

CLC Lecture

Building Cities Together: When enterprises and governments collaborate

Written by Alvin Chua



Aerial View of Sino-Singapore Guangzhou Knowledge City, Southern Start-Up Area. Source: Ascendas-Singbridge

Singapore is not a technology powerhouse, but we are a very good aggregator, able to put together all the hardware, the software and the intangibles that make a city liveable. That's why we have been focusing not only on the physical development and infrastructure, which the Chinese are very good at, but also on things like [intellectual property] and good schools.

— NG KOK SIONG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
SINO-SINGAPORE GUANGZHOU KNOWLEDGE CITY

Governments around the world are under pressure to develop new urban centres, and many are turning to the private sector for help because of their limited resources.

One example is the Sino-Singapore Guangzhou Knowledge City (GKC) by Ascendas-Singbridge. The Singapore urban and business space solutions provider is the master developer of this upcoming city that aims to attract skilled manpower and knowledge-based industries.

"It goes beyond physical development — we did not just do infrastructure provision such as the roads, the water, we were also involved heavily in industrial development and strategic collaboration," said Ng Kok Siong, Chief Executive Officer of this joint venture development, at the launch of the publication, *Guangzhou Knowledge City: A New Paradigm in Collaboration*. He was joined by speakers across the public and private sector to discuss enterprise-led, government-supported and market-driven collaborations in the GKC.

Ascendas-Singbridge...carried out investment promotion to companies already set up in China to build an ecosystem, and also built a talent pipeline with the local government to review policies and create breakthroughs such as improving the city's physical and digital connectivity with the rest of the world.

His colleague, Nina Yang, who heads Ascendas-Singbridge's Sustainable Urban Development platform, said developing this 123 km² development with a projected population of 500,000 offered a different set of challenges from when Singapore began exporting its urban development expertise to China in the 1990s with the Suzhou Industrial Park.

"GKC is meant to showcase the economic transformation of Guangdong province. China is long past the industrialisation era of the Suzhou Industrial Park, where it was about cheap land and cheap labour," said Yang. Instead, Ascendas-Singbridge set out to upgrade the city's economic structure. They carried out investment promotion to companies already set up in China to build an ecosystem, and also built a talent pipeline with the local government to review policies and create breakthroughs such as improving the city's physical and digital connectivity with the rest of the world.

Yang added that she was continuously looking at how to align the interest of GKC's different stakeholders. "The government is looking at GDP growth, how many companies you bring in and how many jobs you create. For the private sector, we're looking at financial viability," she says. "It was a complex process to structure elements that could satisfy the private sector need for financial viability, while at the same time being able to address government expectations for [economic growth], and a beautiful city."

Another challenge faced by the group was the project's long gestation. Ng said a lot of perseverance and patience is required. "In the seven years that I've been there, we have had three Guangzhou Party Secretaries and five local District Secretaries. Every party secretary wants to have their say in the planning process."



CEO of Ascendas-Singbridge's Sustainable Urban Development Nina Yang shares about the developing the ecosystem for Guangzhou Knowledge City. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

GKC is also supported by a government-to-government initiative, the Singapore-Guangdong Collaboration Council. This has spawned collaborations such as the Singapore Joint Research Institute, a joint effort by Nanyang Technological University and the South China University of Technology. Other examples include the Singapore Innovation Manufacturing Centre, the China-Ready development programme for executives and the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore's partnerships in GKC, which is designated as China's sole intellectual property (IP) reform zone.

International Enterprise Singapore's regional director of South China, April Oh, said these initiatives demonstrates Singapore's relevance and participation in Guangdong's economic transformation, especially in the area of software collaboration. "We hope to see GKC becoming a vibrant city that adopts Singapore's work-live-play concept, with a lot more Singapore DNA," she said. "We hope that GKC will become the hub that connects Singapore to the Greater Bay Area, which is really the next area of opportunity for businesses and commercial activities."

To achieve this, the government is bringing in more industries focused on Singapore's strengths and Guangdong's needs. This includes areas like services in healthcare, education, IP arbitration, advanced manufacturing technology and innovation, as well as start-ups.



The panel, consisting of public and private sector players discussed enterprise-led, government-supported and market-driven collaborations in Guangzhou Knowledge City. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities



Participants are given a chance to interact with the panellists during the Question & Answer session. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

Private sector players are excited by the vision and groundwork that has been laid. Michael Leong, CEO of Sesto Robotics, said the Singapore Manufacturing Innovation Centre in the GKC exemplified the traditional Chinese proverb that says 'at home you have your parents, when you go out you depend on your friends'. He added, "By banding the [Singapore] companies together, we move and hunt as a pack in the ever-demanding Guangzhou manufacturing hub."



