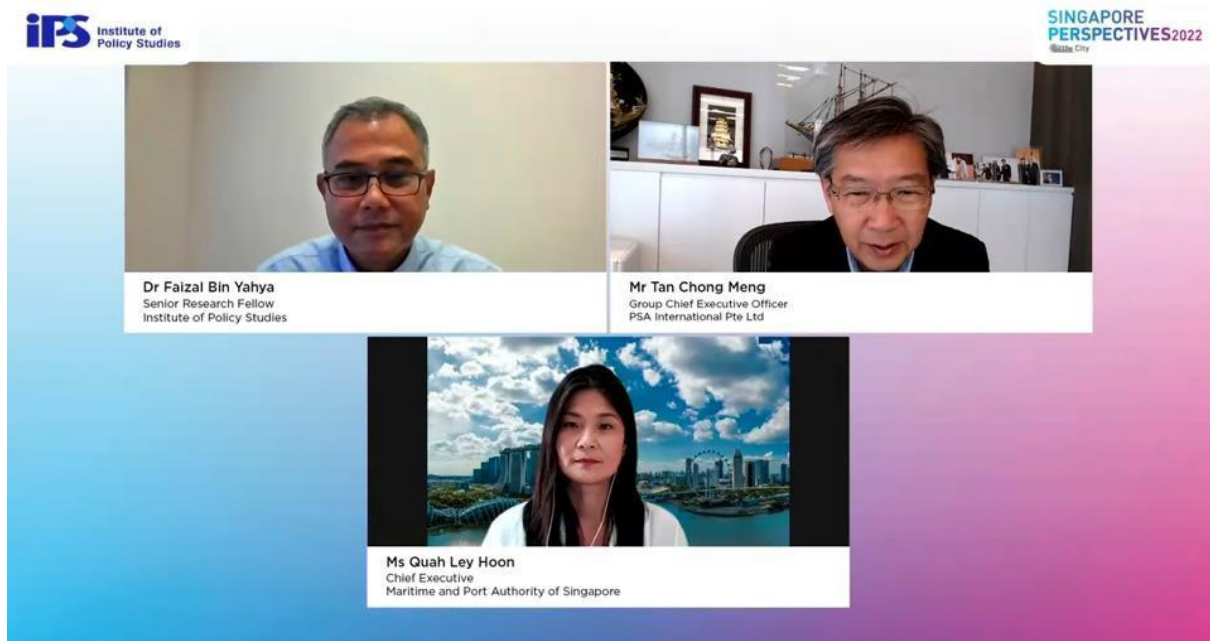


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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Forum 5: City as Connected Space

By Fiona Phoa



Caption for photo: Panellists at the fifth forum of Singapore Perspectives 2022, moderated by Dr Faizal Bin Yahya

The fifth forum of Singapore Perspectives 2022, “City as Connected Space”, was moderated by Dr Faizal Bin Yahya, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies. The speakers were Mr Tan Chong Meng, Group Chief Executive Officer of PSA International Pte Ltd, and Ms Quah Ley Hoon, Chief Executive of the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore. Dr Faizal opened the forum by giving an overview of Singapore’s global connectivity and locational advantages. He also shared about the development of Changi Airport and its performance during the pandemic.

Opening Remarks by Ms Quah Ley Hoon

Ms Quah described the importance of Singapore’s global hub port and international maritime centre, highlighting Singapore’s plans on staying ahead as a global hub. She introduced the new Tuas port as a smart next-generation port, which would be well connected, with a focus on productivity, optimising land use, safety and security, and sustainability. She also shared about the efforts in place to connect data and streamline information flow across supply chain ecosystem partners. To enhance cyber security, Singapore was also acquiring advanced

cyber and data security technologies, and training analysts on maritime cyber security. She added that Singapore was committed to innovation in the industry, and explained that a maritime innovation hub was being developed to drive innovation in the industry by supporting start-ups.

Opening Remarks by Mr Tan Chong Meng

Mr Tan believed that the maritime ecosystem needed to stay ahead of change, and shared some key changes that have happened in the industry. He highlighted how Singapore had multiple ports across the world, which allowed us to see through the supply chain, and how the Tuas port would be built differently to make use of adjacent industries. He outlined the need to prepare people to embrace new technologies and mindsets, and how working with digital solutions would improve efficiency and reliability in the industry. While reliability of the global supply chain was taken for granted in the past, its reliability has been halved today due to the pandemic. Technology has created the possibility to cross borders and digitalise. He also shared the key developments in creating new connectivity excellence, such as the building of an intelligent logistics ecosystem to enhance digitalisation across the logistics system, providing support for cargo inside containers, and having a common data highway to facilitate secure data sharing between supply chain ecosystem partners.

Question & Answer

The panellists addressed questions regarding the considerations behind the location of the Tuas port; remaining competitive in the face of new challenges; the impact of the pandemic and how Singapore could emerge stronger from it; how the shift towards green energy may affect Singapore's bunkering and petrochemical hub; and talent development in the industry.

When asked about the potential threat of new developments in the industry such as the Kra project and Northern passage, Ms Quah said Singapore was able to differentiate itself from the competition with a strong maritime ecosystem, being forthcoming to developing new plans for the industry and having a strong network and enjoying high trust in our port. Mr Tan shared that Singapore could continue to work on its strengths while participating in new developments to see possibilities and raise value-add to Singapore. He believed that the economic activity on the Northern passage was low, and the economic viability of a shipping route would be dependent on the pick-up and drops of containers the ships are able to make on their journeys based on the economic activity on the route, adding that the hub-and-spoke model was still very much needed.

The panel was also asked if they saw the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a challenge or opportunity, and how we can maintain our competitiveness in the face of many challenges. Mr Tan shared that the thinking has shifted from the hub-and-spoke model to networks, by treating the transshipment centre as a node of the network. For the whole supply chain to be successful, all nodes of the network would need to play their role. We should think of ourselves as a regional player supported by a regional centre in the network, he added, and having the capability to plan, prioritise and operationalise within this network end-to-end would be more important than just having a number of physical points. With today's digital connectivity, he suggested we could do better by setting up a highway with a common data environment, which would help to orchestrate the different parts of the supply chain. Ms Quah added that

technology would continue to help improve efficiency on a global scale and benefit all, hence developments such as the BRI could be seen as a collaborator.

On the topic on how the pandemic had affected the mid-term or long-term plans for the industry, Ms Quah shared that Singapore had continued to build on our reputation by showing our commitment, resolving problems and helping the industry to transform, while Mr Tan shared that the situation was still unstable, and there were still concerns over essential goods. Singapore responded by having better digital monitoring and ensuring that we had enough essential goods. Moving forward, he noted that we could do things differently by paying attention to goods that are challenging to move, and said that industry players were also reaching out to Singapore to see how they could use Singapore as a strategic location.

Ms Quah also talked about how there had been active engagement with companies to encourage more people to work in the sector, and highlighted the need to market the industry in order to attract talent. Mr Tan noted how the industry had evolved to become more integrated and systems-based, emphasising the need to encourage workers to grow in their jobs by multi-skilling and leading others through change as well. He noted how training had accelerated through the pandemic, and how the syllabus and delivery of content had changed which allowed learning to be rolled out more expansively.

Another question posed by the audience was on how the shift towards green energy would affect our bunkering and petrochemical hub. Ms Quah stated that the strategy would be a multi-fuel bunkering transition hub where Singapore will work with industry players to form value chain ecosystems. Work was in progress to help the industry — such as by setting up a future fuel network to work on building global standards, conducting trials, and working with industry players on how to bring the necessary fuel in and what industry players could convert their tanks to. Mr Tan agreed, and added that we could be more responsible for supply chain processes and outcomes — regardless of the fuel we use — by greening both fuel and supply chain choices.

The panel also shared on the importance of finance in funding infrastructure and processes in the industry. Ms Tan described how the bigger players were looking into future investments to finance and how market-based mechanisms and the building of the carbon-trading hub would facilitate investments into the sector. Mr Tan added that there was an emergence of criteria to fund suitable projects in green financing among the government and financial institutions, but hoped that investments would be more diverse through other investments such as commercial investments or private investments. He noted the need to bring together good advisory, assessment, accreditation, business models, measurement, structuring of funds and way to engage impact investor into community.

