Chapter 14

Public Housing and Community Development: Planning for Urban Diversity in a City-State[1]

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Introduction

Over the last 50 years or so, Singapore's population has expanded from 2.07 million in 1970 to 5.47 million in 2014. More spectacularly, between 1990 and 2010, the population grew by about one million or more each decade. Correspondingly, the population density has also more than doubled from 3,538 per square km in 1970 to 7,615 in 2014 (DOS, 2014:v). This growth has necessitated and is reflected in the proliferation of high-rise apartments across the slightly more than 700 square km-island Republic. Most of these flats were built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB), Singapore's public housing authority. Indeed, official figures indicate that close to 82% of Singapore residents, comprising citizens and those granted permanent residency, live in HDB-built flats, while most of the rest reside in private condominium apartments or landed properties (DOS, 2014:v).

Moreover, notwithstanding the "public housing" label, which may convey a negative impression in some other social contexts, an overwhelming 97% of HDB dwellers live in "sold", as opposed to "rental" properties. Some 77% of residents in the "sold" units live in the larger flat type, ranging from four-room to executive apartments (HDB, 2014:15). These figures are the outcome respectively of the government's home ownership policy, as well as a manifestation of residential and social mobility, which has contributed to a visually homogeneous middle-class society in housing terms (Chua and Tan, 1995:4).

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However, beyond what is immediately observable, and as one gets closer to the ground and data on the profile of residents, it is obvious that the HDB towns, estates, and precincts house a rather heterogeneous population along the dimensions of ethnicity, religion, and even class. What then are the implications of heterogeneity for community building in Singapore, especially given that we are also dealing with an urban context where casual observations often convey the image of closed doors and lack of social interactions among neighbours, and thereby the apparent absence of community, despite people living in close proximity to one another?

Is Community Possible and Alive in the HDB Neighbourhood?

The transformation of the housing and urban landscape commenced in earnest in the 1960s to handle the massive resettlement of the population from kampongs or villages and overcrowded inner-city neighbourhoods with poor infrastructures and provision of utilities and sanitation amenities. While this programme had vastly enhanced the physical comforts of residents, it also involved the rupturing of old neighbourly ties and community, real or imagined.

Indeed, the notion of "loss of community" has been a common theme in the older sociological literature, both local and international (Hassan, 1976; Delanty, 2003). The feeling of nostalgia about community life during "kampong days", perceived positively to be characterised by communal solidarity, social integration, and sense of belonging and involvement (Hassan, 1976:260), is often captured in—or, more correctly, generated by—local popular drama series and writings. These contain an implicit message that it is worth recovering the traditional community life that was lost with the move from kampongs or villages to high-rise, urban living (cf. Delanty, 2003:25). Perhaps, it is also in this spirit that providing citizens with a roof over their heads has turned out to be not the HDB's only mission; the housing authority also aims at community building, a process which corresponds to and reinforces nation building in post-independence Singapore.

Wong and her colleagues (1997:443) observed that "the HDB's housing philosophy has evolved from the emphasis of the early 1960s on providing basic shelter to the present emphasis on providing a total living environment and supporting community development within the housing estates". They also noted that in "the concepts of neighbourhood and precinct planning, the provision of common spaces such as void decks, playgrounds and segmented corridors, have been introduced in order to encourage social interaction among residents who share common facilities", and that "HDB area officers are being trained in community relations and extensive co-operation is given to grass-roots organisations and voluntary agencies to help nurture a community spirit among the residents" (Wong *et al*. 1997:444).

But community-building involving the grafting of people from diverse locations into an urban context can be rather challenging, though not impossible. Wong and her colleagues (1997:444) pointed out that the popular perception is that community existed only in the "idyllic" village or small town, while the urban context, characterised by "the size, density and heterogeneity of the city [which] give rise to a generally impersonal competitive environment", spells the demise of community. Such a view is obviously untenable, given the weight of the evidence. They countered that "sociologists and urban anthropologists have long found the persistence of primary ties, informal groups and well-organised neighbourhoods" in the urban environment (Wong *et al.* 1997:444).

