

Conference on Integration

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Integration in the Singaporean Heartlands

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- Yet not all Singaporeans are comfortable with the pace of change and developments. I can understand why, and I empathise with them. Some point out that the pace of life has picked up too fast, and they are experiencing higher levels of stress. Some attribute problems related to congestion and increased prices to the presence of many foreigners, and feel we should admit fewer of them. Others are concerned about potential erosion of our Singaporean identity, as we become more cosmopolitan. In short, some Singaporeans wonder **whether a global city can also be an endearing home** (Wong Kan Seng, 2008)

The Local Problem

- Global city = attract talent; competition; unfamiliarity
- Home = familiar, stable
- Neighbourhood - Home – “haven in a heartless world”

- Housing large foreign population / new immigrants in the neighbourhood – the unfamiliar is now at the doorstep
- Sense of threat at the heart of the neighbourhood

State Discourse

- “locals and newcomers must reach out to one another to bridge gaps and narrow differences” Mr Wong K.S (2008)
- “The Government can say many things but if you don't reach out to your neighbour across the corridor, then it is meaningless. It has to be on a very personal level” Mr Mah BT (2009)

- “the tricky problem takes three parties to solve - Singaporeans, who have to be welcoming; new immigrants, who have to adapt to a new culture; and the Government, which has to provide a framework for people to bond”
(K.Shanmugam, 2009))

State Initiative

- People's Association has appointed 690 'Integration and Naturalisation Champions' to reach out to newcomers and involve them in activities.
- Successfully included 900 Singaporean Permanent Residents as grassroots leaders.

International Literature

- the segregated nature of neighbourhoods with the arrival of immigrants
- enclave - haven which enables the migrant to adjust to the new environment
- Ghetto - protective environment as a space of identification (Marcuse, 1988)
- Segregation problematic because it reduces possibility for contact and bonding between groups - may result in mistrust and a lack of cohesion in society (Peach, 1996).

- mixing immigrants with natives in neighbourhoods can have substantial losses for both categories (Putnam, 2007)
- Contact hypothesis – close living, more engagement, less stereotypes
- Conflict theory – close living, inter-group rivalry over scarce resources
- Constrict theory - diversity decreases both in-group and out-group trust because diversity means that there are more people unlike you; less social trust - people begin to isolate themselves

Local Literature

- Achieving social cohesion, good race relations explicit agenda of policy planners as they housed Singapore (Goh,2002)
- Ethnic housing quota policies (Ooi, 1993; Chih,2002)
- Communities can form (Chua, 1997)
- Integration of ethnic groups and neighbourliness (Siddique)

- residents adopted an attitude of avoidance of conflict, tolerance, accommodation and respect based on their common living arrangements; not without tension though (Lai, 1995)
- Connections between neighbours of inter-ethnic groups small (Appold & Chua, 2006)

Aim of Current Study

- Understand the extent that Singaporean HDB neighbourhoods are becoming sites for integration especially between local born Singaporeans and new immigrants.
- barriers to this process
- Policy considerations

Methodology

- Data from IPS Integration Study (2010)
- This analysis uses 937 foreign born and 888 local born citizens living in HDB estates
- 47 in-depth interviews – mixture of race, SES, age groups, gender, local/foreign born

DATA FROM SURVEY

Table 1 - Proportion of local born Singaporeans (n=888) who came in contact with new immigrants from different localities

Country of Origin of Immigrant Group	% of local born who come into contact with this group most	% of local born who come into contact second most often
China	17.5	10.7
India	5.9	10.4
Indonesia	2.6	10.7
Malaysia	9.9	11.0
Philippines	3.2	10.4
No contact with immigrant	48.0	40.9
Not sure whether these foreigners are Singapore citizens	11.0	0

Table 2: Proportion of local born Singaporeans (n= 311) who have new immigrant friends in their neighbourhood

No of friends made	New Immigrant Group	
	Group with most contact	Group with second-most contact
0	14.0	16.3
1	18.1	20.0
2-5	54.3	53.5
>5	13.5	10.4

Table 4: Proportion of immigrants (n=937) who made contact with local born Singaporeans in their HDB neighbourhood

Race of local born Singaporean	Proportion of new immigrants who had contact with local born in the neighbourhood	
	<i>Group with most contact</i>	<i>Group with second most contact</i>
Chinese	82.5	15.4
Malay	10.2	33.8
Indian	7.0	11.7
None	0.1	38.6

Table 5: Proportion of immigrants with local born Singaporean friends in their neighbourhood