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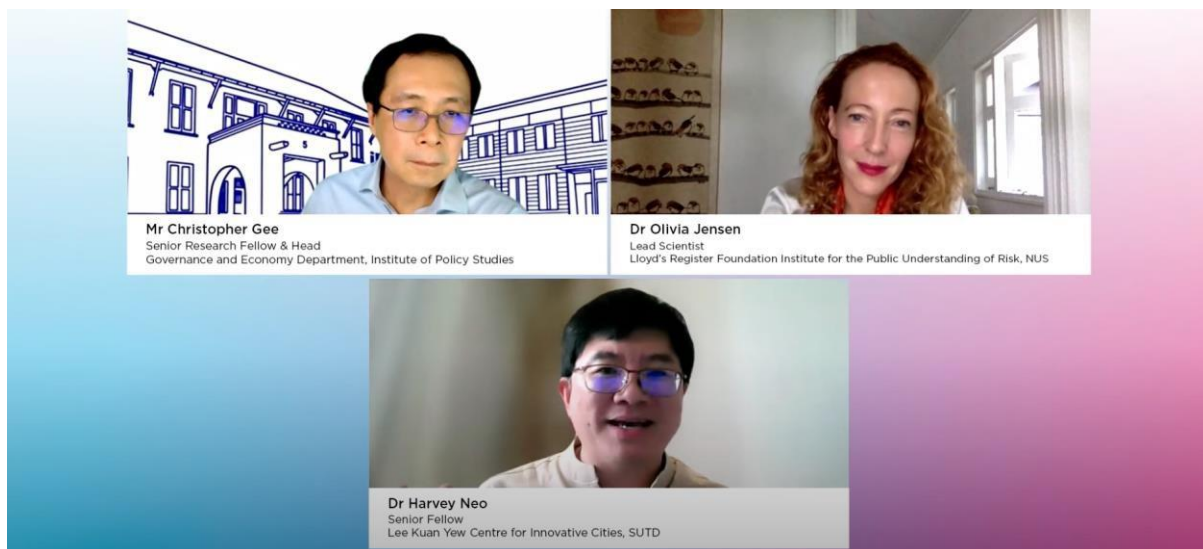
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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Forum 6: City as Green Space

By Yu Yen King

The sixth forum of the Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022 was held virtually and featured Dr Olivia Jensen, Lead Scientist of the Lloyd’s Register Foundation Institute for the Public Understanding of Risk at the National University of Singapore, and Dr Harvey Neo, Senior Fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. The session was moderated by Mr Christopher Gee, Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Governance and Economy Department at the Institute of Policy Studies. The forum addressed issues around urban environmental policy and the potentials and challenges for Singapore as a city-state in tackling climate change.



Caption for photo: Moderator Mr Christopher Gee opened the session on “City as Green Space”

Opening Remarks by Dr Olivia Jensen

Dr Olivia Jensen started by stating how cities were well positioned to be generators of solutions for environmental sustainability and resilience to climate shocks, given their concentration of skilled people and thriving innovation systems. She observed that the size and density of cities generate economies of scale as well as justifies investment in resilience. However, Dr Jensen noted an important challenge to cities being green spaces locally and regionally — their concentration of population and productive assets amplify the risk from pollution and climate change, while their dependence on their hinterland for scarce resources

and waste disposal can cause unsustainable resource use and biodiversity loss. While cities needed to find ways to share resources and reduce their environmental impact beyond their borders, Dr Jensen said Singapore had the additional challenge of coordinating and cooperating with its neighbouring states to achieve sustainability goals.

Dr Jensen said the greatest achievements in urban environmental policy were related to sound governance and joined-up policymaking. While taking action across sectors is always challenging, Dr Jensen argued that it is much more feasible at the city level. She cited positive examples of inter-sector policy planning and implementation in Singapore, such as the coupling of solid waste management and wastewater treatment to make Tuas Nexus energy self-sufficient, and the coordination between transport policies and green space management in efforts to limit vehicle numbers, improve access to public transport, stimulate zero-carbon mobility and expand park connectors. Dr Jensen suggested that reducing carbon emissions was not and should not be the only policy goal, and raised the question of whether policies that improved public life and economic prosperity could generate co-benefits for the environment.

To set meaningful indicators of environmental sustainability that could be used to identify appropriate policies, Dr Jensen stressed the need to define the boundary of the system carefully and to consider not just the actions and changes happening within the city itself but issues of interconnectivity with its neighbours. For example, Singapore was a top maritime and aviation hub and those sectors were important sources of carbon emissions, so while it might be inappropriate to allocate those emissions entirely to Singapore, Singapore needed to engage in international forums on reducing emissions. She suggested that we might need many indicators at different levels, within the city as well as within the region. Dr Jensen also discussed how there was a lack of information about the relative contributions of different policies and efforts in meeting Singapore's key emissions goals. She shared that communities had signalled their desire to understand how policies fit in with each other and to see that policies were consistent and fair. She expressed her belief that such information would be helpful for interested parties to focus their efforts in contributing to finding solutions, as what was needed for the reduction of carbon emissions was a whole-of-nation effort.

Dr Jensen characterised the possible climate actions that citizens could take in three different spheres: the private sphere where individuals could make consumption choices; the community sphere where one could engage with friends and family about climate change and be part of community groups for environmental causes; and the public sphere where citizens could support policies to reduce carbon emissions by writing to their members of parliament and signing petitions. Dr Jensen was clear on the actions that should be prioritised — the actions in the community and public spheres that would make the most difference.

Dr Jensen cautioned that there could be a caretaker effect in Singapore whereby people did not necessarily see the risks to themselves as individuals and were overly reliant on the government to invest in infrastructure to tackle climate change. She nevertheless was optimistic that people in Singapore were aware of climate change and ready to make commitments or changes in order to support Singapore's climate and environment goals. Dr Jensen noted that there might be anxiety or fear surrounding the impact of transitions, regulations and technological development on individuals. She emphasised the importance of

greater transparency about future policies, expressing her belief that the further in advance people could have information about these new policies, the more different stakeholders such as researchers, civil society organisations and the media could engage with these policy proposals and help people work out what the impact for them would be. As many of the solutions to reducing emissions were not known or invented, Dr Jensen reiterated her view that climate action was a whole-of-nation effort; the more people we engage in the search for solutions, the better.

Opening Remarks by Dr Harvey Neo

Dr Neo's presentation centred around values in Singapore's public policy and how different people would value nature. He began by characterising the main driving imperative of Singapore's policies across sectors as economic development, and suggested that the successful imaging of Singapore as a garden city was driven less by the aesthetics of greenery than by how it could contribute to Singapore's attractiveness as a site of economic investment. He observed that the state's logic of prioritising economic growth has become normalised and part of Singaporeans' vernacular. While it is not objectionable to prioritise economic growth among the various goals a country has to achieve, he noted that we may not be able to determine if certain actions that ostensibly bring about immediate economic growth will inadvertently reduce the potential for economic development in the long run. He explained that many of our actions could have environmental impacts that do not appear immediately or within our lifetime. Nevertheless, Dr Neo remained positive that if Singapore should have a comprehensive nationwide strategy to push for green technology, and the policies are successfully implemented, green policies can drive economic development. Reflecting on the title of the forum, "City as Green Space", he stated that the green space of cities can be seen as sites of intervention to drive the economy. He noted that the city provides us with a think tank or urban laboratory in which we can locate problems and more importantly, suggest solutions to problems.

Dr Neo also considered how different people valued nature, and how those differences play out within policy debates. He posited that the answers to how people valued nature are entangled in irreducible differences in one's ethics and outlook, which are linked to one's socioeconomic class. He said this lack of a common language between people with different views often resulted in those who valued nature for its aesthetics losing out in the discourse about green issues, as their opponents would characterise green issues as highly simplified, even vulgar "development versus conservation" debates. If we do not perceive nature to have intrinsic value beyond its instrumental or economic value, we will not be able to understand why we should engage in pro-environmental behaviours such as recycling, he added. He observed that even if behaviours such as recycling have some benefits to individuals, the pragmatism of Singaporeans may hinder our ability to see these distant benefits that accrue over time, which explains the challenges to inculcating recycling habits in Singapore.