Somewhat similarly, Chua (1997:439) argued that while "the generalized sense of community as in the village is no longer possible", it is "now replaced by much more personalized sentiments localised at a particular void deck or in one's routine routes" in the neighbourhood. In other words, community is not quite dead, but merely reduced in scope and sphere of activities in the modernist, urban environment.

Whatever the form that the HDB community may evolve into in the future, we can expect a fair amount of government intervention, given its importance to nation building and social stability and mobilisation, through the HDB, to ensure that town layouts and amenities contribute towards facilitating social interactions and sense of belonging among residents. At the same time, the People's Association (PA), the government organisation responsible for community development, will continue to develop engagement platforms, as well as encourage ground-up initiatives, to promote social cohesion and ownership through creating opportunities for residents to do things together, be it participation in leisure activities or working on group projects to solve municipal problems (PA, 2014:26). However, whether the community building efforts can maintain the high degree of social cohesion that has already been achieved or, better still, even further strengthen the social fabric in a dynamic social landscape, depend to a large extent on the profile and community orientations of HDB residents, among other factors.

A Multidimensional HDB Social Landscape

One key aspect of the HDB's mission is to house a nation, not merely accommodate a population. It is expected to provide affordable housing to citizens, regardless of race and class, and to facilitate home ownership. This has served to "homogenise" Singapore visually, as well as transform Singapore into a showcase of a middle-class society, though, as noted earlier, heterogeneity is what actually characterised Singapore and the public housing, social landscape.

However the heterogeneity can be reconfigured by the people themselves, through a self-selection process, to produce segregated, homogeneous groupings within distinct

geographical areas. Such an undesirable possibility prompted the HDB to consciously prevent the formation of ethnic enclaves via the "ethnic quota" policy and of class enclaves by locating mixed flat types within the same estate, precinct, and even apartment block. The HDB neighbourhood is therefore, within the limits imposed by the Singapore demographic composition—such as having a large ethnic Chinese majority—clearly a multidimensional social landscape. Besides being multiracial and multi-class, it is also multi-religious and multigenerational. With the stepping up of immigration in recent years, it has become more multi-national as well.[2]

The HDB towns, estates, and precincts[3] are obviously not all multidimensional to the same degree. For instance, in a comparison of HDB towns in 2008,[4] the Central Area, which is classified as a mature town,[5] was found to have the lowest median household income of S$2,979, while a young town like Punggol had the highest median income of S$6,569 (HDB 2010a:52). This income difference could be explained by the fact that the mature town has a higher proportion of elderly residents, who are likely to have less formal education and be economically inactive, and if employed, more likely to be in low skilled jobs, such as "cleaners or labourers" (HDB 2014:49).

Overall, it can be observed that a large majority of HDB residents live in middle-income housing, defined as "four-room or larger flat type". If we use flat type as a crude indicator of class, it can be inferred that the size of the middle class has grown considerably over the last 20 years, rising from 41.3% in 1987 to 77.0% in 2008 and dipping slightly to or perhaps stabilising at 76.3% in 2013 (Table 14.1).

Table 14.2, focusing on education level, also shows a significant increase in the size of the middle class. The proportion of HDB residents aged 15 or older who have attained polytechnic or equivalent diploma or university qualifications rose from 19.9% in 1998 to 31.4% in 2008 and 42.8% in 2013. The proportion with primary or no qualification was somewhat high at 30.5% in 2008, but declined sharply to 15.3% in 2013.

Table 14.3, focusing on occupation level, corresponds to a large extent with that of educational attainment, given the high correlation between these two variables. It can be seen that the proportion of HDB residents among the ranks of professionals, managers, executives, and technicians (PMETs), which may be classified

[2]A "permanent resident quota" policy was also introduced in 2010 to ensure that "no distinctive enclaves of immigrants" emerge on the HDB landscape (Fernandez, 2011:223).

[3]In this paper, "HDB towns, estates, and precincts" refer to the three levels of neighborhood size and organisation, while the term "HDB neighborhood" is used in a generic sense to refer to any of these levels.

[4]The data reported in this paper are primarily from the HDB Sample Household Survey 2008 and 2013 monographs. Figures on some dimensions found in the former are not available in the latter monograph.

[5]Mature towns refer to those built before the 1980s, while young towns are those developed in the 1990s and where construction of new apartments and amenities is still ongoing.