No of friends made	Proportion of immigrants with friendships with local born Singaporean	
	<i>Group with most contact</i>	<i>Group with second most contact</i>
0	15.4%	52.6%
1	5.6%	9.6%
2-5	48.7%	29.6%
>5	30.3%	8.1%

	Immigrants Sample (n=687)	Local born Singaporean sample (n=311)
Ways friends are made	Proportion of immigrants who made local born Singaporean friends (%)	Proportion of local born Singaporeans who made immigrant friends (%)
introduction by friends or relatives	47.0	35.4
religious group/gathering	23.7	8.7
community gatherings at the Community Centre grassroots activities	24.0	9.3
casual interaction around where you live	67.0	68.5
children's school/education (e.g. tuition centres)	26.9	15.8
attending educational training	16.7	6.8
At your workplace	27.3	22.5
In the shops or service outlets	48.8	31.5
Others	0.3	0.3

- More Singaporean Chinese (35.1%) became friends through their interactions at shops compared to Malays (28.6%) or Indians (11.8%)
- Nearly 59% of those who lived in one to two room HDB flats compared to 35% of those in three room flats and 26% in 5 room flats and larger claimed that they had met a new immigrant through a shop in the neighbourhood.

Table 6: Proportion of new immigrants from China and India with cross-racial friendship

Countries of Origin	Proportion of new immigrants who have Singaporean friends of another race (%)
China	31.6
India	87.8

DATA FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL BORN SINGAPOREANS

Theme 1 – Social Climate

- People can have a kind heart, but you need to give them a reason for doing something. You can sell the idea to them, and they will swallow the cost. But for most Singaporeans now, they view the foreigners as threats to their future securities, a threat to getting their own jobs, rather than seeing them as of a synergistic effect (Singaporean Chinese, Pharmacist, 37y female)

Theme 2 – Cultural Differences

- They think they own the place and they are very inconsiderate. They won't hold the lift door for you, and won't give way or move in unlike true Singaporeans. They are not cultured in our local ways. I find them rude and not clean (Singaporean Chinese male, 40+, housing agent)

Theme 3 – Suspicion of new immigrants' interest to integrate

78.6% of the local born Singaporeans who participated in the survey agreed to the statement that immigrants should take the lead in interacting with local-born Singaporeans compared to 63% of new immigrants who believed this responsibility should fall on local-born Singaporeans.

- To me I don't think I want to contribute in any way in fostering a closer relationship with foreign nationals. They view us with suspicion so why should I try and get to know them. I will not invite them to my house or even join in any of their activities as I have no time.
- ...just look at how they group together among themselves and they speak their own language. You see how the Indians have cricket leagues for their own kind. I stay in Sengkang and I notice this very often in the open fields. Also the Filipinos only speak their own language and they go around with their own kind. And as a housing agent I also know how many of these Filipinos or Indians or Chinese nationals come and stay here just for a while then they sell their flats and go back for good. So I don't see a need to make them feel at home here.

Theme 4 – Lack of a welcoming culture

- The thing is when I walk through the white community, they will shout “hi”, they will be friendly to you. But in the Singapore context, I will ride the lift with my own neighbors and we don’t even talk at all. So it is not just with the local foreigners, but it is also with the locals. So it is also our own attitude, we are not as open as, let’s say Australians, or something. They can just talk normally on the streets, for example, when you sit with them side by side in Subway, they will just strike up conversations with us. But for Singaporeans, when we sit next to each other in the MRT, we will just sleep or just listen to our MP3. We don’t even talk to our own locals neighborhood. So I guess it is a fundamental problem with all Singaporeans. Not just us not making friends with the foreigners (Singaporean Malay, 25 male, uni student)

Theme 5 – Neighbourhood not the place for integration

- I guess so, but sometimes I do not have the time or I am not aware of the activities itself. I have other involvements as well, so this is not at the top of my priorities. I guess I do not really see the importance of these activities as well, cause I am rarely at home and hardly involved in my grassroots activities. I do believe integration is important though. I have friends from school and church that are here to study or to work, so I enjoy helping them integrate. But not so much in my neighborhood. (Singapore Chinese, female, 23 years, Potong Pasir)

- Actually there is another one from China but somehow they moved out earlier this year. But really, they are nothing much, they are like our own neighbors, we don't really interfere into our neighbors' business. There is not much interaction, even with the local neighbors. So staying in the same block with these foreigners is not much of a difference for me.
(Singapore Malay, female, 24 years)