Question & Answer

Mr Gee started the Q&A session by asking the speakers to weigh in on the topic of measurements and standards setting for sustainability performance, and what Singapore's role would be in the process. Dr Jensen said it would be helpful to have a clear idea of what the overarching policy objective was; and that this may be more difficult with a big or

impossible-to-define concept like “sustainability”. It could be easier if we focused on mitigation of climate change, she added, where carbon emissions was the indicator on which all countries set their goals; but therein lies the challenge of breaking down the carbon emissions target into sector-specific goals that can then be easily translated into policy. Reiterating her earlier suggestion of having indicators at various scales and paying attention to how a system’s boundary is defined, Dr Jensen stressed the importance of justifying the selection of indicators in a transparent manner, to prevent scepticism and distrust over whether the indicators are set in terms of what is easiest for the government agency or firm to achieve. She also advocated for organisations to involve external stakeholders in the setting of standards to help build public trust. Dr Neo added that frameworks and standards were necessary for comparing performance, but the challenge was in striking a balance in how detailed the framework should be. He stated that a framework that required too many detailed measurements would discourage usage, that unclear weighting of different factors would run the risk of being insensitive to local contexts, while overly broad or general frameworks would have little utility for comparison. Dr Neo also commented that global frameworks were often promulgated by agencies with significant power or prestige and it might be hard for Singapore to use such indicators.

Building on the speakers’ points on finding the right scale and involving multiple stakeholders to take leadership or ownership for environmental policies, Mr Gee asked the speakers to elaborate on possible actions moving forward. Dr Neo said that having a coalition of people and businesses alongside policymakers would allow policies to have more legitimacy, but expressed his doubt over whether this could be achieved in Singapore. Dr Jensen added that different public, private and civil society organisations have different goals, which makes it difficult to have a clear policy objective or indicator. Citing a successful case study of integrated water resource management in Australia, she suggested that Singapore should have an explicit discussion about values with multiple stakeholders involved. She expressed hope that these discussions will reveal greater common ground between stakeholders than expected, given how surveys have shown that people at all economic levels in Singapore are willing to give up some economic development for a better environment.

The speakers then addressed questions regarding the impacts and perceptions of the actions of public and private actors from Singapore. With regard to a question about Singapore’s strategy to address rising sea levels, Dr Jensen explained how the public perception of risks could affect the support for the government’s response to coastal defence. In response to questions on Singapore’s environmental impact on its neighbours in actions such as importing sand for land reclamation, Dr Neo noted that there were certainly impacts but the costs and benefits have to be understood from the perspectives of multiple actors and politics in Singapore and overseas.

The speakers proceeded to discuss Singapore’s role in the region. Dr Jensen noted that Singapore does act as a hub, where the universities are engaged in conversation and learning with their regional counterparts on environmental challenges. Singapore’s good governance is difficult to implement in other contexts, she added, and Singapore may contribute not only by mobilising its technical experts to help design solutions but also mobilising its policy experts to advise how to achieve the governance that supports inter-sector policy efforts. Dr Jensen also raised the example of how property developers in the greater Jakarta area provided some

public services including sanitation and public transport; it may be helpful for Singapore to engage with the private sector as partners in regional exchange, to accelerate the adoption of climate solutions. Dr Neo acknowledged that Singapore might have an image problem amongst our neighbours, thus it was important to engage them on a one-to-one and equal basis, and foster authentic relationships. He added that setting standards for the region may be an effort best driven by a supranational organisation with high legitimacy and respectability. Dr Jensen commented that Singapore had been engaged in global city networks and performs well in terms of urban environmental comparators, thus it may be easier for Singapore to show leadership amongst cities rather than as a city-state, although she clarified that this may be more about engaging in opportunities for collaboration and learning than trying to impress learning on others.

The audience also asked whether nature conservation and development could be in harmony with each other or if there would always be trade-offs. Dr Neo responded by challenging the concept of nature and suggested that the younger generation may have different ideas of or preferences for experiencing nature, including experiencing nature through artificial environments created by technology or AI. Dr Jensen described how the trade-off between environmental quality and economic development would depend on what stage a country is in terms of economic development. She noted that for high-income, highly developed countries like Singapore with a greater proportion of economic activity in services, it is relatively easier to appear to keep growing while reducing their environmental impact and improving sustainability performance. However, that does not mean that the environmental problems common in low-cost manufacturing industries have gone away; these problems could have shifted to other countries that are at a lower stage of development. Dr Jensen also introduced research that showed how environmental regulation implemented at a sector level could stimulate innovation, and expressed her hope that although transition is going to happen across all areas of the economy, environmental regulation and net economic growth might not be at odds with each other. She highlighted that a big part of the policy challenge was in dealing with the uneven distribution of impacts during such a transition.

When asked whether Singapore should consider more radical policies that might detract from economic growth, given the urgency of the climate crisis, Dr Jensen responded that radical solutions create very high transaction costs. She advised that we do not have to do everything immediately but we should start taking climate action now. She advocated for a higher carbon tax, which can help reveal the costs of reducing emissions and trigger innovation. She remained optimistic that measures to keep the average global temperature increase to below two degree Celsius over an 80-year time horizon will not negatively impact economic growth, given that past examples of environmental regulation such as the regulations around sulphur dioxide have shown how actual costs to firms were lower than estimated.

On the topic of the Singapore Green Plan 2030, there were targets that the speakers felt were ambitious and others which they felt were not sufficient. Dr Neo expressed scepticism about the target to produce 30 per cent of our nutritional needs locally and sustainably by 2030, stating that it seemed beyond possibility. He considered how incentives would help immensely with the “30 by 30” target. There are currently disincentives for local farmers to continue production — most significantly, the uncertainty caused by short land leases and constant lease renewals as well as disruptions caused by farmlands being moved. Dr Neo also

mentioned that he would have liked to see more concrete policies and ideas with regard to protecting our wildlife and to mitigate the increasing human-wildlife encounters in Singapore. Dr Jensen expressed her desire for more ambitious targets on water policy and on emissions reduction, and specifically a target for net zero carbon emissions. She acknowledged that Singapore has a reputation of setting realistic targets and achieving them, which is perhaps why it has not set a target for net zero until it has a clear idea on how to achieve it. She nevertheless expressed her hope to see attendant policies on how Singapore is going to take steps towards net zero and provide a roadmap for the public and businesses.

Mr Gee asked about measures to boost domestic recycling rates in Singapore. Dr Jensen shared that the National Environmental Agency (NEA) tried a range of policies and nudges but this was challenging in Singapore. She noted that much of what went into the recycling bins could not be recycled because they had not been properly sorted or prepared, and the resultant low domestic recycling rates created perceptions that the items in the bin did not get recycled and further discouraged people from recycling. She stated that while NEA has been teaching people to properly sort or prepare items for recycling, the crux of the issue lies in how we expected others to behave and how others expected us to behave. She considered that having people sort and recycle in front of other people might help to create social expectations about recycling, but such a policy would come with other costs and inconveniences.

The session concluded with Dr Jensen reiterating the importance of individuals taking action in the public sphere, with one critical action being supporting the implementation of a higher carbon tax in Singapore, while Dr Harvey encouraged everyone to reduce their meat intake as an easy but critical action that our future selves will thank us for doing now.

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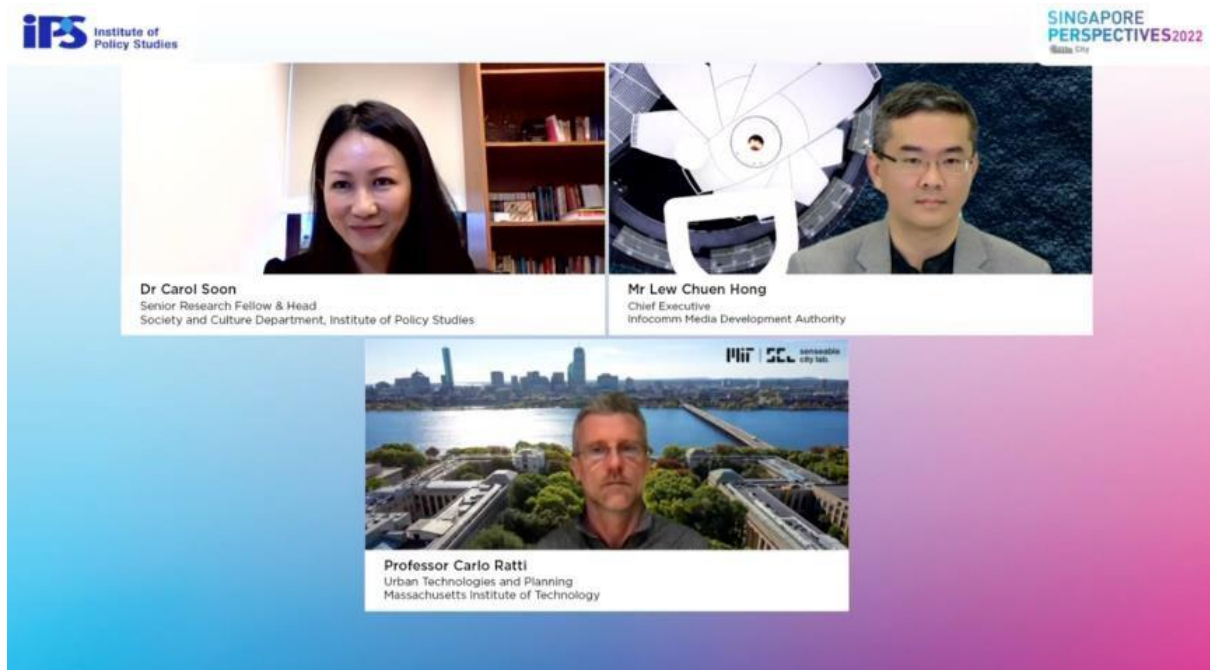
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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Forum 7: Cities in the Digital Space