Table 14.1. HDB residents by flat type (%). *Source*: HDB, 2010a:14 and 2014:23.

	HDB residents					
	1987		2008		2013	
Flat type	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%
1-room	6.3		1.2		1.6	
2-room	7.0		2.2		2.8	
3-room	45.4		19.6		19.3	
4-room	29.0	41.3	41.0	77.0	41.1	76.3
5-room	9.9		26.7		26.6	
Executive	1.6		9.3		8.6	
HUDC	0.8		—		—	
Total	100.0		100.0		100.0	

Table 14.2. Employed HDB residents aged 15 or older by education level (%). *Source*: HDB, 2010a:25 and 2014:30.

	HDB residents					
	1998		2008		2013	
Education level	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%
No qualification	11.8	37.7	8.2	30.5	1.5	15.3
Primary	25.9		22.3		13.8	
Secondary	35.4		32.9		33.2	
Upper Secondary	6.9		4.5		8.7	
Polytechnic	10.7	19.9	15.3	31.4	19.0	42.7
University	9.2		16.1		23.7	
Others	0.1		0.7		0.1	
Total	100.0		100.0		100.0	

as middle-class occupations, has increased steadily from 40.4% in 1998 to 45.2% in 2008 and 50.6% in 2013. The latter figure indicates that one of every two HDB residents is middle class.

In regard to income, the indications for 2008 were that 20% of HDB households had income of S$8,000 or higher, while 25% earned below S$2,000 (Table 14.4). The overall picture shows clearly that there has been significant income mobility, though it also points to one of every four HDB households earning less than half of the median household income, and that 8.5%—many of which were "elderly" households—did not have any earned income.

Table 14.3. Employed HDB resident aged 15 or older by occupation (%). *Source*: HDB, 2014:30.

	HDB residents					
	1998		2008		2013	
Occupation	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%
Legislators, Senior Officials, & Managers	10.9	40.4	10.7	45.2	13.3	50.6
Professionals	8.5		11.9		14.5	
Associate Professionals & Technicians	21.0		22.6		22.8	
Clerical Workers	13.6		12.8		12.9	
Service & Sales Workers	12.7		12.6		11.8	
Production Workers	21.2		15.0		11.9	
Cleaners & Labourers	8.1		10.7		9.2	
Others	4.0		3.7		3.6	
Total	100.0		100.0		100.0	

Table 14.4. Monthly household income from work of HDB residents (%). *Source*: HDB, 2010a:55.

	HDB Residents			
	2003		2008	
Monthly household income (S$)	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%
No earned income	10.2	30.1	8.5	24.8
Below 1,000	7.5		4.4	
1,000–1,999	12.4		11.9	
2,000–2,999	17.8		12.3	
3,000–3,999	15.8		12.9	
4,000–4,999	9.3		10.1	
5,000–5,999	7.1		8.6	
6,000–6,999	6.3		6.2	
7,000–7,999	4.1		5.3	
8,000–8,999	2.0	9.7	4.4	19.9
9,000–9,999	2.6		3.1	
10,000 & above	5.1		12.4	
Total	100.0		100.0	

Tables 14.5 and 14.6 confirm that there is some intersection between age and class, using income and house type as crude indicators. It shows that in 2008, elderly households were more likely to be living in one-room or two-room rental flats, compared with non-elderly households: 14.6% and 2.9% respectively. By the same token,

Table 14.5. Flat type by elderly and non-elderly households, 2008 (%). *Source*: HDB, 2010a:62.

	Elderly		Non-elderly	
Flat type	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%
1-room	7.0	14.6	0.8	2.9
2-room	7.6		2.1	
3-room	40.3		21.3	
4-room	30.2		39.3	
5-room	12.3	14.9	27.5	36.6
Executive	2.6		9.1	
Total	100.0		100.0	

Table 14.6. Monthly household income (S$) from work by elderly and non-elderly households, 2008 (%). *Source*: HDB, 2010a:64.

