IPS Community Leaders Integration Conference

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Orchard Hotel Singapore

Institute of
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25 Years &
Forward
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ENGAGING MINDS, EXCHANGING IDEAS

Community Leaders Integration Dialogue

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BACKGROUND

Purpose of Dialogues

➢ Dialogues with immigrant association leaders to understand the aspirations and challenges of integration.

➢ Allowed local community leaders to better understand immigrant concerns and to share the concerns of local-born Singaporeans.

FINDINGS

Motivations to come to Singapore

➢ Reasons for coming to Singapore were economic in nature.

➢ Newcomers sought work opportunities or were posted on job assignments

➢ Professional advancement from education or job placement was also a motivator.

Motivations (2)

➢ Where new immigrants had worked or lived in other countries besides Singapore, they noted the advantages of settling in Singapore -

1) quality of life
2) physical infrastructure
3) the cultural and political landscape of the country.

Motivations (3)

➢ English as the medium of instruction viewed positively as a basic means of equity and meritocracy for every citizen.

➢ The secular nature of Singapore's brand of multiculturalism and intercultural harmony

➢ The possibility of becoming a citizen

Initial surprises about the Singaporean way of life

➢New immigrants sometimes found Singaporeans distant and reserved, although noted that when engaged, they could become close.

➢A competitive and fast-paced culture compared to one which was more easy-going

Initial surprises about the Singaporean way of life

➢ Multicultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious way of living

➢ Use of Singlish and how it was sometimes is seen as a marker of localization

➢ A strict classification of CMIO and its implications

Initial surprises about the Singaporean way of life

➢ Singapore seen as overly Westernised and in practice, little emphasis on individual cultures and history.

➢ Some migrants were concerned about the dilution of their cultural heritage brought about by assimilating into Singaporean culture.

Internal factors affecting assimilation

➢ Whether citizenship or permanent residency was possible and desirable

➢ Personal initiative and disposition

Internal factors affecting assimilation

➢ For those who were already here on a more permanent status as a PR or new citizen, some found it difficult to break into local social networks as more initiative was needed on their part.

Internal factors affecting assimilation

➢ some found it easier and less stressful to join existing expatriate networks through their workplace, schools or communities based on nationalities

➢ Immigrants are naturally bound to seek primordial ties for building up social capital in a new environment.

Internal factors affecting assimilation

➢ Many new immigrants who started a family here with young children were surprised at the flexibility and ease with which their children seemed to fit in with the local environment.

➢ They were able to pick up local culture such as familiarity with customs, foods, and language at a faster pace.

Internal factors affecting assimilation: Transition to citizenship

➢ Many mentioned various criterion in which an individual swung between staying in Singapore as a citizen or moving back home or elsewhere for better opportunities.

➢ Besides local policies regarding citizenship or education or even economic opportunities, softer factors such as the choice of lifestyle were also brought up.

Forging and maintaining social cohesion: Recalibrating migrant status and class

➢ Migrants were aware of some Singaporean's discontent about their presence

➢ Heard statements from Singaporean colleagues about their loss of resources and competition

Forging and maintaining social cohesion: Recalibrating migrant status and class

➢ participants noted the equation of expatriate to someone in a higher socio-economic bracket is not always necessarily accurate. There is diversity even among the migrant community here in terms of income and choice of lifestyle

➢ when these immigrants stay on as Singaporean citizens, they too are placed in the same local situation and context where foreigners will continue to be brought in and compete.

Forging and maintaining social cohesion: Recalibrating migrant status and class

➢ Some local participants noted that such a closed-minded attitude towards immigration, may lead to an over-entitled attitude in the young and make them ineffective in the face of globalization.

Forging and maintaining social cohesion: Integration efforts

➢ the diversity in educational options for immigrants in the form of international schools was a big hindrance to natural integration.

➢ Considering that integration at a younger age was deemed more successful, this was called out as another form of unnecessary social divide.

Forging and maintaining social cohesion: Recalibrating migrant status and class

➢ The dialogue participants had all in their personal or communal capacity organised or participated in integration efforts.

➢ Immigrant and local organisations such as PA offered avenues for such integration activities

➢ immigrant individual could also immerse into local culture through personal efforts without necessarily going through established immigrant communities or local organisations – sports events, social activities etc

Forging and maintaining social cohesion: Integration efforts

➢ there was a plethora of ideas and initiatives taking place, some as tie-ups with grassroots community clubs.

➢ These included partnering up for local festivals such as the Chingay parade or film screenings and involvement in community and charitable efforts.

End of Presentation