By Ruby Thiagarajan

The seventh forum of Singapore Perspectives 2022 was titled “Cities in the Digital Space”. It was moderated by Dr Carol Soon, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, and featured Mr Lew Chuen Hong, Chief Executive of the Infocomm Media Development Authority, and Professor Carlo Ratti of Urban Technologies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



Caption for photo: Panellists at the seventh forum of Singapore Perspectives 2022, moderated by Dr Carol Soon

Opening Remarks

Mr Lew Chen Hong began by asking why cities exist. For him, there are two main factors: the accumulation of specialisation and the ability to gather a critical mass of people. Specialisation introduces an exchange of goods and ideas. The ability to trade makes the general ecosystem of the city better off and leads to innovation. This trend towards specialisation needs to be supported by a broader critical mass of people. Throughout history, the real units of progress are not countries but cities. This explains the continual drive for people to congregate in cities.

When discussing the role of the digital sphere in cities, Mr Lew explained that it opens up an entirely new commons where people can gather. Traditional cities were the original commons, but the digital sphere can replicate these conditions in bigger and quicker ways. Digital spaces are more able to generate a critical mass of people who are not limited by physical space or time; they can gather as and when needed. Similarly, when talking about cities as sites of exchange, digital platforms are increasingly able to fill those roles. E-commerce platforms are democratising the arbitration between latent supply and latent demand and can function across transnational boundaries.

Mr Lew advocated upping the “reality premium” in order for cities to remain relevant in the digital age. The complex human endeavour that is difficult to replace digitally is the act of creation and innovation. Richness of experience and engineered serendipity are the reality premium that must be created in cities for them to remain relevant. This must take place both in “hard” infrastructure and the “soft” elements of the city. Cities also need to add a digital experience that is safe, secure, and conducive to living and working digitally. This complementary digital space that is both vibrant and efficient is essential for the contemporary city. It then becomes a useful metaphor to think of the city as a platform itself.

What are the implications for Singapore? The digital space allows Singapore to transcend its space constraint because of its expansive nature. Mr Lew ended his remarks by asking if Singapore would be able to harness its ambition to transform from a “little red dot” to a “big red dot”.

Prof Carlo Ratti’s remarks centred on the question of the city in an evolving culture of work. The changing nature of work has not only moved workers away from the cities, but has also fundamentally changed the purpose of city spaces such as central business districts. Quoting famed architect Le Corbusier, Prof Ratti listed the four functions of the city: dwelling, work, recreation and transportation. Initial global city designs separated different regions according to these four functions. As time passes, mixed-use developments have gained popularity. Now, with the digital revolution, many different activities can take place within the same physical space.

Prof Ratti introduced his research on the use of space and networks on the MIT campus. Using data from Wi-Fi signals on campus, researchers were able to understand the usage fingerprint of each building. This allowed them to measure how physical space was being used in a precise way. They were able to look into different factors such as the productivity or heterogeneity of various buildings on campus. The COVID-19 lockdown provided the opportunity to examine how networks had changed when they had to move completely onto the digital space. The team examined the email communication network on the MIT campus and used that data to cluster and identify the different communities in the university. During the lockdown, communities became more tightly knit and there was less heterogenous communication in the networks. The one key parameter that changed significantly with working from home was that the presence of weak ties, the connections made between acquaintances or strangers, decreased greatly. These weak ties reappeared when campus reopened, albeit gradually. Moving entirely onto the digital sphere hindered the ability to create new ties and make new connections.

Question & Answer

When asked about the use of the digital in governance, Mr Lew noted that, if used well, digital platforms build a deeper sense of participation, community, and engagement with the process. However, the digital space can also facilitate mob behaviour and contribute to the production of echo chambers. Mr Lew gave the example of the 6 January US Capitol building riot, and cautioned against over-reliance on the digital sphere. Technology is therefore a tool that must be used wisely. Prof Ratti agreed that technology did contribute to fragmentation, as backed up by his research — people lose weak ties when they only interact with others digitally, and their ability to engage with diversity suffers. In his view, physical space serves as an antidote to that. Physical space is a space of inevitability, where people needed to confront diversity. On the topic of collaborative policymaking and governance, Prof Ratti said it was important to define the areas in which collaboration was desirable. For example, citizens would not be needed to consult on technical aspects of a slated building but would be able to give their feedback on which architectural design they liked better.

In response to Prof Ratti's comments that physical spaces were essential for avoiding fragmentation, there was a question from the audience about how to engineer physical spaces and infrastructure to encourage digitalisation. Prof Ratti replied it was important to examine the "new type of lifestyle" that is generated by new technologies and to translate that into physical infrastructure. This is especially pertinent now that COVID-19 has fundamentally changed cities' approach to work with the rise of remote working.

The panellists were also asked about the ownership of the city's digital space. Mr Lew brought up the idea of "the commons" and differentiated it from traditional ideas of property ownership. Instead, the digital space consists of mostly shared spaces. Shared spaces come with huge advantages for small countries like Singapore because they are able to expand beyond their physical geography. Shared spaces also come with transnational shared problems like questions about digital trade and regulations. Mr Lew advocated the implementation of regulatory frameworks within the digital space. He gave the example of the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) as the government's right to reply to statements online. He also underscored the importance of protective legal frameworks to ensure that the digital space remains safe and efficient. However, because digital spaces transverse national borders, there will be continued challenges in law enforcement and mitigation measures.

Following up on Mr Lew's thread about regulatory frameworks, audience members asked about the legal frameworks for digital crimes. He replied that digital safety was a top concern for Singapore. Many digital threats are international and that accentuates the risk. However, within the local environment, the government is moving to put in place mitigation measures like public education campaigns and technical defences like firewalls.

A question from the audience raised the issue that the digital economy and digitalised work processes have benefitted firms and employees but workers who are less-skilled may be left out of this digital revolution. Prof Ratti responded by talking about the "liminal ghettos" that used to be physical but are now moving into the digital space. He suggested the use of digital information such as geolocated data from cell phones to study the city and to identify invisible fault lines. Equipped with that knowledge, policymakers will then be able to ameliorate issues like exclusion from the digital economy amongst residents of the city. Mr Lew promoted the

idea of upskilling in order for the labour force to keep up in the digital revolution. He mentioned that Singapore needs to continue being the country that welcomes the best minds in order to remain competitive.

Prof Ratti spoke about both national and international regulation as a key way to rein in big business and curb inequality in the digital sphere. He also described cities as some of the main actors on the global stage and that the process of devolution to big cities has had a big impact on decision making in the global economy. These actors are able to create their own digital standards and to form coalitions (such as C40) to create critical mass and influence business that way. Mr Lew agreed with Prof Ratti and brought up the EU's Digital Markets and Digital Standards Acts as good examples of regulation. He also mentioned, however, that was important for Singapore to work together with tech platforms and to adopt a more calibrated approach to regulation.

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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Panel 1 — City: Who Owns?

By Ruby Thiagarajan

The first panel of the in-person conference for Singapore Perspectives 2022, “City: Who Owns?”, was moderated by Mr Christopher Gee, IPS Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Governance and Economy Department. The panel featured speakers Dr Cheong Koon Hean of the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities and Mr Manohar Khatani, the Senior Executive Director of CapitaLand Investment Limited.