	Elderly		Non-elderly	
Monthly household income (S$)	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%
No earned income	36.3	57.9	2.4	16.6
Below 1,000	7.4		3.0	
1,000–1,999	14.2		11.2	
2,000–2,999	9.5		13.2	
3,000–3,999	9.5		13.9	
4,000–4,999	5.3		11.2	
5,000–5,999	4.4		9.2	
6,000–6,999	3.7		6.7	
7,000–7,999	2.7		5.8	
8,000–8,999	2.1		4.7	
9,000–9,999	1.5		3.5	
10,000 & above	3.4		15.2	
Total	100.0		100.0	

Table 14.7. Monthly household income (S$) from work by ethnicity, 2008 (%). *Source*: HDB, 2010a:55.

Monthly household income (S$)	Chinese		Malay		Indian	
	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%	%	Cum.%
No earned income	8.8		6.6		8.1	
Below 1,000	4.2		5.3		4.9	
1,000–1,999	11.3	48.7	15.8	57.8	12.3	51.3
2,000–2,999	11.8		15.2		12.5	
3,000–3,999	12.6		14.9		13.5	
4,000–4,999	9.7		12.4		10.6	
5,000–5,999	8.5		8.8		8.8	
6,000–6,999	6.1		7.4		5.6	
7,000–7,999	5.4		4.1		5.4	
8,000–8,999	4.6		3.2		4.1	
9,000–9,999	3.4	21.7	1.7	9.5	2.2	18.5
10,000 & above	13.7		4.6		12.2	
Total	100.0		100.0		100.0	

57.9% of elderly households were found in the below-S$2,000 income bracket, compared with 16.6% in the case of non-elderly households. Significantly, slightly more than a third of elderly households had no earned income.

Another correlation to note is that between race and class—again using income as a crude indicator of class. Table 14.7 shows that in 2008, 57.8% of Malay households earned less than the median household income, compared with 48.7% for the Chinese, and 51.3% in the case of Indian households. On the upper segments of the income ladder, it can be observed that 21.7% of Chinese households earned S$8,000 or more in 2008, while the comparative figures for Malay and Indian households were 9.5% and 18.5% respectively.

The final diversity to be highlighted here is that of nationality. Currently, about two of every five persons living in Singapore are foreigners, including about half a million permanent residents, but excluding those who have become naturalised citizens (DOS, 2014:v). Unfortunately, I do not have the figures on the nationalities of HDB residents; hence, as a crude approximation, I shall refer to the Census 2010 data, which refer to the entire Singapore population. Table 14.8 shows the significant presence of residents hailing from East Asia (China, Hong Kong, and Macau), South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka), and Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, and 0.7 per cent from Europe, North America, or Australia and New Zealand. The majority of non-Singapore born residents originated from Malaysia.

Table 14.8. Resident population by place of birth, 2010. *Source*: DOS, 2010.

Place of birth	%
Singapore	77.2
Malaysia	10.2
China, Hong Kong, Macau	4.6
South Asia	3.3
Indonesia	1.4
Other Asian countries	2.4
Europe	0.4
North America	0.2
Australia and New Zealand	0.1
Others	0.1
Total	100.0

These figures do resonate with casual observations of any heavy human traffic space, such as hawker centres, shopping malls, and bus terminals, in a HDB town regarding the diverse "nationality" composition of residents.

From the above analysis, the image we form of the HDB neighbourhood is that it is largely middle-class—broadly defined to include residents with tertiary qualifications, PMET occupations, or above median level household incomes—with small pockets of low or no earned income elderly households or ethnic minority residents living in one- or two-room rental flats (HDB 2014:xiv). However, the middle class, being a broad category, can be fairly heterogeneous itself.

Does Diversity Spell Social Tension and Conflict?

Having described the multidimensional diversity of the HDB resident population, a critical question to ask is which one of these scenarios best characterises the HDB neighbourhood: prevalence of social tension and conflict involving opposing values and interests; apparent presence of social harmony produced by strong state intervention in society; or the emergence of community brought about by the forging of social ties and the accumulation of social capital across the diverse social landscape?

Data from my (Tan, 2004:36–37) 2001 survey indicate that, among Singaporeans, 85% had "friends from lower income groups", while 11% said they did not. Slightly less impressive were the figures on having "friends from higher income groups". Seventy-seven percent had friends who are of a higher class than themselves, compared with 18% who did not. A high proportion of Singaporeans, 47%, and 60% of

those who identified themselves as "lower class", also indicated that "successful people in Singapore tend to look down on the less successful ones".

