

# Engaging Seniors in Community Building: The Bukit Panjang Resident Gardener Programme

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Singaporean seniors are a heterogeneous demographic that hold a wide and complex basket of ideas and concerns about what constitutes “successful ageing”.

This study investigates the central role that horticulture and landscaping, which I view as a kind of what the sociologist Robert Stebbins (2020) terms as serious leisure pursuit and devotee work, had played for a group of senior landscapers in the Bukit Panjang Town Council’s (BPTC) Resident Gardener Programme. Drawing upon participant-observation fieldwork and semi-structured interviews carried out in 2020 with 16 resident gardeners aged between 60 and 81, I discuss how they formed and maintained social connections with each other and the wider Bukit Panjang community through their pursuits of horticulture and landscaping. Particularly, I highlight how their shared backgrounds of being former farmers in evicted villages fuelled the construction of a “kampung spirit” that encouraged and maintained communal connections in old age, and provided innovative ways of rethinking models of senior employment straddling concepts of leisure and work.

## **Social Connection and Community in Ageing Singapore**

Singapore’s population is rapidly ageing, and seniors increasingly live apart from their children (Department of Statistics 2020). While the overarching position of the Government remains to emphasise the continued economic participation of seniors, and the provision of social and financial support by the family, it has also taken concrete policy action to address issues related to ageing. Most notably, the Government has rolled out the Pioneer and Merdeka Generation Programmes for those born before 1960. However, the programmes’ healthcare focus has also meant less attention on other areas of seniors’ well-being, with only the Merdeka Generation Package offering a one-off \$100 credit for “active ageing programs”. Thus, there remains much leeway towards offering greater support for long-term sustained involvement in pursuits that promote active engagements in old age.