

IPS Reflects on the Year Gone By

By *IPS Researchers*

In 2013, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) commemorated its silver jubilee. Beyond its 25th anniversary gala dinner, highlights from the year include a number of significant milestones and projects. Here are reflections on the year gone by from IPS' various research clusters:

ARTS, CULTURE AND MEDIA

Making Sense of Corrosive Speech and Harassment

As Singaporeans spend more time posting and sharing information online, they are increasingly exposed to diverse experiences, both positive and negative. As a medium, the Internet is a paradox of the good and bad, gains and risks, opportunities and constraints.

In 2012, researchers from the IPS Arts, Culture and Media cluster commenced a study on corrosive speech. It was timely as multiple online cases of anti-foreigner and racist speech had given rise to much anxieties and concerns regarding their causes and effects.

With the objectives of analysing the nature of corrosive speech present in public discourse and developing policy recommendations, the researchers conducted a content analysis of popular websites and interviews with website editors. In March 2013, the findings were presented in a closed-door seminar. Academics, online practitioners, representatives from the public sector and mainstream media attended the seminar where they provided feedback and recommendations. The seminar culminated in a report titled [*Corrosive Speech: What Can Be Done.*](#)

Besides uncovering different realities in the cyberspace, the study also challenged existing assumptions regarding corrosive speech. First, the online space is not a homogeneous one — different sites have their own reporting and commentary styles and moderation policies. Second, while there was disturbing speech such as those that witch-hunted foreigners and galvanised Singaporeans for anti-foreigner movements, there was also the rise of inspiring ground-up movements that targeted xenophobia and racism.

The report presented several recommendations for different groups of people involved in corrosive speech and netizens in general, i.e., users of Internet technologies and social

media. Covering public education, increasing media literacy, promoting self-regulation and horizontal alliances, the proposed measures go beyond regulation by involving civil society organisations, mainstream media, online media and policymakers.

Set against the context of increasing incidents of harassment in various settings involving victims from all walks of life, the cluster organised a one-day conference in November on the realities and conundrums of harassment, and possible approaches in curbing the problem.

Comprising three panels, the conference addressed sexual harassment at work and stalking, harassment in schools and bullying of children and youth, and cyber-harassment. Reflecting the multi-dimensional nature of the problem, experts from the legal community, academe and non-governmental organisations spoke on the various forms of harassment, effects on victims, how the cyberspace has changed the nature of harassment, and legal and civil remedies to curb harassment. The conference ended with a dialogue session with Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law K Shanmugam, and Senior Minister of State for Law and Education Indranee Rajah,

Many ideas and insights were shared at the conference, leading to the emergence of two themes — for the government to consider a unified anti-harassment law instead of amending existing piecemeal regulations, and that law should be a last resort with non-legal remedies playing a more prominent role in providing recourse to victims.

Besides the completion of these projects, the cluster also embarked on two book projects in 2013. The first is an edited volume on cultural policy which seeks to provide an overarching perspective of Singapore's arts and cultural policy trajectory, and assesses key arts and cultural policies from the late 1950s to the present that have shaped and are shaping Singapore as a global city for the arts. The second book project is the *Singapore Chronicles* comprising 50 books that will commemorate the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence in 2015. The series is intended as a primer on various subjects that explain why and how Singapore took certain paths in making itself a nation and a society.

Dr Carol Soon is Research Fellow from the Arts, Culture and Media cluster in IPS.

DEMOGRAPHY AND FAMILY

Making Population Projections

The IPS Demography and Family cluster initiated a number of projects in 2013.

The cluster continued the work from 2012 on the Population Outcomes: Singapore 2050 (POS 2050) project. The six study groups tasked with analysing the implications of IPS' projections of the Singapore population up to 2050 and drawing up recommendations on how these can be addressed have completed their work and the consolidated report is expected to be ready for release in early 2014.

Besides POS 2050, the cluster also completed and published its report on [Perception of Policies in Singapore \(POPS\) 6](#), a study on Singaporean singles' perception of marriage and childbearing.

The cluster is now engaged in preliminary work on a longitudinal study on the dimensions and implications of ageing in Singapore, with a view to proposing suggestions for policy and programmes.