Caption for photo: Dr Cheong Koon Hean (middle) and Mr Manohar Khatani (right) in conversation with Mr Christopher Gee (left)

Opening Remarks

Dr Cheong Koon Hean started the discussion by posing the question, “who owns what?” in response to the title of the panel. She raised the importance of defining the “what” and offered

up three possibilities: physical land space and assets in land-scarce Singapore, digital assets, and the right to decide how the city develops. She contextualised the idea of the city by explaining why people would choose to come together and live in dense and close quarters. People move for economic activity, the promise of better jobs, a higher frequency of social interaction and the proximity to multiple amenities such as schools and hospitals. However, because cities play host to a large number of people in a small space, rapid urbanisation puts a lot of stress on resources. In particular, she mentioned land scarcity and the volatility of land prices. This makes the question of who owns the city vital. In a market like Singapore's, land becomes investment assets.

Two major forces guide the use of Singapore's land: the private and public sectors. In Dr Cheong's view, the private sector is important because it designs and creates key aspects of the city. However, if land usage is left solely to the workings of the market, scarcity will inevitably price out social goods such as parks and schools that are unable to generate profit as much as other developments. It could result in a systematic transfer of land ownership to corporations and developers and even lead to gentrification. This trouble with land ownership can also worsen inequality.

The government therefore taps the best of the private sector while also considering wider public interests and safeguarding the city for the people, she said. With this in view, the government plays two main roles in the city. It facilitates economic growth and also plays a social and redistributive role. It does this through planning and zoning. This ensures that land is protected for both economic and social goals. It is also important to put in place appropriate policies such as the Land Acquisition Act, which Dr Cheong described as a form of wealth redistribution. She ended her remarks by suggesting that the public was made up of various communities and was not a homogeneous group. The answer to "who" owns the city is a complicated one and that the main challenge was being able to balance the needs of everyone in the city while still moving forward.

Mr Khatani picked up on Dr Cheong's remarks about land scarcity and raised the issue of trade-offs. He said Singapore needs to be both a liveable city as well as a city that is attractive for international business. He used the example of industrial land to demonstrate how absolute market forces were not appropriate for determining land prices. Were prices left up to the market, Singapore would price itself out of important manufacturing activities which are critical components of the economy. As it stands now, 20 per cent of Singapore's GDP comes from manufacturing. Ultimately, the key consideration to take into account is not the maximisation of land price but the maximisation of the economic returns from the land.

He also responded to Dr Cheong's discussion on the public and private sectors, by suggesting that in most cases the interests of both sectors were totally aligned. Speaking from his experience as a senior member of CapitaLand, he explained that it was in the private sector's interest to ensure that the assets they own continue to remain attractive 30 to 40 years down the road. It makes good business sense to not only be concerned with short-term profits but to ensure the vibrancy of the communities that cluster around different developments.

Question & Answer

Mr Christopher Gee began the Q&A session by posing a question about the tension between international competitiveness and the social good and how best to manage this balance. Dr Cheong reiterated that long-term planning was essential to the success of the city due to Singapore's land scarcity. However, the plan needed to be flexible in order to account for unexpected developments. The government's role is not only in being a regulator; rather, regulation is seen only as a means to an end. She gave the example of the Marina Bay Sands development and how the government eventually chose its developer. During the tender process, the government was considering how each proposal could build the economy and the city, providing public space as well as commercial square footage. Mr Khiatani responded to say that hardware, software and heartware were essential to any development. In the example of the one-north development, the government wanted to create a business park that deviated from the campuses of the 1980s which were centred around quiet spaces and greenery. Instead, one-north was to become a vibrant collaborative space. The government and JTC kickstarted the project and installed key elements while still leaving space for the private sector to come in. The result was a successful collaboration between public and private sectors.

Mr Khiatani also spoke about how Singapore is a global hub that needs to remain attractive and open to international businesses. SMEs should have certain benefits and there are grants from Enterprise Singapore for local businesses, but when it comes to allocating business space, there should not be a distinction between multinational and local firms. Space should instead be allocated according to an understanding of which space best serves which company. Having one-north be a mixed development and its proximity to institutes like Biopolis and Fusionopolis have facilitated innovation and the breaking down of silos.

The conversation then turned to zoning and land planning. Dr Cheong noted that most contemporary zones were mixed-use which suits a vibrant city. Specifically talking about the central area, she mentioned that URA was interested in bringing mixed use into the city and not reserving it just for offices. Marina Bay, for example, is a place for "big footprints" and has opened up space in the conservation areas for other smaller businesses. Mr Khiatani talked about how his company was developing Liang Court into a mixed development and how they were centring the whole customer journey. That was more important than maximising commercial space. He also mentioned the Sengkang Central project and how the government made a community centre, childcare centre and other social amenities a key requirement in the tender process. In his view, as long as the direction from the government on how to use the space was clear, the private sector would respond accordingly.

Dr Cheong spoke about the issue of leaseholds in Singapore and explained that it allows for the virtual recycling of land for future generations. The leasehold mechanism ensures that the land in Singapore is not simply owned by the same few individuals and that new housing and business developments can be built. The varying lengths of leases exist to foster economic dynamism. Shorter leases come with lower land prices and allows for a change of ownership along with economic changes. Leases in the same area are also timed to end at around the same time in order for the land to be rejuvenated at one go. This is especially relevant to Singapore because there is no possibility of a city sprawl beyond the existing land. Mr Khiatani

added that Singapore's economy had changed vastly in the last few decades, moving from being labour-intensive to knowledge-intensive. If Singapore's industrial land had remained focused around labour-intensive industries, it would not have kept up with Singapore's fast-paced economy. That is why industrial land is now allocated for 30-year durations. This, however, is not a blanket rule. Different considerations must be made for different industries.

There was a question from the audience about where the people factored into the conversation as the discussion had centred on both the public and private sectors so far. Dr Cheong admitted that urban planning used to be more top-down from the government, but this changed tack in the last two decades. As the trade-offs for land use became more stark, it was important to speak to different groups of people. In her experience, joint solutioning was not an easy task but it was critical. She suggested putting different groups in the same room and merely facilitating the discussion. The conversation, which she described as "sharing the dilemmas", would lead parties with different priorities to come to a consensus.

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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Panel 2 — City: Who Plans?

By Sufia Maisarah



Caption for photo: Dr Woo Jun Jie (left) & Mr Seah Chee Huang (right). Ms Hwang Yu-Ning (not featured) who was overseas attended the session via conference call.

The second panel on the final day of Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022 was moderated by Dr Woo Jun Jie, Senior Research Fellow at Institute of Policy Studies and featured speakers Mr Seah Chee Huang, Chief Executive Officer of DP Architects as representative from the private sector, and Ms Hwang Yu-Ning, Chief Planner & Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) as representative from the public sector. The panel took place over a hybrid format with both a live and an online audience. The speakers gave their presentations on city planning in Singapore before going on to a question-and-answer session with the audience.

Speakers' Opening Remarks and Presentation

Ms Hwang Yu-Ning kickstarted the panel with her presentation. She started off with her opening remarks by saying that when it comes to city planning, building experts and architects will come to mind, however, everyone in Singapore plays a part. She described the planning processes by URA, and the steps taken to gather feedback from the ground, which include focus group discussions, exhibitions, competitions and other methods. To ensure smooth planning, the public and private sectors will have to work hand in hand. Different instruments such as taxes and policies are used to ensure things run smoothly. Initiatives such as the Business Improvement Districts brought together property owners and business operators to take the lead in the management of their precincts. This allowed them to take ownership while reaping the benefit of greater footfall to their areas.

Ms Hwang then went into the planning processes that involved different stakeholders and gave the example of the masterplan for Marina Bay, which began in the 1980s. The plans for Marina Bay were non-static and changed over different generations and culminated into various attractions. Ms Hwang also mentioned the park connectors and waterways in Singapore as examples of nature being integrated with surrounding urban landscape. She then talked about places that included insights from the public and integration with community. Heartland hubs such as Tampines Hub and Kampung Admiralty and Rail Corridor were the main examples. There, the surrounding communities were involved through gathering feedback, conducting workshops and exhibitions, and using data and insights to better plan and cater to the needs of the various surrounding demographics.

At the end of her presentation Ms Hwang said the URA is always looking forward and recognises the need to adapt to new challenges. She also mentioned that with COVID-19 pandemic, new trends have arisen. She concluded with a reminder that Singapore is a city-state with limited space, and the authorities will always try to capitalise on new ideas, and public engagement and collaboration with the private sector will always remain vital.