With regard to inter-ethnic relations, 21% of Singaporeans indicated that they did not have "close friends of a different race". It was also shown that older people are less likely to have "close friends of a different race", compared with younger people. In addition, Singaporeans with lower education have fewer "close friends of a different race" than those with higher education. This finding is also true of the majority Chinese, compared with their counterparts among the ethnic minorities in Singapore, who are more likely to interact across ethnic lines (Tan, 2004: 38–39). The broad picture painted here is reinforced by a more recent survey which indicates that 23% of Singaporeans agreed that they "don't have much in common with Singaporeans of other races" (Tan and Koh, 2010).

The same recent survey also casts some light on the challenges confronting citizen-immigrant integration. It shows that two thirds of Singaporeans felt that the "policy to attract more foreign talent will weaken Singaporeans' feeling of one nation, one people". The proportion with a "negative" inclination towards foreign talent was highest among those in the smaller house type or with low income, declining from 72% among those living in one- to three-room HDB flats to 49% among those residing in private properties.

Singaporeans are somewhat more accommodating towards immigrants when they consider the latter's importance to the economy. Specifically, two thirds of Singaporeans, as reflected in the survey, agreed that the "Government is right to increase the number of foreigners working in Singapore if our economy needs it". However, the proportion who disagreed with the statement was, not unexpectedly, highest among those living in the smaller house type or with lower income, decreasing from 45% among the one- to three-roomers, to 24% among those residing in private properties.

Within the HDB towns or estates, a similar pattern can also be discerned. The proportion of HDB residents who perceived that the foreigners in their midst were integrating well was 44.3%, as compared with 25.9% who thought otherwise. Like the findings from the national survey reported above, HDB residents with higher education, living in larger house types, and younger in age were more likely to perceive foreigners in a positive light (HDB 2010b:66).

Notwithstanding some of the "negative" indicators highlighted above, I would argue that, given what we know of Singapore over the last 50 years, it would not be justifiable to suggest that the country is characterised by, or prone to, class, ethnic, religious, or citizen-immigrant conflict. If anything, the "positive" figures generally outweigh the "negative" ones. This is not to deny that individuals may, to different extents, harbour prejudices and practise some subtle form of discrimination against people of another class, race, age, or nationality, as manifested in snide, even toxic,

remarks reflecting negative stereotypes in response to specific events which have "gone viral" on social media; or, occasionally, experience unhappiness over nuisances committed by neighbours (HDB, 2014:23).

However, despite the largely positive atmosphere in the HDB social landscape, it is plausible to suggest that the diversity remains potentially a source of social tension or conflict; hence, the need for vigilance and community building. Take for instance a 25% "negative" figure, as compared to 75% "positive", with respect to how Singaporeans feel about migrants in Singapore. While this is a statistical minority, it can be rather significant, given that it reflects the views of almost 800,000 people, equivalent to the population size of three major HDB towns combined (HDB 2010a:15). This to some extent explains why the state continually emphasises social integration even with the much taken-for-granted prevalence of harmony and stability in Singapore. It should be reiterated that integration is more than just about the absence of conflict, or even the presence of harmony, which could be achieved through coercive measures; rather it goes much further, seeking to promote understanding, acceptance, connection, and collaboration across social divides.

Community Orientations of HDB Residents

Apart from examining the social profile of HDB residents, another dimension which may have a strong bearing on community development in the HDB towns, estates, and precincts is that of their "community orientations". The latter concept "captures" how residents relate to their neighbourhood, including the extent to which their daily routines take place within its boundaries. Specifically, it affects the probability of their developing a sense of belonging, ownership, rootedness, and commitment, and thereby the propensity to contribute to community building.

Sense of Community

Community orientations may be gauged in terms of two dimensions: that of commitment to community, and thereby directly or indirectly contributing to its development; and participation or involvement in daily or community activities as well as neighbourly relations. The HDB Sample Household Survey (SHS) 2013 (HDB, 2014: 15) indicates that an overwhelming majority of residents engaged in less intense forms of neighbourly interactions, such as exchange greetings and casual conversations, while more than half went further to "exchange food/gifts on special occasions", and a third, to "visit one another", or "keep watch over (each other's) flat". The HDB survey also found that the ethnic minorities were more likely to engage in the more intense forms of neighbourly interactions, and that length of residence and

age of residents are positively related to increase in mutual help between neighbours (HDB, 2014:21). Another important indicator is that 85.7% of HDB residents interacted across ethnic, nationality, or both ethnic and nationality lines in 2013 (HDB, 2014:19).