Besides these IPS-initiated projects, the cluster has also been working on government-commissioned projects. The report on the [National Survey of Senior Citizens 2011](#) commissioned by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) has been published by the ministry at its website.

On the international front, the cluster participated in a Comparative Family Policy: Selected East Asian Countries project led by Dr Yoon-jeong Shin of the Korean Institute for Health and Social Policy (KIHASA). Funded by the OECD Korea Policy Centre, the project involved building a database on family policies similar to the OECD Family Database for four countries (Korea, Japan, China and Singapore). A conference to share the findings of the project with Korean policymakers, academics, media and other interested participants was held in Seoul in October.

Individually, cluster members were involved in projects with other university colleagues. IPS Senior Research Fellow Dr Yap Mui Teng continued her involvement in a Comparative Health and Social Policy in Asia project with National University of Singapore (NUS) colleagues Dr Phua Kai Hong (study leader, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy), Dr Thang Leng Leng (Department of Japanese Studies) and Dr Goh Lee Gan (Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine), while IPS Research Fellow Christopher Gee worked on a project on Market Influences in Public Housing with Dr Lum Sau Kim (Department of Real Estate, NUS). Dr Yap Mui Teng was also a member of an independent study group appointed by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) to look into creating a high-density and good quality liveable environment for Singapore.

In addition, the cluster organised various conferences, workshops, closed-door discussions and forums in 2013. As IPS continues to be a partner agency of the MSF for the Family Research Network (FRN) forums, the cluster organised two forums in the year, one focusing on childrearing in the 21st century and another on the multiple roles of women in the Singapore family. A workshop and a conference were also held as part of the POS 2050 project to share the preliminary findings with study group members and then with stakeholders including other academics and public officials.

In view of the government's review of its healthcare financing policy, in particular MediShield, the cluster organised a closed-door discussion on "Healthcare Financing for the Elderly" in Singapore in May. Notably, speakers from the Netherlands shared the country's experience in healthcare insurance in the form of the Standard Packet Policy (SPP) which attempted to keep premiums affordable for the elderly while requiring younger participants to pay slightly above their actuarial risk. Participants included insurers as well as academics and government officials.

The Institute was privileged to organise a public lecture by a world-renowned demographer Prof. Wolfgang Lutz, who was in Singapore in February as the National University of Singapore Society Distinguished Professor. The Institute also hosted Lord Adair Turner, Senior Fellow of the Institute for New Economic Thinking and former Chairman of the UK

Financial Services Authority, who shared his views on demography and economic development at a closed-door discussion in October.

Besides contributions to *IPS Update*, *IPS Commons* and local print media, the cluster has published in journals such as the *Asian Population Studies*. Finally, Dr Yap Mui Teng has co-edited a book titled *Economic Stress, Human Capital, and Families in Asia* with Prof. Jean Yeung of the Asia Research Institute, and Department of Sociology at NUS.

Dr Yap Mui Teng is Senior Research Fellow and Mr Christopher Gee is Research Fellow from the Demography and Family cluster in IPS.

ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

Banking on Small and Medium Enterprises

The issues examined by the Economics and Business cluster in 2013 included income inequality, public housing pricing, economic restructuring, regional economic integration, and revitalisation of the small and medium enterprises (SME) sector.

In February, for example, the cluster presented a proposal on bringing down public housing pricing by deferring the payment of land costs to the point of resale. The resultant interest savings would not only make public housing more affordable but also leave homeowners with more in their Central Provident Fund (CPF) for their retirement.

In May, the cluster organised its 19th Singapore Economic Roundtable (SER) with the theme of “Restructuring the domestic economy”, to address rising concerns over Singapore economy’s falling potential growth. One key take-away from the roundtable was that local SMEs are a necessary engine to drive future growth as multinational companies (MNCs) continue to relocate their lower value-added operations to reduce costs. The greater emphasis now placed on grooming world-class SMEs brought into focus the problems they face in fostering growth. Some of these concerns, for example, are gaps in financing, which make it difficult for SMEs to fund their expansions; rising business costs, attributable to both higher wages and rental; and difficulty in recruiting and retaining talent needed to drive growth.