Next, Mr Seah Chee Huang gave his opening remarks by looking at the role of architects. He stated that architects were not most involved in city planning but they had the role of negotiating through the different policies and regulations. Mr Seah went on to mention that the question of “who plans?” is rhetorical given the meticulous planning by the authorities and the private and public sectors working hand in hand. Like Ms Hwang, Mr Seah also discussed the constantly evolving nature of city planning and mentioned the enactment of the Land Acquisition Act of 1966 as a form of outreach. He then spoke about the Singapore Green Plan 2030 and its five pillars which will depend on Singaporeans for its success.

This dependence on the people goes into every aspect of planning in Singapore, he added, especially when it comes to land and environment which is shared by everyone, making civic partnerships important. He used the example of feedback gathered for Tampines Hub as a form of public engagement in designing a building outside of the city centre, which would benefit many and become an emotional connection between people and space.

Mr Seah emphasised that society here is sophisticated enough to laud new developments and designs. He acknowledged that private sector participation was key in supporting larger urban development. He used the example of Golden Mile Complex as an example of engaged citizenry and urban advocacy in private development. The conservation of the building proposed by URA and its later gazetted status is significant for heritage architecture in

Singapore. The interest of preserving Golden Mile Complex is shared among the public and private sectors and is a clear indication of people's interest in city planning. Mr Seah concluded that over the past 50 years Singapore has successfully established strong imageability of the city as there are clear results in establishing a well-designed urban landscape. The next coming phases will need for more diverse and inclusive means of citizenry engagement in vision making and the identity shaping process.

Question & Answer

Questions from the audience focused on a number of issues relating to urban planning in Singapore.

The first question was about as emphasis on public engagement such as with nature groups and heritage groups can become highly politicised, how could it be ensured that the government continue to make sound and objective decisions notwithstanding strong vested interests. Ms Hwang answered that it is through trying to bring different voices together, bringing in balanced perspectives and hearing from different groups. Given that Singapore is very constrained by limited land, Ms Huang stated that a science-based approach is needed to weigh different possibilities. Mr Seah said the idea of common ground was key as well as providing a platform for empathy. He added that, on top of a science-based approach a discussion of values and what contributes to the greater good is also required.

The following question from Dr Woo was on how planners manage potential risks and threats in the future on things like urban density, while still in the tail of a global pandemic and facing potential disruptions from climate change. Dr Woo also mentioned that urban density has become a bit of a double-edged sword, as the city without urban density could not possibly thrive as well, hence how has that changed the way in planning parameters and spaces. Mr Seah replied that there were three ways to look at. First, the dimension of area to something volumetric, followed by the idea of time and then health. Area is key as urban planning in Singapore must look at how much volume buildings are able to withstand. He then mentioned the notion of time as useful when looking at the larger scheme of things, as time in Singapore is used as a metric to connote distance. In relation to health, Mr Seah thought that the pandemic according has forced us to think of new ideas and has made us very aware of space. Ms Hwang then added that there have always been attempts at balancing density and in trying to create a good quality of life that people could enjoy. She also believed that understanding values was something important in drawing up a plan.

The next question was from the audience and was about how people have talked about what worked well in planning over the years. It was then asked if there were instances and examples where we have not done as well or where we had made mistakes which had learned from to improve our plans subsequently. Ms Hwang answered there will always be challenges and hence the importance of reviewing plans every five to 10 years, to take time and review trends. She added that it should include bringing voices together and hearing perspectives as time would allow us to make large moves. Ms Hwang acknowledged that not all plans worked and there would always be the need to revisit plans and hear from the ground. Mr Seah added the idea of adaptability and using people as the point of reference to understand policy.

Following question from the audience was on how to consult those who are not consultable and those who are not happy with these processes, and how about those who are not able or willing to step forward. Ms Hwang answered that the authorities would try to have representative sampling of commissioned surveys, work with different NGOs and conduct sessions in different languages. Aside from that, was to approach youth leaders and broaden human engagement to ensure diverse range. When it came to biodiversity and wildlife, Ms Hwang believed it needed to be approached scientifically. Mr Seah agreed with Ms Hwang's comments and saw the science-based approach as the most sensible. He added that human engagement must be strategic and purposeful to address concerns and anxieties and highlighted the importance of social media and newsletters in reaching out to the public.

Another question asked was on urban heritage. It was about besides preserving our past for heritage, how do we go about preserving the present for our future heritage, given that we are a young country and will need to continue building our heritage even as we rejuvenate the city. Ms Hwang explained that the URA works with different stakeholders to try and capture buildings from different eras and understand buildings important to people. In addition, they would look beyond design to see how people resonate with buildings, and this is where the National Heritage Board comes into play. Ms Hwang also said that urban heritage was not only about preserving old buildings. It can also be done by other avenues, and, for a young nation, the authorities try to keep buildings and others that are important to our identities, and this is a continuous process. Mr Seah reiterated that heritage starts from conversations and establishing what buildings have an impact on people.

Dr Woo then asked what are some buildings that capture the zeitgeist, that could be reflective of current trends. Mr Seah suggested HDB public housing that are close to majority of Singaporeans, and that for public housing at every injection of new estate, the old must be kept.

The next question from the audience, was whether a more dynamic environment requires a quicker urban planning cycle than what we have at present; less than 10-15 years. Ms Hwang replied that there were active studies going on besides the 10 to 15-year cycle reviews. She explained that if the major reviews were done faster, there might not be enough time and distance for major change.

Dr Woo then asked what the advantage was of developing a city-state. Ms Hwang replied that there is the single-layer government and small size, whereby different stakeholders are aware of constrictions and challenges. She also mentioned the biggest constraint will always be land and the challenge are to optimise space not only for this generation but also for the next. Mr Seah offered his view that the advantage for Singapore is the physical showcase of the country's success due to the radical thinking and crisis mentality in the earlier days.

The question-and-answer session was concluded with a final question from the live audience in which when it comes down to land, how do you choose for business or for nature. Ms Hwang answered that people want jobs, and planning is all about balancing social and economic needs and ensuring that Singapore is sustainable in the future. Therefore, long-term plans bring together all the needs to prioritise them. Ms Hwang reiterated the science-based approach when she talked about nature and greenery, to ensure that Singapore is protecting

and retaining the available nature. She concluded that there would always be some measure of balancing in different considerations and needs.

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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Panel 3 — City: Who Belongs?

By Fiona Phoa



Caption for photo: Dr Gillian Koh (left) and Ms Cindy Khoo (middle) and Associate Professor Ho Kong Chong (right) during the third panel of Singapore Perspectives 2022

The third panel of Singapore Perspectives 2022, “City: Who Belongs?,” was moderated by Dr Gillian Koh, Deputy Director (Research) and Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of Policy Studies. The featured speakers were Ms Cindy Khoo, Deputy Secretary, Strategy Group, at the Prime Minister’s Office, and Associate Professor Ho Kong Chong, Head of Urban Studies at Yale-NUS College and Associate Professor of Sociology at Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. Dr Koh opened the session with an overview of the interaction and co-dependence between locals and foreigners and the diversity in Singapore, and asked how we could ensure that our political, social and cultural frameworks continue to help Singapore be a vibrant global city and a country that has generosity of spirit to maintain its fundamental identity as an open cosmopolitan city.

Opening Remarks by Ms Cindy Khoo

Ms Cindy Khoo identified three main components involved in national identity: shared values, sense of belonging, and the sense of commitment that comes with a sense of agency to make Singapore a better place and progress as a nation. She noted the need to refresh our identity as more foreigners convert to citizens or permanent residents. The texture of our society is also changing with transnational marriages and inter-ethnic marriages. She questioned what makes Singapore or Singaporean, and stated that national identity would be key in enabling

Singapore to tackle future challenges again. She talked about the presence of echo chambers, and elaborated on how people formed identities in real life and online and how it would affect the way we formed relationships, where the older generation and younger generation of digital natives would differ in the way they formed relationships and derived their identities. Given that people would have lives both online and in physical reality, she questioned how we could construct national identity with different boundaries.

She believed that lived experiences shape our sense of identity, and our reflections and choices affect our lived experiences, hence reinforcing our beliefs and norms. She shared how the government could enable this process to happen on a collective level by setting basic standards, creating an enabling environment for positive lived experiences by providing opportunities for mixing to build a sense of belonging, reinforcing a sense of commitment to contribute to nation-building, and allowing shared values to evolve.

