

# What are the Experiences and Effects of Living in a Diverse Society?

## Interactions in a Diverse Society and Common Space

**Common space** refers to a physical location and/or a social space where different groups of people interact, cooperate or collaborate on projects or activities. Such interactions allow people to do the following:

- Forge ties and establish mutual understanding between people of different races, ethnicities, religions and socio-economic statuses.
- Create shared experiences and memories.

### **Void Decks**

Void decks are the open and sheltered areas on the group floor of most blocks of flats built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB). Void decks provide opportunities for residents to meet, interact and bond.

Common spaces also include social spaces. Examples of social spaces are social and cultural events, and programmes where people can engage and develop relationships with one another. These events and programmes can be organised by governmental and non-governmental organisations to promote interaction and build understanding among different groups of people.

### **Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCCs)**

The IRCCs were first established in 2002 to serve as an inter-faith platform. IRCCs are formed in every constituency to promote racial and religious harmony among different religious, ethnic and community groups.

On 30 July 2022, the IRCCs were renamed as Racial and Religious Harmony Circles. It continues to deepen the work of building trust, understanding and confidence among various communities through activities that promote inter-faith and inter-ethnic interactions.

### **People's Association (PA)**

The PA aims to promote racial harmony and social cohesion in Singapore. It offers a wide range of community service, sports and cultural programmes that help connect people to people, and people with the government. These programmes are carried out through a network of over 2,000 grassroots organisations, over 100 Community Clubs/Centres (CCs), five Community Development Councils, the National Community Leadership Institute and PAssion WaVe.

## **Experiences and Effects of Living in a Diverse Society**

An attitude of **openness** or being open-minded helps promote harmonious interactions in a diverse society. When people are open-minded, they are more willing to actively listen, respectfully engage and appreciate the differences between one another.

### **Just an Extra Chair!**

Just An Extra Chair is an initiative organised by the Singaporean Kindness Movement. Singaporeans who are willing, host guests during festive celebrations. Most of the guests are foreigners working or studying in Singapore who would otherwise spend festive seasons alone.

During the Chinese New Year, Mr McRhon Banderlipe, an expatriate from the Philippines, and two other guests joined Ms Sia Yan Dih and her family for dinner.

## **Cultural Exchange and Appreciation**

One outcome of cultural exchange is a deeper understanding and appreciation of the customs and traditions of Singapore's diverse ethnic groups. Different ethnic groups have their own cultures and ways of life, which are commonly reflected in their rituals, greetings, art and music. These aspects have been developed over a long time and have become integral to the identity and cohesion of the people within the ethnic group.

### **The Lion Dance**

The lion dance is a performance dating back to more than 1,500 years. This custom is believed to have originated from the legends of Nian, a monster that terrorised a village in China. The villagers discovered its fear of lions and loud noises and successfully scared the monster off. Today, the lion dance continues to be performed during Chinese celebrations and auspicious occasions as it is believed to bring good fortune.

Cultural exchange also helps deepen understanding and appreciation of uniqueness, commonalities, and differences among people. This can enable people to build meaningful relationships with others from different backgrounds, and to learn from their ideas, experiences and cultures.

### **Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Youth Fellowship (AYF)**

Cultural exchanges can take place through programmes such as the ASEAN AYF. Through the AYF, ASEAN Youth Fellows commit themselves to forging closer partnerships and strengthening connections with young ASEAN leaders from across the region. They also commit to enacting positive change within communities and countries in ASEAN.

Cultural exchange can also deepen one's appreciation of other cultures and contribute to shaping the local cultural and arts landscape.

### **Dr Iskandar Jalil**

Inspired by Dr Iskandar's time in Japan, he integrates Japanese and Islamic styles into his pottery. His art is influenced by *wabi-sabi*, a Japanese approach to life that sees beauty in imperfections and in the passing of time. This is reflected by Dr Iskandar's pottery, which showcases natural weathering and imperfections. His pottery is found in many public and private art collections in Singapore and around the world.

Cultural exchange and appreciation can also result in **cultural fusion**.

### **Ms Oniatta Effendi**

In Ms Oniatta's designs, she incorporates classically Javanese motifs, including the *parang*, *kawung* and *wahyu temurun* together with contemporary patterns such as the Japanese-influenced *sashiko* motif.

When one culture adopts some aspects from another culture, it is important to acknowledge and give recognition to that culture. When the language, cuisine, music, dance or dress of a culture is used without permission or portrayed in an insensitive manner, it is known as **cultural appropriation**.

### **The Oma Ethnic Minority Group (Laos)**

In 2019, a large Italian company plagiarised the traditional designs of the Oma ethnic minority group in their clothing collection. The company digitally duplicated and printed the designs onto their dresses, skirts and blouses. The colours, shapes and arrangement were identical to the traditional Oma designs.

