

A Frame Analysis of Singapore's Population Policies

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Background

- Singapore's total population has grown by over 4 million since 1960 and is expected to continue to grow, but at a slower pace between 2020 to 2050 (Population Division I United Nations, 2020).
- This predicted growth is mainly driven by policies which encourage immigration to the region.
- Population growth through immigration has been a major source of tension for Singaporeans.
- In 2013, large-scale protests took place following the endorsement of population plans in parliament.
- In these plans, it was suggested that the population of Singapore would grow by almost 30% between 2013 and 2030 mostly via foreign workers (National Population and Talent Division, 2013).
- Protesters galvanized around discontent over high-income inequality, rising property prices as well as living costs which many locals blame immigration for worsening (BBC News, 2013).

Research Objectives

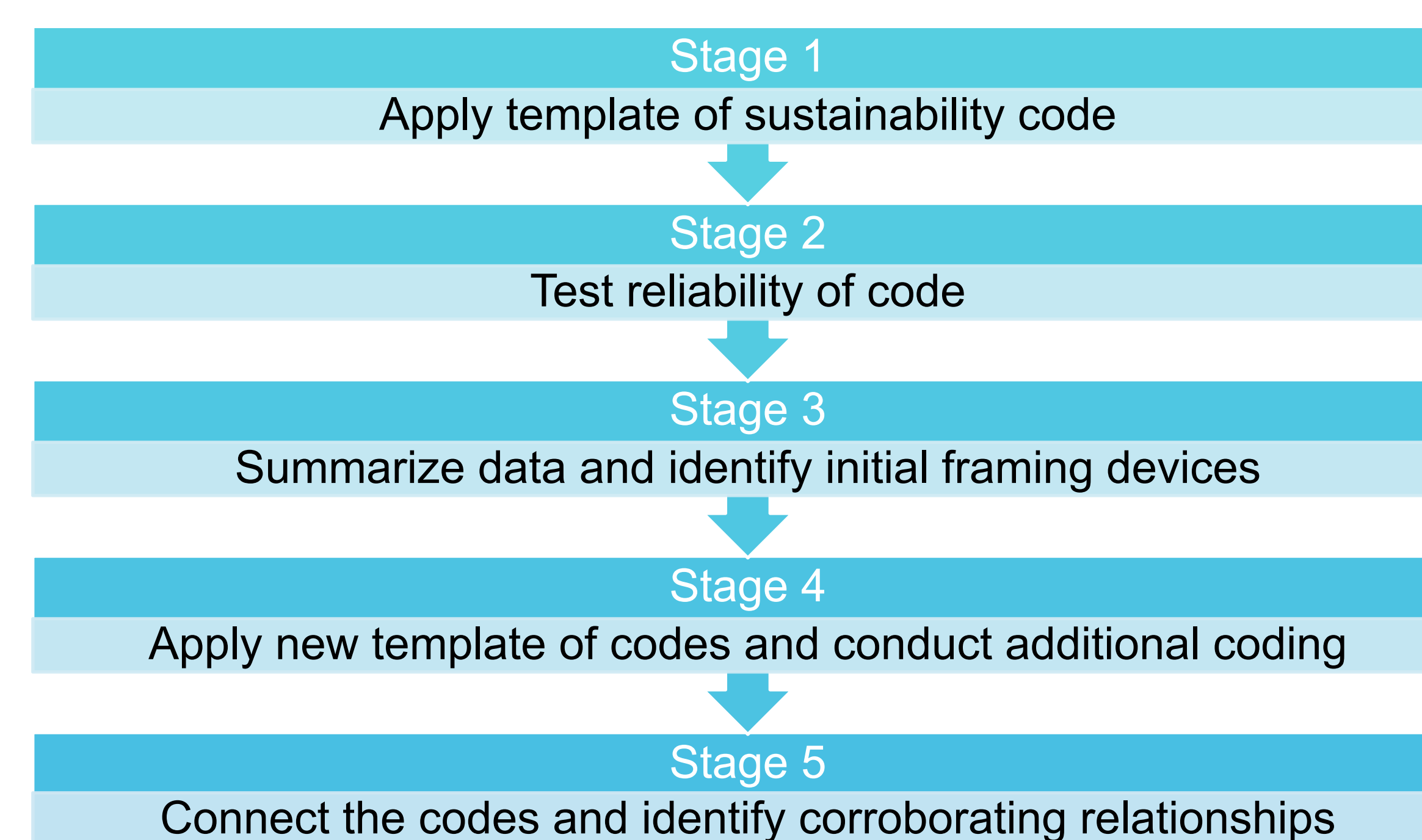
- Identify how the concept of sustainability is used as a frame in Singapore's population policies.
- Evaluate what the usage of sustainability in population policies is intended to convey or obscure.
- This research is important to sustainability given the varied usage of the term and often strategic usage of the concept to justify decisions and initiatives.

Key Takeaways

- The concept of sustainability is intended to highlight as much as it is intended to obscure.
- The government is not actually trying to achieve sustainability through population policies.
- Sustainability-related terms are being rhetorically used to justify population policies which will support initiatives intended to maintain economic growth as a pathway.

Methodology

The document analyzed was a White Paper entitled "A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore" published in 2013. A hybrid approach of deductive and inductive coding in NVivo was used to identify framing devices. Stages using deductive coding focused on identifying instances where the concept of sustainability is mentioned/discussed, while latter stages aimed to identify framing devices, i.e., concepts, key words, themes, etc., used to enforce the original frame of sustainability.



Discussion

Existing literature suggested that sustainability has never been at the forefront of population concerns in Singapore, rather it is a concept that has been used to justify elements of economic growth and planning strategies such as filling workforce gaps via immigration. The results tended to support what existing literature states about whether sustainability is considered in population policies, and if it is considered, how it is framed. Additionally, within the larger context of the population's existing sensitivities towards such policies, the results make sense.

Results

- Sustainability as a frame is being used to highlight or enforce other themes and concepts. This includes immigration, demographic shifts, economic growth, national identity, and quality of life.
- Sustainability-related terms were used in the document as a bridge to explain the need for specific objectives or initiatives that the government is advocating for.
- Out of the 20 cases identified, economic growth was the framing device that occurred the most frequently (12/20), while the most common framing device pair was economic growth and quality of life (8/20).
- Typically, sentences where a sustainability-related term was identified had a particular structure. This being one where in some cases the broader context or issue at hand was discussed followed by a specification of either or both a pathway and an outcome. The most common pathway and outcome combination was economic growth and quality of life respectively.

Framing Device	Definition
Immigration	Process by which individuals become new citizens or permanent residents of Singapore (mainly through employment).
Demographic Shifts	Naturally occurring changes in the composition and characteristics of Singapore's population.
Economic Growth	Efforts to increase the amount of economic goods and/or services being produced by Singapore over time.
National Identity	Common sense of belonging to Singapore as a country despite the holding of distinct individual cultural-related characteristics by people.
Quality of Life	Perceptions of Singaporeans related to their expectations around and ability to pursue aspirational goals comfortably because of their living environment.