Opening Remarks by Associate Professor Ho Kong Chong

Assoc Prof Ho began his remarks by sharing on the importance of the neighbourhood in fostering a sense of belonging. Neighbourhoods provide social spaces for new citizens or residents to develop local loyalties and attachments, and create a sense of identity, security and stability. He also believed that citizenship needs to be an actor on a regular basis. He stated that governmental belonging begins when citizens co-create and participate, and argued that there were existing opportunities where citizens could contribute at the grassroots level. He also explained the concept of a “everyday nation”, which comes from the everyday routines we enjoy, such as eating at a hawker centre, which form a common platform for people to identify with. He also shared the importance of the senses in the neighbourhood, where people are able to develop place belonging without interacting with neighbours as there are many things, which may appeal to people in the neighbourhood.

Assoc Prof Ho also shared some challenges that Singapore faced. He felt that the idea of belonging was an oppressive expectation and an imposition if this issue was continually harped on. He added that people do love the city for its diversity, which gives freedom to the people. He said that when thinking about belonging, we would need to consider freedom, which is the other side of belonging. Hence, while the idea of belonging is important, it is also a challenge. He mentioned that existing practices brought over from overseas by new citizens or permanent residents would run into conflict with local practices and such conflicts could be negotiated, but he also asked how resident networks could help bridge practices. He shared his concern about having a proportion of the population living in private housing, where people would choose to live near their own communities and could result in concentrations of groups due to effective market mechanism. He also pointed to the increasing diversity in Singapore as a challenge. He suggested having private housing that are not gated, and allowing more mixing of people in rental housing by opening the criteria to own rental housing to other groups of people such as singles.

Question & Answer

The panellists discussed the necessity of the concept on belonging, defining national identity, the influence of social media and how to adapt to it, the effectiveness of neighbourhoods for

interaction and building a collective identity, and when Singapore would be able to move past labels to accept that identities are porous and fluid.

Referencing what Ms Khoo mentioned on the importance of developing a sense of national identity because we are a city state and country and what Assoc Prof Ho mentioned about the concept of belonging as being oppressive, Dr Koh asked the panel whether the concept of belonging was necessary when we talked about Singapore as a city-state and country. Ms Khoo said Assoc Prof Ho's comment was a sound reminder that sense of belonging and identity is a multi-textured concept, adding that valuing diversity could be a shared value and questioned how that could be engendered. Assoc Prof Ho commented that there are different ways in which identity and belonging are built, but a narrative of belonging would run against the reason why people are attracted to cities in the first place. The ideas of belonging and freedom are important.

On the topic of migrant workers and who gets to define our national identity, Ms Khoo shared that the rationale behind granting citizenship/permanent resident status to foreigners was based on numbers, and foreigners would need to spend some time in Singapore, contribute and form relationships with Singaporeans. She shared that while the door was not closed, it boiled down to the question of how much space Singaporeans are able to make emotionally, psychologically and socially, and how accommodating Singaporeans want to be. It could be a part of our identity to accept that people can come and leave.

Assoc Prof Ho commented that there were preconceived notions of what it means to be Chinese among Chinese migrants. He added that the process of being Singaporean was more fluid and conversations would continue to evolve. It was difficult to define what it means to be Singaporean because it would continue to evolve as the demography of the population changes.

Responding to questions on changes in national identity, Ms Khoo said that our lived experiences and everything we love about Singapore would need to go through a process of reflection — to determine what makes them Singaporean and would reflect our shared values, such as how Singlish and hawker culture reflect us living with efficiency and embracing diversity. She said that national identity was not shaped top-down, and Singaporeans should participate and be part of the conversation in shaping national identity. On top of lived experiences and things we have in common, Assoc Prof Ho added that participation was important as that was the basis for governmental belonging and citizenship. He stated that it was insufficient to have a common set of elements, and there must be an attempt to contribute, initiate and participate.

A few questions on adapting to the digital sphere were posed to the panel. Ms Khoo replied that while guardrails could be established to deal with the occurrence of echo chambers and promote standards on online behaviours, they would not create bridging across communities and enabling people to move out of their comfort zones to have constructive conversations to find commonalities. She added that the topic of national identity was challenging because real change happens at a micro level, which is very hard to intervene and requires individuals to reach out to form relationships. What was key was how much experiences happening online would translate to how people behave in the real world and she suggested enabling behaviours which appear online to appear offline as well to create consistency in terms of

identity and sense of belonging. She also added that for seniors who were less comfortable with using online technologies, the question went beyond their sense of identity, but would also include whether they were able to live a comfortable life given that many services were going online. Assoc Prof Ho added that authenticity was valued by younger people because of how interactions were now online, and suggested that there were ways to build the kind of society we envision through the use of social media to create conversations.

When asked about the effectiveness of neighbourhoods today in promoting interaction and building a collective identity, Assoc Prof Ho shared about the minimal neighbourhood model which would be more applicable for Singapore, where solidarities could be built through amenities, creating opportunities to meet neighbours and to participate at the neighbourhood level. Ms Khoo added that there are no boundaries when it comes to the neighbourhood, and people are able to participate in other neighbourhoods through their online channels. She added that neighbourliness could be built before physical spaces are ready, and gave the example of Build-To-Order (BTO) Telegram groups, where homeowners could interact before their apartments were ready.

The next question was about when Singapore would be able to move past labels such as Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) in order to accept that identities are more porous and fluid. Assoc Prof Ho shared that identity was already fluid and porous, and diversities would be even greater moving forward. He added that the challenge was in developing a strategy that insists on common things that people agree on with regard to identity and belonging, and be flexible enough to adapt because our society is changing quickly. Ms Khoo shared that labels do not equate with identity. While certain groups might not fit neatly into these CMIO categories, she added that for a sizeable proportion of people, they were able to fall into the CMIO boxes, and shared that race was an important identifier when people formed their sense of identity. Ms Khoo further commented that labels allowed policymakers to administer policies to manage differences. Assoc Prof Ho shared that Singaporeans were “same same but different”, and people drew their identities from commonalities and differences as an ethnic community. He suggested that we could look at governmental belonging where citizenship needs to be experienced, and focus on participation, bridging and understanding.

When asked about whether the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) was effective and served to create harmony, Assoc Prof Ho stated that the EIP was meant to be inclusive but could be made to be more inclusive. Ms Khoo shared that EIP would become irrelevant when enclaves do not naturally form in the absence of this policy, and the fact that there were applications that were still getting rejected today meant that there was still a tendency for people to congregate in their communities — and this may not promote cohesion and shared lived experiences in the neighbourhood. The EIP would help to build shared lived experiences for the people in the neighbourhood after they get their flat and build the community in the long run.

In closing, Assoc Prof Ho shared that citizenship matters and there was a lot of stakeholding involved in citizenship. He added that citizenship had to be experienced and the idea of participation and contribution would continue. Ms Khoo reiterated that citizenship was not taken lightly in Singapore. She said that citizens would be able to advocate for citizenship for

foreigners staying here, and it was up to citizens to do something about it if the outreach in order to be more inclusive was inadequate.

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Singapore Perspectives Conference 2022: City Closing Dialogue Session with Minister Desmond Lee

By Beverly Tan



Caption for photo: Minister Desmond Lee giving his opening statement

The hybrid closing dialogue of the Singapore Perspectives Conference, moderated by Professor Tan Tai Yong, President and Professor of Humanities (History) at Yale-NUS College, featured Mr Desmond Lee, Minister for National Development and Minister-in-Charge of Social Services Integration.

In his opening statement, Minister Lee emphasised that cities reflect the diversity of the society, not only in terms of race and religion, but also increasingly in the ideas and perspectives of the people. He noted that the challenge for Singapore has been balancing different priorities and ambition, and allowing them space to flourish.

Preparing for Major Trends

In his speech, Minister Lee addressed sustainability, inclusivity, city maintenance, land use planning, and the ageing population.

On sustainability and climate change, Minister Lee highlighted Singapore's Green Plan, which was launched in 2021. The plan will remake Singaporeans' way of life, work and transport. Included in the plan are efforts to restore and enhance core biodiversity areas, naturalising the city to help wildlife transverse, planting one million trees by 2030, and meeting the goal of having every household live within a 10-minute walk from a park by 2030. The minister also highlighted other efforts that make the urban infrastructure, transportation system and power grid more sustainable. These efforts include making 80 per cent of buildings "Super Low Energy" buildings, phasing out all internal combustion engine vehicles by 2040 and installing more solar panels in various locations. In addition to the "hardware", or infrastructural improvements, the minister also highlighted that the "heartware", or people's efforts and lifestyles, would be crucial in making Singapore a more sustainable city.