Similarly, the sense of community score has remained consistently high, though rising only slightly over the years, from 70.0% in 2003 to 73.2% in 2013 (HDB, 2014:32). Overall, the indication is that there is a strong sense of community in the HDB neighbourhood, whether at the precinct, estate or town level, and that two variables—age of residents and length of residence—have a positive effect on its magnitude.

A Typology of Community Orientations

Besides the broad picture outlined above, it might be useful to develop a typology relating social characteristics and community orientations. I would hypothesise, based on non-systematic observations, that we could identify the following four possible types of community orientations.

Among the HDB residents, probably the least committed to the neighbourhood would be the subtenants and rental tenants, since they are in transition, whether short or long term. However, this orientation does not necessarily render them visually invisible, especially if they are non-Singaporeans and likely to congregate with their fellow nationals in neighbourhood facilities, such as basketball courts, coffee shops, or shopping malls, possibly giving rise to an impression that they constitute an enclave of sort. The high visibility may have the unintended effect of enhancing the "negative" feeling which some Singaporeans may hold towards the foreigners in their midst. But, on a more positive note, there is also a fair amount of interactions between Singaporeans and foreign nationals in the HDB neighbourhood, thereby contributing to some extent to social cohesion and community development.

The second type of orientations is that of non-Singaporean HDB residents, but who are non-tenants, comprising foreign domestic workers. Given the nature of their job, they spend the most time in the estate, and are likely to form their social networks among fellow domestic workers from other households in the neighbourhood. Their daily activities, whether they involve looking after elderly persons, bringing young children to and from kindergarten, buying groceries at the wet market, or taking the family pet for a walk, present many opportunities for interactions with others who frequent or operate in the same public space or route, thereby contributing to community building in the neighbourhood.

The third type relates to that of HDB residents who are elderly persons, housewives, and young children. They may be owners, occupiers, or tenants of a flat. They are likely to spend much of their time in the estate, and have established their own

social networks through their daily routines, which may be similar to that of foreign domestic workers, for instance, mothers sending their young children to kindergarten or school, housewives shopping in a nearby wet market or supermarket, elderly persons chatting at the void deck on the ground floor, elderly men having a drink and discussing politics with friends at a coffee shop, or young children, under the watchful eyes of their mothers or foreign domestic workers, using the playground.

The fourth type of orientations is that of older teenagers, and young and working adults. They are likely to spend the least time in the estate due to study or job responsibilities. However, this does not necessarily mean that they would possess the weakest commitment to the community. Moreover, given their educational and occupational profile, they would have the capabilities and, potentially, the commitment to provide leadership in the community-building process. There are indeed some data on social capital in the HDB neighbourhood which indicate that younger residents, households in higher income brackets, and those living in the larger flat types, or with higher educational attainment, tend to score higher on reciprocity and trust, two key components of social capital measures (HDB, 2010b:25–34).

Social Capital in the HDB Neighbourhood

As implied above, social capital is another angle by which to gauge the presence and extent of community. This concept may be operationalised for use as a measure not only of social distance, but, more importantly, also the degree of connection and collaboration among HDB residents. Broadly speaking, to the extent that social capital, embedded in both bonding and bridging ties, is present, we could expect a community in the making populated by residents who possess some sense of identity, belonging, and ownership, and having the potential to produce a secure, stable living environment where residents look out for one another and contribute towards the collective good.

Social capital is therefore an attractive concept from the perspective of housing policy and governance. Not surprisingly, it was given much prominence in the research efforts of the HDB. Its Sample Household Survey (SHS) 2008 report also provides a rather comprehensive definition of the concept as follows:

> "Social capital refers to the accumulation of people's trust, confidence and shared relationships with one another in both formal and informal settings. It has both an individual and a collective dimension… At the individual level, it refers to the resources available to a person, through his networks of relationships with informal groups (e.g., family members, relatives, neighbours, colleagues)…and formal institutions (e.g., community and government agencies)…which can facilitate and enable the pursuit of his objectives. At the community level, social capital refers to the collective strength of individuals' social networks, along with related attributes, which facilitates (and enables) the pursuit of collective or shared objectives" (HDB, 2010b:14).