Cognisant of the various issues hindering the growth of SMEs, the Economics and Business cluster further examined SMEs in a series of consultations with the Singapore Business Federation (SBF), Association of Small Medium Enterprises (ASME), Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCCI), Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), and International Enterprise (IE) Singapore.

The discussions culminated in a closed-door discussion held in October with Parth Tewari, Head of the World Bank’s Competitive Industries Practice, as speaker and Inderjit Singh, Member of Parliament and a serial entrepreneur, as discussant. The discussion focused on whether Singapore should and, if so, how it could groom a relatively small number of competitive SMEs out of a stock of 154,000 businesses, to contribute to new job creation, income enhancement and significant productivity growth.

The October discussion was closely followed by the 20th SER in November. The SER looked at Singapore's regional economic integration and the emerging growth opportunities for SMEs. Specifically, it examined whether the Iskandar Development Region model could be replicated in other economic corridors in Malaysia as well as inspire further linkages with East Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Greater Mekong region.

Finally, the cluster recently began studies on two additional areas related to SMEs. The first focuses on the rising cost pressures and their impacts on SMEs' competitiveness while the second looks at Singapore's evolving trade structure to identify possible new export growth areas for SMEs.

Looking forward, the cluster will build on its current research efforts on SMEs. Two other closed-door discussions, one on the impact of real estate investment trusts (REITs) on commercial and industrial rental and another on budgetary measures targeted at helping SMEs, have been scheduled for early 2014. The ongoing discussions and studies are also likely to culminate in further collaborations, with government agencies and trade federations, to better define and to assuage the constraints faced by SMEs.

Dr Faizal Bin Yahya and Dr Tan Meng Wah are Research Fellows from the Economy and Business cluster in IPS.

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Generating Discussions about Governance

The Institute of Policy Studies' 25th Anniversary year began with its flagship conference Singapore Perspectives 2013, held on 28 January. The Politics and Governance cluster conceptualised the conference, which had the theme of "Governance", bringing focus back to the *raison d'être* of the Institute. The guest of honour was the Singapore's Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong.

The PM was candid in responding to a wide range of comments and questions from the floor, especially since this was the first public forum he addressed after the Punggol East by-election of 26 January. He reiterated some key principles of governance that should guide Singapore and also discussed how ideas from other systems might or might not be useful in shaping how the country is run in the future.

The dialogue session with the PM and speeches from speakers — including Acting Minister of Culture, Community and Youth, Lawrence Wong, Prof. Chan Heng Chee, Prof. Kishore Mahbubani, Donald Low, Sylvia Lim, Nizam Ismail and Lee Tzu Yang — have been published in a collection with the same title, [Singapore Perspectives 2013](#). Also included in the book are the findings of the IPS Prism survey and together, the papers provide provocative thoughts about future political development in Singapore.

The cluster also organised a landmark conference to coincide with the Institute's jubilee anniversary on 11 November, titled the IPS Conference on Civil Society 2013. The conference took a closer look at the trends relating to a central part of any governance

system — the role of the civic or people sector. Coming a long 15 years since the first such conference was organised by the Institute, the discussion was marked by tales of the ebb and flow of the relationship between the government and civil society, and how that has shaped public policy and ultimately social and political development in Singapore. Speakers emphasised an even greater need now for “the language of engagement”. In the dialogue session with the guest of honour, Minister of Law and Foreign Affairs K Shanmugam appealed to the government to institutionalise its public engagement process more deeply and widely. The [report](#) on the Conference has been published and a book based on the papers presented will be published by the end of 2014.

As the government and people reconsider the social compact and the extent to which social safety nets should be strengthened or introduced in Singapore, the cluster also embarked on a comparative study of the welfare systems in the smaller Scandinavian countries of Finland and Denmark. IPS Research Assistant Valerie Koh and Donald Low, Associate Dean (Executive Education) at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, visited the countries and conducted interviews to review their reforms of the social support systems and to understand the political pressures, socio-economic and fiscal concerns driving those reforms. Their research, which will enable an appreciation of both the strengths and limitations of Finnish and Danish policies as well as the public sentiment in those countries, aims to inform the design of sustainable social support policies in Singapore. The findings will first be published as an IPS Working Paper sometime in the first quarter of 2014.

