

Conference on Managing Diversity in Singapore

Friday, 5 August 2016
Ballroom 2, Level 3
Orchard Hotel

**MANAGING DIVERSITY IN SINGAPORE:
POLICIES & PROSPECTS**

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Managing Diversity in Singapore: Historical Foundations & Prospects

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MANAGING DIVERSITY IN SINGAPORE

Policies and Prospects

Singapore society is increasingly becoming diverse. During the first few decades of nation building, policies were designed to homogenise aspects of Singaporean society while enshrining principles to allow restricted amounts of diversity. Fast forward to the present, and fifty years after independence, the number of areas where diversity is profoundly apparent remains copious, and its manifestations more varied.

This book provides an updated account on the tensions posed by diversity in Singapore and how this is being managed, primarily by the state through policies and programmes but also by communities who attempt to negotiate these tensions. Such an enquiry is crucial especially at this juncture when the nation is finding ways to embrace the different forms of diversity brought about through external impetuses, as well as manage internal reactions from the various communities. The book chapters highlight important considerations if Singapore's diversity management strategies will hold promise for the future.

About the Editors

Mathew Mathews is a Senior Research Fellow and leads the Society and Identity cluster at the Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

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Policies and Prospects



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Diversity Management As a Concept

- Earlier discourse in United States and Europe surrounded race, gender and immigrant status
- Current discourse indicates many dimensions which people try to be mindful of.

Dimensions of Diversity

- “race, gender, ethnicity, culture, social class, religious beliefs, sexual orientations, mental ability, physical ability, psychological ability, veteran or military status, marital status, state of residence, nationality, perspectives, insights, backgrounds, experiences, age, education level, cultural and personal perspectives, viewpoints and opinions” (Vertovec, 2012, pp. 295–296).

Institutional Diversity

- Beyond social and cultural diversity, the discourse of diversity also extends to how institutions are arranged.
 - diversity in school systems,
 - urban landscape,
 - welfare provision
 - family diversity

Diversity and the Goal of Inclusion

- Diversity is a driver for change
- “the word promote some unspecified social good” (Modan, 2008)
- invokes an aspirational element - social inclusion
- formulated so that the previously excluded can be included
- Accommodate more visions of processes

Singapore's History of Diversity Management

- Singapore – internationally regarded success case
- Early strategies of diversity management included homogenization and boundary policing.
- Homogenisation – control the variables of diversity to simplify management
- Boundary policing - the strict supervision of categories.

Current Concerns about Diversity Management

- Much more diversity currently – bringing global into the city
- Singaporeans have become accustomed to a set number of diversities, neat categories
- we are in a state of flux where clean cut categorisations are no longer easy.
- Some wary of the homogenization and boundary policing strategies of the past

STRATEGIES FOR BETTER DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

1. Appreciation of Complexity in Diversity

- familiarisation with properties of diversity
- Intersectionality - individual experiences of diversity are varied with forces such as gender, age, class and employment status interacting in a complex manner

2. Allow for Deviations from Norm

- carefully study differences
- acknowledge that they can contribute positively
- Requires maturity within population to look for synthesis rather than engage in boundary making

3. Activate Policies which Recognise Superdiversity

- Some policies will need to strengthen group boundaries
- Find policies that can recognise fluidity
 - e.g second language options not bound by parents' race
 - Contribution to self-help groups not solely on race

4. Articulate Values that Bind

- values give us a sense of rootedness
- Is there a set of values we can find consensus on?
- Assertion of values will help us deal with diversity

CONCLUSION

Concluding Remarks

- We are increasingly aware of ethnicity/race, gender, age, sexuality, disability, personal outlook and experiences
- important that exchanges do not spiral out of control and destroy social cohesion
- to dialogue about diversity constructively, everyone must be committed to the betterment of people's lives and wellbeing

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