DATA FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH NEW IMMIGRANTS

Theme 1a – New immigrants understanding of social climate

- As a foreigner who has come to Singapore in search of a better life, I think the locals must be more accepting of us and not view us as rice bowl breakers. This mind set must change if at all meaningful relationships can be fostered. I know Singapore to be a fair and meritocratic society and there is room for anyone to excel provided he or she wants to work hard and achieve the high goals set. I personally set goals for myself and that is why I am where I am today and I also aim higher for a better life too. While the government offers the dream to all, it is very disheartening to hear of snide remarks made by Singaporeans about we coming here to steal their job opportunities.....So as a new citizen as I hear, all those hurtful remarks sometimes I feel it is not worth exploring the possibility of making friendships with Singaporeans. I just live my life, take care of my kids , give them a good life, mingle with my own circle of friends who are Malaysians and live life. I find foreigners are not well received here. Sometimes it is unfair to blame the rise in cost of living on foreigners. The rise in cost is due to the rise in standards of living. I like the Singapore Government as they do not discriminate (Malaysian Indian, male, 37)

Theme 2a – Sense of being stereotyped

- I cannot change a person if they perceive that I am not someone to make friends with, they will not.. I will not go out of my way to make friends but I am open to making friends. Because of the experiences I choose to behave this way. The difficulty is the perception of others about us. For example some perceive the Indians to be either not hygienic, or maybe they are crooks, so on a number of occasions I have seen that when I am entering the lift, they will not go in. They prefer to wait for the next lift ride. From these kind of incidences I gather that perhaps the perception of the Chinese of us Indians has a lot to do with how I can move forward and form friendships with them

Theme 3a – Desire for integration and long term plans

- Me and my husband. I got married here. My husband is a Singaporean. I feel that I am almost like a normal Singaporean already. Quite assimilated. I know of my husband from polytechnic. We attend school together. I had been in Singapore for 11 years. Before Serangoon, I had stayed in Pasir Ris. When I first came over, I stayed with another Chinese room mate. Last time I never interacted with my neighbors before. But now, I take more effort to maintain good relations with my neighbors. Last time, we don't have so much of a feeling that we are going to stay here for long. But now, since I know I am going to stay here for a period of time, then I am more open to neighbors (Sin PR from PRC, female, 27y)

Theme 4a – Integration and cultural preservation

- I think for Asians, normally it is like they tend to stay in their own groups. So I understand that it is very typical of Singaporeans to not open up and stay in their comfort zone. It must definitely work both ways. Both must be open to make new friends. Basically it is openness. We need to try to understand both cultures and how we work together. I think it would still be good to keep some boundaries. Some things I choose to do it my way. Singaporeans can do things their own way, but I hope they don't try to convert me into a Singaporean in all ways (New citizen from PRC, female, 30+)

- But in my own home, in any area that I don't have to change, I won't change. I will cook according to my own "china" taste-buds. And I will talk like a China person. My accent amongst people of my own nationality is different. I will have two channels that can change according to the people that I hang out with. It had become a habit that I will speak in the Singaporean Channel here. And when I go back to China, I will switch to the Chinese Channel (Singapore PR from PRC, female, 30+)

DISCUSSION

How much integration between new immigrants and local born citizens?

- Data seemingly suggests high friendships in HDB estates (>85%)
- Extent of friendship unclear

Casual friendships insufficient for integration

- casual friendship between new immigrants and local born Singaporeans are probably not sufficient for any serious integration which converts the “outsider” to “insider
- indepth interviews seemed to question how much such casual friendships would challenge the deep-set beliefs, stereotypes and practices of both groups

Home as space to resist dominant culture

- Integration is generally envisaged as leading to some acculturation where immigrants give up former practices and patterns to take on those commonly found in the new society they are in.
- unlikely to occur much since home for new immigrants was the Goffmanian “back stage” where they could live their lives the way they were accustomed to growing up in their countries of origin.
- This dynamic does not augur well for serious integration efforts in the neighbourhood level

No real need for integration because of pre-existing social connections

- Interactions between local born and new immigrants in the neighbourhood might be based on comfort level
- In the case of new immigrants their attachments to fellow immigrants who might live close to them
- pre-existing social connections means less need to build strong friendships with those they are not familiar with.

Inter-race relations more challenging?

- pattern of ties between new immigrants and local born Singaporeans in the neighbourhood follow racial lines

Recommendations

- Ensuring that local born Singaporeans feel there is enough security for them in these key areas is important if they are to be welcoming towards foreign immigrants.

- neighbourhood space is not primarily seen as a place for forging social connections, residents aspire for a peaceful environment to recuperate from the stressors of public life
- This then requires reminders to residents, irrespective of their immigration status, of the obligations of neighbourhood living.
- Broad based programmes to address neighbourliness is important.

THANK YOU