

# SSP Inaugural Workshop on “The Impact of Social Science on Social Policy in Singapore”

Singapore, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2013



A/P Tan Ern Ser, the SSP steering committee and academician of Department of Sociology in the FASS-NUS was chairing the first panel discussion

The Social Science and Policy (SSP) Research Cluster, the newest cluster in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)-NUS organized an inaugural workshop entitled ‘The Impact of Social Science on Policy Research in Singapore’ on March 4<sup>th</sup> 2013. It was a conversation forum for practitioners, academicians and client representatives to share their experience of using social science in policy research.

Assoc. Prof Ho Kong Chong of the Department of Sociology and Vice Dean of Research in the FASS-NUS was giving the opening remarks and shared his view on how policy makers draw from the social science in areas of intelligence and monitoring for government data collection and tactical research to obtain alternative interpretations.

This half day workshop comprised of two panel sessions. The first panel discussed the contribution of social science to policy research conducted in the recent years. In the first panel, A/P Paulin Straughan, the practitioner as well as academician of the Department of Sociology in the FASS-NUS was sharing her perspectives and research on ‘the relevance of social science in public policy’. She discussed the contribution of social sciences, the significance and also the challenges for applied social research, using sociological study on littering behavior. After that, Dr. Irene Ng, the academician of the Department of Social Works in the FASS-NUS was presenting her research on ‘the impact of social science on social policy in Singapore: applications in work support evaluation’, with specific investigation on the low income families in Singapore. The last panelist at the first panel, Ms. Charlotte Beck, the director of Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) was presenting ‘the government perspective on the contribution of social science on social policy’. She shared information on the category of social research projects conducted under the MSF, previously called MCYS (Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports), and announced that MSF has opened up its report based data on official statistics, censuses and surveys to public for social policy research use. She also spoke on the importance of connecting the academic curriculum offered in Singapore tertiary education with the application of social science and policy research or the needs of community in Singapore.

She welcomed more links between academia and policy makers and suggested building strong partnership between academicians, practitioners and policy makers in developing social science and policy research.



(From left) A/P Straughan of the Department of Sociology, Dr. Irene Ng of the Department of Social Work and Ms. Beck at the first panel in the workshop conducted by the Social Science and Policy Cluster



(From left) Dr. Hui Yew Foong, Dr Leong Chan Hoong, and Dr Justin Lee at the second panel in the workshop.

The second panel discussed several topics on how social science could inform policy research dealing with current issues confronting Singapore. Dr. Leong Chan Hoon, the senior research fellow from the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), was sharing his views and experience of using psychological research in policy studies. He spoke on the need of changing mindsets to reduce the significant gap between the social science approach which is mainly theory-driven and nuisance attention and the public policy approach which is mainly problem-focus, pragmatism and observable-data-reliance, not feelings. Dr. Hui Yew Foong, the senior research fellow from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) was presenting his research on the heritage issue, particularly Bukit Brown Cemetery, in relation to policy research in Singapore. He suggested that the heritage site should be studied in term of meaning accrued to the social-cultural life and landscape. The last panelist speaking in the workshop, Dr. Justin Ng, the senior manager of research and strategy development in the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) was sharing his views on how to design 'a research ecosystem conducive for solving problems and creating social impact'.

The workshop has received good responses from the participants and indeed successfully served its purpose as an interactive forum for a dialogue between academicians, practitioners and policy makers in Singapore.