The company was called out for cultural appropriation. People pointed out that simply scanning and printing the traditional designs on clothing was disrespectful to the Oma people, who take the time, skill and patience to create their homemade textiles. Furthermore, the company did not acknowledge the Oma in their marketing, labelling or display of the clothing collection, nor did they provide any compensation to the Oma.

## **Exchange of Knowledge and Skills**

A diverse society like Singapore's brings together people with different backgrounds, qualifications and experiences to share their share their knowledge and skills. An outcome of this exchange is the creation of new ideas, methods and products.

## **Thermo Fisher Scientific**

Thermo Fisher is a multinational company with over 2,000 employees in Singapore and 80,000 employees globally as of 2021. **(1)** Singaporeans in the company are trained in leadership skills and encouraged to collaborate with employees from different cultures and with different experiences and expertise. **(2)** Such collaborations enable employees to sharpen their skills by sharing and learning from one another. It also allows younger technicians to be mentored to produce high-quality equipment. **(3)**

The company also collaborates with Singapore-based design firms, universities and research institutions, such as A-STAR, to support their R&D in a wide range of areas, including genetics and cancer research. **(4)** Thermo Fisher played a critical role in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. It collaborated with the Ministry of Health (MOH) **(5)**, Temasek Holdings **(6)** and the Economic Development Board (EDB) **(7)** in the production of personal protective equipment (PPE) and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) kits. **(8)**

## **Prejudice**

Prejudice refers to attitudes and feelings towards other groups that are not based on reason or fact. It can come in the form of stereotyping, assumptions, generalisations, beliefs or feelings about a group.

## Discrimination

In June 2021, an interracial couple comprising a man of Indian and Filipino-Spanish descent and his girlfriend of Thai-Chinese descent were strolling along Orchard Road. A local Chinese man confronted the couple and accused the man of "preying on a Chinese girl" and ordered him to "date people of his own race."

Later, in a social media post, the couple shared that they felt embarrassed and hurt by the way they were treated by a fellow Singaporean. They added that while the Chinese man admitted to being a racist, they hoped that he would learn to stop being racist and allow everyone to live in harmony. The Chinese man was later fired from his job as a polytechnic lecturer and was charged in court for his actions.

## Competition for Resources

The inflow of foreigners into Singapore is meant to meet Singapore's shortage of manpower due to its low fertility rate and ageing population. This foreign workforce consists of highly-skilled, high-wage earners and lesser-skilled, low-wage workers.

## Employment Passes in Singapore

Employment Pass	S Pass	Work Permit for Migrant Workers	Work Permit for Migrant Domestic Workers
For foreign professionals, managers and executives earning at least \$4,500 a month with suitable qualifications.	For mid-level skilled workers earning at least \$2,500 a month who meet the assessment criteria.	For semi-skilled migrant workers in the construction, manufacturing, marine shipyard, process or services sector.	For foreigners employed as domestic helpers in Singapore.

Singaporeans are concerned about the heightened competition with foreigners over limited resources. These resources include job opportunities and **infrastructure** such as public housing and transportation.

This competition, whether real or perceived, has led to tensions, unhappiness and negative experiences among groups of people in the country.

In 2020, a survey conducted by REACH, a governmental feedback unit, found that Singaporeans generally agreed it was important for Singapore to be regional hub as it provides good opportunities for Singaporeans. This also means remaining open to foreigners.

However, concerns over job security and career opportunities have continued to be source of anxiety for Singaporeans, especially among the unemployed.

## Addressing Concerns About Foreigners in Singapore

### Stricter Workforce Controls

- **Tightened the criteria for Employment Pass (EP)** resulting in slower growth in the number of EP holders each year.
- **Raised the minimum qualifying salary for the S Pass** to keep pace with rising wages. This means that a foreigner needs to earn a higher minimum salary before they can be considered for a pass.

Responding to Singaporeans' concerns over the competition posed by foreigners in the job market, the government has implemented the Fair Consideration Framework. Under this framework, measures are put in place to promote local hiring and ensure that employers give fair consideration to Singaporeans based on merit. For example:

- Employers submitting EP and S Pass applications must first advertise their job vacancies on MyCareersFuture, an online portal that facilitates job searches for Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents.
- Action is enforced against errant employers who carry out unfair hiring practices that favour foreigners.



## Addressing Infrastructure Concerns

### **Land Transport Master Plan 2040**

- Connecting more places by train
- Priority for buses
- Autonomous, on-demand services
- More cycling paths
- More Integrated Transport Hubs