

# Identifying and defining cultural codes

Cultural codes are shortcuts that we use to understand and communicate with people from our own culture. Cultural codes can be used to identify and reinforce the shared values of the majority community. They can serve as a mechanism for inclusion and exclusion. These codes can include (but are not limited to):

- **rules of behavior and politeness**
  - o How do you greet people?
  - o How do you end a conversation?
  - o How do you say yes or no politely?
- **formality and informality**
  - o What is appropriate dress for different occasions?
  - o Do you use honorifics and titles when addressing people of certain rank or position?
- **social distance**
  - o How do people treat the elderly or children?
  - o Are there class distinctions in dress, behaviour, etc.?
  - o To what extent do people from different ethnic and religious identities interact on those bases?
- **public versus private space**
  - o Who is included in the family?
  - o What information can I share with others?
  - o Who is welcome in your home and under what conditions?
- **relationship to food**
  - o When and what meals do people eat throughout the day?
  - o What foods are considered taboo or cannot be consumed together?
  - o How is food used to show hospitality?
- **humor**
  - o What is funny and why?
  - o What is taboo and cannot be discussed or joked about?
- **gender relations**
  - o What are men and women's roles in the family, community, etc.?
  - o Do men and women dress and act differently?
  - o How do men and women interact with each other?
  - o How do people flirt?
- **linguistic conventions**
  - o How do people express their social positions in language?
  - o How do you use language in different modes of communication (email, text message, phone, etc.)?

## Task:

What are the cultural codes that one needs to know to 'fit in' in Toulouse?

Imagine that a foreign student has just arrived in Toulouse. What important cultural codes would you share with this student to help him or her integrate? In your group, brainstorm a list of insider tips to share with this student. Be prepared to present your tips to the rest of the class.