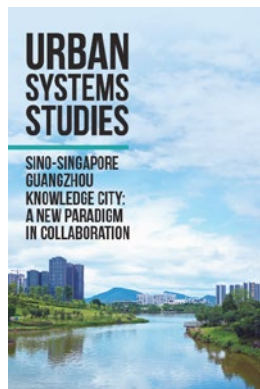
Panellists are presented with the Urban Systems Studies book as a token of appreciation for their time and contribution to this knowledge sharing session. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities



Lecture attendees take the opportunity to network with Michael Leong, Chief Executive Officer of Sesto Robotics, as he shares more about his experiences in Guangzhou after the lecture. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

For Dr Victor Li Lietao, CEO of Lion TCR, the GKC's live-work-play concept is a vital factor for his company which has commercialised a medical technology originating from research at A*Star. They had a laboratory in a healthcare and biotech in Beijing but noticed their staff for rushing for the shuttle bus to get home because the city became dead in the evening.

“For research and innovation-based jobs, we need people to have more flexible working schedules. If everyone plans their work within eight hours, their output is only 50 or 60%,” he said. “But in GKC, with a work-live-play environment, we don't mind paying our staff subsidies to live there. Our staff from northern China, Beijing, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Guangzhou all relocated to GKC. Though we pay them 120% [for wages and accommodation], I believe their output is 150%.”



Download an online copy of CLC's new Urban Systems Studies book *Sino-Singapore Guangzhou Knowledge City: A New Paradigm in Collaboration* to find out more.

About the Speakers



PANELLIST

Nina Yang

Chief Executive Officer,
Sustainable Urban Development,
Ascendas-Singbridge Group

As the current CEO for Sustainable Urban Development at Ascendas-Singbridge's, Nina Yang is in-charge of the urbanisation platform within the group and oversees large scale urban development in partnership with the local government. With over 25 years of urban planning and building design, she has been involved in numerous public and private sector projects in both a local and overseas context.



PANELLIST

Ng Kok Siong

Chief Executive Officer,
Sino-Singapore Guangzhou Knowledge City,
Ascendas-Singbridge Group

Ng Kok Siong currently heads the joint venture company serving as the master developer for the 123sqkm Guangzhou Knowledge City project. With over 20 year's real estate experience, he has been involved in the investment, development, asset management, mall management and consultancy for over 30 projects in the Asia Pacific region, including landmark developments in China, Hong Kong and various other countries.



PANELLIST

April Oh

Regional Director (South China),
International Enterprise Singapore

In her capacity as the Regional Director for South China Region of International Enterprise Singapore, April Oh has promoted internationalisation of Singapore-based companies in Southern and Central China, including Hong Kong and Macau. She is also the Commercial Consul for the Consulate General of the Republic of Singapore in Guangzhou, as well as a key member of the Singapore Secretariat for the Singapore Guangdong Collaboration Council.

About the Speakers



PANELLIST

Dr Victor Li Lietao

Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
Lion TCR Pte. Ltd.

With over 24 years of biopharmaceutical experience and 4 years of medical clinical practice, Dr Victor Li played an important role in numerous key functions of biological product development: from pre-clinical research, clinical trials down to marketing strategy and financing. He is also the inventor and coinventor for over 60 patent certificates and has led the development of two vaccine products to complete Phase I and II clinical trials.



PANELLIST

Michael Leong

Chief Executive Officer,
SESTO Robotics Pte Ltd

As the CEO of SESTO Robotics, a subsidiary of HOPE Technik specialising in the field of autonomous technology, Michael Leong oversees the business goals of the company. Michael's experience with robotics technology coupled with his in-depth knowledge of the industry has led him to be appointed as the chairman of SPRING Singapore's Technical Committee for Automation and Robotics which focuses on identifying and evaluating new standards in automation and robotics.

About the Speakers



MODERATOR

Dr Limin Hee

Director, Research,
Centre for Liveable Cities

Dr Limin Hee focuses on research strategies, content development and international collaborations. Dr Hee's own research focuses on urban liveability and sustainability and their agenda for architecture, urbanism and public space. Recent book publications include *Constructing Singapore Public Space* (Springer-Nature, 2017) and *Future Asian Space* (NUS Press, 2012).

About CLC

The Centre for Liveable Cities was set up in 2008 by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, based on a strategic blueprint developed by Singapore's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. Guided by its mission to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities, the Centre's work spans four main areas - Research, Capability Development, Knowledge Platforms and Advisory. The CLC Lecture Series is a platform for urban experts to share their knowledge with other practitioners. For more information, please visit us at <http://www.clc.gov.sg>

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