The cluster also organised a unique exchange programme with a Swiss think tank Avenir Suisse in October, which provided a useful appreciation of the research and innovation culture of the country and its envied apprenticeship system. The guest of honour, Second Minister for Trade and Industry S Iswaran, remarked how there is much to emulate in the Swiss system even though Singapore and Switzerland are neck and neck in global economic competitiveness rankings. The report on this seminar is available [here](#).

We wish to acknowledge the valuable contribution of Valerie Koh who left the Institute after a 15-month stint in the cluster. She was a key member of the IPS Prism team, a scenario-planning project in 2012, and in all the other projects in 2013. She compiled a useful reference document of the key policy and political developments of the year just passed, “[The Year in Review: Policy and political developments in 2013](#)”, which can be found in this edition of *IPS Update*. We wish her well in all her future endeavours.

Dr Gillian Koh is Senior Research Fellow from the Politics and Governance cluster in IPS.

SOCIETY AND IDENTITY

Profiling the State of Race and Religious Relations

The Society and Identity cluster completed data collection for the IPS Race, Religion and Language survey in April 2013. This was followed by a press release together with OnePeople.sg, a ground-up national body championing racial and religious harmony. The “Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony” was an instrument created using responses

from over 4,000 Singaporeans who participated in the survey. The 10 indicators provided a comprehensive profile of race and religious relations here. The top three ranked indicators — absence of minority discrimination in using public services; absence of inter-racial and religious tension; and a positive view about embracing diversity — are a testament to the success of Singapore's policies to foster racial and religious harmony. The indicators that were ranked at the bottom pointed to the lack of close inter-racial friendships and the low interest in inter-cultural understanding. This revealed the importance of individual effort and adjustment beyond what social policy can orchestrate.

A forum on 11 September 2013 allowed academics and community leaders to weigh in on the survey data. There was robust discussion especially on the discomfort that local-born Singaporeans had of new Singaporeans and the sense of exclusion that some communities felt. Calls were made for Singaporeans to reconsider stereotypes and engage in greater inter-cultural understanding.

Another highlight from the cluster was the convening of the IPS Community Leaders Integration Conference. This was a culmination of four dialogues where local community leaders and leaders representing immigrant groups discussed issues and concerns related to integration. The findings from the closed-door dialogues were discussed at greater length during the conference with panellists and the audience providing thoughts on initiatives to increase integration among the local-born citizens and newcomers. The conference showcased the many efforts of immigrant associations to integrate newcomers to Singapore and to bridge the cultural gap. Panellists also reflected on the inherent difficulties of giving up a citizenship to take on a new one and called for understanding by both new citizens and local-born citizens about the difficulties of integration.

Besides the two major events, the cluster was involved in a number of research and book projects. The editing of a volume on managing diversity in Singapore was completed. Two book manuscripts, one on the work of the 1967 Education Study Team and another on racial and religious harmony, are in their final stages of completion. Cluster members were also involved in commissioned research projects on social service workers, the attitudes of older persons to successful ageing and low-income households assisted through the Work Support Scheme.

Dr Mathew Mathews is Research Fellow from the Society and Identity cluster in IPS.

IPS SOCIAL LAB

Tracking Changes in Society

The year 2013 was a challenging but fulfilling period for Social Lab, an independent centre for social indicators research at IPS. The centre was formally established in November 2013 with the aim of conducting timely survey-based research on public perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in Singapore.

Social Lab's flagship project, to be launched in 2014, is a panel study on social dynamics. It is a longitudinal survey involving some 5,000 households and up to 10,000 interviewees.

The study will track changes in family dynamics, societal values and attitudes relevant to national identity and social mobility.

Besides the flagship panel study, Social Lab also organises periodical workshops and conferences. Its inaugural workshop on 29 November 2013, with the theme “Doing Social Research in Singapore: Survey Fieldwork and Panel Studies”, was jointly organised with the Social Science & Policy Cluster at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS. It brought together practitioners from market survey companies, renowned academic scholars and senior policymakers to discuss unique, culture-specific issues in the social research landscape within the city-state.

The IPS Social Lab looks forward to another exciting year in 2014.

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