

S'pore a global city, yes. But how about humility?

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SINGAPORE - For a global city which has been described in some quarters as the "Monaco of the East", it seems that "hubris" has seeped into certain segments of Singapore society who think the country has arrived, Singapore Management University literature academic Kirpal Singh suggested yesterday.

The issue of Singapore's global city status was one focal point at the Institute of Policy Studies' annual flagship conference, and Mr Singh's viewpoint as a participant found resonance with one of the speakers.

Independent scholar Derek da Cunha cautioned against "a self-congratulatory attitude that's very pervasive" here.

He said: "By default, that tends to be critical of other countries ... I don't believe that's the right way to approach and move ahead."

Another concern, according to panellist and Non-Constituency Member of Parliament Sylvia Lim: "A palpable loss of identity and nationhood in the last few years due to the pace of change",

The Workers' Party chairman cited the population surge from three million to five million in 20 years - which increased population density by 1.7 times - while the proportion of citizens fell from 86 per cent to 64 per cent.

She called the Economic Strategies Committee's two-pronged aim of building a global city and an endearing home "a contradiction".

To reconcile the two, Singaporeans need to be empowered, she felt. "The Government should retreat from various spheres of life and allow authentic leadership to grow," she said.

In a 90-minute discussion, it came back to a familiar question of what globalisation has wrought.

The entry of casinos is perhaps the most visible and ambitious manifestation of efforts to remake Singapore as a global city, Mr da Cunha believes.

But questions remain over the social impact and boost to local employment, he added.

National Trades Union Congress assistant secretary-general Ong Ye Kung countered that "a great majority" of those working in the IRs were Singaporeans.

Out of 12,000 rank-and-file workers, 3,000 were placed directly by the Employment and Employability Institute, he said.

He also cited the Marina Bay skyline as a product of globalisation and Singapore's global city status.

"Do I feel that it's not Singapore? Totally no," he said. "When I go overseas now, I point to people and say, 'look at our Marina skyline. It's going to be as prominent as the Manhattan skyline and the Sydney skyline."