The SHS 2008 found that, on a scale of 0 ("Not at All") to 10 ("Completely"), HDB residents have mean social capital scores of above 6 (Table 14.9). If we conceive of social capital scores as valid indicators of social health, or the extent to which community is taking shape—and there are strong theoretical and empirical bases for doing so—then we have good reasons to be optimistic that the HDB neighbourhood is becoming more of a community over the years. However, it should be noted that family, kinship, and friendship ties, in terms of trust and reciprocity, remain stronger and more extensive than that of neighbourly ties (Tables 14.10 and 11). In regard to social integration, a positive sign is that 77% of HDB residents are interacting across ethnic and/or nationality lines (Table 14.12).

Table 14.9. Social capital scores of HDB residents (Mean score). *Source*: HDB, 2010b:20.

Components of social capital	Mean score
Trust in informal & generalized networks	6.4
Reciprocity in informal & generalized networks	6.5
Confidence in institutions	6.8
Average size of informal networks	61 persons

Table 14.10. Norms of trust in informal and generalised networks (Mean score). *Source*: HDB, 2010b:20.

Network	Mean Score
Family members	9.0
Relatives	7.2
Friends who are not neighbours	6.3
Friends who are neighbours	6.1
Neighbours in general	4.9
Overall score	6.4

Table 14.11. Size of informal networks (Mean number). *Source*: HDB, 2010b:22.

Network	Mean number of people
Family members	7
Relatives	17
Friends who are not neighbours	24
Friends who are neighbours	6
Neighbours in general	10
Overall score	61

Table 14.12. Interaction with neighbours across ethnic and nationality lines (%). *Source*: HDB, 2010b:43.

Type of interaction	%
Interacted across ethnic lines	60.3
Interacted across nationality lines	2.0
Interacted across both ethnic and nationality lines	14.7
No interaction across ethnic and/or nationality lines	23.0

Concluding Remarks

The discussion and findings mobilised above indicate that while the HDB landscape is heterogeneous, with some social divides, it is, by and large, not characterised by social tension and conflict. The harmony has been brought about by policies and measures aimed at promoting social integration through both town designs which facilitate interactions as well as programmes and activities which encourage participation, connection and collaboration. This harmony is undergirded by the core values of fairness and multiracialism, which are regularly reinforced and consistently enforced by a strong state, to prevent any seeds of tension from germinating, let alone taking root. The HDB neighbourhood has therefore been created and nurtured to become an epitome of more than just a decent physical living space, but increasingly a community and an important contributor to nation building in Singapore.

However, notwithstanding the positive report, one should not assume that the community is able to last indefinitely on its own. In the age of globalisation, we can expect changes to the demographic profile, and challenges to our core values. This entails a robust response in terms of strengthening social capital, adaptation to changing conditions, but rejection of values which threaten our social fabric and welfare.

At the same time, if the desire is to build community from the ground up, it makes sense to encourage those with the capacity for leadership to step forward. In my view, this capacity is already present among those with higher educational and occupational attainment, but they may not have the time due to school, work or familial responsibilities. Perhaps, a practical approach is to customise or calibrate the time commitment required to match individual schedules. This facilitates participation from a larger pool, and the possibility that involvement can produce its own momentum for further involvement.

Secondly, allowing for and encouraging voice and civic participation would strengthen sense of belonging and ownership among residents and thereby community. Given the rise in the education level of residents, we would expect the capacity and propensity for civic participation to expand as well. A likely consequence of civic participation is that HDB residents would increasingly see themselves less as customers to be served, but more as empowered stakeholders with a responsibility to serve the community.

Thirdly, strengthening the sense of security among citizens would enhance their acceptance of migrants and foreigners in their midst, thereby contributing to social integration.

Finally, even as Singapore emphasises self-reliance as a value, it is important to pay attention to inculcating mutual support within a caring community as a counterbalance. This is because a community is established on networks of interdependency, rather than a collection of self-sufficient individuals.

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