Inclusivity was the next issue minister Lee spoke about. He highlighted Singapore's success with the Ethnic Integration Policy, which ensures a representative mix of races in HDB heartlands. Other efforts include the recently launched Prime Location Housing model, which includes public rental housing for lower-income households in prime locations. Minister Lee also described efforts in making the city more accessible for the differently abled through the Accessible City Network, which aims to improve way-finding tools and identify overlooked opportunities for more barrier-free features.

The third issue he focused on was preparing for a silver generation. Singapore's proportion of citizens above 65 will see an increase from one in six to one in four by 2030. To address this, the minister highlighted the steps being taken to make the city more senior-friendly. These include retrofitting almost all older HDB blocks to bring lifts to every floor, installing accessibility features at highly subsidised rates in seniors' homes, piloting Community Care Apartments as well as integrated developments aimed at integrating seniors with the community.

Tying in with the ageing population, Minister Lee also spoke about what was being done to care for and maintain the ageing city. To prevent urban decay, Singapore has rolled out the Home Improvement Programme and a Periodic Façade Inspection regime to keep homes in good condition. Additionally, research on more advanced facility management methods continues, alongside the preservation of building important to the collective heritage of Singaporeans.

On land-use planning, Minister Lee highlighted Singapore's evergreen challenge of catering to various competing needs while making use of the limited land. Singapore's Master Plan that guides short-term development over the next 10 to 15 years is reviewed every five years; and the Long-Term Plan, which caters for the next 50 years, is updated every 10 years. Building higher, reclaiming land, utilising underground space and redeveloping existing development are strategies that Singapore uses to maximise land use.

Minister Lee noted that these issues were "known unknowns", but the increasingly volatile and uncertain world has also made imperative that Singapore prepares for the "unknown unknowns".

A Vision of Our Future City

Minister Lee painted his vision of Singapore in the coming future: it is a city that celebrates diversity — finding joy in commonality and becoming closer through common spaces built together; that is more inclusive and purposefully caters to differences of the people; that is in harmony with nature; that minimises damage to the environment or even does more good for the environment than harm; that is digitally enabled and globally connects; that is rooted in heritage; and lastly, one that is a close-knit community that uplifts.

To attain this vision, he outlined the importance of trust, stewardship and collective action. Trust comes in the form of trusting that views expressed will be heard, that those who disagree come from a good place and that decisions are made with the city's and people's best interests in mind. Stewardship comes in the form of taking accountability for the city, taking care of it so the future generations can thrive in this city as well. Collective action also needs to be taken, going beyond discussion and ideation.

Question & Answer

During the Q&A session, Minister Lee responded to queries on housing policy, the pessimism of Singaporeans, Singapore's role in the region, brain drain and racial harmony, among other questions. This session was moderated by Professor Tan Tai Yong, President and Professor of Humanities (History) at Yale-NUS College.



Caption for photo: Minister Lee responding to a question during the Q&A session

The session started with a broad question from Professor Tan, on the possible tension between building Singapore to be a global city and building a city that is considered a home.

In answering the question, Minister Lee emphasised that the priority for Singapore would be to build a home, which would then enable the outcomes related to a global city. He added that it was imperative to make citizens feel at home in order to achieve the aspirations of being globally connected.

The next question was raised online by a participant who was concerned about how housing policies should be changed or developed to address the rising number of singles and non-traditional family structures. The minister noted Singapore's unique situation — where most of the population reside in public housing, which the government strives to keep accessible and affordable. He highlighted that society is not static and that policies will change as time progresses. Minister Lee explained that singles are not necessarily excluded from the recently launched Prime Location Housing, as singles who are caretakers will be eligible.

Another question was asked online about whether mixing rental and sold flats has achieved its intended effects, and what can be done to better support those in rental housing. Minister Lee replied that without learning to relate to one another through the lived experience of social mixing, there could be more segregation. He also pointed to research that suggests putting people of different backgrounds together in a space can enable social mixing if done well, as it provides amenities for people to mingle and share ideas. On providing better support to those in rental housing, Minister Lee gave the example of the ComLink project where agencies and social workers came together to work out a progress plan to help families in rental housing to unlock the shackles standing in their way. He also spoke about how moving to home ownership was only one proxy of stability, self-reliance and, ultimately, social mobility. Minister Lee explained that home ownership could be used as an aspiration for these families to work towards, while the core obstacles that these families face in attaining financial stability are tackled first.

The next online question was about the pessimism of Singaporeans despite Singapore's success. The minister alluded to the difference between the experiences shared online and the experiences shared face-to-face. He explained that the pessimism could actually be a sense of realism, and speaking to people, he has noticed there was often some hope and optimism. The youth today are better equipped and should be more confident that their skillsets are well placed. Thus, it is important for mentors to address our youth's fears regarding the unknown and to empower them.

Minister Lee responded to a question from the floor on Singapore's role in the region and the world, as a city-state with the rising of Asian giants such as India and China. He stated that Singapore needs to remain nimble and flexible, structuring relationships to remain relevant and flourish. In order to do this, Singapore needs talent with the necessary skillsets, flexibility and resilience, which falls on the government to make sure that the education system prepares such talent for the workforce and world. He added that Singapore serves as a neutral place that can communicate to both the East and the West, making Singapore highly relevant today when Sino-US competition is rising. As such, the government needs to connect with the region and larger countries and make efforts to encourage youth to connect with their peers in Southeast Asia.

The next question from the floor asked what could be done to prevent brain drain amidst the increasingly competitive society. Minister Lee replied that corporate leaders have the

responsibility to pay attention to the well-being of employees. He acknowledged that emotional and mental well-being have been neglected; there was a need to strike a balance for overall well-being, not just the physical. There is a need to have earnest conversations about work-life balance and the intrusion of digital devices at home, especially now when the pandemic has enabled the population to work more digitally and remotely than before. Minister Lee said the solution needs to be a collaboration between the government, industry, employers and non-government organisations.

The next online question asked about the future generations of political leaders and their understanding of the changing complexities of the multiracial, multireligious Singapore. Minister Lee emphasised the strong mentoring alliance that needs to be pushed, from older Singaporeans to guide future leaders on the intellectual, emotional and instinctual aspects of nation building, which cannot be learnt in a classroom.

A question from the floor pertaining to climate change, as well as Singapore's position and role on the world stage, was asked. Minister Lee explained that while Singapore is a small city-state, it does not shy away from participating from climate conferences, as it is important to ensure that the city-state has a chance of survival at the onslaught of climate change. He stressed the importance of global collective action, as political will is needed from countries big and small. Countries are starting to pay more attention to the issue because their people, who are being directly affected by climate change, are paying more attention to the issue as well. He elaborated that Singapore has played its part by collaborating with various universities and non-government organisations to address the issue of climate change locally. He also highlighted the importance of engaging the youth and getting their feedback on how citizens are able to partner with the government to combat this issue.

The last question from the floor was about Singapore being a leader in the region for climate and green innovation. While headline commitments were important, Minister Lee said that policies and operations that put things in action to achieve the stated goals were equally important. He added that Singapore might not sign on to agreements very readily, as it is important to make commitments that the country can deliver. Instead of simply having the political will, there is a need for the country to have the resources, mechanisms and policies to see such commitments through. Referencing the Green Plan — which seeks to galvanise policymakers, the private sector, institutes of higher learning and the community to help tackle the issue of climate change — Minister Lee noted that mere policy and infrastructure alone are not enough. He argued that there needs to be a change in the way of life and conservation, which is what the Green Plan will do to secure the environment for future generations, provided the nation sees it through.

The remaining questions asked about physical spaces. Minister Lee spoke about how physical spaces in a city are important in enabling social interactions, even though these spaces do not necessarily cause interactions to happen. He noted that open and inclusive physical spaces are necessary, but not sufficient. As such, it is important to have policies such as the Ethnic Integration Policy, which might not be perfect, but is recognised as important by Singaporeans. Minister Lee also highlighted that digital platforms enabled communities to form, drawing on the example of BTO WhatsApp groups fostering a sense of friendship and neighbourliness, and has also translated to offline friendships and communities forming

through the digital platform. The minister also cautioned against the dismantling of cultural icons that make up an important part of the complex identities of Singaporeans. He added that instead of homogeneity, the preservation of such sub-identities will help to give Singapore a link to its heritage.

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